

A Brief History of Jazz

The earliest can be traced back to 1910 or very early 1920's in the city known as "The Birthplace of Jazz", New Orleans. Although the first official recording of instrumental jazz occurred in New York City by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, New Orleans really embraced and provided a receptive environment for jazz to grow. Why New Orleans? It could be because there were many slaves and cultures in this melting pot of a city. It could be because it was a city that was fairly tolerant of many races and creeds. Regardless, "America's Most Interesting City" gave birth to one of the most interesting genres of music.

The New Orleans style of jazz was known for its collective improvisation. This means that each instrument will play a unique, often improvised part. The instruments that make up a Jazz band were different from any other type of music group. The front-line consisted of the cornet, trombone, and clarinet. The back-line held the tuba, guitar, banjo, and eventually the drums. The melody was given to the cornet.

After seeing its origins in New Orleans, jazz spread to Chicago. Chicago style focused more on the soloists rather than the collective improve of New Orleans style. One of the most famous cornet players was Louis Armstrong. A member of King Oliver's band, Armstrong was a big influence in the shift from collective improve to soloists. At this point in jazz, the piano and the saxophone were added to the ensemble, achieving a much fuller sound.

Then along came the 1930's. Probably one of the most key decades of jazz. Many of the most popular names in Jazz arose from this decade. Influential names like Ella Fitzgerald, Duke Ellington, Benny Goodman, Fletcher Henderson, and Billie Holiday served to pave the path for an era of jazz known as swing or big band. An important thing to remember here, is that swing jazz is a type of dance music. This allowed jazz to reach the ears of many brand new types of audiences. Jazz was able to expand beyond the social restrictions of race. Many bandleaders were prominent enough mingle with the

upper echelons of white society.

During the 1940's, World War II hit. It became a little more difficult for big bands to keep going. A shift occurred in jazz in favor of smaller groups. Out of these smaller groups arose a genre of jazz known as Bebop. Bebop was faster paced, much more improvised and is similar to modern jazz. Cool jazz was almost the exact opposite of Bebop. Cool jazz was known for its slower tempo and lighter tone. It often incorporated elements of classical music and was often performed by white jazz musicians.

In the 1950's many different genres of jazz arose. For example, hard bop, modal jazz and free jazz just to name a few. Hard Bop was a slow tempo jazz that often used elements of gospel and blues. To many, it was seen as the black response to the predominantly white, cool jazz. Two of the most important names in modal jazz were John Coltrane, and my personal favorite, Miles Davis. Davis "modestly" believed that he changed the course of music five times throughout his career. It was bigheaded free-thinking personalities like Davis that pioneered jazz to take a direction towards freedom in structure and improvisation.

After jazz took on this artistic freedom, it eventually turned into Rhythm and Blues, which many don't consider to be jazz at all. Overall, jazz remains one of the most free-forming genres to ever exist. It has a uniquely American tale of origin that no other genre of music can associate with. Heavily influenced by African American culture and spirit, jazz has become a music that often represents America in its golden age of musical revolution.