

**MSC 1003 - Music in Civilization    Spring 2019**

**Prof. Smey**

**Class 24, Tues April 30**

This is our first session (out of two) on African-American music and the artform called Jazz.

## Roots of African-American Music

In class we began the discussion around the year 1890 with the invention of the Blues and Ragtime, and then we looked at the first early jazz in New Orleans around 1900. However, to really understand these phenomena one must ask “how did we get here?”

I have [an online unit](#) with accompanying exercise that will function as a sort of prequel to our jazz lesson, tracing African-American music from its origins on the continent of Africa all the way through various developments in 19<sup>th</sup>-century America. Some elements from this lesson will be relevant to our Quiz Four.

## Our three “bedrock periods”

The first three periods of jazz (New Orleans Style, Swing, and Bebop) are the most crucial for the evolution of the art form, as each generation makes dramatic changes that move things forward towards where we are today. In a sense the Bebop period never ends, as this style of music is still played in clubs all around the world.

In this session we covered the New Orleans Style and Swing. In the following notes, remember that all the names and vocab words in **bold type** may appear on the quiz. This includes a few people who aren't on the listening playlist – in these cases I still want you to know their names and their basic claim to fame.

## 1900-1930s – the emergence of Jazz and the New Orleans style

The emergence of jazz involves bands with a mixture of horns, drums, and chordal instruments such as piano, guitar, or banjo. These groups of musicians originally formed to play Blues, Ragtime, and other styles of dance music that were popular at the turn of the century. By blending these styles of music and adding a lot of improvisation these groups created jazz.

An early figure who became known for playing jazz music was New Orleans trumpeter Buddy Bolden, who was active around 1900-1907. Unfortunately this was too early to be recorded, so we don't know exactly what his band sounded like.

After a crackdown on Storyville, the “red-light” district of New Orleans in 1917, many musicians traveled upriver to Chicago, where they recorded some of the first jazz records.

In class we first listened to Joe “King” Oliver’s Creole Jazz Band 1923 recording “Dippermouth Blues.” Louis Armstrong plays second cornet in this band. He eventually becomes one of the most famous figures in jazz history.

For the quiz we will listen to **Louis Armstrong** and his Hot Five with their 1927 recording of “Hotter Than That.” In class we carefully followed the structure of the record, which begins with Armstrong playing the tune on trumpet and then moves through a few improvised solos. In general one could say that the structure of a jazz performance is a lot like a Theme and Variations, as the form of the main tune is repeated over and over and people add new things each time.

(In jazz each pass through the form is called a *chorus*. On “Hotter Than That” some musicians like the clarinetist Johnny Dodds improvise one whole chorus, and others like Kid Ory the trombone player get a half-chorus.)

### **Characteristics of the New Orleans-style of jazz**

There are a few ways that this early period of jazz sounds distinctly different from later periods.

- The beat still owes a lot to ragtime, with its somewhat stiff “oom-pah” pattern. (When modern musicians play this music it is not so stiff but it still has a noticeably different groove, more like a marching band.)
- At key points in the performance all musicians will solo at once, creating a chaotic, polyphonic texture.
- New Orleans-style jazz uses certain instruments that are less common later. The bass line may be played on a tuba. Saxophones are rare – instead the clarinet is the main reed instrument. And the banjo is a common element in the rhythm section (instead of the guitar).
- Because of the limitations of recording technology at this time drummers were not allowed to play much.

### **1930s – early 40s: The Swing Era**

Swing introduces a few stylistic changes.

- “Everyone soloing at once” is basically abolished. Instead, performances are more organized, and horns tend to play coordinated back-up riffs.
- The groove becomes more swinging and danceable. Bass lines in particular tend to hit all four beats in a constant pulse.

This is the era of the **Big Band**, groups of 20 or so musicians with a full trumpet, trombone, and sax/clarinet section. Important big band leaders include...

### **Duke Ellington (1899-1974)**

Duke Ellington is artistically the most important figure of the swing era. He began leading bands in the 20s, and by the 30s he was writing ambitious compositions that aimed for unique concepts and sounds.

Between in-class listening and homework we heard Ellington's "Mood Indigo," "Ko-Ko" and "Take the A Train." The latter tune was composed by Billy Strayhorn and probably co-arranged by Strayhorn and Ellington.

### **Benny Goodman (1909-1986)**

Benny Goodman was the most successful popularizer of jazz. His concert appearances in 1935 and 1936 became media sensations that made swing music and dancing mainstream entertainment. His most recognizable recording today is probably "Sing Sing Sing (with a Swing)." In 1937 he was also the first white musician to play with a desegregated band, which featured the pianist Teddy Wilson and vibraphonist Lionel Hampton.

### **Glenn Miller (1904-1944)**

Glenn Miller was perhaps the most pop-oriented entertainer of the era, presenting familiar tunes such as "Moonlight Serenade" and "In the Mood."

### **Count Basie (1904-1984)**

During Swing's wave of popularity the Count Basie band from Kansas City emerged as a new alternative for jazz purists, who liked his blues-based compositions and hard-swinging beat.

## **Bebop – mid 40s to Present**

Bebop was a movement to pull jazz away from the world of popular entertainment and make a more challenging kind of "art." It has several stylistic trademarks:

- Return of small groups, often 3-5 players. It was played in bars like Minton's Playhouse on 118<sup>th</sup> St. in NYC.
- Not for dancing. The beat is more aggressive and "abstract." Drums and bass are often louder in the mix.
- There are generally no more carefully arranged backup horn riffs or fancy composed-out interludes. We go back to the Theme-and-Variations-like form that we saw in the New Orleans period – the musicians just play the tune and then take turns soloing over the structure of the tune. This music is really all about the solos.
- Solos feature long, ornate lines with lots of notes. They use "advanced" techniques like exotic scales, new chords and so on.

We have heard music from a few major figures in the bebop movement.

Dizzy Gillespie, trumpet, was an early innovator in bebop improvisation. He often teamed up with Charlie Parker (a pairing referred to as “Bird and Diz.”)

**Charlie Parker** (aka “Bird”), alto saxophone, is probably the greatest bebop soloist of all time. He could improvise very elaborate lines with lots of notes and he made it all sound effortless.

We also heard **Miles Davis** playing trumpet with Charlie Parker. Davis eventually led his own bebop combo and would be hugely important in future developments in jazz.

Finally, we looked at the somewhat eccentric pianist and composer **Thelonious Monk**, whose tunes have a distinctive “off kilter” sound. Monk is not trying to impress by playing long, complicated lines in his solos – instead he explores punchy and unusual gestures. His compositions are always catchy and fun, and musicians still love to play them. (“Off kilter” means “out of balance” or “crooked.” Students often don’t know what I mean by this, but it is still my favorite way to describe Monk’s musical style. He’s a little strange but very fun.)

(I’ve also put up [a bonus page on Charles Mingus](#), another post-bebop composer who rivals Monk in popularity and influence.)