

# The history of the jazz style

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Jazz is a type of music created by Black Americans characterized by improvisation, and syncopation. Jazz music usually entails brass and woodwind instruments and piano and sometimes the guitar and the violin; styles include Dixieland, swing, bebop, and free jazz. It has evolved from other different types of music that range from blues, Church music, traditional African drumming along with other varying sounds and techniques from both African and European descent.

## **Origins and Roots**

By 1866 the Atlantic slave trade had brought 400, 000 Africans to North America, and with those 400, 000 Africans came their unique musical traditions. The Africans were well known for their rhythm because they were very intune with drums which held a special significance since it was the only way they could communicate at the time. According to the accounts of 1885, they used washboards, washtubs, jugs and boxes which were beaten with sticks as their instruments which served as the percussion in the spirituals (christian songs created by African Americans). However, due to their new freedom, blacks in North America started forgetting the roots of those traditions from Africa but also remembering certain traditions. These traditions included rhythms that have a counter-metric structure, a single line melody and a call and response pattern, characteristics often found in jazz. Festivals featuring their percussion were often held on Sundays at Place Congo in New Orleans until 1843. During these festivals different types of music were exposed to the Africans and gave them the inspiration to modify and evolve their music. This is why New Orleans is often described as “ the melting pot”. It is because of its diversity and appreciation of all sorts of

different cultures. It is also the only place where slaves were allowed to own drums. One of the major influences in the spirituals at the time came from hymns of the church.

Jazz is believed to be generally founded on blues (a said to be “ secular counterpart” of the spirituals). Blues is a type of music that was born in the South from African Americans in the late 1800’s. The music evolved from hymns, work songs, field hollers and often expressed injustice, sorrow and lost love. However, some people are skeptical due to the fact that the spirituals are homophonic meanwhile the blues were more heterophonic. The more the Africans were integrated to the community, the more opportunities arose to try and learn new and polished instruments such as the Violin and band instruments which they eventually incorporated into their music.

Jazz is also said to be founded on ragtime (another genre of music which came from African- American musical traditions). Ragtime was mainly popular during 1895 and 1918 (right before Jazz became what we would consider Jazz today) and uses primarily the piano. While blues was often customarily improvised (an element of Jazz), Ragtime was more restricted by sheet music and was more upbeat.

These two musical forms (blues and ragtime) together gave birth to New Orleans Jazz. Musicians such as Jelly Roll Morton were inspired from earlier brass-band marches, French quadrilles, biguine, ragtime and blues and took the initiative to blend all those components together. By the 1940’s many Jazz bands included ragtime compositions in their sets. However, since Jazz has been widely played over the years, different cultures were able to

contribute their own styles and jazz developed in different ways making jazz an art form undefinable. This is why there are many subgenres of Jazz today. It is also why when referring to the roots of jazz, we often call it New Orleans Jazz.

In conclusion, the roots of jazz is truly the blend of both African and European musical traditions. Its harmony and instruments from European music and its rhythm and feel, blues quality from African music.

### **Development timeline 1900's – Ragtime and New Orleans Jazz**

The early stages of jazz where blues and ragtime were being mixed as one. Artists who actively played this music includes Charles “ Buddy” Bolden – trumpeter extraordinaire, Jelly Roll Morton and Scott Joplin.

### **1920's (Jazz Age) – Chicago Style and Hot Jazz**

Chicago style is much like new orleans jazz but it has a greater emphasis on individual solos and has a less relaxed feel. Hot Jazz is where improvisations and strong rhythms were introduced. Jazz improvisation is the process of creating new melodies on the spot over a chord progression played by rhythm sections instruments. As ragtime faded away, band instruments such as a trumpet, clarinet, trombone, tuba became more important. Artists of this style include Duke Ellington, King Oliver and Sidney Bechet.

### **1930's (Swing era) – Big Band Swing**

The swing era is also often called the big band era because the number of instruments in these bands were considerably larger. Swing is characterized by its lively rhythms and its ability to provoke a visceral response. Swing is

hard to define since its more of a feeling but it is classified as groovy. Artists during this time include Fela Anikulapo Kuti, Theodore Walter “ Sonny” and Fletcher Henderson.

### **1940’s – Bebop and Vocalese**

Unlike other types of Jazz this type of jazz was meant purely for listening and challenging the musician. It does not really prioritize dancing. For this reason Bebop is very different from other kind of Jazz. Bebop is characterized by fast tempo, unpredictable rhythms and harmonic complexity. Artists that played Bebop are Charles “ Charlie” Parker, Dizzy Gillespie and Thelonious Monk. This is also the time where singers were introduced to Jazz.

### **1950’s – Cool Jazz and Hard Bop**

Towards the end of 1940’s the energetic vibe of bebop was replaced with a vibe of calm and smoothness. The tone was lighter and the tempos were more relaxed. Hard bop is much like bebop with the differences being a more bluesy sound, slower tempo and is often in the minor key. Artist during this time includes Miles Dewey Davis III, Chesney Henry “ Chet” Baker Jr. and William John Evans.

### **1960’s – Free Jazz**

Free jazz is the approach of jazz without any strict rules or regard for fixed chord changes or tempos. Hence the name free jazz. Artists during this time include Billy Taylor, Arturo Sandoval and Stanley Getz.

### **1970’s and 1980’s – Jazz Fusion**

With the availability of new technology and the popularity of jazz growing, people started to mix different genres and styles with jazz (such as jazz rock,

jazz funk, folk jazz etc.). Artists include Armando Anthony “ Chick” Corea, John McLaughlin and Al Di Meola. During the 1980’s the jazz community shrank with only older audiences who still held an interest. However, acid jazz (jazz fusion of jazz, funk, soul and hip hop) became more popular.

### **Present (2017)**

Today all kinds of jazz is played all over the world. From New Orleans jazz to bebop, it can be played whenever. With new styles developing, jazz develops as well. Traditional artists perform jazz mainly on blues, bebop or anything but free jazz and fusion. Contemporary mainstream artists use mainly hard bop and then there are the artists that mix whatever they want.

## **“ Dizzy” Gillespie**

### **Biography**

One of the most important jazz influencers of all time includes John Birks Gillespie or better known as “ Dizzy” Gillespie. Born on October 21, 1917, in Cheraw, South Carolina to John and Lottie Gillespie. The youngest of nine children, Gillespie had a difficult childhood especially since he grew up with an abusive and an unusually strict father. In 1927 his father died and the family started to get into financial trouble. However, before his death, his father was a musician and band leader and encouraged all of his children to play music. Even though his first eight children were not interested, Dizzy Gillespie learned to play the piano at 4 years old and learned to play the trombone at 12 years old. Since his arm wasn’t long enough to reach all the slide positions he taught himself the trumpet instead. Showing much more talent on the trumpet than the trombone, he earned a music scholarship to North Carolina’s Laurinburg institute at the age of 15. He played there for 2

years until his family moved to Philadelphia in 1935. There he got his first full time job as a musician with Frankie Fairfax's band and where he got his nickname " Dizzy" for his free spirit. During his free time he would listen and learn Roy Eldridge's solos from records and broadcasts. Ever since he heard the Teddy Hill Orchestra broadcasting live in 1930, he fell in love with the band and idolized its trumpeter Roy Eldridge. He then moved to New York City in 1937 and got to live out his dream of becoming like Roy when he replaced him in the Teddy Hill Orchestra. In that year his first recording " King Porter Stomp" was made. In 1939 he joined Cab Calloway's band where he recorded " Pickin' the Cabbage" (one of Dizzy's first compositions) which is seen by many jazz fanatics as his first attempt to bring a latin influence into his music. Liking to experiment, Gillespie would work on harmonic substitutions which eventually led to the development of the subgenre of jazz: bebop-a reaction to swing. Sadly, the band wasn't a fan of his style of playing and it ended up having Dizzy fired in 1941. He spent the following years working with some of the biggest names in jazz to develop bebop which would become an official genre in 1945. In the same year he led a big band which went on tour to the West Coast. It was unsuccessful and he returned to New York. However, in 1946 he put together an orchestra which introduced the fusion of Afro-Cuban rhythms. By 1950 the orchestra broke up due to economic pressures and Gillespie moved on to leading small groups and traveling the world. He was active up until early 1992 when he got diagnosed with cancer. Unfortunately, Dizzy Gillespie died of pancreatic cancer on January 6, 1993 in Englewood, New Jersey.

### **Contributions to Jazz**

If it weren't for Dizzy Gillespie's initiative to experiment with music (despite the fact that no one liked it at the time), Bebop and modern jazz may have never come to be. Harmonically ahead of his time, Dizzy often wrote down his musical innovations and explained them to the next generation which made sure that bebop wouldn't die and would eventually become the foundation of modern jazz. His big band produced the first successful fusion of Afro-Cuban rhythms and jazz, an art form that is still appreciated today. His trumpet playing inspired many other jazz influencers/artists such as Miles Davis, Clifford Brown and Fats Navarro.

### **Conclusion**

Jazz is a type of music founded on blues and ragtime (music made by African Americans) and military band music (made by Europeans). Taking the blend of all these sounds many Jazz influencers such as Dizzy Gillespie made it their own by adding their own styles which aided in the evolution of modern jazz. There is no specific date where jazz became jazz because just like human evolution, you can not truly mark a date where jazz is "invented". Jazz today is enjoyed all over the world and it wouldn't be possible if it weren't for its history and influencers.