

# Bebop essays example

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The swing era was marked by the introduction of jazz to the world. This genre of music started for the Southern states of the US. New Orleans in Louisiana is particularly considered to be the home of jazz music. During the swing era, this genre of music started to be acknowledged not only throughout the country but throughout the world. It was so influential that even some composers of classical music started borrowing some components from it.

In the 1940', there emerged a new sub-genre of jazz music that was referred to as Bebop. Jazz had been increasing developing in the United States since the turn of the 20th Century. By the 1940's, jazz was mainly performed by musicians who assembled themselves in bands. However, the 1940's saw the occurrence of the Second World War. This period was accompanied by drafting of individuals to the army, and this ultimately resulted in the breaking up of many bands . The period was also characterized by economic pressures that resulted in the closure of many performance centers or dances halls that had played a great part in propelling jazz to worldwide recognition. Consequently, a relatively huge void in the scene of jazz started to emanate. This meant that new musicians who had failed to break into the scene because of the stringent arrangements of the existing jazz structure could not step away from the strict arrangement confines and commence with individual exploration. It is this individual exploration element that culminated in the emergence of bebop that has in actual sense become synonymous with modern jazz. This form of jazz had melodies that were more complex and also featured some relatively fast tempos. The melodic lines were fast and were also highly ornamented with rhythmic discontinuity.

The bebop form of jazz was also characterized by more reliance on chordal improvisation unlike the previous form that mainly used melodic improvisation. In fact, the musicians who wrote and performed bebop usually took some of the chord progression present in swing era jazz tunes and used them to compose new melodies and at the same time embellished the original melody changes. This particular practice not only made this form of jazz to be more interesting but also discouraged the musicians who were considered to be weak from sitting in.

Before the emergence of bebop, jazz music was primarily arranged for dancing. However, the relatively fast tempo of bebop made it quite hard to dance to. The emergence of bebop meant that jazz was not strictly written for dancing.

Bebop also had other remarkable differences to the swing jazz. As mentioned, earlier, the 1940's was marked massive break up of bands due to the Second World War. The bebop ensembles comprised of quite smaller ensembles unlike the swing era jazz which had prominently featured big bands. The reasons for this have already been explained (drafting of large numbers of people and economic pressures which meant that smaller bands were more economical). An average Bebop ensemble comprised of bass, piano, drums, and two or even one horn (such as the saxophone, a trombone, and a trumpet).

Two of the musicians who are usually classed as the pioneers of this genre of jazz are trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie and saxophonist Charlie Parker. Both musicians had roots in swing era jazz where they played in big bands before

performing together in the 1940's mainly in New York. Gillespie and Parker utilized the superb technical command that they had over their instruments and influenced the style of almost every Bebop musician primarily through their improvisation mastery.

In the beginning, the primary role of jazz musicians was to entertain. However, with the emergence of bebop, the roles of jazz musicians shifted widely. The jazz musicians no longer just played what came naturally but tried to improvise as much as much as possible. The core of this new form of music was however much more than just its format. It was almost an existential mood that almost had an element of blues. The bebop's soloist was also a philosopher and a poet and not just an entertainer as was previously the case with a swing jazz musicians. The syncopation part of the genre that was mainly incorporated to facilitate dancing, therefore, started to become obsolete. In simple terms, jazz became emancipated from the dancehall, and this also meant that it was no longer just a genre of music for the masses but a genre for the elite.

Bebop is often considered to have emerged as both as a reaction to the swing era as well as an expression of artistic innovation from a community of jazz musicians from the African American community. In fact, the origins of the bebop form of jazz is traceable to several cultural and social influences that motivated jazz musicians in the 1940's.

Although jazz primarily used European instruments, the music drew a lot from African roots. Some of the elements of jazz that, for example, exhibited Africanism included complex rhythms, pitch flexibility, polyphonic melodic structures and collective improvisation. However, in the late 1930's into the

1940's, many African American musicians began to feel that the commercially dominant jazz (the swing jazz) that was characterized by huge bands was not providing a viable outlet for them to exhibit their musical creativity. In simple terms, they started reacting to mainstream tastes in the United States. Swing jazz had become popular mainly because of its dance appeal. Although solo improvisation at this time was still important, many bands adopted strictly structured musical arrangements that suited popular dance. Many young musicians felt constrained by this and those who ignored the strict arrangements and tried to experiment found themselves being shunned by older musicians, leaders of big bands and many audiences. An example is Kenny Clarke, who is also regarded as one of the founders of bebop. He started experimenting with the drum kit which he used as a separate musical voice and not as a time keeping device. Clarke's unconventional use of rhythmic patterns and accents eventually culminated in him being fired from his band after fellow players started complaining that he was breaking up the tempo of the music.

African Americans like Kenny Clarke were becoming resentful of the social conventions that hugely limited their musical opportunities, and this is what led to huge innovations to the mainstream. In addition, racial segregation was also rampant, and there were few mixed color bands. Audiences also tended to be separated by race. Black musicians also found themselves earning less than white musicians even when they were sometimes in the same band.

As a result, great African American innovation was placed in jazz, and this was combined with a changing attitude outlook of young African American

musicians. This nurtured the development of new musical expression with bebop ultimately being the ultimate result. There emerged young black jazz musicians who were enthusiastic about experimentation.

However, as time went on, the bebop style of jazz also had its fair share of opposition. There was particularly some criticism from the white community who came up with a new style that was relatively cool. This was known as cool jazz and it emanated as a sort of reaction to the perceived “ hot and fast” qualities of bebop. Composers and writers of this form of jazz. The advocates of the cool form of jazz preferred understatement and relaxation and were not fans of the fast tempo of the bebop. Some of the most prominent musicians whose style was categorized as “ cool jazz” included Stan Getz, Gil Evans, Dave Brubeck, Miles Davis and Lennie Tristano among many others. This form of jazz was particularly prominent in the west coast. However, there termed a reaction to the cool jazz through an extension of bebop form. This gave rise to hard bop. Hard bop started to emerge in the mid-1950’s and unlike cool jazz, it was mainly performed by black artists who had become frustrated with the cool jazz. It was also popular in the East Coast unlike cool jazz that had its roots in the West Coast. Hard bop was an extension of bebop and mainly emphasized on jazz roots (the blues) and incorporated elements of gospel and RNB. Miles Davis and Horace Silver are two of the musicians who are credited with promoting hard bop especially after they released two famous compositions in 1954 that revolutionized the jazz industry. These were “ Walking” and “ Horace Silver and the Jazz messengers”. The style continued being popular through the 1960’s but slowly died down in the following years.

As observed, jazz is genre of music that has gone through various changes and transformations. These changes have mainly been influenced by social and cultural factors, and the emergence of bebop is a perfect depiction of this fact.

## **Bibliography**

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