

MSC 1003 - Music in Civilization Summer 2018

Prof. Smey

Class 12, Thurs July 5

These are all of the jazz notes that will be relevant to quiz four. Some of this material will probably get left over for Monday, July 9.

Roots of African-American Music

We'll begin this unit around the year 1900 with the first jazz music being played in New Orleans. However, to really understand this phenomenon 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 19th-century America. Some elements from this lesson will be relevant to our Quiz Four.

Here in these notes we dig in to Jazz history. Remember that any name in **bold type** is important to study for the quiz.

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 emerged as a new alternative for jazz purists, who liked his blues-based compositions and hard-swinging beat.

(Quiz note: Ellington and Goodman are going to be important for the quiz, Miller and Basie are not.)

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 118th 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.)

Cool Jazz, Avant Garde and Beyond

After bebop we looked at some of the trends in jazz from the 50s all the way to the present. These are not necessarily historical periods that follow one after the other – instead, they are “movements” that tend to co-exist. You can still go to Smalls on West. 10th and hear excellent bebop, or you can hear avant-garde jazz at The Stone at the New School on 13th. You can even go hear historical recreations of big band music at Lincoln Center.

Remember that anything in **bold type** is something that I might ask about in the quiz. Anything else is just here in case you are interested. I will also include lots of this music on our blog, and I encourage you to check it out, even if it’s not on the test. 😊

Miles Davis

Probably the most important figure in this later part of jazz history is trumpet player and bandleader **Miles Davis**. We’ve already heard him in his younger years as a bebop musician, playing alongside Charlie Parker on recordings such as “Yardbird Suite.” Eventually he became the leader of his own bebop groups as well.

As time goes on, Miles acts as the most important trendsetter in jazz. He joins the “cool jazz” trend and eventually kicks off the move into jazz-rock fusion. Thus, unlike most of our historical figures who belong pretty clearly in one main category, Davis spans at least three of them.

Cool Jazz – 50s onward

Cool jazz is simply jazz that is more relaxed and laid-back than bebop. In class I often refer to this as “cigarette-smoking music” or “Mad Men music.” The cool movement originated with a group of mostly white musicians from California (such as Gerry Mulligan and Chet Baker), but it was perhaps legitimized when Miles Davis collaborated with these guys on a project called *Birth of the Cool*. These sessions were originally released as 78rpm singles in 1949-50 and compiled into a long-playing album in 1957.

Davis’s *Kind of Blue* [1959] is a hugely influential album that is both “cool” and *modal*, another important development. Modal music avoids the frequent chord changes that are present in

most jazz. Instead, it tends to hang out on a single chord and scale for long stretches of time. Thus, people playing modal jazz are free to relax a little bit and just “jam” on one scale. (This scale is usually not the typical major or minor scale found in classical music, but rather a more exotic kind of scale called a “mode.” Hence the term “modal” music.)

For the quiz we will learn “All Blues” from *Kind of Blue*.

Avant-Garde Jazz – 50s onward

The term “avant-garde” refers to art that might be described as “experimental” or “pushing the envelope.” One might feel that such work is “difficult,” “weird,” or “extreme.” There are some artistic and musical movements that were avant-garde in their day but now seem quite mainstream and normal, but other avant-garde artists will probably be forever viewed as eccentric or provocative.

We looked at the first prominent figure in avant-garde jazz, pianist **Cecil Taylor**. In class we will also look at the music of John Coltrane who could also be put in this category.

Cecil Taylor’s music for piano is both “*atonal*” and “*free*.”

Atonal music refers to music that intentionally avoids any underlying sense of a key. It also tends to avoid the familiar sound of triads which are the basis of most tonal music, instead exploring new, dissonant combinations of notes.

Free Jazz refers to music that is pure improvisation. It is performed without a pre-arranged underlying structure such as a chord progression. Free jazz musicians instead prefer to listen to each other and create a wholly spontaneous new structure – often they simply sit down and “just start playing” without any discussion whatsoever.

Fusion – 70s onward

As rock music surged in popularity jazz musicians began playing a hybrid of rock and jazz known as “**fusion**.” Once again **Miles Davis** was at the center of this evolution of style. We watched a documentary clip about his experience at the 1969 Newport Jazz Festival and his exposure to acts such as Sly and the Family Stone. Then we listened to a few clips from his 1970 album *Bitches Brew*.

For the quiz we will learn “Spanish Key” from *Bitches Brew*.