

## **An Introduction to Jazz**

### **Grade 11 | Lesson Plan 3: Jazz's Beginning**

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

#### **TOPIC:**

1. Roots
2. Ragtime
3. Early Jazz (Dixieland)

#### **SESSION OBJECTIVES:**

The student will:

1. Gain a fundamental understanding of jazz's roots and their hybridization in New Orleans in the early 20th century
  - a. African Roots
  - b. European Influences
  - c. Blues, dance music and parade bands, and ragtime
2. Gain a fundamental understanding of Early Jazz (Dixieland) – 1900 through mid-1920s
3. Learn the basic definition of several terms associated with jazz
  - a. blues
  - b. break (AKA stop time)
  - c. collective improvisation
  - d. combo
  - e. ensemble
  - f. mute
  - g. polyrhythm
  - h. ragtime
  - i. solo/soloist
4. Listen to ragtime and early jazz recordings
5. Participate in a class discussion regarding the cultural implications of jazz in the first quarter of the 20th century

#### **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 how the Black experience in America led to the development of a distinct African American culture
2. Discuss jazz's roots and their hybridization in New Orleans in the early 20th century, defining terms associated with jazz as needed
  - a. African influences
  - b. European influences
  - c. blues
  - d. dance music and parade bands
  - e. ragtime

3. Discuss Early Jazz (Dixieland)
4. Play significant recordings of ragtime and early jazz
  - a. *Maple Leaf Rag*, Scott Joplin or *The Entertainer*, Scott Joplin
  - b. *Dippermouth Blues*, King Oliver/Louis Armstrong or *Working Man Blues*, King Oliver/Louis Armstrong
  - c. *Dixie Jazz Band One Step*, Original Dixieland Jazz Band or *Livery Stable Blues*, Original Dixieland Jazz Band

## Content Outline

### I. Jazz's African roots

- A. From 1619 to well into the 1800s**, slaves were brought to America from Africa's Gold and Ivory Coasts where music played a functional (not artistic) role: work songs, spiritual songs, healing songs, fertility songs, etc.
- B. While those involved in the slave trade** strived to strip everything away from their victims (freedom, names, possessions, family members, etc.), they, for the most part,<sup>1</sup> allowed them to keep their music as "a singing slave, was a happy slave" and, therefore, would be less likely to cause an uprising
- C. Traits found in jazz that are of primarily African origin include:**
1. rhythm, especially polyrhythms (i.e., one rhythmic pattern superimposed upon another)
  2. expressive (i.e., "vocal") quality when playing or singing

### D. Blues

1. evolved from slave field hollers and African American folk songs
2. usually characterized by plaintiveness and melancholy, a slow tempo, lyrics in the form of paired couplets in iambic pentameter, and intensity and passion
3. utilizes extremely expressive and emotional "vocal" quality even when played instrumentally, e.g., pitch bending, portamento (a musical term that represents a vocalist or instrumentalist "gliding" from note to note rather than articulating each note separately), whining, etc.

### II. Jazz's European roots

- A. Contrary** to the basic concept of African music as functional music, the basic concept of European music was art (and entertainment) music
1. both concepts are essential to jazz
  2. jazz is unquestionably art music; however, it has been and continues to be utilized as functional music as well (e.g., for dancing, atmosphere background music, even funeral music in the 1920s); it has been performed everywhere from the most prestigious concert halls (e.g., Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Los Angeles Music Center, The John. F. Kennedy Center, etc.) to the lowliest night clubs and bars
- B. Traits found in jazz** that are of primarily European origin include:
1. instruments (saxophone, trumpet, trombone, piano, bass, etc.)
  2. harmony (most chord progressions utilized in jazz compositions are essentially European in origin)

### C. Dance Music and Parade Bands

1. Pre-jazz dance bands of the late 19th and early 20th century primary function was playing for dances, parties, picnics, and funerals
2. Typical instrumentation consisted of cornet, clarinet, trombone, bass, guitar, drums, and violin
3. Late 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>- century dance bands played the popular dances of the day including waltzes, polkas, and quadrilles (high society dance), that is, music with a steady beat
4. Parade band music provided exhilaration and a sense of non-discipline to the music that was eventually to be called jazz

### III. Ragtime (1896-1917)

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<sup>3 1</sup> Certain slave owners feared that the slaves' music could be used to cause a rebellion. For instance, the Slave code of South Carolina in the 1700s banned African drumming fearing it might be used to communicate the particulars about a slave revolt.

**A. Ragtime was the direct precursor to jazz**

**B. Primarily a solo piano style<sup>2</sup> that incorporated military march like steady time in the left hand and syncopated (i.e., "ragged") melodies in the right**

**C. Ragtime reflected both African and European musical traditions**

1. African
  - a. Complex right-hand syncopation derived from polyrhythms (several different rhythms played simultaneously)
  - b. Ragtime was developed and first played primarily by African Americans and was a source of pride to African American composers, musicians, and listeners
  - c. The most prominent ragtime composer in history was Scott Joplin
2. European
  - a. The piano itself was of European origin
  - b. Written musical notation
  - c. Left-hand march beat
  - d. Standard European chord progressions

**D. Ragtime's Cultural Implications**

1. Ragtime was developed in response to and reflected the "balance" of American attitude in the late 19th and early 20th century
  - a. Recognized and cherished American traditions (e.g., conservatism, motherhood, rural life) were symbolized by the piano itself (a "classical" instrument) and ragtime's simple left-hand march rhythms
  - b. New fast pace living (e.g., expansion of lively public leisure, excitement of diverse urban populations and pleasures, etc.) was symbolized by ragtime's ragged complex right-hand syncopation
2. Ragtime was enjoyed by both European and African-Americans as it reflected the full gamut from conservative to liberal attitudes (note: music is in the ear of the beholder)
  - a. conservative example: ragtime was performed on the piano, a white middle class symbol of nostalgia and status
  - b. liberal example: ragtime's syncopations, derived from Black musical traditions, reflected the exciting pace of modern industrial life

**E. Play *Maple Leaf Rag* or *The Entertainer*, both by Scott Joplin**

**IV. Early Jazz (Dixieland); 1900-1928<sup>3</sup>**

**A. New Orleans** is considered the birthplace of jazz for a variety of social, economic, political, and geographical reasons:

1. New Orleans was a seaport city
  - a. meeting place for many different ethnic groups and cultures
  - b. market for music and entertainment
  - c. much work available in a port city
2. New Orleans had a liberal atmosphere
  - a. strong influence of French, Spanish, West Indian traditions and Catholic religious attitudes
  - b. no prohibitions against drums, known in certain circles as "devil" instruments

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<sup>2</sup> While ragtime was primarily a solo piano style, ragtime bands later emerged which performed ragtime music in a combo setting.

<sup>3</sup> All styles of jazz from Dixieland to contemporary are still being performed and recorded today; all style dates given are approximations of when each respective style came to the forefront of jazz and experienced its most concentrated development; of course, styles and dates overlap.

- c. different attitude towards African Americans; pride in being a cosmopolitan, sophisticated city
- d. African Americans had more mobility
- 3. long-standing tradition of music and entertainment
  - a. from Congo Square in the 19th century to present day Mardi Gras
  - b. Congo Square provided performance opportunities for African music
- 4. Storyville (a district of New Orleans) provided places for pre-jazz and early jazz groups to perform: houses of prostitution, cabarets, saloons, dance halls, etc. (1897-1917)
- 5. reinterpretation of the 14th Amendment to justify segregation
  - a. forced downtown and uptown (Creoles) African Americans together, depriving the Creoles of their privileged status
  - b. the Creoles had conservatory training, good instruments, and the pop market (balls and other social events); the downtown African Americans had a long-standing vocal tradition with no preconceived notion about what was or was not possible on instruments

## **B. The music**

- 1. typical instrumentation: trumpet or cornet, clarinet, trombone, piano, tuba or string bass, banjo, drums
- 2. each instrument has an assigned role (carry-over from the brass bands)
  - a. trumpet/cornet: melody
  - b. clarinet: embellishes the melody
  - c. tuba/string bass: bass lines
  - d. embellishes bass line, sometimes plays melody or afterbeats (adding to the rhythm, adds sound effects such as smears and slides)
  - e. piano and banjo have the dual function of providing chordal (harmony) and rhythmic accompaniment
  - f. drums (via military style drumming): keep a steady tempo, provide rhythmic accompaniment, and set up breaks<sup>4</sup> via fills
- 3. tune sources
  - a. ragtime tunes
  - b. military music
  - c. religious music
  - d. classical music (overtures, operas, etc.)
  - e. popular tunes of the day
  - f. blues tunes
  - g. original tunes (music written specifically to be played in the jazz style)
- 4. characteristics and performances practices
  - a. everybody plays all the time except for the solos which occur in during the breaks (besides adding musical interest and allowing each soloist the opportunity to show off his musical prowess, the breaks also serve a functional purpose in that they give the other players a chance to rest)
  - b. collective improvisation, i.e., everyone is improvising at the same time (very little, if any, written music)
  - c. simple harmonies (simple chords)
  - d. improvisation based on embellishing the melody
  - e. usually learned by ear (not by reading music)
  - f. dramatic effects proliferate: slides, trills, vibrato, mutes<sup>5</sup> (e.g., bathroom plunger mute for wah-wah effect); influenced by vocal tradition
- 5. reasons for style losing its popularity

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<sup>4</sup> *Break* (AKA *stop-time*): the part of a tune in which everyone stops playing except for a soloist who improvises a short solo

<sup>5</sup> A mute is an attachment inserted into the bell of a horn (particularly trumpets and trombones) which reduces an instrument's volume and changes its tone color (different kinds of mutes offer different alterations of an instrument's general sound); bathroom plungers have been used as mutes providing the "wah-wah" effect heard most commonly in Dixieland and Swing music.

- a. stylistically static; once the style was established, there was very little room for growth and exploration
- b. as great soloists emerged (such as Louis Armstrong), more emphasis was placed on the solo and less on collective improvisation
- 6. most important musicians of this style:
  - a. King Oliver (trumpet)
  - b. Louis Armstrong (trumpet)
  - c. Jelly Roll Morton (piano)
  - d. Bix Beiderbecke (trumpet)
- 7. first jazz recording: *Livery Stable Blues*, Original Dixieland Jazz Band (an all-white group), 1917

### **C. Play examples of Early Jazz**

- 1. *Dippermouth Blues*, King Oliver/Louis Armstrong or *Working Man Blues*, King Oliver/Louis Armstrong
- 2. *Dixie Jazz Band One Step*, Original Dixieland Jazz Band or *Livery Stable Blues*, Original Dixieland Jazz Band
- 3. *Jelly Roll Blues*, Jelly Roll Morton
- 4. *Singin' the Blues*, Bix Beiderbecke