

# The growth and decline of bebop media essay



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Jazz music has existed for nearly 100 years producing many subgenres of music and evolving styles along the way; starting with Ragtime in the late 1890's - early 1920's, moving on to the prominence of the big band, to the syncopated feel of Swing (that led to the mainstream popularity of Jazz); during the 1930's. These progressions in Jazz led to the formation of a new subgenre, Bebop.

Swing music brought two main developments to the Jazz genre; firstly throwing Jazz into the limelight, and secondly becoming a popular type of Jazz music people could dance to. However, the conformity of Swing constrained Musicians' freedom to experiment and gain personal acclaim through the opportunity to play solo passages. The frustration this led some Jazz musicians to branch out and develop a music genre known as Bebop.

This new style of Jazz (named Bebop but often referred to as bop or Rebob); emerged in the main, from Swing bands around the 1940's. The music placed larger emphasis on technique, speed and complex harmonies than swing; making it almost impossible to dance to which was the intention of the musicians who wanted their music to be appreciated through listening. Despite this causing much controversy, musicians were content with the longer solo time and smaller band sizes this style offered. Historically, Bebop is referred to as the first modern Jazz style originating in New York, through such artists as Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk, Dizzy Gillespie, Kenny Clarke and Charlie Christian. The freedom of this style soon attracted other musicians drawn to its complexity, lack of structure and very experimental style Musicians often used different types of ornamentation to aid the complex melodies and harmonies. Features such as comping, sliding, parallel

octaves (often borrowed from piano by guitar), improvisation and emphasis on the 3rd and 7th notes of a chord, were all common features of Bebop.

## 2. The rise of Bebop

Bebop music, whose roots are founded in Swing, began to emerge in the mid 1940's when musicians became frustrated with swing and began working on a new, more technical type of Jazz. Its growth and development continued until around 1955. Aimed at destabilising swing music and excluding the less talented, white musicians that had latched onto what had once been a black innovation; bebop was seen as a chaotic revolution in the Jazz genre. In his book, *Jazz 101*, Szwed states that, " To non-jazz fans or swing devotees, bop was a musical affront, a deliberate provocation, a scandal." 3 pg161

Another contributing factor to the rise of Bebop was the commercialisation of swing music and its increasing status as the " Pop music of America" 4 pg162 when it had previously been seen as more ethnic, alternative type of music. This commercialisation led to Swing becoming more focussed on pleasing mainstream audiences and making money.

Bop originated in New York as artists who were already playing large shows in the city would often find smaller venues to practice and refine the more technical aspects of the music. Bars and clubs that were often too small for the dancing encouraged by swing were perfect for the groups of 4-6 musicians needed for a Bebop combo. One of the more famous venues for the development of Bebop was Minton's playhouse; where many jam sessions took place involving renowned musicians and some of the most famous Bebop music was played.

### 3. The influences leading to the evolution of Bebop

#### **Political/Economic/Social**

During this time in history a number of political, social and economic factors can be seen as influential and relevant to the ways in which Jazz music evolved. Firstly, racism and a lack of civil rights had a significant impact on black African American communities and black musicians were no exception. The majority of black musicians struggled to profit in the music industry and White musicians were alleged to have frequently stolen black musician's ideas. Furthermore, many black musicians were prevented from performing concerts or recording their music.

Secondly, World War II had a significant impact on Jazz as a whole due to musicians that played in big bands being drafted into the army.

Thirdly, the economic depression during this time made life hard. Many families did not have enough money to live and feed themselves. There were frequent riots in major cities, led by black people revolting against their terrible living conditions and unjust treatment. In contrast, increasing industrialism and mass production significantly reduced prices of products such as radios and cars. Most households owned a radio which made Jazz Music more accessible to the mainstream including young, impressionable artists who were able to listen to their idols.

#### **Musician Preference**

As previously mentioned, one of the largest contributing factors to the growth of Bebop music was musician's frustration with swing and big bands. Despite the generic success of swing music through its easy melodies and

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dance like feel, many artists felt unfulfilled when playing it. There were constraints on what they could play with only a few musicians having the chance to solo for short periods. Many performers believed their music should be appreciated through listening rather than dancing. Skilled and experienced musicians wanted to exclude amateur musicians joining in with jam sessions and thus invented more elaborate, complex ways of playing that only professional musicians could accomplish.

What changed? The developments from Swing to Bebop

### **Band sizes**

Bebop was seen as a more collaborative and intimate type of music than Swing with bands consisting of only 4-6 musicians; thus allowing for greater cohesion between musicians and more time dedicated to individual's soloing. In addition, the musicians would often play off one another 'trading fourths', which involved the soloist exchanging a 4 bar progression with another musician or the drummer. This was very engaging to audiences. Bop became music for the elite rather than the masses and was associated with more accomplished and skilled musicians.

### **Chances for soloing**

Due to smaller band sizes, Jazz musicians were given longer sections for soloing; including bassists and drummers which was very appealing to musicians who had previously been playing simple beats or chords in the background. The band would play a melody before individual musicians would solo over the song's chord progression, making the melody secondary, with a greater emphasis on solos.

## **Instruments and Rhythm**

The rise of Bebop music saw the end of rhythm guitar and clarinet. The typical big band size of 10 or more musicians was reduced to 4-6, and often did not include more than one of each instrument. A typical Bop combo would consist of drums, double bass, piano and either a guitar, trumpet or saxophone. Rhythm guitar was only used for accompanying another instrument during its solo, when other musician's would be playing a complex melody or 'head' in unison. Bassists would play a walking bass line that consists of a mixture of scale tones (arpeggios or chromatic runs) that outline the chord progression of the song. Drummers relied less on the kick drum and more on the cymbals to maintain the often complex and fast paced rhythm. For example 'Nica's Dream' (a song played by many artists) switches between 4/4 Latin or Samba and 4/4 Swing, creating a complex rhythm.

Above are the two different rhythms used during the song 'Nica's Dream'

There was significant emphasis placed on the 1st and 3rd beats of the bar by musicians during the swing era. However, during the Bebop period, the rhythmic prominence changed to the 2nd and 4th beats of the measure. These techniques created a feel of solos (characteristic of Bebop music) being more free and less rigidly tied into the song. This genre was characterised in part by its unpredictable rhythms.

## **The scales, notation and approach to playing**

Although the approach to playing and soloing was different in Bebop in comparison to swing, most sections played were based on the melody of a

song. Bop musicians employed chromatics and favoured the use of the 3rd, 5th, and flat 7th notes of the chords for improvisation. The faster tempo made the music more frantic and energetic which also led to a greater display of musicians technical talent. The use of harmony became significantly less fashionable for the greater part of the Bebop period and most melodies or 'heads' were played in unison. Guitarists incorporated the use of unison octaves (made famous by Wes Montgomery) for solos.

## **Song Analysis**

The following two songs are great examples of Bebop music, containing many of the features commonly associated with this genre:

### **Billie's Bounce**

Recorded in 1945, 'Billie's bounce' is a through composed Jazz-blues song written by Charlie Parker. The song was recorded by a quintet consisting of a young Miles Davis, Curley Russell on bass, Dizzy Gillespie on piano and Max Roach on drums. The song is in F major or D for alto sax and 4/4 time. The general chord progression of the song is in F blues, however the melodic tonality of the head and the solos are more characteristic of Jazz and the tempo, indicative of Bebop. It is described as 'a "Bebop" head over a variation of the 12-measure blues progression in which a I-VI-II-V7 substitutes for V7 - V7- IV7, IV in the last six measure. The light, bubbly piano intro from Dizzy Gillespie outlines the beat and style of the song. This is followed by the head that is played in unison 3rds and octaves with both the saxophone and trumpet. In bars 11 and 12 we see a repeat of the earlier 2 note theme seen in bars 2 and 3 to end the head. Throughout the melody there are examples of chromatics and slurred triplet notes that are seen

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later during the solos. The first 7 bars of the song are in standard F blues; however in bar 8 there is an Am7, followed by an Abm7. This chromatically sets up the Gm7 in bar 9. A standard blues would see bar 9 and 10 contain the chords C7 and Bb7 respectively, but Billie's bounce extends the C7 over 2 bars and then re-harmonizes it with a standard II-V7 progression that turns to F in the last 2 bars.

The beginning of the first solo sees a chromatic passing note between the G and A and again between the Bb and C. At the end of the second bar the notes of the chord Dm7/C are played over the Bb7 chord. In the third bar, Charlie Parker uses the notes of the Eb Mixolydian scale. The movement of the whole song is highly arpeggiated in both directions and there is some trace of a stepwise movement. Parker used a 'licks-based' approach to the solo; however he was also very adept at altering the licks already in his vocabulary and changing them in more creative ways. He had a very flexible sense of harmonic placement that allowed him to change the duration of chords by either hitting them early or prolonging them and even sometimes adding progressions that were not part of the accompaniment.

Above is a list of the guide tone lines for measures 1-7 as notes in a staff.

Above the staff are chord options implied by Parker occasionally.

## **Four on Six – Wes Montgomery**

Four on six is a Bebop Jazz piece written by Wes Montgomery. The song is in Bb major and 4/4 time. The Harmony is based around the intro made entirely of 5ths and played in unison with the bass and piano. The intro that precedes the solo sections, sees the drums playing a simple crotchet rhythm on



alternate cymbals to create a 2/2 feel. Following the intro of 5ths, Wes plays a small break that consists of the four chords Bbmaj7, Gm7, G#m11, Am11 and D7(#9). The chords played in the break are similar to those that form the intro of 5ths, but are however played of a much smaller time frame. After the break there is a Small melody. This modal melody line moves around the notes of Gm9. The backing chords for the melody are the same as those seen in the first 2 bars of the song, however the Gm now includes the 7th note; a note often used in bebop scales and songs. The melody is followed by a II V chord sequence with strong accents. These II V chords follow the harmony of the intro. The chords used are Cm9, F7(#9b11), Bbm9, Eb7(#11b9), Am9, D7(#11b9), Ebm9 and Ab9(#11). The chord sequence is descending and contains many chromatic notes that are very characteristic of bebop music. After the melody and chord sequence the solo section of the song begins. The chord accompaniment for this section is very similar to that of the intro. The chords cycle through 4 bars of Gm7, then simplified version of the descending sequence. For improvisation over the solo section there are a few scales that Wes Montgomery generally used that fit his style and way of playing. Over the Gm7 part Wes would use a G Dorian scale consisting of the notes G, A, Bb, C, D, E and F. Wes made sure that he was ever confined to one position on the neck and therefore learned the scale across the whole guitar neck. An alternative to the Dorian scale is the G minor pentatonic scale with or without the blues notes. This scale consists of the notes G, Bb, C, Db (blues), D and F. The blues notes are used to slide from the C to the D. The advantage of the pentatonic scale in this situation is that all of the notes are either the root notes of the chords or a note inside

the chords of the song. Wes uses many of his signature licks during his solos and even throws different styles into the mix.

Above is an example of simple melody that includes a big jump across the fret board of the guitar. It uses a Gm(7) arpeggio with extensions. Wes also uses other styles such as blues in his solos. Below are two examples of this.

This is a unison-interval blues cliché played over the Gm7/maj7 and C7 chords. There are two hammer-ons and pull-offs during the melody to make a faster, smoother transition between notes.

Above is a series of four repeated II-V's. In the theme the dominant chords contain a natural 9 and Sharp 11 (F9#11). The scale played over these chords is a melodic minor scale. Over the Cm7 and F7 a C melodic minor scale can be played, however the name of this scale over the F7 is the Lydian dominant scale (5th mode of the melodic minor). Wes Montgomery doesn't think in scales for this part but in melodic patterns. Because the tempo is so fast this is an advantage as fast tempos make scales difficult to play musically. He frequently plays a pattern on the first II V and transposes it down the neck for the rest of the II V's.

## Features

The evolution to Bebop music created many stylistic changes and new musical features, which not only livened up the music but made it more contemporary, and distinguished the more accomplished musicians. The melodies were different from those previously associated with Jazz and were the base for most improvisational solos.

## **Scales**

Jazz musicians typically used complex scales for their solos. The generic 'Bebop scale' was made by adding either a major 7 to a Mixolydian scale or a major 3 to a Dorian scale. For solos, musicians preferred to use the 1, 3, 5 and flat 7th notes of the scale.

### Illustration of a C Major Bebop Scale

The freedom of the melodies and complex chords of Bop opened up new possibilities for soloing. Musicians could play over the whole register of their instruments and find notes in any range that fitted into the chord progression; aided through the use of chromatics. Musicians used other scales such as the blues or enclosed scales (which use the technique 'enclosure'- taking a note and playing one note above it and one note below before arriving at the note you were targeting.)

## **Comping**

Although Rhythm guitar had essentially been excluded from Bebop bands, it was still used when accompanying a soloist through the 'comping' (staccato chord playing) technique. However, as Bebop did not often follow a simple time signature, comping was not used frequently. Furthermore, the rhythms used by musicians were commonly irregular and thus the 'regular' strumming pattern of comping may have disturbed the soloist.

## **Chord melody**

Some musicians played solo arrangements by simultaneously playing chords in the background and the melody over the top. This was most commonly associated with piano and guitar.

## Decline of Bebop

### **Economic**

Although considered a significant musical achievement by many musicians, by the 1950's bop music had begun to decline; partly due to its lack of commercial viability and niche market appeal. Variety magazine, an entertainment trade magazine based in New York reported " Bop is a flop" in late 1949. Many musicians such as Charlie Barnet, Benny Goodman and Woody Herman (who was \$175, 000 in debt) had to break up their bands during this decline.

### **Cool Jazz and Hard bop**

The decline of Bebop music served as a platform for 2 new subgenres in Jazz. Firstly, Cool Jazz which was developed by many bop musicians such as Chet Baker, John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie and newer musicians such as Dave Brubeck and Gerry Mulligan; was a direct contrast to bop with its more relaxed tempo, lighter tone and more traditional harmonies. In response to this progression and to maintain some of the features of Bebop, another subgenre developed known as Hard bop. This music was less extreme than Bebop music, had a more soulful feel rooted in traditional African and Blues music but still incorporating many phrases and notes from Bebop. These differences made Hard bop more accessible to beginner musicians and brought back a rhythm section.

### **Artists**

Many artists that had been prominent during the Bebop era such as John Coltrane, Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk and Charlie Parker; continued

playing into the Hard bop and Cool Jazz period that subsequently followed.

The most prominent cross-over artist of the two genres was Miles Davis who became very popular and well-known, especially with the release of his record ' Birth of Cool' which was acclaimed within the Jazz world.

## **Conclusion**

At the height of its popularity, Bebop introduced many innovations into the world of not only Jazz, but other genres of music. It changed the way musicians and listeners alike viewed Jazz and opened up many doorways to other styles, genres and artists. Bebop music has been an innovation and the ideas that have been created are still used to this day. In modern day ' jam sessions', Bebop is one of the most employed genres due to its small band sizes and simple structure (melody followed by solos). It gives many musicians the chance to improvise and explore different avenues of Jazz, allowing for the progression of new music in the modern industry. Even After its decline, bop music is still influencing instrumentalists and their music today

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