

## MSC 1003 – Music in Civilization Spring 2022

Prof. Smey

### Class 24, Monday May 2

In this class we looked at jazz developments in the 50s, 60s, 70s and 80s. In general jazz after bebop splits into many different styles and movements.

#### Cool Jazz – 50s onward

Cool jazz is simply jazz that is more relaxed and laid-back than bebop. It is usually still presented in the bebop format, with a small group and lots of focus on the soloists, but it is less aggressively challenging. This is also the first time that jazz was marketed as “cool” and relaxing – prior to the 50s jazz was often described as “hot” and exciting instead.

In class I often claim that this music was intended for people to listen to while they smoked cigarettes and drank martinis. (This is what people really liked in the 50s and early 60s, anyways. For reference you could consult the show *Mad Men*, which is set in this era.)

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*.

#### Hard Bop – 50s onward

Hard Bop is another variant of bebop that goes in a sort of opposite direction from cool jazz. Hard Bop musicians sought to infuse bebop with more elements from popular styles of African-American music – from the Blues, Rhythm + Blues, and Gospel.

In class we listened to **Charles Mingus's** “Better Git It In Your Soul,” from *Mingus Ah Um* [1959]. This is a very high-energy and exuberant track with lots of blues riffs in the various

instruments. With headphones on you can hear a vocalist doing “Blues shouts” in the background, and there is a passage where the bands drop out and the musicians clap the beat instead, like one might do in church.

Charles Mingus was a bassist and bandleader whose highly creative music really transcends the Hard Bop category. He is another great jazz composer in the tradition of Duke Ellington, and he perhaps rivaled Monk as a leading figure of the 50s and 60s.

## 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.

### **Cecil Taylor (1929-2018)**

We looked at one of the first prominent figures in avant-garde jazz, pianist **Cecil Taylor**.

Cecil Taylor studied at the New England Conservatory of Music up in Boston, and there he was inspired by Modern classical music like Schoenberg to make improvised music that is both “*atonal*” and “*free*.”

**Atonal** music refers to music that intentionally avoids any underlying sense of a scale or 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.

### **John Coltrane (1926-1967)**

Tenor saxophonist John Coltrane began as a bebop musician and was always known as a skilled improviser. (He appears on our quiz recording of “All Blues,” for example, beginning his solo around the 6:15 mark.) In the 1960s he began to make recordings that were somewhat avant-garde. These performances were notable for their unprecedented stamina and ferocity. They would feature long (10- to 20-minute) solos which would gradually build in intensity, and the tunes were often modal, hanging out on a single chord or scale for long stretches of time.

Overall his music was thought to have a meditative or trance-like effect. People in the U.S. in the 1960s were very interested in alternative spiritual ideas, Black Nationalism, and consciousness-altering substances, and Coltrane's music seemed to be the ideal complement to all of these trends.

In class we listened to Coltrane solo on the tune "Impressions," and we also heard *A Love Supreme*, his 1965 album that is considered by many to be a profound spiritual statement.

(Coltrane is an extremely important figure in jazz history – many people would put him in their top 5 alongside Charlie Parker, Duke Ellington, and Miles Davis. Thus, we play him in class and talk about him. It would be a crime against jazz not to! However, I think students don't really understand him and the test questions I've tried to write about him have been kind of a flop. Thus, he is not on the quiz.)

## 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*.