

The origin of jazz music essay examples

[Experience](#), [Belief](#)



Introduction

As one of the most famous genres of music, jazz has played a very important role in the United States throughout the years. In spite of its popularity, the origin of this art form is however more vague than its impact. The major subject of contention about jazz has been about its place of founding and the exact dates of its formation amongst other hot topics. Some have maintained that jazz naturally evolved from two popular forms of music of the period, the blues and ragtime. This evolution occurred across the entire country as various musicians experimented with these two forms of art. Others have claimed that jazz did not really spring up simultaneously across the nation but rather originated from New Orleans where it then spread to other parts of the nation. The city of New Orleans was united by a myriad of factors in a way incomparable to other cities. These factors included a diverse racial composition, a celebration culture and rich tradition of music. These were indeed the necessary conditions for jazz creation and are thus attributable to the creation of jazz.

Sidney Bechet, a renowned jazz artist is among the group of individuals who attribute the origin of jazz music to the city of New Orleans. In “Treat it Gentle”, Bechet states that most people are already familiar with the notion that one of the founding elements of jazz music, that is ragtime, originated in New Orleans. However, most people view New Orleans jazz, they simply view it as a fading memory and fail to realize that the influence of this jazz can be felt everywhere. Bechet also goes ahead to discredit the notion that he is the one together with several of his peers (including Buddy Bolden, La Rocca and Kid Or) who came up with this music form (Bechet 2). He states that jazz did

not start with a single individual.

Bechet uses some experiences from his childhood to explain the natural origins of jazz music. For instance he describes an experience where his family used to beat time with their hands on drums. In regards to ragtime, Bechet states that there is a significant difference between it and jazz music. While he does not explicitly deny the influence of ragtime on jazz music, he states that ragtime contains a more superior influence from Negro spirituals (Bechet 8). He states that “ When I tell you ragtime, you can feel it; there is a spirit right in the word. It comes right out of the Negro spirituals” Jazz on the other hand does not contain any single distinct single element could mean “ any damn thing” (Bechet 8). If one had a particular rhythm, developing a jazz sound or tune was relatively easy.

Jelly Roll Morton is another phenomenal jazz artist who has voiced his opinion about the origin of jazz in his famous Library of Congress recordings with Alan Lomax. Like Sidney Bechet, Morton hails from New Orleans and has witnessed the evolution of jazz firsthand. Morton states that the atmosphere of New Orleans provided optimum conditions for jazz music to flourish. In one of his compositions, he describes New Orleans as a “ free and easy place where everyone got along just the same”.

Just like Bechet, Morton is of the opinion that a rhythm is the baseline of any jazz music. However, he states that jazz music is to be played in a sweet, soft and plenty rhythm (Morton 36). He makes reference to some of the jazz peers such as Buddy Bolden and Louis Music to describe their influence to this genre of this music. Like Bechet, he is however of the opinion that the origin of jazz cannot be attributed to one single individual.

Morton also voices his opinion about the influence of ragtime and blues to the jazz music. Ragtime music has often been seen to rival blues in terms of importance. In fact, ragtime is said to surpass blues in their influence to jazz music. This led to a situation where it became even hard to differentiate ragtime from jazz. In fact, the two terms were often used interchangeably in this period. Although it is clear to draw distinctions between the two genres in the modern setting, the grounds for subtle distinctions between the two genres were not very clear in the early 20th Century. For instance, in the Library of Congress recordings, Morton demonstrates an instructive comparison of two different ways of playing “ Maple leaf Rag” by Scott Joplin. One style of playing reflects the ragtime tradition of Missouri while the other style contains a New Orleans jazz inflection into this composition. However, in spite of his efforts to differentiate the two, the distinction itself seemed to be elusive. For example, in the same recordings, Morton asserts that Art Tatum and Fats Waller who were eminent jazz pianists of the 1930’s were essentially “ ragtime pianists in a very fine form”.

All many would not agree with this categorization, the statement by Morton reveals the thin line that existed between ragtime and jazz not only in the early 20th Century but even later in the era of big bands and swing music. With this in mind, it is fairly safe to argue that the most credible of origin of jazz music was New Orleans. In spite of both ragtime and blues having an influence on jazz, the influence of ragtime was more pronounced such that it became hard to differentiate between the two genres.

Works Cited

Bechet, Sidney. *Treat It Gentle*. Boston: Da Capo Press, 2002. Print.

Morton, Jelly R, and Alan Lomax. *Jelly Roll Morton: The Library of Congress Recordings*. Cambridge: Rounder Records, 2006. Sound recording.