

Understanding Music

Seventh Edition

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What is jazz? Most of us recognize it when we hear it, but it's not so easy to list the essential ingredients of jazz. First of all is the rhythm. Jazz usually has a steady rhythm that continues from the very beginning of a piece to the end. That rhythm is often underscored by percussion instruments, which play a central role in the performance of jazz. The most characteristic part of jazz rhythm is **syncopation**: accenting the "offbeats." (See p. 24 for a more detailed explanation of syncopation.) The combination of a steady beat and accented offbeats contributes to what is known as "swing." Swing is the *feeling* generated by the music. Swing is what makes you want to move your head or tap your foot. Or both!

Another primary ingredient of jazz is the use of "blue notes." Blue notes are notes that are played or sung low or flatter than the pitches in a conventional Western scale. Common blue notes in jazz are the third, fifth, and seventh notes of a scale. Often, these notes are not exactly a half step lower but rather indeterminate in pitch, and they can be "bent" or "scooped" by many instruments and by singers. These blue notes contribute to the expressive nature of much jazz performance.

Third, jazz often contains special sounds produced by conventional instruments. Trumpets playing "wah-wah," trombones sliding between notes, clarinets squealing in the high register—these are sounds directly associated with jazz but avoided in "straight" concert music. Jazz singers also deliberately make use of unusual sounds. A special kind of singing in which the vocalist improvises with invented syllables ("doo-be-doo dah," etc.) is known as **scat singing**. There are also instruments rarely used in concert music that are central to jazz. Foremost among these is the saxophone, which comes in many sizes, from the small soprano sax to the enormous contrabass. Most common in jazz are the alto and tenor saxophones.

Finally, most people would say that improvisation is a necessary element in jazz. Certainly in many forms of jazz, improvisation plays a central role in the creation of the music, and some of the best jazz performers have been spontaneous and inventive improvisers. There is a difference, however, between genuine improvisation and the performance of a free-sounding melodic line that has been worked out in advance. Some of the most famous jazz performers would repeat their best solos night after night. This does not mean that



they were not playing jazz. Perhaps the best approach is to say that improvisation is a typical but not an absolutely necessary ingredient of jazz.

Great jazz artists, however, are often great improvisers. This means that they are not just performers but *composers* as well.

The History of Jazz

Origins

Although jazz seems to have developed in several places simultaneously, one of the most important of these was New Orleans. In the late nineteenth century, New Orleans was one of the most culturally diverse and thriving cities in the United States. Its people were of African, French, Spanish, English, and Portuguese origin. There were first-, second-, and third-generation Europeans; African Americans who were former slaves or descendants of former slaves; Haitians; Creoles; and a constant influx of new immigrants from Europe, the Caribbean, and other parts of the United States. As a flourishing port, New Orleans also attracted sailors and visitors from all over the world.

JAZZ: FOUR KEY ELEMENTS

1. Syncopated rhythm (accents on the offbeat)
2. Flatted "blue" notes
3. Unusual instrument sounds
4. Improvisation

The saxophone comes in many different sizes—from soprano to subcontrabass.

A jazz musician is a juggler who uses harmonies instead of oranges.

—Jazz author Benny Green

Jazz is about the only form of art existing today in which there is freedom of the individual without the loss of group contact.

—Dave Brubeck

The city had one of the liveliest musical cultures of any city in America. There was opera and chamber music. European ballroom dances were heard side by side with sailors' songs and hornpipes. Street sellers advertised their products with musical cries. Work songs and "field hollers" (chants sung by workers) mingled with the piano music of elegant salons. The bars, gambling joints, dance halls, and brothels were filled with smoke, liquor, and music.

Band Music

Everywhere in New Orleans were the bands: marching bands, dance bands, concert bands, and society orchestra bands. Bands played at weddings, funerals, parades, and political rallies, or just for the joy of it. Some of the musicians were classically trained; most could not read a note. But almost everybody played. Bands often held competitions among themselves to see which could play the best. And the sound of a band in the street was an excuse for children (and adults) from all the neighborhoods to come and join the fun.

The standard instruments in late nineteenth-century American bands were the trumpet (or cornet—a mellower form of trumpet), clarinet, trombone, banjo, drums, and tuba. This instrumentation provided the proper balance between melody instruments, harmony instruments, bass, and percussion. All these instruments were, of course, portable. Only later, when band music moved indoors, did the instrumentation include piano and string bass, and the stationary drum kit was invented.

Band music was the first of the three major musical influences on early jazz. The other two were ragtime and the blues.

Ragtime: white music, played black.

—Jazz historian Joachim Berendt

Ragtime

Ragtime was a type of piano music (sometimes also played on other instruments) that became popular in the 1890s. It was originally played mostly by African American pianists in saloons and dance halls in the South and the Midwest. "Ragging" meant taking a popular or classical melody and playing it in characteristic syncopated style. Later the style caught on and developed a form of its own, and ragtime was played by both black and white musicians to audiences all over the country.

Ragtime music is usually in duple meter and has the feel and tempo of a march. The left hand plays a steady, regular beat while the right hand plays a lively melody in syncopated rhythm. A ragtime composition usually consists of a series of related sections with a repetition pattern, most often AA BB A CC DD or something similar.

The most famous composer and performer of ragtime was Scott Joplin, whose father was a slave but who himself received a formal music education and composed classical music as well as a large number of piano rags. Scott Joplin was born in 1868 and eventually got a job as a pianist in the Maple Leaf saloon in Sedalia, Missouri. His most famous piece, "Maple Leaf Rag," was published in 1899 and sold so well that Joplin moved to St. Louis to concentrate on composition. In 1909 he settled in New York and composed a full-length opera, *Treemonisha*, which he attempted (without success) to have professionally produced. Joplin died in 1917, completely unrecognized by the musical establishment.

LISTENING GUIDE

SCOTT JOPLIN (1868–1917)

Date of composition: 1899

Tempo: *Tempo di marcia* ("March tempo")

Meter: $\frac{2}{4}$

Key: A \flat major

Duration: 3:14

 Listen on MySearchLab

Maple Leaf Rag, *for piano solo*



CD III, 17

Scott Joplin's "Maple Leaf Rag" was published in 1899 and became immensely popular. Like most music at the time it was published in sheet music form; it became the first instrumental sheet music to sell over a million copies. It is typical of much ragtime music written around the turn of the century. A steady left-hand accompaniment keeps the march beat going throughout the piece while the right hand plays a lively, syncopated melody against this steady beat. The sections are

repeated in the usual pattern: AA BB A CC DD. Each section is 16 measures long. The slight changes between sections, the standard but slightly irregular repetition pattern, the contrast between the rock-steady left hand and the dancing right hand—all of these characteristics make for a composition of great attractiveness and help to explain the enormous popularity of ragtime in the early years of the history of jazz. In this recording, we hear a **piano roll** (early mechanical recording) made by Joplin himself in 1916.



Time	Listen for
	A
0:00	Strong, steady chords in left hand; syncopated rhythm in right hand; short arpeggiated phrases.
	A
0:21	Repeat.
	B
0:42	Melody begins higher and moves down; <i>staccato</i> articulation.
	B
1:03	Repeat.
	A
1:24	Opening section is played only once here.
	C
1:45	Change of key to D _b major (IV); rhythmic change in right hand; left-hand leaps.
	C
2:06	Repeat.
	D
2:28	Return to original key; strong final cadence.
	D
2:48	Repeat.

The Blues

The blues is a form, a sound, and a spirit, all at the same time. It began as a type of vocal music that crystallized in the 1890s from many elements. Among these were African American spirituals, work songs, and street cries. The blues began as unaccompanied song but soon came to use banjo or guitar accompaniment. The common themes of early blues are sadness in love, betrayal, abandonment, and sometimes humor.

There is great variety in sung blues, but if there is a “standard” form, it is this: a series of three-line stanzas, in each of which the first two lines are the same:

*I followed her to the station, with a suitcase in
my hand.*

*I followed her to the station, with a suitcase in
my hand.*

*Well, it's hard to tell, it's hard to tell, when all
your love's in vain.*

*When the train rolled up to the station, I looked
her in the eye.*

*When the train rolled up to the station, I looked
her in the eye.*

*Well, I was lonesome, I felt so lonesome, and I
could not help but cry.*

(From Robert Johnson, “Love in Vain”)

Find the **Quick Listen** on **MySearchLab**

“Robert Johnson
‘Love in Vain’”

Each line is set to four measures, or bars, of music, so this pattern is known as **12-bar blues** (4 bars \times 3 lines = 12 bars). The chord progressions in 12-bar blues

are very simple, using only tonic (I), subdominant (IV), and dominant (V) chords. The overall pattern of 12-bar blues looks like this:

	MEASURE 1	MEASURE 2	MEASURE 3	MEASURE 4
Line 1	I	I	I	I
Line 2	IV	IV	I	I
Line 3	V	V (or IV)	I	I

She had this trouble in her, this thing that wouldn't let her rest sometimes, a meanness that came and took her over.

—Jazz saxophonist Sidney Bechet about Bessie Smith

Every stanza of the song follows the same pattern. The singer may accompany him- or herself on a guitar and may occasionally vary the accompaniment a little by introducing other chords or extra beats, but the basic pattern stays the same. Also, the singer has ample opportunity for varying the melodic line according to the expression of the text and his or her own personal feeling. The best blues singers use the rigid structure of blues as a vehicle for the most subtle variations in pitch (blue notes) and rhythm. Slight shadings of the pitch, little ornaments, and especially deliberate “misplacement” and constant manipulation of the rhythm are part and parcel of blues singing. The effect is of a very flexible and very personal vocal style against a square and simple background.

The form of the blues, with its special combination of flexibility and rigidity, began to be widely used by instrumentalists in the 1920s and has strongly influenced other types of popular music and jazz ever since.

Our example of blues singing is by Bessie Smith (1894–1937), known as the “Empress of the Blues.” (See **Listening Guide**.) Bessie Smith grew up in Tennessee and from an early age helped support her family by singing on street corners. After false starts as a dancer and a vaudevillian, she devoted herself full time to singing blues.

Smith had a hit in 1923 with her very first recording. Audiences were stunned by the mature, tragic quality of her voice and by her sensitive, personal style—which seemed to speak directly to the listener. On her way to a singing session in 1937, her car crashed into the side of the road, and by the next day, Bessie Smith was dead.

LISTENING GUIDE

 Listen on MySearchLab

BESSIE SMITH (1894–1937)

“Florida-Bound Blues”

Date of performance: 1925

Duration: 3:14



Bessie Smith often recorded with a small ensemble, but many of her performances feature piano and voice alone. Some of the great jazz pianists of the day recorded with Smith; and this recording features pianist Clarence Williams, who was also active as a songwriter, music publisher, and record producer.

“Florida-Bound Blues” is a standard 12-bar blues with words and music in an AAB pattern. Listen, though, for subtle changes in the words and melody between the first two lines of each stanza. In the first stanza, for example, “North” and “South” are sung as short notes in the first line but extended in the second line.

Among Smith’s many vocal trademarks found in this recording is the addition of a chromatic note before the last note of a line.

The bare-bones melody:



CD III, 18

Bessie Smith's version:



Sometimes she makes a quick slide, but sometimes she stretches out the added note.

Another common effect is a sudden pitch drop at the end of a line, producing a more intimate spoken sound. This device was a dependable way of creating a bond with an audience that was often doing plenty of talking on its own.

"Florida-Bound Blues" also shows the broad, world-weary tone that permeates her work and provides glimpses of her offhand sense of humor. Above all, this recording provides a clear picture of her masterful control of pitch, rhythm, and volume.

Time	Listen for	
0:00	Piano introduction	Piano immediately puts listener off balance before settling into a solid key and rhythm.
0:11	<i>Goodbye North, Hello South.</i> <i>Goodbye North, Hello South.</i> <i>It's so cold up here that the words freeze in your mouth.</i>	Strict rhythm in piano is offset by Bessie's extra beat in the first line. Vocal control: listen to the change of volume on "North" and "South." Compare the heavily blued note on "words" to the centered pitch on "freeze."
0:46	<i>I'm goin' to Florida where I can have my fun.</i> <i>I'm goin' to Florida, where I can have my fun.</i> <i>Where I can lay out in the green grass and look up at the sun.</i>	Piano introduces a smooth, more melodic response to vocal. Listen for the added chromatic note on "fun." Note the piano "roll" filling in the space after "grass."
1:22	<i>Hey, hey redcap, help me with this load.</i> <i>Redcap porter, help me with this load (step aside).</i> <i>Oh, that steamboat, Mr. Captain, let me get on board.</i>	Listen for the deliberate variety and humor in these two lines. Each of the repeated notes is approached from below, creating a pulse in the line.
1:58	<i>I got a letter from my daddy, he bought me a sweet piece of land.</i> <i>I got a letter from my daddy, he bought me a small piece of ground.</i> <i>You can't blame me for leavin', Lord, I mean I'm Florida bound.</i>	Heavily blued notes on "from my daddy" ("daddy" means "lover"). Bessie varies this line by not taking a breath in the middle, making the ending breathless.
2:35	<i>My papa told me, my mama told me too.</i> <i>My papa told me, my mama told me too:</i> <i>Don't let them bell-bottom britches make a fool outta you.</i>	A new ending for the melody of the first two lines. Vocal line moves up on "fool," highlighting the punch line at the end.

New Orleans Jazz

New Orleans jazz (sometimes known as Dixieland jazz) flourished in the city of New Orleans, especially in the red-light district called Storyville. Small bands played in the brothels and saloons, and a standard form of "combo" arose: a "front line" of trumpet, clarinet, and trombone, and a "rhythm section" of drums,

banjo, piano, and bass. Every instrument in a Dixieland band has a specific function. The main melody is played by the trumpet, while the clarinet weaves a high countermelody around it. The trombone plays a simpler, lower tune. In the rhythm section, the drums keep the beat, the piano and banjo play chords, and the bass plays the bass line (usually pizzicato—plucked).



Louis Armstrong's Hot Five, Chicago, 1925 (from left to right): Armstrong, Johnny St. Cyr, Johnny Dodds, Kid Ory, Lil Hardin.

The sound of Dixieland jazz is of many lines interweaving in a complex but organized way. The effect is of collective improvisation but with every instrument having a carefully defined role. The most common musical forms are 12-bar blues and 32-bar AABA form (the standard form of thousands of pop songs throughout the twentieth century).

The 32-bar AABA form has four, eight-measure sections:

- A—eight measures
- A—eight measures
- B—eight measures
- A—eight measures

The first statement of the tune takes up the first 32 measures. Then the band plays variants of the tune or improvises on its basic chord progressions, while keeping to the 32-measure format. Each statement of the tune or the variation on it is known as a “chorus.” In Dixieland

The recordings of [Louis Armstrong's] Hot Five and the Hot Seven contributed more than any other single group of recordings to making jazz famous and a music to be taken seriously.

—Jazz historian
Gunther Schuller

jazz, a piece usually begins with the whole band playing the first chorus, and then features alternations of (accompanied) solo and collective improvisation. Sometimes everybody stops playing for two or four measures except for a single soloist. This is known as a “break.”

Some of the most famous musicians and bandleaders of early jazz were Jelly Roll Morton (piano), Louis Armstrong (trumpet), Joe “King” Oliver (trumpet), Bix Beiderbecke (trumpet), Sidney Bechet (clarinet and soprano saxophone), and Jack Teagarden (trombone).

The most important figure in jazz from the 1920s was Louis Armstrong (1901–1971). After he left New Orleans, Armstrong settled in Chicago, where, with his composer and pianist wife, Lil Hardin, he made a series of groundbreaking recordings. His brilliant trumpet playing and enormously inventive improvisations paved the way for a new focus on solo playing. Armstrong's career spanned more than 50 years in American music, and in later years, when asked to speak about his life, he would simply point to his trumpet and say, “That's my living; that's my life.”

In Chicago, Armstrong brought jazz from an era of dense polyphony, with many simultaneous lines, to an era of the astonishing solo performance. The performance we will hear is a Hot Five recording—trumpet, clarinet, and trombone for the musical lines, and piano (Lil Hardin), guitar, and banjo for rhythm and fill-in harmony.

“Hotter than That” is a remarkable performance on many levels. It might be seen as a textbook of early jazz: it contains bits of the earlier polyphonic New Orleans style as well as the flashy solos that became popular in the 1920s, and it displays breaks, stop-time, and call-and-response, all standard parts of the vocabulary of early ensemble jazz. Beyond that, it is one of the first truly great jazz recordings, showing Armstrong at his exuberant best on both trumpet and vocals. (See *Listening Guide*.)

LISTENING GUIDE



LOUIS ARMSTRONG (1900–1971)

“Hotter Than That”

Date of performance: 1927

Instruments: trumpet, clarinet, trombone, piano, banjo, guitar

Duration: 3:04

“Hotter Than That” is built around a 32-measure tune written by Lil Hardin. The 32-measure chord pattern is repeated several times, and the performers improvise all their melodic lines over this stable chord structure. The end of each 16-measure section is played as a break: everyone drops out except the soloist, who leads the song into the next half of the chorus or into the next chorus itself. The basic structure of the performance is shown here:



CD III, 19

Intro:	full ensemble (8 bars)
Chorus 1:	trumpet solo with rhythm section (32 bars)
Chorus 2:	clarinet solo with rhythm section (32 bars)
Chorus 3:	vocal with guitar (32 bars)
New material:	vocal and guitar duet (16 bars)
Chorus 4:	trombone solo with rhythm section (16 bars) full ensemble (16 bars)
Coda:	trumpet and guitar

In the third chorus, Armstrong puts aside his trumpet and sings, scatting through the entire 32 bars. Pay special attention to the similarity between his trumpet playing and his singing: he uses the same clean attack, the same “shake” at the end of a long note, the same “rips” up to a high note, and the same arpeggiated style of melody. He also builds a string of 24 equal syncopated notes, intensifying the swing in the rhythm.

After the scat chorus, Armstrong and guitarist Lonnie Johnson play a call-and-response chorus, imitating each other’s notes, inflections, and rhythms. In this section, as in the whole song, every note drives the song forward, producing a work of great energy and unity.

Time	Listen for
Intro	
0:00	Full ensemble, New Orleans–style polyphony. Listen for the individual instruments.
Chorus 1	
0:08	Trumpet solo. Listen for Armstrong’s confident rhythm and occasional “bubbles.”
0:24	Break: background drops out, Armstrong “rips” to a high note.
0:26	Armstrong improvises on arpeggios. “Shake” on long notes.
0:42	Break: clarinet jumps in on trumpet line, prepares for solo.
Chorus 2	
0:44	Clarinet solo. Same tempo, but not as much rhythmic variety.
1:00	Break: clarinet dives into a long blued note.
1:02	Clarinet solo continues.
1:17	Break: Armstrong jumps in, preparing the scat chorus.
Chorus 3	
1:20	Scat chorus. Listen for variety of sound: jagged lines vs. smooth lines, notes hit perfectly vs. notes slid.
1:35	Break: “rip” to high note.
1:39	Scat in syncopation with guitar.
1:53	Break: whining scat, preparing for:
New Material	
1:55	Scat/guitar dialogue. Call-and-response.
2:08	“Rip” to high note in voice, imitated in guitar.
2:13	Piano transition to:
Chorus 4	
2:17	Trombone solo, ending with chromatic climb to:

2:32	Break: Armstrong on an energetic climbing sequence into:
2:35	New Orleans-style polyphony by full ensemble, Armstrong on top.
2:43	Multiple breaks (“stop-time”).
Coda	
2:47	Full group, followed by:
2:49	Guitar/trumpet interchange.

Swing

In the 1930s and early 1940s, the most popular jazz style was **swing**. The Swing Era takes its name from the fact that much of the music of the time was dance music. Because swing was usually played by large bands with as many as 15 or 20 musicians, the Swing Era is also called the Big Band Era. This period also saw the growth of much solo playing, such as that of tenor saxophonists Coleman Hawkins and Lester Young, trumpeter Roy Eldridge, and pianists Fats Waller and Art Tatum.

The most important changes in the evolution from Dixieland jazz to the big bands were the larger number of performers, the use of saxophones in the band, and the use of written (composed or “arranged”) music. For the first time, jazz was mostly written out, rather than

mostly improvised. Swing music became extraordinarily popular during these years, and huge ballrooms would be filled with enthusiastic crowds dancing to the music. Some of the great swing bands of the time were those of Fletcher Henderson, Count Basie, Duke Ellington, and Benny Goodman.

The instruments of the big bands were divided into three groups: the saxophones, the brass section, and the rhythm section. The saxophone group included alto and tenor saxophones, and saxophone players (“reedmen”) could usually also play clarinet. The brass section included both trumpets and trombones. The rhythm section included guitar, piano, bass, and drums. In addition, the bandleader (usually a pianist, a clarinetist, or a trumpeter) would often be featured as a soloist.

PERFORMANCE IN CONTEXT

The “Home of Happy Feet”

Music, dancing couples, and spectators wandered freely in the Savoy Ballroom (1926–1958). This New York City hotspot was equally famous for its quality music, virtuoso dancers, and lack of segregation. White and black patrons mingled on the dance floor: the only hierarchy was one of skill. The ballroom’s music featured some of the biggest names of the Big Band Era: musicians Benny Goodman, Cab Calloway, Chick Webb, and Ella Fitzgerald, and dancers Frankie Manning and Norma Miller, to name only a few. The Savoy Ballroom was located in north Harlem. At its peak, an estimated 700,000 patrons a year passed through its door. Dances featured or invented at the ballroom (including the Lindy Hop, the Flying Charleston, and the Jitterbug Jive) frequently grew into nationwide crazes. There has been a major revival of swing dance in recent decades. On May 26, 2002, a commemorative plaque for the Savoy Ballroom was installed on Lenox Ave between 140th and 141st Streets.





Duke Ellington, directing his band from the piano, 1943.

Visual presentation was an important element of the big bands. Similarly, the sound of the big bands of the Swing Era was smooth and polished. This was partly because of the prominence of the smooth-sounding saxophones, and partly because the music was almost entirely written down. The polyphonic complexity of collective improvisation had given way to an interest in a big homophonic sound, lively presentation, and polish.

One of the most important and influential composers in the history of jazz was Duke Ellington (1899–1974). He is said to have been responsible for as many as 1,000 jazz compositions. Ellington was a man of many talents, being at one and the same time a master songwriter, an innovative composer and arranger, an imaginative and capable pianist, and an extraordinary bandleader.

Ellington was the first to make full use of the rich palette of colors available to the jazz orchestra. Similarly, Ellington's harmony was years ahead of that of his contemporaries, using extended chords, deft chromatic motion, and novel combinations of disparate sonorities.

The bandleader who did the most to popularize swing was Benny Goodman (1909–1986). Known as the “King of Swing,” clarinetist Goodman led a band that was heard by millions across America on a weekly radio show, and he achieved the unprecedented in 1938 by bringing his band to Carnegie Hall, the traditional home of classical music. Goodman was also the first to break through what was then known as the “color barrier” by hiring black musicians such as pianist Teddy Wilson and vibraphonist Lionel Hampton to play among white musicians. This was an important step in what was still an officially segregated country.

Another influential aspect of Goodman's work was his formation of small groups—sometimes a trio or a quartet, but most often a sextet. Goodman's sextet and his other small groups paved the way for the virtuoso solo playing and small combos of bebop.

We listened to the Duke Ellington band performing “It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)” in Chapter 3. Here we'll listen to it again, in the context of jazz history and paying attention to the swinging style of the band, the color and variety of the arrangement, and the subtle ways in which Ellington makes the form of the piece interesting, by inserting extra passages into the conventional chorus–chorus–chorus pattern.

Find the **Quick Listen** on **MySearchLab**

“Benny Goodman at Carnegie Hall 1938”

Find the **Quick Listen** on **MySearchLab**

“Duke Ellington ‘Take the A Train’ in Color”

LISTENING GUIDE

Listen on MySearchLab

DUKE ELLINGTON (1899–1974)

“It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)”

Date of performance: 1932

Orchestration: voice, three trumpets, two trombones, three saxophones, piano, banjo, bass, drums

Duration: 3:11

The soloists in this performance are Ivie Anderson (vocals), Johnny Hodges (alto saxophone), and Joe “Tricky Sam” Nanton (trombone). The contrast in timbre among them is an important feature of the performance, as is the contrast between the composed parts for the band and the improvising by the soloists, and between the growling brass and the sultry saxophones. The whole performance is lively and infectious.



PLEASE NOTE: CD 1, 6



Beboppers in 1948. From left to right: Thelonious Monk, Howard McGhee, Roy Eldridge, Teddy Hill.

For such controversial music, bebop is based on a remarkably conservative structure. Normally it begins with a 32-bar tune. Often the melody instruments play the tune in unison. Then each instrument improvises over the chords of the tune.

The great genius of bebop was Charlie Parker (1920–1955), a brilliant, self-destructive saxophonist who died at the age of 34 from alcoholism and drug addiction. His improvisations changed the way a generation thought about jazz. His playing was profound, dizzying, subtle, and complex; his phrasing was unconventional and inspired; and his tone was edgy and intense—liquid in one line and sandpaper in the next. Parker absorbed music of all kinds,



Charlie Parker at the peak of his career.

including Stravinsky and Bartók; he loved painting and dance. And he was both loyal and inspiring: Dizzy Gillespie called him “the other half of my heartbeat.”

We shall listen to a remarkable performance by Parker, entitled “Confirmation,” which he recorded in 1953. “Confirmation” is in 32-bar AABA form. This format provides a frame for the extraordinary creativity and brilliance of the saxophonist.

Bird [Parker’s nickname] was kind of like the sun, giving off the energy we drew from him. In any musical situation, his ideas just bounded out, and this inspired anyone who was around.

—Max Roach, jazz composer and drummer

LISTENING GUIDE

 Listen on MySearchLab

THE CHARLIE PARKER QUARTET

“Confirmation”

Date of performance: July 30, 1953

Personnel: Charlie Parker, alto saxophone;

Al Haig, piano; Percy Heath, bass; Max Roach, drums

Duration: 3:01



CD III, 20

“Confirmation” is one of the most stunning of Parker’s many extraordinary performances. The studio tapes show that the piece was recorded straight through, with no splicing, no alternative takes, and no errors. It is important to remember that although the first few measures (the initial A of the AABA form) and the third group of eight measures (the B section) have been worked out beforehand, all the rest of what Parker plays is made up on the spot. All the running notes, the rhythmic figures, the cascades of musical gestures—all of these are created in the very moment of performance. Not only that, but each time Parker plays the A section—every single time—he varies it considerably. It is hard to imagine that anyone could come up with such rich creativity in such an instantaneous way.

Charlie Parker's alto saxophone is accompanied by piano, bass, and drums. These serve to create a harmonic foundation and keep a consistent beat, against which Parker's ingenuity, flexibility, and expressive flights can shine. Toward the end of the piece, each of the other players gets a few measures to improvise on his own: first the pianist, then the bass player, and then the drummer. Parker wraps everything up with everyone playing together again.

The form of the piece is the favorite one of the bebop era: AABA. Just to remind you, each section of this form lasts for 8 measures. So each statement or *chorus* of the whole form lasts for 32 measures. There are three whole choruses with Parker, then the piano plays the A section twice (16 measures), the bass player has 8 measures, the drummer has 8, and then Parker returns to play B and A once more (the final 16 measures). To keep your place, keep counting measures (**1**, 2, 3, 4; **2**, 2, 3, 4; etc.) all the way through (it's easier if you focus on the bass, which plays on the beat all the way through).

Time Listen for

Introduction

0:00 | There is a brief four-measure introduction by the piano.

Chorus 1

0:05 | The tune is a typical bebop composition: angular, irregular, and offbeat. Yet Parker makes it sound melodic as well as deeply rhythmic. The rhythm section is rock solid, though the drummer manages to be splashy and interesting at the same time. Although the chorus contains three statements of the A section, Parker makes it sound different each time. The B section (0:25–0:34) is not as highly differentiated in this piece as it is in some bebop compositions, though its harmonies are different.

Chorus 2

0:44 | Parker really starts to fly on this chorus (remember his nickname: "Bird"). He also plays in the lower register of the saxophone to give variety to his solo.

Chorus 3

1:22 | The third chorus is unified by rapid, descending chromatic phrases, which in turn are balanced by arch-shaped arpeggios. A triplet turn is a common motive, and Parker plays right across the "seams" of the AABA form to make long, compelling musical statements of his own.

Piano Solo (AA)

2:00 | Al Haig takes 16 measures for his improvisation, which is quite musical for a normal human being, but sounds a bit dull after listening to Charlie Parker!

Bass Solo (B)

2:16 | Percy Heath gets to play some different rhythms with hints of the tune for eight measures.

Drum Solo (A)

2:28 | Amazingly, Max Roach manages to suggest the melody on his eight measures. (Try humming it along with him.)

Final Half Chorus (BA)

2:35 | Parker repeats the B and A sections as a final half chorus, playing with intensity but closer to the original melody. Percy Heath (who was said to be overwhelmed by Parker's playing on this recording date) gets in the last word!

Cool Jazz

Cool jazz was really a subcategory of bop. It continued to use small combos, and the rhythmic and harmonic styles were similar. Cool-jazz pieces also were based on popular tunes or blues patterns. The departures from bop can be noted immediately in the overall sound of the groups and in the improvised

solos. The playing is more subdued and less frenetic. Pieces tend to be longer, and they feature a larger variety of instruments, including the baritone saxophone, with its deep, full sound, and even some classical instruments, such as the French horn and the cello, which are characteristically mellow in sound.



The Modern Jazz Quartet.

Some groups specializing in cool jazz became quite popular in the 1950s. Miles Davis formed a group with nine instruments, including French horn and baritone sax; the George Shearing Quintet used piano, guitar, vibraphone, bass, and drums; and perhaps the most popular group of all (certainly one of the longest lasting) was the Modern Jazz Quartet, which featured vibraphone, piano, bass, and drums. The vibraphone (an instrument like a xylophone, with metal bars and an electrically enhanced, sustained, fluctuating tone) is the perfect instrument for projecting the “coolth” of cool jazz.

In the 1950s, the musician who pushed the outer boundaries of jazz was the trumpeter Miles Davis. Davis was influential on many fronts. He formed small, highly creative bebop ensembles; he recorded whole albums in front of big bands in a concerto-like format (*Sketches of Spain*, *Porgy and Bess*); and he got together a sextet that made the most popular jazz album of all time: the dreamy, introspective *Kind of Blue* (1959). (If you want only one jazz album in your collection or on your playlist, this is the one to buy.) In his success, his attitude, his clothes, and his spare, understated music, he became the emblem of personal cool.

Davis’s principal sideman during these years was the tenor saxophonist John Coltrane. Coltrane was the opposite of Davis in his playing: he played streams of notes where Davis played very few. They made a perfect combination. Coltrane left Davis to form his own band in the 1960s and became one of the most intense and expressive players of his time.

Free Jazz

A move away from the preset chord progressions that were the basis of jazz up to that time led to the development in the 1960s and 1970s of what

is known as free jazz. This style depended both on original compositions and on creative improvisation. The most influential musician of this period was Ornette Coleman, alto saxophonist, trumpeter, violinist, and composer. Several pieces have been named for him, and an album of his, made in 1960 and entitled *Free Jazz*, gave its name to the whole period.

Free jazz is abstract and can be dense and difficult to follow. Besides abandoning preset chord progressions, it often dispenses with regular rhythmic patterns and melody lines as well. The drumming is energetic, full of color and activity, without a steady and constant pattern of beats. Melodic improvisations are full of extremes: very high notes, squawks and squeals, long-held tones, fragmented phrases, and sudden silences. Many free-jazz groups have experimented with the music of other countries. Idioms borrowed from Turkish, African, and Indian music appear in many free-jazz compositions, and some groups have made use of non-Western instruments, such as sitars, gongs, and bamboo flutes.

Free jazz in its purest form was controversial and less widely accepted than other jazz styles. It could be difficult to listen to and was often raucous and dissonant. Totally free collective improvisation must necessarily have many moments of complete chaos. (Coleman’s *Free Jazz* has two bands improvising simultaneously with no predetermined key, rhythm, or melody.) Free-jazz composers responded to this problem by writing compositions that would begin and end with a set theme or melody, allowing room for free improvisation in between. Obviously, in these

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“Modern Jazz Quartet Live Blues”

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“Coleman *Free Jazz*”

Miles Davis.



JAZZ AND CLASSICAL

Some of the elements of jazz—syncopation, for example—appear in classical music. Some Bach melodies are fascinating in their syncopations and cross-rhythms, Beethoven wrote some variations that sound like ragtime, and Debussy invented many of the chords used later in jazz. But jazz brought to the musical scene an art that was highly original and full of vitality. And many classical composers of the twentieth century turned to the inspiration of jazz in their own work.

Jazz exerted a strong influence on Stravinsky. His first work to incorporate elements of jazz was *L'Histoire du Soldat* (1918); subsequent compositions that employ jazz techniques include *Ragtime* (of the same year), *Piano-Rag-Music* (1919), and the *Ebony Concerto* for clarinet and jazz band (1945).

Ravel, Milhaud, Copland, and Bernstein were four other famous twentieth-century composers influenced by jazz. The Ravel piano concertos each contain jazzlike episodes, and his *Violin Sonata* has a second movement entitled “Blues.” Milhaud’s *Création du Monde* incorporates influences from the jazz he heard in Harlem nightclubs in the early 1920s. Copland’s music is full of jazzy rhythms and harmonies, as is that of Bernstein, who moved especially freely between the two worlds.

The composer who most successfully brought together elements of jazz and classical music was George Gershwin. His *Rhapsody in Blue* (1924) is a perfect example of a symphonic work permeated by elements of the jazz style.

The pianist Cecil Taylor has played in an improvisatory style that is halfway between jazz and classical music. And so-called nu jazz combines the sounds of electronic classical music and jazz improvisation. In 2000 the French producer Ludovic Navarre, who uses the stage name St. Germain, produced a nu-jazz album called *Tourist*, which became a world-wide hit. And Boxcutter (Barry Lynn) combines nu jazz with dubstep in his album *The Dissolve* (2011).

cases the melody provides a common basis for the intervening improvisations and eliminates the randomness of complete freedom. Also, the influence of Eastern and African music brought to free jazz a common language of drones and new scale patterns.

Fusion

Fusion is the name given to the musical style of the 1970s and 1980s that combined elements of jazz and rock music. Perhaps it was the lack of an audience for free jazz or the overwhelming popularity of rock that encouraged jazz musicians to incorporate elements of rock into their performances and compositions during this period.

Rock and jazz have some origins in common: early blues, gospel music, and popular ballads. But they developed along separate lines. Rock is largely vocal music and is based on simple and accessible forms and harmonies. Jazz is mostly instrumental music, and some forms of jazz are quite complex, ignoring popular appeal.

Fusion was the first jazz style to achieve wide popularity since the mass appeal of swing in the 1930s and 1940s. Its most influential proponent was Miles Davis, who made two records in 1969—*In a Silent Way* and *Bitches Brew*—that established the fusion style for the 1970s and 1980s.

The primary characteristics of fusion are the adoption of electric instruments (electric piano, synthesizer, and electric bass) in place of their traditional ancestors, a large percussion section (including several non-European instruments such as hand drums, bells, gongs, shakers, and scrapers), and simplicity of form and harmony. Fusion is often based on straightforward chord progressions and highly repetitive rhythmic patterns. Over this accessible and almost hypnotic foundation, however, fusion presents a kaleidoscopic variety of sounds.

The most popular fusion group of this era was Weather Report, founded by musicians who had worked with Miles Davis on *In a Silent Way* and *Bitches Brew*. The leading light of the group was Joe Zawinul, composer and pianist, but all the members were expert musicians who worked together brilliantly. The result was a remarkable combination of solo lines merging into a rich group sound. Other important groups were founded by Herbie Hancock and Chick Corea.

Back to the Future

The 1990s witnessed a big jazz revival and the coexistence of many different jazz styles. Dixieland groups, big and medium-sized bands, bebop players, experimenters with

electronic music, and fusion players (often with only a small proportion of jazz in the mix) all attracted audiences. The main trend was a conservative one. Wynton Marsalis and his groups revived older styles of jazz instead of creating new ones. Many colleges and universities added jazz courses to the curriculum. Women began to be more active than ever in jazz, most of them singers, pianists, or composers. They included composers Toshiko Akiyoshi, Marian McPartland, Carla Bley, and Maria Schneider; singers Diane Schuur, Abbey Lincoln, Cassandra Wilson, and Dianne Reeves; pianists Joanne Brackeen, Eliane Elias, Geri Allen, and Renee Rosnes; singer-pianist Diana Krall; saxophonist Jane Ira Bloom; and drummer Terri Lyne Carrington.

In the twenty-first century jazz has become an international language. It has large audiences and great performers in Japan, as well as in Western Europe (especially Scandinavia), Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, and Eastern Europe.

In the 1990s, many of the jazz legends passed away, among them Miles Davis (1991), Dizzy Gillespie (1993), and Ella Fitzgerald (1996), but in the new century a new generation of talented younger players established itself on the mainstream jazz scene. Saxophonists Joshua Redman and James Carter; trumpeters Roy Hargrove and Nicholas Payton; pianists Eric Reed and Jacky Terrason; bassist Christian McBride; drummer Leon Parker; and singers Karrin Allyson, Stacey Kent, Madeleine Peyroux, and Kurt Elling all display a deep knowledge of jazz tradition and a remarkable fluency in a variety of styles.

As an alternative to mainstream jazz, various blends of jazz with ethnic, pop, rap, and classical idioms continue to take place, and new musical horizons are being explored by such diverse avant-garde artists as John Zorn and Steve Coleman. A special kind of blend was called “acid jazz.” This music is a hybrid of traditional jazz and popular dance rhythms, created by manipulating “samples” of classic jazz records to form a background for new improvised solos, rap vocals, or both. Acid jazz functions primarily as dance music. A bluesy, complex, repetitive but rhythmic style of jazz called “funk” or “groove” music has also become popular. Its best-known exponents include guitarist John Scofield, saxophonist Maceo Parker, and the organ-bass-drums trio Medeski, Martin,



Jazz singer Betty Carter.

and Wood. And nu jazz combines electronica with jazz solos.

In addition to the highly eclectic mixture of up-to-date jazz styles available today, a movement has manifested itself that might be called a “return to the past.” This movement treats recorded jazz as a great musical repertory, as important in its way as written classical music. Performers attempt to “capture” great jazz styles of past eras in clean, modern performances, enhanced by the new virtuoso instrumental techniques of young performers.

The history of jazz is an elusive one, being concerned with compositions that are fleeting—invented in the heat of the moment. We are fortunate that some of the great improvisations of the past have been captured on recordings and even (by some determined individuals) in notation.

The prime exponent of the “neo-conservative” approach has been Wynton Marsalis, a superb trumpeter and a musician with a great respect for the past. His clean, sophisticated, modern technique, allied with his reverence for the jazz greats of earlier eras, made him the most popular jazz artist in modern times. In 1997, Marsalis became the first jazz musician ever to be awarded the Pulitzer Prize, and he has since become the controversial spokesman and leader of Jazz at Lincoln Center. Although he has managed to create greater awareness of the jazz tradition, many feel that he has stifled creativity and stunted the growth of new styles.

Much exciting new jazz is now being made in countries other than the United States. One of the best was the

Find the **Quick Listen** on **MySearchLab**
 “Medeski, Scofield, Martin, & Wood—
 A Go Go”

A jazz musician who plays fusion is selling out.
 —Wynton Marsalis

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"E.S.T. From Gagarin's Point of View"

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"Empirical Live at the Southbank"

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"The Bad Plus—'Smells Like Teen Spirit' (Nirvana cover)"



Wynton Marsalis.

piano-bass-drums trio called E.S.T., based in Sweden. This group made many recordings, and toured regularly in America, before the tragic death of their leader in a scuba diving accident at the age of 44. A quintet of serious and dedicated young players in England is becoming well-known; they call themselves Empirical. And one American trio, the Bad Plus, is forging a hip new style, incorporating pop and rock into their repertoire.

Jazz purists scorn smooth jazz, which they regard as pop music played on a saxophone with lots of echo. But some listeners enjoy the easy-going sounds of a smooth-jazz player such as Kenny G. Whatever your taste, you can find a panoply of jazz styles in cafes, nightclubs, hotel bars, and restaurants near where you live.

STYLE SUMMARY

Jazz

America inherited many of its musical forms and styles from Europe. Jazz, however, is one of the truly original American art forms.

Jazz was forged in New Orleans and other cities from a vigorous amalgam of African American singing and playing styles and European instruments and harmony. Its strongest early influence was band music, and to this day a jazz group is known as a band. From band music, jazz inherited its instruments: drums as the backbone, trumpet, trombone, clarinet, banjo, and tuba. These instruments could be carried while marching and were loud enough to be heard outdoors. When jazz moved indoors and became stationary, banjo and tuba were gradually replaced by piano and string bass, and the drum kit was invented.

Two other early influences were the syncopated rhythms of ragtime (which was also based on march tempo, meter, and form) and the blues. The blues is simultaneously a poetic form, a harmonic template, a flexible, highly inflected sound, and a people's spirit.

Even more than in classical music, in jazz the music is strongly influenced by individual personalities. And no single person had more influence on jazz than Louis Armstrong—trumpeter, bandleader, singer, actor, individualist, collaborator, and cultural ambassador. It is said, with only slight exaggeration, that he single-handedly invented swing—that almost indefinable element of rhythm that gives jazz its life.

The only period in the twentieth century when jazz could genuinely lay claim to being a

Timeline of Key Jazz Styles

1900–1920s	New Orleans/Dixieland Jazz
1930s–1940s	"Big Band" Jazz/Swing
1950s	Bebop
1950s	Cool Jazz
1960s	Free Jazz
1970s–1990s	Jazz/Rock Fusion
1990s	Neo-Conservatives (Wynton Marsalis and others)
2000s	World Beat/Eclectic Fusions/European Jazz

popular music was the 1930s, variously known as the Swing Era or the Big Band Era. Both white and black audiences, embraced the new music and its exponents and danced to their radios or in dance halls all across America. Swing bands were polished, showy, and put less emphasis on individual accomplishment than on group sound. This did not stop one of the greatest bandleaders, Duke Ellington, from showcasing some of the strongest individual players of the era as members of his band or from using his band to highlight his own remarkably original and sophisticated compositions.

After World War II changed everything, small groups led the way, concentrating on individual expression, instrumental virtuosity, and challenging improvisation in a style known as bop. The voluble genius Charlie Parker on alto saxophone and the taciturn, oblique trumpeter Miles Davis showed how

the new, smaller combos could be a framework for complex, profound statements.

In the 1970s and 1980s an amalgam of jazz and rock, known as Fusion, attracted attention. In more recent times, jazz has been blended with a large assortment of other elements, including Latin sounds and rhythms, synthesized mood music, rap, and funk. These blends are heard all over the airwaves, in nightclubs, and on recordings, though in the 1990s a “return to the past” movement—spearheaded by Wynton Marsalis—led to a re-creation of older styles. Most of the excitement and innovation in jazz is now found in the music made by groups outside the United States, but the latest American jazz performers are striving to breathe new life into a musical genre that has flourished for over a hundred years. Jazz today is torn between a movement back to the past and one that insists on pushing the music into the future.

FUNDAMENTALS OF JAZZ

- The three primary influences were marching bands, ragtime, and the blues
- The characteristic harmony and melodies of jazz are based on the blues scale, with variable third, seventh, and, occasionally, fifth notes in the scale
- Characteristic instrumental sounds are those of saxophone, trumpet (often muted), plucked string bass, and drum kit
- Performing forces usually range from the trio to the small combo (five or so players) to the big band (about 12 to 15 players)
- Jazz usually includes an element of improvisation
- Jazz has become a worldwide phenomenon incorporating influences from hip-hop, rock, and pop

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION AND STUDY

1. Listen to a Louis Armstrong solo several times, and compare it with the notated version (many are available in Gunther Schuller's *Early Jazz*). Discuss the limitations of conventional notation when it comes to jazz performances.
2. Compare Duke Ellington's "It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)" with a Baroque concerto grosso (perhaps Corelli's Op. 6, No. 2), noting the similarity between the jazz soloists and the Baroque soloists, the rhythm section and the basso continuo, and the full band and the *tutti* sections.
3. Throughout the history of jazz, there have been outcries against new trends. This happened with bebop, free jazz, and other styles. Why do you think this is?
4. How did the cultural and social atmosphere of the 1960s influence the development of free jazz?
5. A fusion of pop music and jazz is called "smooth jazz" (heard in the work, for example, of saxophonist Kenny G). Is this very popular style truly "jazz"? Why or why not?
6. Read some articles about the controversies surrounding Wynton Marsalis and Jazz at Lincoln Center. Discuss the issues involved.
7. What role, if any, does race continue to play in jazz?
8. Who gets to define what is really "jazz"? Why?