

Research paper on global fusion in new orleans: the birthplace of jazz

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Jazz can be considered the classical music of the Americas. New Orleans is the city considered the birthplace of jazz. The history of slavery holds the clues to why jazz became so popular in New Orleans and later became loved around the world. Slaves were given very strict rules to remind them that they were no longer in Africa. They were forbidden to do anything that might seem to be an African tradition. The masters of slaves did not allow dancing if the step was done by crossing one leg in front of the other. Things like singing and using African instruments were forbidden in music the slaves sang and played. In fact New Orleans was the only place that allowed dark-skinned former slaves to own and play drums. Slave owners were threatened by the sound of African drums anywhere on their plantation and even anywhere in the region. But in New Orleans Voodoo music was the beat laid down under the new sound of jazz. This essay discusses the birth of jazz and the people who made it famous.

Slaves from Africa were taken to holding areas in Caribbean islands including Haiti and Jamaica. On these slave islands Caribbean music and African music were combined with West Indies, Mexican, Spanish and French musical influences. Cuba and Haiti were the location of the first important fusion of world music when the island's indigenous music and African music melded. "(The) process was actually set in motion earlier in the Caribbean, particularly Cuba, Saint Dominque (Haiti), and Mexico, and carried to New Orleans by black and Creole refugees." Voodoo was a practiced religion which used drum beats instead of hymns during worship. So even before jazz reached the southern shores of Louisiana African music was fusing with island music. The sound of European horn music was combined with the

drum beat. New Orleans had its own personality of freedom and joyfulness. People there could dance and sing whenever they felt like it. There was a feeling of celebration in the atmosphere that also influenced the birth of jazz.

Jelly Roll Morton took total responsibility for starting the genre of jazz music. Ferdinand "Jelly Roll" Morton proclaimed "It is evidently known, beyond contradiction, that New Orleans is the cradle of Jazz, and I myself happen to be the inventor in the year 1902." But there were many great musicians in New Orleans at the end of the nineteenth century so it is not possible to say only one musician was the inventor of jazz. For example in 1895 the great cornetist Charles "Buddy" Bolden started his own band. Bolden did not play the European style though. He played the notes very fast and he played so loud people said his cornet playing was heard all the way to Africa. He played so loud his audience compared his sound to the trumpet of Jericho "his trumpet could be heard all over New Orleans, and even across the river in Algiers." A cornet is similar to a trumpet but the cornet is designed in a more compact shape because it has more curves. The sound is more mellow and easier for the musician to control.

Music historians acknowledge that Jelly Roll is one of the first jazz greats but they give Buddy Bolden the honor of 'inventing' jazz due to his new sound and his great popularity. Bolden's bands included cornet, trombone, bass, guitar, clarinet and drums. The band's sound was a combination of blues, ragtime and original improvisation. It was the improvisation that made Buddy Bolden's band unique. Soon other bands were following his lead and introducing jazz improvisation, too. Two famous musicians that sometimes

played in the Bolden Band were Sidney Bechet and Bunk Johnson. The fans of Bolden were described as “ ratty” meaning people out for a good time – people who worked hard to barely survive who looked for a change from their daily life hardships. Other words used to describe the new music were “ gutbucket” and “ ragtime.” Jazz came from the word “ jass.” A very old and old-fashioned word from England was used to insult Brown’s Dixieland Band (later known as the Original Dixieland Band) when it played in Chicago. The Chicago Musician’s Union was the group that started using “ jass” as an insult against Tom Brown’s Dixieland Band. The Original Dixieland Band is the first jazz band that made a recording. Audio recording had not been invented during the time Bolton was leading his band so there is no way to hear how the music sounded. The descriptions that have been written about the music are very excited and thrilled with Bolden’s new sound. Band’s started improvising during their performances and from then on improvisation has never stopped.

Fats Waller was a famous good-time pianist. He was a personality who was popular with ladies as well as a great piano player. The “ soundster” “ Lemon” Nash included African sounds in his music simply from taking in the daily sounds of New Orleans because freed slaves from Africa were working at the waterfront there. Richard “ Rabbit” Brown was another songster; he played the guitar and ukulele and sang ballads. Songsters like Lemon and Rabbit sang folk songs, ballads or created their own storytelling songs. They used real life events in their songs. The song “ The Downfall of the Lion” was based on the murder of Police Chief Hennessey. “ Gyp the Blood” was written about a dance hall murder in New Orleans. Foreign music was

integrated creatively with improvisation in singing and instrumental music. New sounds were welcomed by audiences especially those who were considered lower class.

Jazz grew from " Its hybrid origins and development and through utilization of new technologies." A rhythm on the downbeat became a part of the music. It was called syncopation. " Syncopation is literally the decentering, a deviation from the expected." The pianist Scott Joplin used syncopation to create ragtime music and now syncopation is a mainstay of jazz music. Other cross rhythms were added. Call and response music from Africa was introduced and allowed band members and even audience members to have a ' conversation' with the lyrics or the music. First the ' call' might be a piano melody which the guitarist responds to on the guitar. Polyphony is when the call and response happen at the same time. More than one melody is played during one song and the musicians react to what each is adding to the sound. For example the blending of sounds is what is appreciated in " a string quartet, (whereas) in African based music . . . different tones qualities of each instrument in the ensemble, creating a mosaic of varying tone colors" opposed to a " smooth blend" is more appreciated. Changing the pitch is another strategy used by jazz musicians. " Bending" is using pitch by " bending of notes slightly flat or (less often) sharp." In other words pitch is not consistent in a jazz piece. Musicians and singers have the freedom to experiment with pitch by approaching a pitch from different directions even though they may never actually play the pitch they are approaching. The creation of jazz by super talented musicians was not appreciated (and in some circles is still not appreciated) because it is labeled black music or

Latino music. Jazz is a classical music though and most musicians today have conservatory such as the Marsellis family (father Ellis and his two sons Wynton and Bradford) have formal training in music. The 'first generation' of jazz, the Tio family, were role models for the Latino musicians that followed in their footsteps. But at the beginning of jazz in the 1890s to the 1920s the music was thought of as slave music because former slaves were the people making the music. It was thought of as foreign music in the USA because the sound of the music was not familiar. The beats were not conventional and the melodies took different forms right in the same song. At that time in America's history the popular discussion about music was about what was 'good' music and what was 'bad' music. People who thought of themselves as 'genteel' looked down their noses at the new forms of music starting with ragtime and the blues. Buddy Bolton was incredibly popular with working class people even though he improvised sometimes during a whole evening of playing music.

"Jelly Roll" Morton liked to say that he invented jazz and maybe he did in a way. He was the first person to record Buddy Bolton's music. On the other hand there were many great unknown musicians who created jazz and others who, like Jelly Roll, became household names. During the two decades before the Roaring Twenties Bessie Smith, King Oliver, Louis Armstrong and Lionel Hampton. Soon 'hepcat' white musicians were an expected part of jazz playing bands. A contemporary New Orleans' hepcat white musician in Harry Connick, Jr. These professionals gained stature from the jazz musical foundation laid down by former slaves.

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