

History and developments of jazz music essay



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In this essay I am going to discuss the evolution of jazz music, from its beginnings in African culture to its many forms in the twenty first century. I have focused on styles/ genres, instruments, ensembles, technology, composers (both classical and popular), and musicals. As a singer I find the jazz repertoire challenging and enjoy improvising when performing. I selected my A level solos from three different decades in the twentieth century, to demonstrate contrasting styles of composition. Taking part in this years school production of the musical " Bugsy Malone" encouraged me to research the background to the story and led to my Investigation and Report.

The origins of jazz lie mainly with African American musicians. The early songs were not written down but were passed on from musician to musician orally. In Africa, the culture and life remains centered around the village. Everyone participates in some way and the music is connected to everyday events, with songs and dances for such occasions as births, deaths and other rites of passage. Some characteristics of traditional African music involve the whole body, with hand clapping, swaying to the beat, etc. The singing was often led by a soloist and the group replied using harmony. The heart of African music is rhythm, this is also the case in jazz today.

African slaves were taken against their will to America, between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries, mainly to work on the cotton plantations. Whilst working in the fields slaves would sing work songs and field hollers. (CD track 1) " Call and response" came from the African traditions mentioned, and was sung by people working on a physical and often repetitive task, such as picking cotton (track 2). Possibly, the rhythm of the music helped to increase productivity in the daily task and the meaning

of the words reduced feelings of sadness and boredom. The work songs also helped to create a feeling of familiarity and connection between the workers, as often families were separated and other slaves were from different regions. The verses were often improvised and sometimes mentioned escaping to freedom.

Negro Spirituals (CD track 3) were created by enslaved African people in America and are religious songs. Later they may have served as socio-political protest helping with assimilation into white American culture. In the USA, slaves were forbidden to speak their native languages and were unable to express themselves in ways that were spiritually meaningful to them so they often held secret religious services. These meetings were known as “hush-harbours” and were also centres for organising rebellions. The Afro American slave population began to increase naturally around 1810, as the slave trade to the USA had almost stopped. Clergymen in the South saw an opportunity to convert slaves to Christianity. They preached the message that in the eyes of God all Christians were equal, giving Afro Americans a reason to live, with hope for the after life, when they felt hated and not valued on earth.

The Services held were similar to the ones Afro Americans organised for themselves, with clapping, dancing, enthusiastic singing and spirit possession. Afro Americans felt more comfortable attending this style of Christian worship. Many white slave owners forced their slaves to attend white controlled churches, afraid slaves would rebel if allowed to attend other churches which preached messages of liberation and equality. With their freedom and the opportunity to chose their own religion, many Afro

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Americans continued with Christianity. 90 % of Afro Americans, in the 21st Century, attend one of seven black dominated Christians denominations.

In the early eighteen hundreds there was a movement to end human slavery, known as Abolitionism. The Anti-abolitionist Riots, also known as the Farren Riots, occurred in New York City in 1834. In 1865, after the American Civil War, slaves were freed. (The Anti-abolitionist riots song, Charles Ives, see page 11, Investigation) As free men, African Americans were able to buy instruments and formed musical groups, such as military bands, which became really popular.

At the end of the nineteenth century the people of the city of New Orleans began to experiment with different sounds and styles of music. Some of these styles blended together to create a new kind of music, which is now known as Jazz. In the 1920s due to the harsh economic climate, these musicians moved to Chicago as this was becoming a centre for music. Their music was then known as New Orleans or Dixieland Jazz, (track 4) and is now known as " traditional" or " trad." Jazz. This musical genre was popular in America, as well as in Britain and Australia from the late eighteen hundreds to the nineteen forties. By this time, Dixieland/ traditional Jazz was appreciated by the general public, not just a small section of Afro-Americans.

" Dixieland" or " Dixie" is the name for the Southeastern portion of the USA, where most of the slaves lived. The style of music is sometimes referred to as " Hot Jazz" or " Early Jazz". Dixieland Jazz combines brass band marches, ragtime and blues. There is collective, polyphonic improvisation by trumpet

(or cornet), trombone and clarinet, over a “ rhythm section” of piano, guitar or banjo, drum kit and double bass or tuba. The polyphonic sound is in contrast to the extremely regimented “ Big Band” sound. The term Dixieland became widely used after the advent of the first million selling hit records of the original Dixieland Jazz Band in 1917. The most popular band, identified with Dixieland, was Louis Armstrong’s “ All Stars”. The Dixieland style came to an end with the introduction of the swing era of the 1930s. Many musicians retired at this time, unable to maintain popularity.

Early Ragtime music was written for the piano, and became one of the most popular styles. Some of the features are:

- A) Question and answer melodies with step wise movement and contrasting syncopated leaps
- B) Use of chromatic scales/ melodies, ascending or descending by semi tones.
- C) Use of syncopation to emphasis the weak beats in a bar, rather than strong beats.
- D) Parallel thirds and sixths are used in melodic passages.

Scott Joplin, (1868-1917), known as the “ King of Ragtime”, performed and composed music, has inspired musicians to the present day. As well as 44 original ragtime pieces, he wrote a ballad and two operas. In 1893 he went to Chicago for the World’s Fair, which played a major part in making ragtime music a national craze. “ Maple Leaf Rag” brought Joplin royalties for life, although later he struggled financially. His music was rediscovered and

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became popular again in the early 1970s with a best selling album and was featured in the popular film “ The Sting”, particularly “ The Entertainer”. (CD 5)

The Blues (track 6) form is characterized by specific chord progressions, usually the primary chords I, IV and V, twelve bar blues, and use of “ blue notes” (flattened third and seventh in the scale) in jazz, rhythm and blues, and rock and roll. Genre of Blues ranges from country to urban blues. The blues is often used to describe a mood of depression and sadness. Typical early instruments were just voice and acoustic guitar. In the 1940s instruments began to change from acoustic to electric and more people began to listen to the style of music. Bass guitar, electric guitar, rhythm guitar and drum kit were typical instruments. Blues-rock evolved in the 1960s and 1970s.

Another style of music, associated with piano, is “ Boogie Woogie”, popular in the 1930s and early 1940s. Often used to accompany singers it was also used as a solo part in bands and small combos. The left hand part was very important and featured a repeated bass figure. Winifred Atwell (1910-1983) was a very popular “ Boogie Woogie” and “ Ragtime” performer in England in the 1950s and 1960s. She moved from Trinidad to the United States and then moved to London to attend the Royal College of Music. She started the craze of the honky tonk style of playing piano. Honky tonk piano is an ordinary piano in which nails are placed on the hammers of the instrument to give it a very old (out of tune) sound. Another method of preparing the piano, made popular by Mrs Mills, is to lacquer the hammers. Mrs. Mills (1918-1978) was a popular pianist in the 1960's. (cd 7)

Rhythm and Blues (cd 8) also evolved in the 1940s and had a strong gospel back beat, with intense, emotional lyrics for the vocalist. The instruments used were usually piano, one or two guitars, bass, drums and sometimes saxophone. This term has evolved in the 1940s, for example in the 1950s R'n'B was often applied to blues records. It contributed to the development of electric blues, rock'n'roll, gospel and soul music. In the 1970s it covered soul and funk and In the 1980s the new style was called contemporary R'n'B.

Electric Blues started in the 1930s; in Chicago, in the 1940s, musicians used amplification of guitar, bass guitar plus drum kit and harmonica. Electric blues includes the Memphis blues and Texas blues scene which lead to the development of blues-rock. It also led to rock-music. The harmonica is also known as blues harp. As well as in electric blues, the harmonica is sometimes featured in Rock'n'Roll, for improvisation. There are many types and sizes of harmonica including diatonic (major/ minor) and chromatic.

Memphis Blues was created in the 1920s and 1930s by musicians such as Frank Stokes and Memphis Minnie. As well as in main entertainment centres, such as clubs and bars the style was popular in vaudeville (various acts such as magicians, jugglers and acrobats, performing in a theatre) and medicine shows (traveling horse and wagon teams, selling miracle cure medications, between entertainment acts. They were common in the 19th century).

At the same time as guitar based blues, jug bands were very popular. This style of music used simple, often homemade instruments such as harmonicas, mandolins, banjos, violins, washboards, guimbarde (jew's harp), kazoos and jugs, blown to supply the bass. Examples are the " Memphis Jug

Band” and Gus Cannon’s “ Jug Stompers”. The style used a range of traditional folk music and emphasised the syncopated rhythms of early Jazz, which were easy to dance to. (CD 9)

Texas Blues has more “ Swing” in style and differs from Chicago Blues, in its use of sounds and instruments, relying heavily on the guitar, with guitar solos featured. It began to appear in the early 1900s, with African Americans working in lumber camps, ranches and oil fields. Slide guitar/ bottleneck guitar is featured. This is a particular guitar technique using a slide against the strings. (cd 10) Originally necks were broken from glass bottles and placed over the fingers, instead of pressing the strings against the frets with the bare fingers. Metal picks were attached to the fingers instead of using the triangular plastic plectrums. A resonator guitar, or resophonic guitar, is an acoustic guitar which has resonators (one or more spun metal cones) in place of a wooden sound board. A lap steel guitar is held horizontally and uses a slide called a steel, held in the left hand. This instrument is often featured in “ Blue Grass” country music.

In the 1920s jazz-like improvisation was introduced by Blind Lemon Jefferson, who inspired later musicians, for instance, T-Bone Walker and Lightnin’ Hopkins. T-Bone Walker was admired by Muddy Waters and his style influenced the Chicago electric blues sound. In the 1960s and early 1970s, influenced by Country music and Blues-rock, the Texas electric Blues Scene evolved. The style has continued to the present day with artists such as ZZ Top.

Rock'n'Roll (cd 11) evolved during the 1940s and 1950s in America, its often considered to be one of the best selling musical forms since this time. It became very popular to dance to and the new " Teenagers" in the 1950s wore a distinctive style of dress when " jiving" in pairs. The instruments were electric guitars, drum kit and vocal soloist and often backing singers, using " Doo-Wop" harmonies. The chords were usually the primary chords, I, IV, V, as in the twelve bar blues with improvised guitar solos in the middle, and the form was usually verse and chorus. Bill Haley and the Comets took Rock'n'Roll to England in the 1950s and he was copied by many British musicians, for instance Cliff Richard and Adam Faith.

Soul (cd 12) originates stylistically from Rhythm and Blues, Doo-Wap and Gospel as well as Jazz. It started in America in the late 1950s and typical instruments are keyboards/ piano, vocals, horn section, drum kit and guitars. From the 1960s to the early 1980s was the most popular era for the style of music and contemporary R'n'B, Hip Hop, Disco and Funk emerged from soul. Important features are handclaps, improvised body moves and catchy rhythms. There is often " call and response" between the soloist and chorus with use of improvisation.

Ray Charles is often considered to be one of the most important early soul singers, starting with " I've got a woman", 1954. Solomon Burke recorded soul hits for Atlantic Records in the 1960s, followed by James Brown and Fats Domino. James Brown, (1933 to 2006), known as " the godfather of soul" started by singing gospel and progressed to soul. Although his own career eventually declined, his work has often been used recently in digital

sampling, for instance in Hip Hop, with the consequence that his music remains popular in the 21st century.

In the 1990s Beyoncé Knowles, popularly known as Beyoncé, became famous as the lead singer of the R'n'B girl group "Destiny's Child". When the group disbanded in 2005 she became one of the most honoured solo artists, with many Grammy Awards, singing soul and pop as well as R'n'B. Beyoncé released a cover version of the famous jazz standard "Fever", which originally was sung by Peggy Lee. A contemporary of Beyoncé is the British jazz singer Jamie Cullum. Born in 1979, his compositions and performances have brought jazz to the attention of all age groups. He graduated from Reading University and has released best selling albums. He presents a weekly Jazz Show on BBC Radio 2 and has belonged to many bands, singing and playing the piano. He has performed at many large music festivals, for instance Glastonbury Festival, New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, and the North Sea Jazz Festival. In 2003 he was awarded the "Rising Star" by the British Jazz Awards, and he has been nominated for the BRIT Award, Grammy and Golden Globe Award. Although his musical roots are firmly based in Jazz, he performs in a wide range of styles, and draws inspiration from many different musicians. Jamie Cullum has made a cover version of the famous song "Hit the Road Jack", by Ray Charles, which I have performed as part of my coursework.

In America, Funk (cd 13) evolved in the 1960s from soul music, R'n'B and rock as well as jazz. Typical instruments are bass and electric guitar, drum kit, organ, horns and congas. The rhythm is very important and makes funk very danceable. William Everett "Billy" Preston (1946 to 2006) was a

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musician, songwriter and bandleader. His music combined genres such as rhythm and blues, soul, rock, funk and gospel. He played many instruments but mainly organ and piano. He worked with The Beatles, Ray Charles, Bob Dylan and many other famous Soul, Jazz and Blues artists relevant to the period. The Red Hot Chilli Peppers were formed in 1983 in America and play funk rock, which fuses funk with punk rock and psychedelic rock.

Technology has played an important role in the development of Jazz bands and ensembles, as well as helping to increase the global audience. By the 1930s radios were present in most households appliance in the developed world. During this period advances in recording technology, in particular the microphone, enabled subtle nuances in both playing and singing to be amplified for the first time and improved both radio broadcasts and live performances. Studio musicians were employed as both soloists and background instrumentalists for shows and commercials. The amplification enabled instrumental soloists/ vocalists to balance their sound with large groups, such as big bands, and not be overwhelmed. The first weekly radio broadcasts in America in 1934 were Benny Goodmans " Lets Dance", which featured Hot Jazz music. The ribbon or velocity microphone was introduced in 1931 by RCA and became one of the most popular. In 1933 RCA developed the cardioid pattern dual ribbon microphone. Forms of amplification, for instance " wireless" technology, continue to evolve to the present day.

One of the famous big band leaders, Paul Whiteman, invited George Gershwin, American composer and pianist, to write a " jazz influenced concert piece" for an experimental concert in 1924, which was called " Rhapsody in Blue" (cd 14). Ferde Grofé, another American composer

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orchestrated the accompaniment provided, for jazz band. Gershwin had to improvise at the actual concert as he had not completed the piano score at this time. The jazz band accompaniment was later rewritten for full symphony orchestra by Grofé. The two main jazz ingredients used are syncopation, placing emphasis on weak beats and blue notes, flattening the third and the seventh notes of the scale, creating a clash with the underlying harmony. The one act jazz opera "Blue Monday", set in Harlem, is considered to be the forerunner to Gershwin's opera "Porgy and Bess". Based on DuBose Heyward's novel and play which deals with African American life in Charleston, South Carolina in the early 1920s, "Porgy and Bess" was first performed in 1935. The premier production featured an entire cast of classically trained African American singers, and took place in New York in 1935. Due to social conventions of the time, this was a daring act. The opera is now regularly performed internationally, although some critics have always considered it to be a rather racist portrayal of African Americans.

Musicals have been a very popular form of entertainment for more than sixty years and there are many based on jazz music. For instance, in the early 1950s the American dance director Jerome Robbins had the idea of a modern musical based on Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet", with music composed by Leonard Bernstein. In the musical "West Side Story" the two families are represented by New York street gangs and the famous balcony scene takes place on a fire escape. As well as Jazz, Bernstein incorporates many other musical styles into his score. (cd 15) Bernstein, who died in 1990, is best known as the musical director of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, as

well as being the composer of *West Side Story*. He was highly regarded as a conductor and, like many other classically trained musicians, he appreciated many other styles of music and incorporated them into his work.

In 1966s there was a hit Broadway production of “ *Cabaret*”, based on the book written by Joe Masteroff, music by John Kander and lyrics by Fred Ebb. (cd 16) The story is based on the rising power of the Nazi Party in Berlin, it focuses on nightlife in the seedy “ *Kit Kat Club*”, in particular English cabaret performer Sally Bowles and her relationship with the young American writer Cliff Bradshaw. Many films, plays, and numerous subsequent productions of the musical followed.

Another hit Broadway production also with Jazz music by John Kander, starting in 1975, was “ *Chicago*”, with lyrics by Fred Ebb.(cd 17) This is based on the book by Fred Ebb and Bob Fosse and the 1926 play by reporter Maurine Dallas Watkins. The story is a parody/ satire on corruption in the administration of criminal justice and the concept of the celebrity criminal. This musical holds the record for the longest running musical production.

Also in the 1970s the very popular musical film “ *Bugsy Malone*”, directed by Alan Parker, lead to the musical of the same name. Although both film and musical are based on events in New York City, in the prohibition era, especially the exploits of gangsters such as Al Capone and Bugs Moran, the subject matter was considerably lightened as the musical is performed by children, imitating adults. One of the most recognized jazz songs from this musical, in the 21st century is “ *Tomorrow*”, which I am singing as part of my coursework. (cd 18)

In conclusion it can be seen that many musical styles have evolved from Jazz. The early beginnings of the genre, performed by African Americans, spread throughout America and eventually other countries. Although the jazz style of music became really popular globally from around the 1930s/1940s, it seems that, in the 21st century, “ Trad. Jazz” and “ Modern Jazz” is only heard in a few specialist concerts, clubs or radio programmes. However, the influence of Jazz on many musicians and styles of music remains considerable and shows no signs of diminishing at the present time.