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The Origins Of A New Sound

"Exactly what is jazz, Mr. Waller?" asked an elderly woman of the legendary piano player, Fats Waller. He replied rather simply, "Madam, if you don't know by now, don't mess with it." He had his point, but it is helpful to make some examination into the origins of this art form and into the people who gave each period its unique thrust. In this column, we will begin a series of articles dedicated to such a historic survey of jazz.

The term "jazz" didn't appear in print until around 1913. It was first used to describe a musical performance recorded in 1917 by the original Dixieland Jazz Band. It is very unclear as to where the word came from, but because of the French culture in New Orleans, it may be a derivative of the French word "jaser." This verb translates "to chatter or have an animated conversation among diverse people." But regardless of when and where this "jazz"

term appeared, the emergence of "jazz" as a new American sound is impossible to pinpoint.

The African musical tradition certainly had a dominant influence in the development of jazz. However, it was the interaction of this complex, rhythmic heritage with the American and European cultures that eventually forced the birth of this unique form.

The immediate forerunners of early jazz are two styles known as ragtime and the blues. The blues are directly related to the spirituals, field cries, and work songs of the American Black slave. The accompanied or unaccompanied sung solos were free improvisations, using syncopated rhythms applied to a basic pulse. Ragtime developed around a style of piano-playing known as stride bass. In 1899, Scott Joplin's famous "Maple Leaf Rag" was first published. Although many others composed and performed the popular rag music, Joplin's name has become synonymous with this cheerful, syncopated style. Famous stride school pianists of the day were Jes Pickett, Eubie Blake, and Hames P. Johnson.

These new sounds seemed

Louis Armstrong



to develop simultaneously throughout the United States, perhaps through the influence of the nationally popular traveling minstrel shows. New York, Chicago, Missouri and Texas all experienced their own unique developments. New Orleans, with its diverse blendings of European and African cultures, became the hotbed for much of the activity that led to the development of what is known today as traditional or "classic" jazz. In the period from 1900 to 1920, the "classic" jazz band consisted of all black musicians, performing the blues in a group improvisational manner. One of the giants of that period, crowned "King of Jazz" around 1897, was Buddy Bolden. His cornet playing revolutionized the concept of improvisation within these early New Orleans ensembles.

Jazz Innovation In The 1920's

Previously, we explored the emergence of jazz as a definable "new sound" around the turn of the century. In the period just prior to 1920, New Orleans witnessed the genius of Buddy Bolden, "King of Jazz", and the rise of the classic jazz ensemble. The members of the Bolden bands were men like Willie Warner and Frank Lewis on clarinets, Willie Cornish on trombone, Willie "Bunk" Johnson on cornet, and Frankie Dusen, the trombone player who finally took over the band around 1907. Other early band-leaders working in New Orleans at the time were Joe "King" Oliver, Freddie Keppard, and later, Manuel Perez, Pops Foster, George Baquet and Sidney Bechet. These men,



Bix Beiderbecke

performing as sidemen in early jazz ensembles, became the innovators of the early 1920's. Exactly what "jazz" sounded like during this period is impossible to say, but recordings became available in the early 1920's of groups such as King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band. These are probably the most authentic jazz recordings available to us today.

Joseph Oliver, billing himself as "King", had moved himself to Chicago in 1918, bringing musicians with him from New Orleans. In 1922, he sent

for a new cornet player to join his "Creole Jazz Band". His name was Daniel Louis Armstrong. Armstrong, along with Johnny and Babe Dodds, Lil Hardin, Honore Dutrey, and others, created the sounds of the new Chicago-based band, recording the famous Dippermouth Blues album in 1923. Another of Oliver's sidemen, Edward "Kid" Ory, was a band-leader in his own right. His playing is the epitome of the New Orleans tailgate-trombone style, and his most famous composition was "Muskrat Ramble".

The influence of both ragtime and blues on jazz in the 1920's came together in the classic jazz pianist and composer, "Jelly Roll" Morton. There is little fact to his claim to be the "inventor of jazz", but his contributions as a jazz musician are of major importance. He merged ragtime's form and harmonies with the blues' melodic style of improvisation. The overall concept of his music is orchestral, drawing from the New Orleans brass-band sounds. Many of his works became jazz standards, such as

"King Porter Stomp", "Jelly Roll Blues" and "Wolverine Blues."

Bix Beiderbecke, along with others such as Nick LoRocca, represented the white jazz musicians during these developing years. Although Bix has often been used as a symbol of the Jazz Age, he died almost unnoticed by all but a small circle of jazz associates and admirers. He played with the Wolverines, Charlie Straight's commercial orchestra, Paul Whiteman Orchestra and others. His solo jazz-cornet style was unique and employed an "exquisite tone and legato style of improvisation." He is also said to be perhaps the first white musician ever to be admired by Negro jazzmen. His music was unconventional and drew on the new French impressionistic sounds.

Louis "Satchmo" Armstrong was perhaps the most legendary of the black musicians of the traditional or classic period. His powerful technique and creativity on the cornet allowed him to become the leading jazz virtuoso of the day. The jazz recordings cut by his groups, the "Hot Five" and the "Hot Seven," display his unrivaled soloist abilities, and earned for him a success and fame that were enjoyed until his death in 1971.

Duke Ellington



Emergence Of The Big Band Sound

Jazz in the 20's had slowly changed from the classic New Orleans style to a modified Dixieland style. Some of the youngsters of that period who were to become leaders in the following decade were Eddie Condon, the remarkable Chicago banjo player; Pee Wee

Russell, clarinet; Bunny Berigan, trumpet; Gene Kruppa, drums; and Benny Goodman, clarinet. These musicians performed in and around Chicago - the jazz mecca of the 1920's. Both Chicago and New York afforded these performers proximity to the all-important recording studios and the radio stations. However, other regional styles flourished during this period. The six major territories that emerged were East Coast, Southeast, Midwest, Northwest, Southwest and West Coast.

When the market crashed in 1929, many musicians found themselves out of work and unable to cope with the changing musical demands of the American moods. The lively hot jazz style predominant in the early and middle 20's gave way to the dreamy, sentimental music of bands led by such men as Guy Lombardo and Paul Whiteman. Fletcher Henderson, broadcasting from the Roseland Ballroom in New York, led a band of all jazz musicians but rarely strayed from the moderate path of mid-tempo, social dance music. The leading hot musician, Louis Armstrong, continued to play, but like others who performed in small ensembles, he found his broad support was gradually shrinking. The era of the Big Band was emerging.

Don Redman, alto saxophonist and arranger, joined Fletcher Henderson in 1923. Two years later, a record of Redman's, Dippermouth Blues and Sugar Foot Stomp, appeared. The arrangements called for expanded instrumentation and ensemble section playing. Redman left the group in 1928, but Henderson continued to use the same size group and orchestral concepts that Redman had introduced.

The expanded instrumen-

tation of these leading dance bands was a natural development in jazz, based on the need for exploring new harmonies and timbre. The pioneer who did more to develop and experiment with these new sounds was composer/arranger Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington. He created his own unique brand of chromatic harmony, demonstrated by works such as "Sophisticated Lady." The impact of Duke Ellington on the world of jazz is not easily measured, but it was largely through his efforts that a new sound began to emerge - the sound of the Swing Era.

The Swing Era

Duke Ellington with his 1932 composition "It Don't Mean A Thing If It Ain't Got That Swing" made his own commentary on the American jazz scene.

Between 1929 and 1935, the transition from small ensembles performing "hot jazz" to the larger jazz orchestras performing written arrange-

ments with very little improvisation was regarded by some as a commercial "cop-out." The new music was considered less creative and exciting due to the fact that a large percentage of the popular dance bands were not able to "swing" as a whole.

Some of the musicians employed in these big groups had limited facilities in the art of improvisation, resulting in a poor feeling for section-playing and minimal jazz content. However, the music performed by these groups, such as Glen Gray's CasaLoma Orchestra, had its roots in the past and must be regarded as a progressive link in the evolution of jazz. Bandleader Duke Ellington surrounded himself with jazz musicians of the highest caliber. His Big Band arrangements further expanded this new sound, utilized the unique ability and creativity of each band member.

The name that is synonymous with this new era is Benny Goodman, "King of Swing." Although men such as Redman, Ellington, Moten and Henderson were responsible for inventing the style,

Wes Montgomery





Clifford Brown

Goodman is credited with crystalizing it, setting the technical standards, and bringing it into public demand. (Some of the characteristics of this highly-popular style are tight-knit, precision playing, flashy uptempo solos, a driving four-beat rhythm and powerful brass orchestration.)

A new generation of schooled musicians achieved a level of technical competence never before imagined. Their brilliantly-improvised solos characteristically remained close to the popular tune and the basic underlying chord structure. This ornamental approach was largely for the benefit of the general public.

The master of the swing keyboard was a blind pianist named Art Tatum. His technique on the piano was so astonishing that it is said classical giants such as Horowitz and Rubenstein made a point of visiting clubs where they could hear him play.

Louis Armstrong continued to be the leading trumpet soloist of the day, recording with the Jimmy Dorsey Band in 1936.

Other jazz greats of this period were Goodman sidemen such as Harry James and Cootie Williams on trumpets, Lionel Hampton on vibes, and

Teddy Wilson on piano. Perhaps two of the most famous of his band members were Charlie Christian on guitar and Gene Krupa on drums. Their innovations later became standard repertoire for future players. All of these men would have a major say in the coming decade known as the "Big Band Years."

The Big Band Era

If you were one of those who lived through World War II, then the Big Band Era should evoke some special memories for you.

Maybe you were one of the first to swoon over Frank Sinatra at the Paramount. Perhaps Glen Miller and "Chesterfield Time" helped you get through your homework. If you were a New Yorker, you probably danced one evening to Dick Jurgens at the Tiranon, then over to the Aragon for the champaign music of Lawrence Welk. If you were extremely fortunate, you caught Duke Ellington's first Carnegie Hall Concert in early 1943. Whatever your most memorable moment, the Big Band Era was full of moments that will forever be stamped on the hearts of jazz lovers of every age.

The post-war swing bands were the most exciting organizations of the day. The top bands of the period were led by Woody Herman, Duke Ellington, Bennie Goodman, Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, Count Basie and Artie Shaw. By 1940, there were close to two hundred of these dance orchestras, and each had something musically special with which the fans could identify. These bands had an uncanny rapport with their audiences. The fans

could sense if the soloists or sections were putting forth their best and would respond accordingly. It was common place for people to cheer and yell their approval, although not with the kind of hysterics evoked by today's Rock music. This was an honest reaction to the rooted jazz music of the day.

By 1935, the physical dimensions of swing bands had increased to the standard fourteen members - four rhythm, five brass and five reeds. This size has grown to between 17 and 20 musicians on most of the Big Bands still performing today. Large ensembles dominated the scene until the mid-1940's, when the influence of BeBop and small groups came into its own. Today, we only have a handful of large jazz orchestras remaining. Woody Herman, Maynard Ferguson and Buddy Rich are all leading their respective ensembles. Duke Ellington's son, Mercer, heads that orchestra since his father's death. The Miller and Dorsey bands are on the road also, though led by other musicians. The Stan Kenton Band is said to be returning in 1980 under a new director. Stan died last month at age 67.

With each passing day,

Chet Baker



the great leaders are becoming memories in jazz history. If you have the opportunity to hear any of their great Big Bands, take it - tomorrow they may be gone.

The Influence Of BeBop

If you were dancing to the Big Bands in the early 1940's, then you and your friends were probably wondering about the new music that began to appear on the scene during the later years of that same decade.

The end of World War II ushered in a radically different style of jazz known as "BeBop." The term "BeBop" was first used as a verbal description of the sound that occurred at the end of most musical phrases of this period. The music was daring and sophisticated, both rhythmically and harmonically. For this reason, public acceptance was slow. Even jazz critics did not immediately appreciate the greatness of this era.

One of the most obvious new developments of this period was the rejection of the large ensembles. The very nature and style of the Big Band

music did not lend itself well to the individual player. Rather, it was the ability to blend and remain rhythmically tight as a unit or section that was of primary importance. Also, the music was dance music, and extended or lengthy improvisational passages were not considered suitable. It was due to an increased desire for individual expression that led to a return of the small group of which the quintet was the most popular.

The ideas and innovations of men like Lester Young, Charlie Christian and Louis Armstrong laid the groundwork for the emerging BeBop style. Music participants of the period were many, such as drummers, Kenny Clarke and Max Roach; pianists, Thelonious Monk, Earl "Bud" Powell and Art Tatum; bassist, Oscar Pettiford; and tenor saxophonist, Coleman Hawkins. However, the two leaders of this new music were Charlie "Yardbird" Parker, alto sax, and John "Dizzy" Gillespie, trumpet.

Parker was a brilliantly inventive musician, with an imagination that seemed virtually inexhaustible. Harmonically, he was at least as tasteful as any leader of the day. Rhythmically, he went beyond anyone. His solos were masterpieces of structured improvisation.

Dizzy Gillespie was perhaps the only jazz trumpeter of that time who not only had a sophisticated understanding of harmonic theory, but also possessed total technical facility on his instrument.

It's interesting to note that neither Parker nor Gillespie enjoyed universal recognition for their accomplishments during the period when BeBop was at its height. The years 1945 to 1947 carried the name of

Johnny Hodges as outstanding saxophonists in the "Esquire" All-American Jazz Band Poll. Cootie Williams and Louis Armstrong won during that same time span in the trumpet division.

Jazz history has undergone many changes since the early days of Buddy Bolden and the traditional Dixieland jazz bands. However, the BeBop era was of special significance; for within its ranks, it boasted two of jazz history's greatest names in the art of improvisation - Louis Armstrong, the first, and Charlie Parker, some 25 years later, the second.

The Cool Period

Musicians of the BeBop Era, with their fierce individualism and their sophisticated jazz approach, had planted a seed of experimentalism that drastically effected the jazz in the 50's. Bands and musicians everywhere strove to develop their own unique sound which would distinguish them from their competitors. Amplifying soft-timbre instruments, introducing new sounds such as the cello, dispensing with familiar instruments such as the piano, all were resorted to in the effort to catch the public's attention. This conscious search for the re-organization of jazz sounds resulted in a complex and intellectual music that was not easily accepted by the general American public. The audiences were bewildered by the absence of easily-remembered tunes, understandable rhythms, and well worn harmonies. Even the musicians, caught up in the race of experimentalism, were unprepared for the increasing technical demands of such a complex music. The period not only

Charlie Parker and Miles Davis





Miles Davis

spawned confusion for the musicians and their audiences, but also perplexed the jazz historian who attempted to categorize the countless substyles that emerged out of the BeBop Era. Cool jazz, West Coast jazz, East Coast Hard Bop, and Third Stream, all were part of the puzzling picture that made up jazz in the second half of the century.

While Bop was a revolt against the Swing Era, the Cool Period was simply a further development of the BeBop style. One of the foremost figures was Lennie Tristano. This piano player was one of the first to employ extended forms and contrapuntal textures in his music. One of his most famous disciples, Lee Konitz, was an alto saxophonist who had a great influence on his contemporaries. His statement that it was possible "to get the maximum intensity in your playing and still relax" is an important description of the cool style. This approach was a quiet, unexcited, almost dreamy, behind the beat playing, that strove for a feeling of intense, but relaxed, swing. Stan Getz, tenor saxophonist featured on Woody Herman's "Early Autumn," employed an airy, delicate timbre that typified the cool sound.

Miles Davis was another musician who figured prominently in the birth of the Cool Period. His orchestra made a recording in 1949, using a unique blend of French horn and tuba, along with a modern jazz ensemble. The resulting "cool sound" was a graceful blend of sonorities over complex rhythmic figures patterned after the style of Lennie Tristano.

The Avant Garde Period

During the late 50's and early 60's, the tenor saxophone, as played by John Coltrane and Sonny Rollins, again became the dominant jazz instrument after beginning somewhat overshadowed by the alto sax in the Charlie Parker era.

Sonny Rollins brought a highly developed rhythmic sense to his music. Following in Thelonius Monk's footsteps, he began more and more to base his improvisations on the melody of a piece rather than the underlying harmony. Sonny was one of a new breed of jazz musicians who viewed his music-making in a critical and analytical way. Many

John Coltrane



times he withdrew from performing to re-assess his own approach to his instrument and his musical ideas. This type of inward thinking gradually led to the establishment of a new order - the jazz avant garde. This new group of musicians searched for new and better sounds and pushed jazz to new limits.

One of the composers who helped to usher in the 60's music was George Russell. Much of the new music was based on principles he developed in his "Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization." This work is an ambitious attempt to develop a theoretical basis for jazz composition and improvisation.

With the appearance of the American civil rights movement, musicians performing this revolutionary, free jazz found a ready audience among the young black community. The radical sounds that rejected melodic, harmonic and rhythmic restraints seemed to support their feelings of anarchy and nihilism. One of the most important black saxophonists of the time was musical innovator and spiritual leader, Ornette Coleman. His music carried a message that could be identified with throughout Black America - a message of "freedom, love, and black beauty."

The most central figure among these avant-garde musicians was John Coltrane. In the year of 1965, he won simultaneously the Record of the Year Award, Jazzman of the Year Award, and Tenor Saxophonist of the Year Award in the Down Beat readers' poll. Coltrane used his interest in the music of India to bring a sense of unity he felt had been lost in the free jazz of men like Ornette Coleman. While Indian music is primarily melodic and devoid of harmony, the sound of the drone strings provided a pitch level around which a series of tones could be organized.



Billie Holiday

While Coltrane was evolving a new style, many of the musicians who had become prominent in the 20's and 30's were still active. Musicians like Ben Webster, Coleman Hawkins, Buck Clayton, Red Allen and Duke Ellington all produced excellent work during Coltrane's movement. For as in all segments of life, there are always two philosophies at work - one to preserve and one to evolve.

Third Stream

One of the jazz substyles that spun off from the experimental storm of the 1950's was known as Third Stream. This term was coined by composer Gunther Schuller. Schuller, a classically trained French horn player and a master of the latest avant-garde compositional techniques, attempted to produce a new "third" sound by combining classical and jazz elements. The difficulties arising from such a blending of these two art forms were many. Jazz rhythms are often impossible to notate accurately, presenting an enormous problem for classically-trained performers. Jazz musicians, on the

other hand, found it doubly difficult to maintain the spontaneity of improvisation when faced with complex instructions, new harmonies and unfamiliar forms.

Although Schuller was primarily responsible for establishing Third Stream as a valid musical approach, other composers of the period were quite successful in their experiments along this line.

Teo Macero, saxophonist, was very active as a composer of jazz-influenced atonal classical works. One of his more famous compositions entitled "Fusion" was performed by the New York Philharmonic under the direction of Leonard Bernstein in 1958.

Charlie Mingus, leader of many jazz ensembles, was constantly striving as a composer to broaden the horizons of jazz. He introduced many atonal and dissonant effects in his music and employed classical techniques such as contrapuntal lines and forms. Mingus, unlike Macero and Schuller, was primarily jazz-oriented, and though his music employs some classical element, it was as deeply rooted in jazz as any music of the traditional swing or BeBop periods.

Jazz Today

During the past months, the Jazz Corner has viewed jazz in its historical form. Moving from its inception at the turn of the century and tracing its steps through to the 1960's, we have arrived at the present decade.

Jazz improvisation has fused itself with rock and the result is called Jazz Rock or Fusion Music. There are leading musicians in the idiom such as Grover Washington, tenor sax; George Benson, guitar; and Freddie Hubbard, trumpet. Each of these musicians came up through other periods and have incorporated elements from those periods into the rock music approach.

Perhaps the best known and most widely recorded fusion musicians of the decade are Randy and Michael Brecker. Both brothers began their musical study at an early age, receiving important training from their father, a pianist. Randy began with trumpet at the age of eight, and Michael soon followed on the tenor sax.

Both Brecker boys got their earliest experience in ensemble playing by spending summers at Big Band camps. Randy began playing at local bars while still in his teens. It was here he received his rhythm and blues exposure as well as important improvisational techniques.

In a recent article Randy is quoted as saying: "After gigs I would listen to artists from the classic BeBop era: Sonny Rollins, Coltrane, Parker, Miles,

James Moudy



Horace Silver. These artists had a lot of influence in my development."

Both Randy and Michael attended Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana. Says Randy, "It's important to have a solid music background. Studying orchestration helps a great deal."

Dave Brubeck and Gerry Mulligan



From Indiana, the Brecker brothers eventually arrived in New York City and started the group "Dreams." Although "Dreams" never achieved national acclaim, it opened the way for fusion groups to enter the world of jazz.

Some five years later the Breckers came back with another group called the "Brecker Brothers Band." The group was signed to Arista Records and a hit single "Sneakin' Up Behind You" in 1975 established them on the jazz rock charts. There were two more albums called "Back To Back" and "Don't Stop The Music" which gave them a solid foothold on the scene. Now "Heavy Metal BeBop" has been released, which is a live recording made on their last tour.

What's to come in the jazz field is hard to say, but whoever is to lead the way will

have to be a musician who is well informed and studied in jazz and its history. A tree does not grow straight without a solid root foundation; and for jazz to continue to evolve, its new leaders will have to be like the Brecker brothers - solid, studied, and experienced jazz musicians.

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