

Musical Styles Through the 20th Century

Jazz music encompasses a wide variety of different styles, from ragtime to swing, to bebop to cool jazz and many others. This musical genre began in the African American communities in America during the late 1800s and early 1900s.

Near the end of the 19th century, marching bands were popular in America. African American musicians began to spice up the marches by improvising on top of the melodies. Improvisation involves playing without sheet music, going with the flow of the piece and playing what you feel in that moment.

Jazz moved away from its origins and new styles developed in different parts of America.

The Chicago jazz style involved larger jazz bands including trumpets, saxophones and trombones. Bandleaders arranged the music and joined in the performance too. In the 1930s, Louis Armstrong had an orchestra which he played and sang in. He was famous for his growly singing voice and trumpet playing.

'New Orleans style' involves one instrument playing the main tune whilst the other instruments improvise.

Scat is a jazz singing style that includes vocal improvisation. The singer makes up melodies and rhythms with their voice, not necessarily using full words or making any sense! Scat singing appeared in the first half of the 20th century, as early as 1911. Louis Armstrong sang scat in his recording of 'Heebie Jeebies' in 1926, apparently because his music fell on the floor so he just improvised with his voice to fill in. Another famous artist to use scat was Ella Fitzgerald.

In the 1950s, jazz developed once more into the 'be-bop'



style. This new style was very quick and sounded very complicated, with lots of opportunities for improvisation by the performers. This type of jazz was too fast to dance to and was made for listening. A classic combination of instruments would be saxophone, trumpet, piano, double bass and drums, but could also include the clarinet, trombone or guitar.

Miles Davis was an American composer, jazz trumpet player and band leader who played a major part in introducing new styles of jazz. In the 1960s, Davis introduced electric piano and electric bass into his band, playing in a brand new style which mixed jazz with rock.

In the 1970s, jazz was influenced by Latin jazz, mixing rhythms from Latin and African countries. Instruments such as the güiro and claves were played as well as the more well-known jazz instruments like the double bass.

The 1980s saw a decline in jazz, however there are many jazz musicians still around today, including Jamie Cullum.



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Questions

1. Name a famous jazz musician.

2. When was the 'be-bop' style born?

3. How does scat style singing work?

4. What is Louis Armstrong most famous for?

5. How did the Chicago and New Orleans jazz styles differ?

6. How did Miles Davis change jazz in the 1960s?
