

# Thomas nickerson

[Art & Culture](#), [Music](#)



Thomas Nickerson Glen Pearson Music 015B 29 September 2012 57th Street Gallery — Jam Session What is Jazz Music? “ An academic definition of jazz would be: A genre of American music that originated in New Orleans circa 1900 characterized by strong, prominent meter, improvisation, distinctive tone colors & performance techniques, and dotted or syncopated rhythmic patterns. ” To me jazz is so much more. I personally feel jazz is an expression of the an artist’s deep emotional connection to the rhythms of life and the search for their identity among life’s rollercoaster of experiences and possibilities, always ready to improvise to the ever changing environment. I think the most important thing about jazz is that it is America’s music. Reflecting its birthplace of Storyville, a small section near the French Quarter in New Orleans, jazz too has the influence of whites of English and French descent, Blacks and immigrants from the Caribbean and other European countries. After the closing of Storyville in 1917 jazz was further developed and refined in Chicago and New York. I was formally introduced to jazz on Thursday September 27, 2012. All I knew about jazz was that it was a form of music. I didn’t really understand what jazz was. That was until I went with a fellow music student to a jam session at the 57th Street Gallery to review a live performance. The Gallery was small but quaint. Not really a place you would expect to find a live music performance of any sort. There was no large stage with an elaborate lighting system with bright lasers reflecting off a disco ball or a huge surround sound system with speakers bigger than me, but there was a simple raised area with a piano, a drum set and a couple of microphones. Which I eventually found out, is all you need when it comes to playing a jam session of jazz. The walls were decorated with paintings of

various famous musicians which I felt maybe gave a sense of inspiration to anyone who played there. There was only about a handful of people in the audience, mostly made up of women of various ethnicities and that were of an older generation. The session was to begin a little after the time I arrived which was 8 pm. I started to get discouraged when there was only one guy in the playing area warming up. Rather than feeling discouraged, I decided to use that time as an opportunity to try and talk with the gentlemen warming up. His name was Michael Jones and he was playing the stand-up bass. He didn't seem concerned or worried given the fact it was already past the start time and there weren't any other musicians there yet. He was happy to be playing his instrument just jamming out by himself. After I introduced myself I explained to him that I was a music student and I was there to do a review on the style of jazz and the musicians that played it. He was more than happy to talk about his passion for music and jazz in general. Next I had the pleasure of meeting a wonderful woman who Mr. Jones had pointed out as an amazing singer, who just loved talking about music and enjoyed being interviewed. Her name is Stephanie Crawford. Stephanie was exposed to music at an early age, as were most people growing up in the 30's and 40's, when the piano was considered an essential home furnishing. It was part of her culture growing up in Detroit. I wanted to know if she considered herself a jazz singer or a blues singer, her reply was, " I am only a jazz singer, because jazz is a style, sort of an attitude. See, you can go out and have a glass of wine and listen to jazz, but when you go out and listen to blues, it a whole different class or feeling and I have nothing to feel blue about. " After talking with Stephanie for a short while, she was coaxed into singing.

Grabbing a microphone, Stephanie said to the growing audience, this one is called, " Brother can you spare me a dime? " then she counted down, " 5... 6...7...8". Michael started to play his bass in a pizzicato manner. After the second verse, out of now where a guy starts playing a flute. I didn't realize that a flute was associated with this type of music style. The intensity in which he played was surprising. The bassist kept the beat and tempo while this moment of improvisation was played out by a guy named, " Dave". After the first song, somebody got up from the audience and sat behind a set of bongo's I hadn't notice till then. Again, Ms. Crawford counted down, " 5...6... 7...8" and the addition of the bongo's being played changed the structure and became more layered. The next pieces were only instrumental, which were joined by the drums and the piano. Since the beginning of the session which started only with a stand-up bass and a vocalist, it was now being accompanied by drums, piano, bongos, flute and saxophone. With the addition of these different instruments I was able to hear the syncopated rhythm more clearly and noticed the change of the timbre and the overall texture of the music.