COURSE GUIDEBOOK

Elements of Jazz: From Cakewalks to Fusion

THE TEACHING COMPANY®
The Joy of Lifelong Learning Every Day
GREAT TEACHERS, GREAT COURSES, GREAT VALUE GUARANTEED.
1-800-TEACH-12 (1-800-832-2412) ★ www.TEACH12.com
4151 Lafayette Center Drive, Suite 100 Chantilly, VA 20151-1232

728

Elements of Jazz: From Cakewalks to Fusion

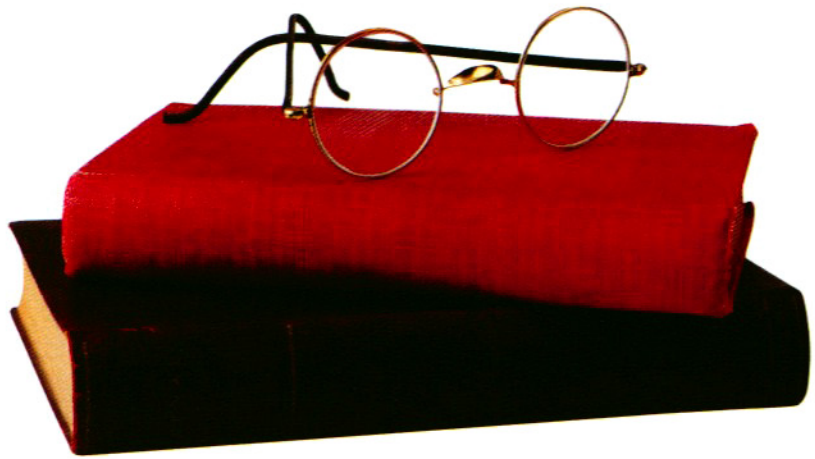
Professor Bill Messenger

COURSE GUIDEBOOK

THE Great Courses℠

Elements of Jazz: From Cakewalks to Fusion

Professor Bill Messenger
Peabody Conservatory of Music



THE TEACHING COMPANY®

Bill Messenger

Peabody Conservatory of Music

Bill Messenger studied musical composition, on scholarship, at the Peabody Conservatory of Music in Baltimore, Maryland, under Louis Cheslock. He attended a master's class in 1963 with Nadia Boulanger, the teacher of Roy Harris, Virgil Thompson, and Aaron Copeland. Mr. Messenger has two master's degrees, both from Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. He has done additional graduate work in musicology at the University of Maryland.

Mr. Messenger has taught composition, music history, and music theory at Goucher College in Baltimore and a number of community colleges. He regularly lectures on American music at the Peabody Conservatory and Towson State University Elderhostels. Mr. Messenger's latest book, *The Power of Music: A Complete Music Activities Program for Older Adults*, has been called "a landmark in music activities."

Mr. Messenger's musical career includes studio work on many early rock and roll recordings. He has accompanied many nationally known performers during his years in the music business, including Lou Rawls and Cass Elliot, and he worked as an opener for Bill Haley and the Comets. He was also a pianist with the acrobatic rock and roll group, The Rockin' Maniacs. As a jazz pianist, he has played in ragtime ensembles, swing bands, Dixieland bands, and modern jazz groups, and in 1983 he was voted Baltimore's best piano player by *Baltimore* magazine.

Elements of Jazz:
From Cakewalks to Fusion

Table of Contents

Elements of Jazz:
From Cakewalks to Fusion

Scope:

In these lectures, we examine the history of one of America's great contributions to world culture: the music known as "jazz." Beginning with the music and dance of the antebellum plantation, we discover how the "cakewalks" of slave culture gave birth to a dance craze at century's end ignorant of its own humble roots. We consider how the minstrel shows, deriving from Southern beliefs that held black culture to be decidedly inferior, eventually spawned a musical industry that African-American musicians would dominate for decades to come. *Jazz*, though a difficult genre to define, was central to the music they created.

Jazz was born—or conceived—in the ragtime piano tunes of turn-of-the-century America. Together with the Dixieland funeral music of New Orleans, this new syncopated music popularized a sound that took America's vaudeville establishments by storm. Drawing on the blues, an emotional but harmonically simple music, jazz was ensconced as a popular genre in the American psyche by the 1920s. Heavily arranged for commercial success in succeeding decades, jazz would reach new popular heights in the "swing era" of America's big bands.

Jazz engendered much more than swing, however. Boogie-woogie, primed with a heavy-handed but highly rhythmic style, found widespread success in the 1940s before being popularized to death. Big band blues, where the simplicity of the blues standard was overlaid on the pop song, fused the worlds of folk and high art. With the rise of bebop, an austere, anxious music that rebutted the commercial spread of swing, modern jazz was finally born.

In recent decades, cool, modal, free, and fusion jazz have all had their devoted followings, proof that jazz is a generic music comprised of many varieties. True to its name, jazz has defied definition, category, stagnation.

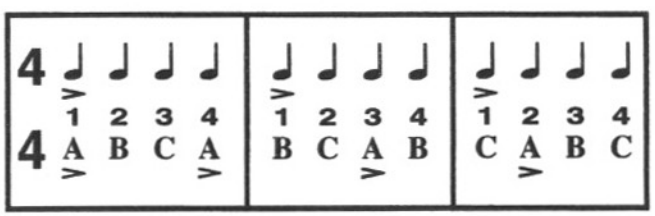
Lecture One
Plantation Beginnings

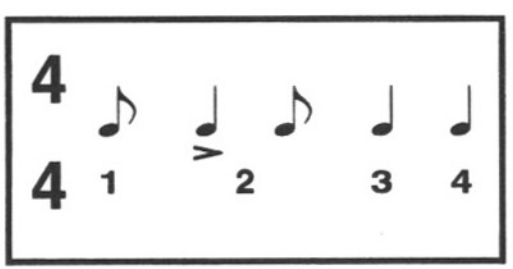
Scope: The roots of jazz go back to the antebellum South, where African rhythms and European form were synthesized in the dance craze taken up by slaves and known as the "cakewalk." Out of this plantation environment grew minstrelsy, the black-faced stage act that, whether performed by white or black actors, had become all the rage in Europe and America by the turn of the 20th century. The greatest of the black minstrels, Bert Williams, introduced the cakewalk to New York, a pivotal event which popularized an early version of the "ragtime" craze about to overtake America.

Outline

I Jazz is tied to the art of popular music and songwriting.

A. African music, the ultimate source of jazz, is polyrhythmic and syncopated. It avoids monotony by changing the accented beat from measure to measure.





B. The synthesis of this African rhythm and the European form it encountered goes back to the plantations of the South in the early 1800s.

C. In antebellum "cakewalking" contests, slaves exaggerated their masters' ballroom marches, arching their backs and stepping high. They performed the dance to the accompaniment of a banjo and bones (meat ribs); one instrument played straight rhythm, while the other played in syncopation, thus creating an early form of ragtime.

D. White people did not realize the imitative nature of the "cakewalk," and they took it up themselves as a dance craze in the 1890s.

E. Cakewalks were like home-made John Philip Sousa marches, entering America from Africa via the plantation.

II African rhythms spread through the popular music of the nineteenth century.

A. Because slaves lacked freedom of movement, white performers capitalized on the inspiration of black musicians.

B. In antebellum America, Thomas Rice first heard the phrase "Jim Crow" in a plantation song, and his subsequent stage act, a self-conscious imitation of what was thought to be "slave culture," required performers to appear in black-face.

C. In 1842, Dan Emmett formed the Virginia Minstrels and turned the black-face minstrel into a million-dollar-business. By conviction an abolitionist, Emmett is commonly credited with having authored "Dixie."

III Black-face minstrelsy, whether performed by blacks or whites, further popularized elements of plantation culture.

A. Christy's Minstrels, over 200 strong, were soon touring Europe and America. Their act used two primary characters: Jim Crow, the good-natured farm boy, and Zip Coon, the wiseguy city slicker.

B. In 1893, the unknown Scott Joplin heard great musicians at the Chicago World's Fair and so was inspired to write ragtime. Minstrels, wearing a uniform shade of black face regardless of natural skin color, also performed.

C. The most famous minstrel of all was Bert Williams, a well-educated black man who actually had to be trained to speak "down" in order to join the Ziegfeld Follies in 1910. By 1912, his star ascendant, he was earning over $10,000 a week, an enormous sum for the time.

D. Williams introduced the cakewalk to New York City. A synthesis of European and African styles, the dance was an example of early ragtime, or what happens when a European march is transformed through syncopation.

Suggested Reading:

Schuller, Gunther. *Early Jazz.*

Questions to Consider:

1. What did Jim Crow mean in the context of the history of modern music?
2. What characteristics distinguish African music from that found in other traditions around the world?

Lecture Two
The Rise and Fall of Ragtime

Scope: Ragtime emerged in the 1890s and reigned supreme in American popular music for two decades. More complicated than the cakewalk, it used energized syncopation to give American vernacular music a unique sound that would later evolve into what we call "jazz." Ragtime's most popular composer, Scott Joplin, at first resisted the new craze but subsequently came to write the most memorable rags ever, including "Maple Leaf Rag" and "The Entertainer." As early cakewalking had inspired contests on the plantation, so too did ragtime thrive on ragging contests at the turn of the century. Wildly popular with America's youth, ragtime was commonly dismissed by elders whose Victorian sensibilities it offended.

Outline

I Ragtime was syncopation, a new rhythm that dominated popular music at the turn of the century.

- **A.** While classical music used syncopation, it did so in a less varied and insistent way than did ragtime.
- **B.** The etymology of *ragtime* suggests that the word is a foreshortening of "ragged time."
- **C.** Just as the 1950s—prosperous, complacent, and strait-laced—witnessed the spread of rock and roll as a youth cult, so did the 1890s experience ragtime.
- **D.** Ragtime dominated the music of the first fifteen years of the century. The king of vocal ragtime was Irving Berlin, who did not so much invent the form as rejuvenate it.
- **E.** But the musical establishment looked askance at ragtime, considering it too light to be "serious" music.
- **F.** Black artists—and white artists in black face—came to dominate the new genre, stamping the music with a sense of "authenticity." Ragtime sheet music, bought by young white women in droves, often showed a black figure on the cover to ensure that it was the genuine article.

II Scott Joplin was the most renowned of ragtime composers.

- **A.** Born in Texarkana, Texas, in 1868, Joplin composed about 30 rags before his death in 1917, the year of the first jazz recording.
- **B.** Classically inclined at the piano, Joplin disdained ragtime at first. Early on he wrote marches and waltzes, and he regarded syncopated music as low-class.

- **C.** After visiting the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, however, Joplin was intrigued by the new, "ragged" sound. When he tried the new style, his popularity soared. In this new manner, Joplin would compose an oeuvre of rags comparable in range to the preludes of Chopin.
- **D.** For 70 years, Joplin's best-known work was "Maple Leaf Rag"—until the movie *The Sting* (1973) showcased his lesser-known rag "The Entertainer," making the piece even more popular.

III Ragging contests were a popular form of entertainment at the turn of the century.

- **A.** Like cakewalking in an earlier day, ragtime inspired its own contests at the fin de siecle. The contests, some of them formal, required participants to syncopate a non-syncopated song, embellishing it with fillers, breaks, and new endings.
- **B.** Such contests ranged widely for musical subjects, from a Stephen Foster song like "Old Folks at Home" to Felix Mendelssohn's "Spring Song."
- **C.** George Cobb, a famous ragtime publisher and winner of many such contests, was once talked into "ragging" on Sergei Rachmaninoff's "Prelude in C Sharp Minor." Unknown to him, Rachmaninoff was listening to his effort—and even critiqued it when he was finished.

Suggested Reading:

Berlin, Edward. *King of Ragtime—Scott Joplin and His Era*. Oxford, 1994.

Questions to Consider:

1. Did the popularity of ragtime bridge or widen the racial gulf in early 20th century America?
2. What is syncopation, and can it be found in music written before the turn of the twentieth century?

Lecture Three
The Jazz Age

Scope: Ragtime evolved into what we now call Dixieland jazz, a syncopated music that grew up in the context of the New Orleans funeral and moved east about the time of the First World War. Called "spasm music" in the 1890s, Dixieland relied on marching instruments like the banjo and tuba that were commonly employed in New Orleans funerals. Dixieland jazz was polyphonic, making it something akin to baroque music of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but it used syncopation and improvisation in ways that earlier polyphonic music had never attempted. Then, in 1924, the course of jazz was changed forever with the invention of the microphone, an innovation which allowed not only the use of quieter instruments like the guitar and string bass, but brought smaller-voiced singers like Bing Crosby, Mel Torme, and Frank Sinatra into the limelight.

Outline

I Though the precise pedigree of jazz is uncertain, improvisation was central to its character.

- **A.** The line between ragtime and jazz is a fuzzy one. Jelly Roll Morton, for example, was a ragtimer who learned how to play jazz, but the transition was not always an easy one.
- **B.** At the heart of jazz is improvisation. Improvisation meant not only changing the melody of a given piece but turning a mistake into an unexpected advantage if the occasion presented itself.
- **C.** Jelly Roll Morton learned "Maple Leaf Rag" by ear and probably did not remember all of it, filling in the spaces in his own style. In jazz, as in folk music, every musician plays a given tune differently.

II In its earliest incarnation, jazz combined syncopation with improvisation, owing a debt to Dixieland and ragtime in the doing.

- **A.** Critic James Lincoln Collier has called Dixieland jazz "advanced ragtime." Singer Sophie Tucker, early associated with ragtime, was also known as the "queen of jazz."
- **B.** The first jazz recording was released in 1917, by which time rags were no longer known as "rags," but as "novelty piano."
- **C.** Jazz, in sum, is syncopation and improvisation. Unlike classical music, it proposed variations on a theme that were both spontaneous and syncopated.

- **D.** The effects of a jazz style are profound. Even a tune as basic as "Mary Had a Little Lamb" can seem totally changed with extra notes and an altered rhythm.

III Early jazz grew out of the rituals of the New Orleans funeral.

- **A.** New Orleans jazz was polyphonic—it contained several simultaneously-played melodies. In a sense it possessed the melodic richness of baroque music.
- **B.** This style of jazz grew out of the lively march that marked the end of a New Orleans funeral. The solemnity of these funerals segued at ritual's end to happy dancing, the extremes of grief and joy both present in the ceremony.
- **C.** Jazz was played in New Orleans long before its christening as such in 1917. In the 1890s it was known as "spasm music" and performed by bands such as Warm Gravy and Stale Bread.
- **D.** Jazz traveled east in 1917 when Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels, concerned with sailors who loitered too long in New Orleans, ordered that the city's Storyville red light district be closed down. Hundreds of musicians were soon out of a job, and they had to travel to find work.
- **E.** The origins of the word *jazz* are uncertain. One possible etymology is that in the cakewalk contest the winner was declared the *chaise beau* (literally, 'the man who sat on the throne'). This was altered to *jazzbo*, which was later shortened to *jazz*.

IV Dixieland Jazz quickly spread to the nation's biggest vaudeville houses.

- **A.** Dixieland—syncopated, improvised, and polyphonic—used marching band instruments such as the tuba and banjo.
- **B.** The Dixieland bands frequently employed the "break"—when everyone stopped playing and someone stepped up to perform a solo.
- **C.** The Original Dixieland Jazz Band that went North on tour was not the original one at all, many of its members having been replaced. The band played the top vaudeville houses in the North, not to mention the Folies Bergeres in Paris.

V The microphone changed jazz—and American popular music—forever.

- **A.** The course of jazz changed in 1924 with the invention of the microphone, the first in a series of electronic breakthroughs that revolutionized the recording industry.
- **B.** Before the microphone, singers needed big voices to project themselves across large music halls, thus the booming style of singers like Bessie Smith and Al Jolson.

C. With the microphone, however, a whole new generation of singers came to the fore. Frank Sinatra, Billie Holiday, Mel Torme—all had smaller voices than their predecessors, but they offered a new kind of intimacy.

D. The microphone also affected instrumentation, allowing the guitar and string bass to replace the banjo and tuba.

E. The new music grew so popular after World War I that the next decade came to be called the "Jazz Age."

Suggested Reading:

Fordham, John and Dorling Kindersley. *Jazz*. London, 1993.

Questions to Consider:

1. What is the central difference between ragtime and jazz?
2. How did the microphone revolutionize jazz?

Lecture Four
Blues

Scope: The blues began as a gut-wrenching expression of emotion, likely deriving from the "field holler" of cotton pickers in the Old South. The classic form of 12-bar blues was primitive compared with the 32-bar jazz song of the era, a fact which has hardly rendered the blues any less compelling. Widely considered the father of the blues, W.C. Handy was more accurately their first arranger, gathering what he learned at the Chicago World's Fair of 1893 and in various popular rags to record a direct form of music considered to be the primitive germ of jazz.

Outline

I What are the blues?

A. The "blues" are many things, but first they are personal. In instrumental blues, for example, every vocal line was followed by at least a full measure of rest where someone could improvise, jazz-style.

B. Indeed, blues is a part of jazz. Blues is a *way* of singing. To play the blues is to shut off the intellect and release pent-up feelings.

C. Though the blues are harmonically simple, some jazz players have trouble playing them. The classic blues form is simple, even primitive, compared to the 32-bar jazz song with an 8-bar bridge.

II The source of the blues is profound feeling, and its form reflects this.

A. Blues began as a formless expression of a basic emotion.

B. Some people have called the blues a "holler"—it may come from the 'field holler' that slaves used in antebellum days while picking cotton.

C. As the blues became more popular, singers used it with the Dixieland band as a back-up.

D. What soon developed was the classic blues form—one line sung, then repeated, and a third line sung that rhymes with it.

III The godfather of the blues was W.C. Handy. The blues were the primitive germ that would grow into jazz.

A. Though Handy is referred to as "the father of the blues," he was more their arranger than their creator. He didn't like the blues very much, though he did refine the arrangements of folk blues artists.

B. Handy was not convinced that the public would even buy the blues until he saw a raw band of bluesmen who, after one performance, were showered with money. Suddenly he saw the beauty of "primitive music."

C. Handy wrote "Memphis Blues," but that was more ragtime than blues. In a singular contribution, though, he played "blue notes"—flatted notes that fall between the cracks in a musical scale.

D. Handy, like Joplin, was at the Chicago World's Fair of 1893; he arranged one song he heard there into the famous "St. Louis Blues." But nothing about the song was original—it was a melting pot of many influences.

E. Blues is the emotional germ of jazz. When jazz goes too far into the abstract or academic, it always returns to the blues.

F. Critic Robert Palmer has claimed that jazz is less "primitive" than Mozart, who had no cross rhythms in his music. Even "primitive," then, is a word to be used advisedly.

IV A personal view reveals the blues in action.

A. For performer Ursula Ricks, the blues of the 1990s are a traditional music with contemporary lyrics.

B. Blues, in her mind, are feeling and simplicity. The blues are a cathartic way of reminding oneself that any problem could be worse.

C. Though blues were a woman's art early on, they later became the province of men. In almost every black family, someone could do something rhythmically or artistically.

D. Where do the blues come from? From pain, from life, from God, says Ricks. She does not read music, but her heart knows it. She is self-taught on the guitar and is an admirer of Aretha Franklin, Billie Holiday, and Bessie Smith.

Suggested Reading:

Berendt, Joachim. *The Jazz Book—From Ragtime to Fusion*. New York, 1989.

Questions to Consider:

1. What did jazz take from the blues?
2. What about the blues, if anything, is prototypically American?

1 **C**	**2** **C**	**3** **C**	**4** **C7**
5 **F**	**6** **F**	**7** **C**	**8** **C**
9 **G7**	**10** **F**	**11** **C**	**12** **C**

Lecture Five
The Swing Era

Scope: The big-band jazz of the swing era reflected the life-style of the generation that came of age in the 1930s and 1940s. Swing placed the syncopation and improvisation of early jazz in the context of careful arrangements, combining planning and spontaneity in a unique way. Not to be confused with the sound of competing society bands, swing music gave talents like Benny Goodman a chance to improvise within the framework of top 40 hits. By 1950, the end of swing was assured with the development of the echo chamber and multiple tracking, studio innovations which could approximate the sound of a large band with a single musician.

Outline

I Swing: Everybody talks about it, but what was it?

A. The big bands were comprised of real musicians who were proud of their craft. There was no electronic doctoring of what they played; what went into a record came out the same way.

B. As with *ragtime* and *jazz*, the word *swing* only followed the music by a considerable interval. Swing in the 1920s was known as "big band jazz."

C. Swing needs a regular beat, even an irregular rhythmic figure based on a regular beat. Swing is a subtle kind of syncopation, in which, for example, quarter notes are not, strictly speaking, quarter notes.

D. Swing was the music of a new generation. It introduced a whole new vocabulary of slang:

1. A *canary* was a woman vocalist.
2. A *cat* was a swing musician.
3. *In-the-groove* meant flawless.
4. A *jam-session* was an improvised swing.
5. *Jive* meant either "good" or a "con job."

E. As with ragtime and Dixieland, the style of swing changed over time. By the 1940s, piano playing known as "stride" had become "advanced stride," the improviser moving further and further away from the melody.

II Swing emerged in the Depression as a soporific, healing genre of popular music.

A. After the stock market Crash of 1929, the world reverted to more restrained behavior. Evening dress reappeared, and the flapper look was gone forever by 1933.

B. The market for hot jazz plummeted in the early years of the Depression. With the repeal of Prohibition in 1933, America's impoverished populace sought a more soothing music; "Stardust," written in 1929, only became no.1 on the charts in 1932.

C. Toward the mid-1930s, the length of women's skirts started creeping back up. This was the start of the swing era.

III Swing combined syncopation with improvisation and arrangement.

A. The swing era lasted from about 1935 to 1950. In 1932, the hit parade had a number of big band groups; by 1950, their absence from the charts was notable.

B. A critical component of the swing band was the arranger, who created the sound for a band in much the way later producers did for rock groups.

C. Swing = syncopation plus improvisation plus arrangement; it was the perfect musical balance between planning and spontaneity.

D. The swing bands were different than the society bands of the era:

1. A society band was for dancing, not swinging.

2. The society band promoted uniformity, the swing band creativity.

3. Swing music was to society music what *Streetcar Named Desire* is to *The Young and the Restless.*

IV By the 1950s, swing was a thing of the past.

A. Technological breakthroughs sounded the death-knell for swing. Les Paul's invention of the echo chamber and multiple tracking meant that an apparent army of musicians could be created in the studio with a single trumpet.

B. The rise of television also hurt swing, as more and more Americans sought their main fare of entertainment in the home.

C. Still another reason for the demise of swing was Frank Sinatra, who proved that the artful singer could rise above his band. The rise of big-band vocalists began in 1942 when Sinatra went solo.

D. By the time rock and roll arrived in the mid-1950s, big band was already a relic. Fortunately, the electronic wizardry that helped to destroy the swing era has also helped to preserve it.

V Today, the legacy of swing seems both quaint and complex.

A. Swing's fame rested on leaders like Benny Goodman, who, by today's standards for media celebrities, seem remarkably unpretentious.

B. Swing, however, was a music of considerable complexity:

1. It walked a balance between improvisation and arrangement.

2. It used instruments like the bass and guitar that could be heard with the aid of a microphone.

3. It was driven by an undefinable beat.

4. It used antiphonal section-playing between reeds and brass, a technique that derived from the "call and response" motif found in many folk songs.

Suggested Reading:

Schuller, Gunther. *The Swing Era.* Oxford.

Questions to Consider:

1. How was swing a precursor to rock and roll as a sociological phenomenon?
2. What were the causes that led to the death of swing?

Lecture Six

Boogie, Big Band Blues, and Bop

Scope: At the same time swing was holding sway, boogie-woogie had amassed a large public following in the 1940s. Probably dating from the late nineteenth century, boogie used a 12-bar blues pattern and ostinato bass that, in the 1950s, would pave the way for the advent of rock and roll. Paralleling the boogie eruption was the growth of big band blues, a development that turned the 32-bar pop song into a work of blues art, using blue notes, repetition, and 12-bar phrasing. Finally, rebelling against the outlandish commercial success of swing, bebop was born, an austere brand of jazz that used the flatted fifth as the hallmark of a new style, blazed by the musical genius of Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker.

Outline

I Boogie-woogie was a precursor of rock and roll.

- **A.** In 1942, you couldn't turn on the radio without hearing boogie-woogie. Like ragtime, boogie-woogie didn't really die so much as it evolved into another form—in this case, rock and roll.
- **B.** A solo piano music, boogie-woogie long predates the first popular recording of it in 1929.
- **C.** In fact, boogie is probably as old as the blues, marked as it is by 12-bar blues patterns and characterized by a repeating ostinato bass figure.
- **D.** Huddie Ledbetter, popularly known as "Leadbelly," claimed that he first heard boogie in 1899. Some claimed its earlier name was "western rolling blues."
- **E.** Boogie is a heavy-handed but highly rhythmic style. In a sense, it is the blues with a repeated figure in the left hand; whether it is eight notes to the bar, or five or seven, the bass stays regular.
- **F.** The word *boogie-woogie* may ultimately derive from a Bantu phrase, *buki-mavuki*, or "I take off in flight."

II The age spawned many other kinds of jazz. Big band blues, like other musical genres, was a hybrid of styles.

- **A.** The blues evolved during the big band period; big bands sang and played the blues, but not in the traditional way. By the 1940s, for example, more innovative jazz chords had appeared.
- **B.** The blues even blended with the 32-bar pop song, as in Harold Arlen's "Over the Rainbow." Arlen wrote for jazz singers, not Tin Pan Alley. In his work, blues was carried to the level of the art song.

- **C.** Though some purists consider such "blues" too complex to be the real thing, many of the people who recorded the music disagreed. They used such standard devices as blue notes, repetition, and 12-bar phrasing.
- **D.** Labels like ragtime, boogie-woogie, and blues are species labels for a generic kind of music. We can call it *jazz*—or, for that matter, African-American syncopated music.

III Bebop developed as a protest against swing, and in turn it encouraged the development of modern jazz.

- **A.** By the end of the 1930s, swing had become a gigantic marketing enterprise, too commercial for many musicians.
- **B.** Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker were instrumental in the rise of bebop, a music so tough in its virtuosity that no one could keep up with them.
- **C.** The hallmark of bebop was the flatted fifth note—avoided in most kinds of music. Leonard Bernstein used it successfully in *West Side Story*, and the flatted fifth became the modern jazz bluenote.
- **D.** Bop was unornamented and austere, using very few rests. Musical phrases were almost onomatopoetic, allowing for hardly any empty space.
- **E.** By this time, the clarinet had faded, the piano no longer played ragtime derivatives, and the bass became the real timekeeper of the music. This is where modern jazz begins.

Suggested Reading:

Gitler, Ira. *Swing to Bop*. Oxford, 1987.

Questions to Consider:

1. What is the relationship between boogie and the blues?
2. What kind of music did boogie rise up against—and what music was a reaction against boogie?

Lecture Seven
Modern Jazz

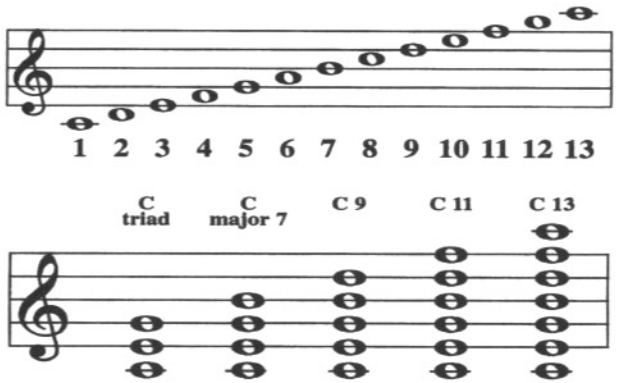
Scope: Modern jazz spans everything from the cool jazz of the 1950s to the fusion jazz of the 1990s, with several stops in between. Cool jazz was a quiet reaction to bebop, a gentle rebellion against the conformity of the '50s which became the trademark music of the beat generation. The decades to follow were marked by modal jazz (extemporizing on ancient church scales), free jazz (spontaneous improvisation without apparent rules), and fusion jazz (a jazz/rock blend comprised of solo collages). In spite of such myriad variations, though, the essence of jazz has remained constant: improvisation, syncopation, and the acknowledged presence of a common ancestry.

Outline

I What is modern jazz?

A. The modern jazz era has been characterized by constant changes. As soon as we get used to one type of playing, the creators have moved on to something new.

B. The basic tonal triad of ragtime and traditional jazz was the 1-3-5 fifth chord. In modern jazz, though, we hear ninth, eleventh, and thirteenth chords, creating a very dissonant sound.



II "Cool jazz" was a gentle form of rebellion against bebop.

A. Cool jazz probably began with Miles Davis's 1950 recording "The Birth of the Cool." The grandfather of the cool sound was Claude Thornhill's big band of the late 1940s.

B. As rock was the music of the hippies in the 1960s, cool jazz was the music of the 1950s beat generation. Even poetry could be heard read above the soft sound of cool jazz.

C. Musical boundaries were extended in cool jazz.

1. Thelonius Monk began building chords on fourths rather than fifths.

2. After Dave Brubeck, everyone began experimenting with non-4/4 time. The odd meters of everyone from Leonard Bernstein to Andrew Lloyd Webber eventually showed the influence of cool.

III Modal jazz was a neo-primitive form of musical expression.

A. Long before the creation of major and minor scales, "modes" were sung in traditional church rituals in parallel fourths and fifths.

B. Modal jazz, which uses these intervals, is, in a sense, neo-primitive; John Coltrane took one or two chords and did them over and over again, making chord changes a thing of the past.

C. Modes can be supported by tension-creating chords, built up in fourths rather than thirds. In fact, any tone can be played modally.

IV Free jazz, a kind of "communal tantrum," has tried to divorce the notion of art and craft.

A. Free jazz is like playing tennis—without a ball *or* net. Ornette Coleman originated both the phrase and the movement, what purports to musical spontaneity without rules.

B. Free jazz has no set chord changes and omits such chord instruments as guitar and piano.

C. But the music has some structure. There is a constant tempo, and a piece typically begins and ends with a tune lifted from a pop song.

D. John Cage pioneered his own "chance music," and in his wake many imitators have wanted to play free jazz without learning form and harmony. This, as in the excerpt we hear from "Free for All," is the price we pay for freedom.

V Fusion jazz, like other varieties before it, was a melding of popular styles. Such is the way of jazz.

A. Beginning with Miles Davis's "Bitches Brew" in 1969, fusion was a blend of jazz and rock. It employs a collage of solo riffs done with electronic instruments and percussion.

B. Through all these radical changes over the years, jazz musicians have always returned to the blues. Even in the complex 1950s, musicians reached back to the blues to make "soul jazz."

C. The myriad forms of modern jazz vary as much as the music of Richard Wagner does from that of Igor Stravinsky. But all jazz is linked by improvisation, syncopation, and a common ancestry.

Suggested Reading:

Berendt, *The Jazz Book*. New York, 1989.

Questions to Consider:

1. What is cool jazz, and how did it define the temperament of the 1950s?
2. Why has jazz leant itself so easily to modification?

Lecture Eight
The ABC's of Jazz Improvisation

Scope: Jazz improvisation is no simple matter. With any combination of instruments, no matter how independently inclined, comes the need to harmonize their efforts. In this lecture we hear examples of how experienced jazz musicians can complement each other with little that is agreed-on in advance.

Outline

I Improvisation, though spontaneous, is far from random.

- **A.** The jazz bass has gone from being a background instrument to a solo player, as demonstrated here by Ashton Fletcher.
- **B.** When one musician throws out a lead sheet, the other has to decide tempo, key, and how many times he is going to play it.

II We consider several improvisational issues facing the jazz musician.

- **A.** In playing behind the singer, one has to be subservient to the singer's key and tempo.
- **B.** In playing boogie-woogie, the bass and piano have to cooperate on a bass-line.
- **C.** Combining polyrhythms can also be challenging, from cha-cha to meringue to bossa nova.
- **D.** In modal jazz, the Dorian mode of the Middle Ages has been changed with a flatted fifth, making for an interesting modern harmony.

Suggested Reading:

Burton, Kim, ed. *World Music*. London, 1994.

Questions to Consider:

1. What gives structure to a jazz improvisation ?
2. What are some typical problems encountered in improvisation?

Glossary of Terms

bebop: The earliest form of modern jazz dating in large part from Dizzy Gillespie's and Charlie Parker's work at Minton's in New York City.

blue note: A flatted note not usually part of the scale of the song, most often the flatted 7th note, 3rd or 5th note of the scale.

cakewalk: An early, simple form of ragtime.

cool jazz: A quiet, relatively restrained form of modern jazz which emerged in the early 1950's.

Dixieland jazz: Improvised, polyphonic, syncopated music which uses, in its classic form, traditional marching band instrumentation.

free jazz: Improvised performances which cast off all restrictions of previous forms of modern jazz.

fusion: Jazz/Rock

homophonic: A single melody line supported by a harmonic background.

improvisation: Spontaneous musical creation.

jazz: Improvised syncopated music.

modal jazz: A harmonically simple form of jazz improvisation based on ancient scales called modes.

modern jazz: The harmonically complex and rhythmically subtle music which emerged in the 1950s; also a generic term for all jazz from bop to fusion.

pitch: A tone which can be identified by letter name or by its number of vibrations per second.

polyphony: Two or more melodic lines of equal importance played simultaneously.

polyrhythms: Different rhythms played simultaneously.

scale: A succession of tones which largely determines the pitches of melodies.

syncopation: An off-beat accent.

swing: Big Band Jazz.

turnaround: A chord progression leading back to the beginning of the song.

Biographies: Performers
(in order of appearance)

Ursula Ricks
Ursula Ricks has been singing ever since she can remember. She was born in Baltimore, Maryland, and raised in Mineral Wells, Texas. Her love of music can be traced back to her upbringing. Growing up, her mother sang the blues and her grandmother loved to sing opera.

She has no formal musical training; her talent is all natural. Ms. Ricks has returned to Baltimore where she plays the guitar and writes her own brand of blues for the 1990s. She performs in the Fells Point area of Baltimore.

Ashton Fletcher
Ashton Fletcher holds a bachelor's degree from the Peabody Conservatory of Music and a master's degree from Morgan State University. He is also the recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts jazz fellowship. His career highlights include touring with recording star Bobby Vinton and performing for the inaugural ceremonies for former President George Bush. He recently played with the legendary Ray Charles. Ashton is the bassist for the Paula Hatcher Jazz Quartet, which records on the MCA label. Mr. Fletcher now teaches at a number of colleges in the Baltimore area.

Fran Mahr
Fran Mahr has studied at the Peabody Conservatory of Music. She is a well-known talent in the Baltimore area who recently performed as the featured vocalist with the Paula Hatcher Trio and the Treasure Coast Jazz Ensemble. She has also played leading roles in the Baltimore Actor's Theater productions of *Kismet*, *Pal Joey*, and *Three Penny Opera*. Ms. Mahr has appeared on camera and as voice-over talent in more than 700 radio and television commercials, many of them broadcast nationally.

Gary Chalmers
Gary Chalmers has been a professional drummer since the age of 15. He received a full music scholarship to Calvert Hall College and has performed with internationally known groups including The Detroit Wheels and Haley's Comets. Mr. Chalmers has also done studio work for RCA, Columbia and Buddha Records. He continues to perform in the Baltimore-Washington area and is presently designing and presenting personal growth seminars.

Biographies: Bandleaders, Singers, and Composers

Davis, Miles (1926-1991): trumpeter, bandleader, composer. A fine judge and promoter of jazz talent, Davis played many styles, from bebop to cool to fusion. He studied at Julliard, played with Parker, recorded in France, and wowed the Newport Jazz Festival—his music always changed, and his feel for the trumpet never deserted him.

Ellington, Duke (1899-1974): pianist, composer, bandleader. For 50 years his orchestra endured as a top act, defying all pop trends. He wrote hundreds of songs that became standards, and he arranged many more. One of the greatest American composers of the century, Ellington played to rave reviews everywhere from the Cotton Club to Carnegie Hall.

Gillespie, Dizzy (1917-1993): trumpet player, bandleader, composer. A singer of scat, founder of Afro-Cuban jazz, innovative groundbreaker of bebop, Gillespie epitomized the jazz player who could turn any "wrong" note into a discovery. He began recording with Charlie Parker in 1945 and continued as an enthusiastic international ambassador of jazz until the year before his death.

Goodman, Benny (1909-1986): clarinetist, bandleader. Called the "King of Swing," Goodman had sensational pop success in the 1930s, having played with many famous sidemen and singers, from Billie Holiday to Gene Krupa. From the mid-1940s on, he played the repertoire he had already established at the height of his career.

Handy, W.C. (1873-1958): composer, bandleader, minstrel soloist. Handy moved to New York in 1917, and his early blues songs were used in several films. He played with Jelly Roll Morton, Billy Butler, and others over a long career, limited after he was blinded in an accident in 1943.

Joplin, Scott (1868-1917): pianist, composer. The popularizer of ragtime, Joplin's "Maple Leaf Rag" (1899) sold 75,000 copies in sheet music the first year, though his forays into ballet and opera were unsuccessful. He never recorded any of is rags.

Monk, Thelonius (1917-1982): pianist, composer, bandleader. A unique innovator in bop and post-bop, Monk's style was too strange for many to appreciate until well into his career. Though his sound did not change much over time, his reputation did, and by the end of his life he was recognized for composing such standards as "Round Midnight" and "Blue Monk."

Morton, Jelly Roll (1890-1941): pianist, composer, bandleader. The first great jazz composer, Morton later claimed to have actually invented jazz. A fine pianist and arranger, he played in New Orleans bordellos before moving to New York 1928. He was virtually forgotten in his later years until the Library of Congress recorded him in 1938.

Parker, Charlie (1920-1955): saxophonist, bandleader, composer. The founder of bebop, Parker freely improvised melodies with new chordal arrangements rather than playing around a given melody. He played a faster run of notes than most people could actually hear. Perhaps the greatest saxophonist of all time, he died at age 34 a heroin addict.

Sinatra, Frank (1915-1998): singer, crooner, vocalist extraordinaire. Arguably the greatest American male vocalist of the century, Sinatra dominated the big band era, creating hysteria among his female fans. He continued into the 1950s and 1960s with considerable commercial success in a career that spanned over half a century.

Timeline

1895.....Scott Joplin publishes first songs

1899.....Joplin's "Maple Leaf Rag" published

1902.....Jelly Roll Morton begins playing in Storyville

1904.....Ragtime contest at St. Louis World's Fair

1911.....Irving Berlin hits the charts with "Alexander's Ragtime Band"

1917.....Joplin dies; ragtime officially ends

Original Dixieland Jazz Band makes first jazz record

1923.....First recordings by Louis Armstrong and Bessie Smith

1927.....Duke Ellington becomes a regular at the Cotton Club

1929.....Louis Armstrong begins recording solely with big bands

Cab Calloway does the Cotton Club

1933.....Billie Holliday records first songs

1935.....Benny Goodman Orchestra becomes big-time sensation

1938.....Benny Goodman performs at Carnegie Hall

Jelly Roll Morton records for the Library of Congress

1939.....Glenn Miller Orchestra becomes no.1 band worldwide

1940.....Meeting of Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker

1942.....Big band era marred by recording strike and military enlistments

1944.....Thelonius Monk writes "Round Midnight"

1946.....Louis Armstrong stars in movie "New Orleans"

1945.....Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie dominate jazz recordings

Miles Davis begins recording

1947.....Birth of Afro-Cuban jazz when Chano Pozo teams with Dizzy Gillespie

1949.....Benny Goodman and Gene Krupa record bebop

1950.....Bebop fades as a popular fad

Dave Brubeck Trio becomes popular on West coast

1952.....Modern Jazz Quartet does first recordings

1955.....John Coltrane joins Miles Davis Quintet

1956.....Sonny Rollins and John Coltrane do battle on "Tenor Madness"

1960.....The Jazztet records "Killer Joe"

Ornette Coleman makes recording of "Free Jazz"

1962.....Bossa-nova movement takes off in America.

1964.....Pharaoh Sanders cuts first record

1967.....Death of John Coltrane

1968.....Chick Corea turns to electric piano

1969.....Miles Davis records "Bitches Brew"

1973.....Herbie Hancock records "Chameleon"

1976.....Weather Report records "Birdland"

1978.....First recording of Pat Metheny Group

1982.....George Winston popularizes New Age piano

1986.....Weather Report issues final album, "This is This"

1991.....Death of Miles Davis

Bibliography

This course serves as a casual excursion through the world of jazz. While not overly technical in content, these eight lessons will allow the attentive student to absorb enough of the theory and principles behind jazz to permit an understanding of the more technical literature available. The nearly 200 years of American music performance explored in this course should not only increase one's knowledge of jazz, but also of the shifting societal values and attitudes which have contributed to the evolution of jazz.

There are literally hundreds of books in print on the topic of jazz. The list below is deliberately short and consists of five books. They are written in a clear and lively style and should be easily understandable to the student without a music background. Each work should be readily available at your local public library:

Berendt, Joachim. *The Jazz Book--From Ragtime To Fusion*. New York: Lawrence Hill Books, 1989, offers a more detailed analysis. This work is also quite readable.

Berlin, Edward. *King of Ragtime --Scott Joplin and His Era*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, is the finest book ever written about Joplin. Berlin not only writes perceptively about Joplin's work but comes closer than any other biographer to revealing the man and his complexities.

Burton, Kim, ed. *World Music*, London: Rough Guides Press, 1994, is a nearly inexhaustible sourcebook. The work examines every kind of popular music currently played, much of it related to jazz. It is the definitive book on current African, Caribbean, and South American music, all of which have contributed to the jazz musical vocabulary. It includes sources for purchasing a variety of recordings.

Fordham, John and Dorling Kindersley. *Jazz*. London, 1993, is a coffee table book with short and simple commentary on every aspect of jazz. It is supplemented with many photographs and multi-colored, easy to understand charts.

Gitler, Ira. *Swing to Bop*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987, is the story of modern jazz. It is told through the words of the great musicians who created the movement. Gillespie, Parker, Gerry Mulligan, Zoot Sims, and Max Roach are among those interviewed.

Excellent follow-up study for the reader willing to explore more abstract, and consequently more difficult, works are Gunther Schuller's texts *Early Jazz* and *The Swing Era*, both published by Oxford University Press.

