

Dave brubeck an  
introductory  
biography film studies  
essay



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MSP 1160 - History of Jazz An essay on a specific jazz composer, focusing on the historic period, the style(s) he/she represents, his/her major compositions, in-depth analysis of at least one specific recording and also your personal view on the artist.

## **Dave Brubeck: An Introductory Biography**

David Warren Brubeck, better known as Dave Brubeck, was born on the 6th of December 1920 in Concord, California, and then moved to Lone, California with his family when he was 11 years old. His father, Howard 'Pete' Brubeck, was a cattle rancher and rodeo roper, and his mother, Elizabeth 'Bessie' Brubeck née Ivey, was a piano teacher who wished to become a concert pianist (she had studied with the acclaimed Dame Myra Hess in England). He also had two older brothers, Henry and Howard Brubeck, who were pursuing a musical career. During his childhood and teenage years, Dave Brubeck would help his father in his ranching duties, but his mother would forbid him to take on the more difficult roping jobs for fear of him injuring his hands. He would also receive piano lessons from his mother, although he wasn't too happy with classical music instruction and could barely read music notation. Eventually, he stopped receiving music lessons from his mother so he could focus more on his ranching duties, as his father had wanted Dave to carry on his legacy. However, his interest in music did not diminish at all; he would often perform polyrhythmic jazz and sometimes his father would have to pry him away from the piano to start on the day's work. Art Tatum greatly influenced Dave Brubeck's early style of jazz performance. Bessie Brubeck was a casual listener of jazz, but did not fully condone her son's musical direction until one day, whilst Dave was pursuing a career as a jazz musician,

she heard Art Tatum's jazz rendition of Antonin Dvořák's "Humoresque". It was at that moment that she looked at Dave and told him, "Now, David, I understand why you want to be a jazz pianist." Dave Brubeck was meant to become a cattle rancher as per his father's wishes and initially studied veterinary science in The College of the Pacific in Stockton, California in order to fulfil his mother's wish of studying at a college level. At the end of the first year of his studies, his zoology teacher advised Brubeck to study at the conservatory of music as his mind wasn't into studying veterinary science but rather music. So the next year, Brubeck switched his major to music and received much acclaim from his teachers for his prowess in wind instruments, composition, improvisation, and other areas. However, once it was discovered that Brubeck was unable to read music, the Dean considered not allowing him to graduate, and it was only through the music teachers' intervention and a promise never to teach that the Dean reconsidered and allowed Brubeck to graduate in music. Throughout this ordeal, Brubeck appeared mostly unfazed about the whole situation, informing the Dean that he didn't care about the fate of his graduation. In fact, he had told the surprised Dean, "No, all I want to do is play jazz and I can do that." After graduation, Brubeck enlisted in the army in 1942 and was mostly away from the action that was taking place in Europe during World War II, eventually becoming a Private First Rank. His unit was deployed to Normandy after the successful D-Day operation, and on the eve of the unit's deployment to the Battle of the Bulge, a Red Cross truck set up a stage in the barracks and asked for volunteer pianists. Brubeck volunteered, and he was such a hit that the colonel in charge of the 17th Replacement Depot ordered that Brubeck should never set foot in the front lines of battle and that he would organize a

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band, known as The Wolfpack. Already in this early start to Brubeck's musical career one could see that he paid a lot of attention to who the members of his band were, as he refused military promotions in order to stay with his band members. Brubeck made use of the G. I. Bill when he was discharged after four years of military service to further his education in music at Mills College in Oakland, California. It was there that he met and studied under the great French composer Darius Milhaud, who had a very liberal view on music and adopted jazz influences for his compositions. Milhaud instructed Brubeck and the other students in polytonal harmony and counterpoint of the classical tradition, but also advised them to make good use of jazz disciplines, especially so that they would keep up their American heritage whilst studying these very European methods of music techniques. During his studies, Brubeck formed an octet with his classmates (unofficially known as the Dave Brubeck Octet). This octet experienced a much different performing experience than its members were accustomed to, and performed in a much more polytonal and contrapuntal manner, directly contrasting with the big band and swing music which was performed specifically for dancing and background entertainment purposes. Because of this, the octet barely found opportunities to perform in clubs because of their 'avant-garde' approach to jazz. Brubeck eventually formed a trio in order to find work opportunities to support himself, his wife, Iola Brubeck née Whitlock, and his eventual children. His career took a long time to take off the ground, and when he finally got his big break, he had a swimming accident in Hawaii in 1951, where he was almost left paralyzed. He damaged his neck and spinal cord, and while he eventually recovered he still maintained nerve pain which affected his hands. Because of this, Brubeck

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had to adapt and write complex block-chords for him to perform rather than the more dexterous and florid runs he was accustomed to. Because of his destitute financial state and his somewhat limited physical ability, Brubeck got in contact with Paul Desmond, a saxophonist who was part of the Dave Brubeck Octet, and asked to form a quartet with him. Thus began one of the greatest collaborations in jazz music. The Dave Brubeck Octet in

actionSource: <http://www.jazzwax.com/2010/02/interview-dave-brubeck-part-3.html>C: UsersMiguel RosalesDocumentsUniversityMusic StudiesMSP

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portrait of Darius Milhaud, who greatly influenced Dave BrubeckSource:

<http://www.classical.net/music/comp.lst/milhaud.php>

## **The Dave Brubeck Quartet**

With Dave Brubeck on the piano and Paul Desmond on the alto saxophone as permanent members, the quartet cycled through various drummers and bassists such as Joe Dodge, Lloyd Davis, Bob Bates, and Ron Crotty. The quartet earned a residence at Black Hawk nightclub, and it gathered a huge fanbase as being, if not the origin, a pioneering element of West Coast jazz, which was a sub-genre of cool jazz. The quartet often toured when they were given free time from their residency obligations, and this resulted in Dave Brubeck often being homesick and missing his family. Therefore, Lola Brubeck proposed sending the quartet to various educational institutions around the state to generate performance opportunities whilst keeping her husband close to home. Unknowingly, Lola Brubeck opened a new audience

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for jazz performers all around in the form of students, who were unable to enter nightclubs for various reasons. The quartet were able to record live albums because of these opportunities, including "Jazz at Oberlin" (1953) and "Jazz Goes to College" (1954). In 1954, Dave Brubeck was featured on the cover of Time magazine. Brubeck had mixed feelings about this; he was honoured to have been featured in such a prestigious magazine, but at the same time he felt that Duke Ellington deserved more recognition and that he was picked over Ellington because he was Caucasian. America was still a country which looked down on African-Americans during this time, and Brubeck couldn't stand this racial ideology. This fact would cause many problems for his quartet in the future, but would also greatly aid it in terms of reaching higher standards. Eventually, Joe Morello and Eugene Wright established their places as the drummer and bassist of the quartet respectively, and it was in this moment that Brubeck knew it was time to push their boundaries and excel in the creation and performance of jazz. Morello was extremely talented at drumming polyrhythms, a trait which Brubeck craved when looking for drummers, and Wright, who was the last member to join this legendary line-up in 1958, was an extremely steady bassist who would always remain in time and key with the rest of the quartet, no matter how much the group strayed into foreign territory. This line-up became the most popular one associated with The Dave Brubeck Quartet. Being African-American, Wright faced much discrimination whilst performing with the quartet; nightclub owners wouldn't let him get onstage to perform, and television programme directors made plans to omit him from recordings, but Brubeck would have none of it and cancelled many shows whilst touring educational institutions, having cancelled 23 shows out of a <https://assignbuster.com/dave-brubeck-an-introductory-biography-film-studies-essay/>

planned 25 in the summer of 1958. The quartet was chosen to take part in the United States Department of State tour of Europe and Asia, and it was during this tour whilst observing Turkish folk musicians performing in 9/8 time that Brubeck was inspired to release an album with music which deviated from the usual 4/4 time found in jazz. So he studied the musical cultures of all the countries the quartet visited (including Turkey, Belgium, Iran, and Scotland, amongst others) and worked with his quartet to record their most successful album " Time Out" (1959). This album featured music with uncommon time signatures, such as 9/8 in Blue Rondo à la Turk, an alternating 3/4 and 4/4 combo in Three To Get Ready, and 5/4 in Take Five. Columbia Records was initially reluctant to release this album as they felt that people would be put off from buying an album which included music which could not be danced to, but they were proven wrong as the album went platinum with over a million sales. The Dave Brubeck Quartet enjoyed much success, releasing several albums such as " Time Changes" (1963) and " Time In" (1966). The quartet also toured frequently and made a plethora of television appearances. In 1967, Dave Brubeck finally felt that he needed more time to spend with his family and on composition, so he disbanded the quartet after consulting with the other members. Brubeck performed on occasion with his sons in their newly-formed quartet, featuring guest appearances by Paul Desmond and Gerry Mulligan amongst others, but to the fans the Dave Brubeck Quartet was at its peak with the 1958 line-up of Dave Brubeck, Paul Desmond, Joe Morello, and Eugene Wright. C:

UsersMiguel RosalesDocumentsUniversityMusic StudiesMSP 1160 - History of JazzAssignment1101541108\_400. jpgDave Brubeck on the cover of Time magazine (8th November 1954)Source: <http://www.time.com/time/covers/0,https://assignbuster.com/dave-brubeck-an-introductory-biography-film-studies-essay/>

16641, 19541108, 00. htmlC: UsersMiguel RosalesDocumentsUniversityMusic StudiesMSP 1160 - History of JazzAssignment5vEvk. jpg(From left to right)

The Dave Brubeck Quartet consisting of Joe Morello on drums, Paul Desmond on alto sax, Dave Brubeck on piano, and Eugene Wright on double bass

(Taken in Belgium 1964)Source: <http://songbook1.wordpress.com/pp/fx/0-new-features/1955-59-selected-standards/in-your-own-sweet-way/C>:

UsersMiguel RosalesDocumentsUniversityMusic StudiesMSP 1160 - History of JazzAssignmentBrubeck Take Five. jpgThe album cover for " Time Out"

Source: <http://www.vintagevinylnews.com/2012/12/dave-brubeck-1920-2012.html>

## **Styles and Compositions of Dave Brubeck**

From his childhood, Brubeck was fascinated with rhythm, particularly polyrhythms. He would often listen to the horses' footsteps while they were galloping and invent a rhythm in his head to play in parallel. He also had an early appreciation for jazz and would often compose music and improvise at home as his mother wouldn't allow her children to possess a radio, instructing them to make music themselves instead. Brubeck's influences include Art Tatum, Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Cleo Patra Brown, Fats Waller, and Darius Milhaud. He initially started off imitating the jazz artists he would hear when he eventually was allowed to make use of a radio. When he entered college, he was made to learn in a more ' classical' discipline, despite not being able to read music. Eventually, he met Milhaud and learnt to combine his classical and avant-garde influences with his jazz performance, and at that point Brubeck saw that even in jazz music new territories could be explored through polytonality and polyrhythm. He was

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given an opportunity to explore such territories with his classmates in The Dave Brubeck Octet. When Brubeck was almost declared dead after his accident in Hawaii, he was limited in his performative abilities because of residual nerve pain affecting his hands. This probably influenced him in his compositions, making sure not to overextend himself and at the same time still be a solid soloist and accompanist, resulting in him writing music with a focus on chords and a sweet melody rather than high-velocity runs.

Brubeck's interest and vision in polyrhythms and polytonality could finally become concrete when he had Paul Desmond, Joe Morello, and Eugene Wright at his disposal. Morello and Wright were much disciplined and could hold their ground to whatever rhythms Brubeck instructed them to play. With a solid foundation consisting of the two, Brubeck was free to roam towards experimentation in tonality, occasionally taking over the show but generally contributing to the rhythm and harmony, leaving Desmond with the duty of providing a sweet lyrical line on top of all the foundations set by his fellow quartet members. This was a perfect example of teamwork and harmony in the blending of musicians with different attitudes and skills towards the making of an amazing end-product. The critics were not impressed though, as they constantly mocked the quartet for not being able to keep in time together, something which irked Brubeck terribly. He said, "If [the critics] don't have a background, say in African music or Indian music or Greek music or Turkish music, [or] they're what you call jazz purists, they haven't a clue to what you're doing. They don't know how to criticize it." Undoubtedly, "Time Out" is the greatest work that the quartet has ever produced,

showcasing Brubeck's fascination with odd time signatures uncommon in

America at the time. Included in this album are songs such as "Blue Rondo à  
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la Turk" and "Take Five", all featuring the quartet's (and particularly Brubeck's) talent in performance and improvisation. "Take Five" is the quartet's best known single, and it appeared out of nowhere. Whilst backstage, Morello was casually playing a 5/4 rhythm, and Desmond improvised on top of that rhythm. Brubeck heard this and instructed Desmond to write what he was playing because he wanted to include it in "Time Out". The next day, Desmond showed Brubeck what he wrote, then Brubeck outlined the structure of the music they should record, and thus "Take Five" was materialised, with Paul Desmond being credited as the composer. The quartet was in shock at how well-received it was, claiming that it was put in the album mainly as an opportunity for Morello to perform a drum solo. After he disbanded the quartet, Brubeck placed his focus on composition. He made use of his knowledge in jazz as well as his classical instruction by his teachers in The College of the Pacific and Darius Milhaud to take on new challenges such as writing a musical, a cantata, an oratorio, and a mass. Brubeck's musical "The Real Ambassadors" is a jazz musical which was written with Louis Armstrong in mind (Dave and Lola Brubeck, the writers of the musical, wanted him to play the leading role), and concerns mainly the racial and foreign relations in regard to America. Even until the end, Brubeck could not stand racial intolerance especially in regard to music, and once famously stated, "Jazz is the voice of freedom." During this phase, Brubeck was going through a spiritual experience, starting from World War II. He often inspired himself from Catholic sources, such as Gregorian chants and masses, blending them with his intrigue in polytonality and odd time signatures as well as Milhaud's teachings. "The Light in the Wilderness" is an oratorio which Brubeck wrote on the basis of Jesus Christ's teachings, <https://assignbuster.com/dave-brubeck-an-introductory-biography-film-studies-essay/>

particularly " Do unto others as you would have others do unto you."

[Matthew 7: 12]C: UsersMiguel RosalesDocumentsUniversityMusic

StudiesMSP 1160 - History of JazzAssignmentfront9. jpgThe cover sleeve to

the jazz music " The Real Ambassadors" Source: [http://underdesign.wordpress.com/2010/03/29/groovy-vinyl-dave-brubeck-the-real-](http://underdesign.wordpress.com/2010/03/29/groovy-vinyl-dave-brubeck-the-real-ambassadors/)

ambassadors/C: UsersMiguel RosalesDocumentsUniversityMusic StudiesMSP

1160 - History of JazzAssignmentUntitled. pngThe main melody line and

chord structure of The Dave Brubeck Quartet's " Take Five" Source: The Real

Book of Jazz Volume 1

Book of Jazz Volume 1

## **Blue Rondo à la Turk**

" Blue Rondo à la Turk" is a composition by Dave Brubeck which had an instant impact on me the moment I first heard it. It was included in the album " Time Out" and showcases the amazing teamwork of The Dave Brubeck Quartet. Brubeck was inspired to write this piece of music when he heard folk musicians performing in 9/8 time in Turkey. The music is written in 9/8 time, but the rhythm is made up of 3 groups of 2 quavers and 1 group of 3 quavers per bar. Every fourth bar, the rhythm changes to 3 groups of 3 quavers and reverts back to the starting rhythm in the following bar. Almost two minutes into the music, the saxophone plays a sweet and lyrical line, with the whole quartet switching suddenly to a 4/4 swing rhythm for 2 bars, reverts back to the 9/8 rhythm (providing the opening two bars of the music) for 2 bars, goes back to the swing rhythm for another 2 bars, and continues this pattern until the quartet settles on the swing rhythm to allow the saxophone and piano to perform very melodic and ' cool' solos. Eventually, the 9/8 rhythm appears for 2 bars and the two rhythms switch back and forth

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until the 9/8 ' Turkish Rondo' takes over again, where the music is allowed to end. The 9/8 rhythm can be considered the A section and the 4/4 swing the B section, and the form of the music, in its essence, is in ABA form. In the recording provided in the album " Time Out", Brubeck provides the melody on his own, and his left hand bass is supported by Eugene Wright on the double bass. Joe Morello slowly and progressively makes his presence known on the drums (specifically the cymbals) and is fully involved once Paul Desmond takes over the melody on the alto sax. During the solo, Brubeck often makes reference to the theme played in the 9/8 time during the 4/4 rhythm, giving it a cooler sound. C: UsersMiguel

RosalesDocumentsUniversityMusic StudiesMSP 1160 - History of JazzAssignmentrblrndo. pngThe first page to " Blue Rondo à la Turk" Source: <http://www.onlinesheetmusic.com/blue-rondo-a-la-turk-p274628.aspx>(Blue Rondo a la Turk Piano Solo)

## **A Personal Reflection on Dave Brubeck**

I had only started taking an interest in jazz music when I was around 17 years old, and even then I was still only a casual listener. Eventually, I had started listening to bebop by Dizzy Gillespie, Charles Mingus, and John Coltrane, as well as to other forms of jazz by artists such as Joe Pass, Stan Getz, Arturo Sandoval, Oscar Peterson, and others. It was only when I heard Avishai Cohen perform at the Malta Jazz Festival in 2011 that I wanted to discover jazz musicians who made use of odd rhythms and time signatures, and it was then that I had taken an interest in Dave Brubeck. While I did enjoy Take Five, it was Blue Rondo à la Turk which got me completely hooked. Dave Brubeck, I feel, was an amazing ambassador for jazz and

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music in general, as he was not tolerant of intolerance (especially in racial circumstances), and he believed music was a language everyone could understand and be free to interpret. One particularly memorable moment is when in the 80s whilst touring Russia he was improvising on a Russian folk song, and suddenly a young Russian violinist stood up and joined him in his performance, with the two responding to each other magnificently. Even though neither could understand each other verbally, they could communicate perfectly through the medium of music and bring smiles to the whole audience in the hall that day. (A video of this event can be found at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ceiDpl\\_ZabA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ceiDpl_ZabA)). I also admire Dave Brubeck for being able to blend a mixture of different musical styles and cultures into one extraordinary output. His jazz compositions were phenomenal, and his exploits in the 'classical' territory were terrific as well, and all the while there were various jazz, intercontinental, religious, avant-garde, and classical influences contributing to each and every single composition, rather than stick to one particular style. If I recall correctly, Brubeck himself didn't like being attributed to a certain style, stating that he simply called himself contemporary with the luck of being able to draw out different influences and styles which previous contemporaries did not have the luxury of doing. Brubeck passed away recently, one day away from his 92nd birthday (5th December 2012), and this sparked a new interest amongst the younger generation into his life and music. One thing is for certain, and that is Brubeck will never be forgotten, not because of all the medals and honours he had been awarded, but for being a musical ambassador like no other.