

## **An Introduction to Jazz**

### **Grade 11 | Lesson Plan 5: The Bebop Era**

*Adapted from Jazz in America: The National Jazz Curriculum*

TOPIC: Bebop: 1940 - 1955<sup>1</sup>

1. Demise of big band swing
2. Bebop (AKA "Bop") philosophy and performance Practices
3. Important Figures
4. Cultural Implications

#### **SESSION OBJECTIVES:**

The student will:

1. gain a fundamental understanding of Bebop
  - a. transition from the Swing Era
  - b. performance practices
2. learn the basic definition of several terms associated with jazz
  - a. contrafact
  - b. range
  - c. scat singing
  - d. standard
3. listen to Bebop recordings
4. participate in a class discussion regarding the cultural implications of jazz in the 1940s and early '50s

#### **MATERIALS**

1. Computer with internet connection
2. Speaker system

*Note: This lesson plan includes prompts to play selections from a variety of jazz recordings. Many of the suggested recordings can be found on the Instrumental History of Jazz, which is available as a YouTube playlist, as well as a variety of streaming and/or download outlets including iTunes, Apple Music and Spotify.*

#### **INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES:**

The instructor will:

1. discuss Bebop
2. play significant Bebop recordings
  - a. *Ko-Ko*, Charlie Parker
  - b. *A Night in Tunisia*, Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie
  - c. *Shaw 'Nuff*, Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker
  - d. *Blue Monk*, Thelonious Monk
  - e. *How High the Moon*, Ella Fitzgerald
3. play *Strange Fruit*, Billie Holiday
4. lead a class discussion regarding the cultural implications of jazz during the Bebop Era

## **Content Outline**

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<sup>1</sup> All styles of jazz from Dixieland to contemporary are still being performed and recorded today; all style dates given are the approximations of when each respective style came to the forefront of jazz and experienced its most concentrated development; of course, styles and dates overlap.

## **I. Reasons for the demise of Swing**

### **A. World War II**

1. the draft - many jazz musicians were called to war, leaving few at home
2. bands raided each other - with such few musicians left home, band leaders "stole" band members from other bands, offering them a slightly better deal; bands that were intact before the war were depleted
3. transportation was difficult (e.g., to night spots outside city limits)
  - a. gas shortages (gas rationing)
  - b. rubber shortages (tire rationing)
  - c. dismantling of the urban and interurban railways
4. midnight curfews (brown-outs)
5. 20% amusement tax (customers would have to pay 20 cents tax on the dollar in any nightclub that included dancing)
6. good players did not have to travel (with so few musicians left at home, a good player could make a living without having to travel outside his city)

### **B. Restrictive musical formats**

1. extremely restricted solo opportunities in big band swing (solos had to be short)
2. overworked harmonic formulae (i.e., the same basic chord progressions were used over and over)
3. lack of creativity - stereotyped rhythms and rhythm sections (lacking creativity)
4. general lack of surprise in any given musical circumstance; jazz had fallen into a rut
5. by the early 40's, with the exception of a few, most big bands sounded stylistically alike

### **C. Recording ban (July 1942 - November 1943)**

1. in response to increased use of recorded music on the radio and in jukeboxes and the threat this posed to live working musicians, the American Federation of Musicians (i.e., the musicians union) ordered a ban on all instrumental recording by union members
2. not being able to record new material, many big bands broke up

### **D. Racism**

Inequities between African and European American jazz musicians

1. African American musicians were usually paid less than their European American counterparts
2. African Americans had to contend with the most oppressive manifestations of racial prejudice and segregation; even the black jazz stars featured with name white bands were subjected to the most demeaning indignities
3. in general, most African American jazz musicians became increasingly disenchanted with swing music the more they watched their innovations capitalized on by European Americans; they wanted to create their "own" music, a music that was too difficult, too virtuosic, and too hip for their white counterparts (a music that was not for dancing but for listening—a true African American art form)

## **II. Bebop**

### **A. Philosophy**

1. Bebop was ART music, not "entertainment" music (i.e., not for dancing but for listening); Bebop had the effect of removing jazz from the mainstream of popular commercial music
2. Bebop musicians considered themselves artists, not entertainers
3. Bebop was a conscious attempt on the part of young African American jazz musicians to open new channels of improvisation and create a music which reflected the seriousness of their endeavors
4. Bebop was a completely African American invention; today it is listened to, studied, and performed by people of all races and cultures

## **B. Performance Practices**

1. primarily a small group music (usually a quintet: trumpet, saxophone, piano, bass, and drums)
2. designed for improvisation, not elaborate arrangements
3. virtuosic music; very difficult to play
4. "trimmed down" arrangements (rarely written, mostly just discussed)
  - a. few introductions, endings, interludes, backgrounds, etc.
  - b. instead of complex arrangements, Bebop utilized complex heads (melodies)
5. usually used a basic format
  - a. first chorus: head played in unison
  - b. middle choruses: improvised solos (each player in turn improvises for as many choruses as desired)
  - c. trading fours or eights (optional): keeping the form, each musician improvises for four bars in alternation with the drums (e.g., saxophone for four bars, drums for four bars, trumpet for four bars, drums for four bars, piano for four bars, drums for four bars, etc.)
  - d. last chorus: head in unison
6. the music is instrumental in nature
  - a. rangy (very low to very high notes)
  - b. rhythmically complex
  - c. extremely difficult to sing
  - d. when sung, singers would "scat sing" (i.e., sing as if they were a jazz instrumentalist using nonsense syllables instead of lyrics for their improvisations; play *How High the Moon*, Ella Fitzgerald)
7. tune sources
  - a. the blues
  - b. standards (popular music of the day that has lasted the test of time)
  - c. contrafacts (complex Bebop tunes written utilizing the same chord progression as extant standards)
  - d. originals (tunes written specifically to be played in the Bebop style)

## **C. Minton's Playhouse**

1. famous jazz night club in New York's Harlem known for its role in the incubation of Bebop
2. in the early late 1930's and early 40's, weekly jam sessions and after-hours playing provided the opportunity for up-and-coming Beboppers (e.g., trumpet player Dizzy Gillespie, pianist Thelonious Monk, drummer Kenny Clarke) to explore new musical ideas together; their experiments played a most important role in the development of the Bebop style

## **D. Fifty-Second Street**

1. in the 1940's and 50's, jazz was performed in several famous jazz night clubs along 52nd Street in New York City (e.g., Birdland, The Three Deuces, The Onyx Club)
2. 52nd Street came to be known as the Street of Bop

## **E. Play significant Bebop recordings:**

1. *Ko-Ko*, Charlie Parker
2. *Shaw 'Nuff*, Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker
3. *Blue Monk*, Thelonious Monk

## **F. Latin influence**

1. Latin music has made an enormous impact on jazz composition and performance
2. trumpet player Dizzy Gillespie and percussionist Tito Puente were two of the first responsible for fusing jazz with Latin music

3. play *A Night in Tunisia*, Charlie Parker and/or *Salsa Caliente*, Tito Puente

### III. Important Figures

1. Kenny Clarke, drums (1914-1985)
2. Ella Fitzgerald, vocal (1918-1996)
3. Dizzy Gillespie, trumpet (1917-1993)
4. J.J. Johnson, trombone (1924-2001)
5. Thelonious Monk, piano (1917-1982)
6. Charlie Parker ("Bird"), alto saxophone (1920-1955)
7. Max Roach, drums (1924-2007)
8. Clark Terry, trumpet (1920-2015)

### IV. Cultural Implications

#### A. Geographical

Bebop was centered in New York City

#### B. Cultural

1. racism and segregation were rampant in America during the swing and Bebop eras; for example, African Americans:
  - a. often had to stay at separate hotels; in some cases, traveling musicians would have to stay at black rooming houses or sleep on the bus
  - b. would often have to eat at separate restaurants; in some cases, African American musicians were not even permitted to eat at the same nightclub/restaurant they were filling with large audiences, night after night (sometimes they were not even permitted to use the front entrance)
  - c. were often required to use separate public bathrooms and water fountains
  - d. were often required to sit in the back of city busses
2. the 1930's and '40's, and 50's witnessed horrific injustices against African Americans including lynchings; play *Strange Fruit*, Billie Holiday
3. as with so many styles of jazz, Bebop reflected the culture of the times, growing out of the desire of African Americans to create their own music; like the African American experience at the time, the music:
  - a. was difficult
  - b. alluded to the Blues
  - c. was exploring new directions, uncharted territory
  - d. was separate from the mainstream of America
4. many jazz musicians, in their struggle to deal with oppression and related issues, became addicted to drugs, particularly heroin; many, in fact, met their demise due to drug abuse