

# Section 3 – Jazz and Popular Music

## **Jazz**

One of the most important musical movements in the twentieth century was that of the jazz revolution. From its earliest beginnings in a number of disparate styles, jazz was to become the catalyst for nearly all of the subsequent musical ideas in the 1900s. It has a long and important history which should be studied in detail in order to appreciate its origins and the many subtleties in its wide range of styles.

The following is a chronological list of some of the most well-known jazz styles with a brief explanation for each. You should investigate each style further, listen to recordings, and become familiar with the unique musical characteristics of each in order to gain a full understanding of this musical movement.

**Ragtime** A piano style developed in North America in the late 1800s which remained popular until the advent of the 1920s. Its main musical features include simple duple or quadruple metre, a syncopated right-hand part against a regular left-hand jump bass, a bright march tempo, and a structure of several contrasting, alternating sections. The African-American pianist Scott Joplin is perhaps the most famous composer and musician of this style. The style was developed by musicians unable to read music who would improvise over the jump bass. Ragtime, although not technically a jazz style was an important precursor to the movement.

**Blues** Again, blues is not technically part of the jazz movement but was the main influence on the early jazz styles. Blues is a folk style that was developed by African-Americans who had suffered the effects of slavery in America's south. Before the Blues, the primary musical style amongst African-Americans was a gospel, spiritual call-and-response type of song. The hallmarks of the blues style are its slow pace, its sad and mournful lyrics and melodies, its use of the blues scale and also the 12-bar blues chord progression. The African musical characteristics of the blues are the syncopated rhythms, call-and-response phrasing, vocal improvisation and the inclusion of a range of vocal techniques such as moans, shouts, slides, bends and shakes. The Western influence can be seen in the 12-bar blues chord progression. Some of the most well-known blues singers are Bessie Smith, and later Ella Fitzgerald and Billie Holiday.

**New Orleans** After the American Civil War a large number of brass-band instruments were left in America's south, and these were taken up by African-Americans in large numbers. They formed bands and marching bands and began to play in the clubs of New Orleans. The main musical characteristic of this style is simultaneous improvisation by all instruments with some alternating solo sections. It was a syncopated style in which musicians would all improvise around the same melody. The groups often comprised cornet and/or trumpet, clarinet, trombone, banjo and/or guitar, bass, drums and piano. This style is also known as Dixieland. Exponents include King Oliver and the Creole Jazz Band.

**Chicago** Chicago jazz was developed through the migration of southern musicians north to Chicago from New Orleans in the 1910s. With influences from the white musicians in Chicago the style began to develop – the simultaneous improvisation was replaced by virtuosic solos which were improvised around a chord progression rather than a melody. Chorus form, where the group would start and end a piece with solo sections in the middle, became a standard jazz form. The saxophone made its debut and became an indispensable part of the jazz band, joining with the aforementioned instruments.

**Task 27** Your teacher will play a variety of excerpts of jazz music to you. Answer the questions below about the musical elements and compositional devices, then try to determine the style of jazz being played.

- 1) Choose two relevant musical elements and discuss their roles in this example.

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Style of jazz: \_\_\_\_\_

- 2) Discuss the roles of instrumentation and tonality in this example.

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Style of jazz: \_\_\_\_\_

- 3) What musical influences and characteristics can you hear in the following example?

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- 4) Discuss the treatment of instrumentation and melody in this example.

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Style of jazz: \_\_\_\_\_