

# Music: An Appreciation

## Part VIII: Jazz

# Jazz Styles, 1900 to 1950

- Blend elements of several cultures
  - West African emphasis on improvisation, percussion, and call-and-response techniques
  - American brass band influence on instrumentation
  - European harmonic and structural practice
- Blues and ragtime were immediate sources

# Elements of Jazz

## Tone color

- Usually performed by combo of 3 to 8 players
- Backbone is rhythm section
- Main solo instruments: trumpet, trombone, saxophone, clarinet, vibraphone, piano
- “Bends,” “smears,” “shakes,” “scoops,” “falls”

## Improvisation

- Created and performed simultaneously
- Usually in theme and variations form

# Elements of Jazz (continued)

Rhythm, melody, and harmony

- Syncopation and rhythmic swing are features
  - Rhythmic accent on beats 2 and 4
  - Syncopation often occurs when performer accents note between the regular rhythmic accents
  - “Swing” results from uneven 8<sup>th</sup> notes (triplet feel)
- Melodies flexible in pitch
- Chord progressions similar to tonal system

# Ragtime

- Dance hall and saloon music
- Piano music with left hand, “oom-pah” part
  - Usually in duple meter at moderate march tempo
  - Right hand part highly syncopated
  - Left hand keeps steady beat

# Blues

- Vocal and instrumental form
- 12 measure (bar) musical structure
- 3-part vocal structure: a a' b (statement, repeat of statement, counterstatement)

# New Orleans Style

- Also called *Dixieland*
- Front line of horns supported by rhythm section
- Songs frequently based on march or church melody, ragtime piece, pop song, or blues
- Characteristics
  - Improvised arrangements
  - Multiple instruments improvising simultaneously
  - Scat singing
  - Theme and variation form predominates
- Many notable performers

# Neoclassicism

- Flourished 1920 to 1950
- Based new compositions upon devices and forms of the classical and baroque
- Eschewed program music for absolute
- Preferred to write for small ensembles
- Sounded modern, not classical



# Expressionism

- Attempts to explore inner feelings rather than depict outward appearances
- Used deliberate distortions
  - To assault and shock the audience
  - To communicate tension and anguish
- Direct outgrowth of the work of Freud
- Rejected “conventional prettiness”
- Art also seen as a form of social protest
  - Anguish of the poor
  - Bloodshed of war
  - Man’s inhumanity to man

# Swing

- Popular 1935–45 (swing era)
  - Written music
  - Primarily for dancing
- Large bands (usually 15 to 20 players)
- Melody usually performed by groups of instruments rather than by soloists
- Theme-and-variations form common

# Bebop

- 1940s and early 1950s
- Meant for listening, not dancing
- Combo was preferred ensemble
- Melodic phrases varied in length
- Chords built with 6 or 7 notes, not earlier 4 or 5
- Theme-and-variations form still dominant
  - Melodies derived from pop songs or 12-bar blues
  - Initial melody by soloist or 2 soloists in unison
- Many notable performers including:
  - Dizzy Gillespie (trumpet), Thelonious Monk (piano)
  - Charlie Parker (alto sax): most famous/influential

# Jazz Styles since 1950

## Cool jazz

- 1950s
- More calm and relaxed than bebop
- Relied more upon arrangements

## Free jazz

- 1960s
- Similar to chance music
- Solo sections of indeterminate length
- Improvisation by multiple players at once

## Jazz rock (fusion)

- In the late 1960s, rock became potent influence
- Style combined improvisation with rock rhythms
- Combined acoustic and electric instruments