



## Jazz in America

### *Bebop*

#### I. Bebop

- A. Bebop was at the forefront of jazz and went through its most concentrated growth and development from 1940–1955.\*
- B. Bebop was primarily played by small groups (combos).
  1. A typical bebop combo is composed of two horns (e.g., trumpet and saxophone) and rhythm section (piano, bass, and drums).
  2. Although usually a quintet, bebop combos can range in size from three pieces (e.g., piano, bass, and drums) to seven pieces (e.g., three horns, guitar, and three rhythm).
- C. Whereas Big Band Swing was considered entertainment (i.e., dance music), bebop was considered *art* music (like classical music, i.e., Bebop was for listening only). Bebop musicians considered themselves *artists*, not merely entertainers.
- D. Bebop was primarily an African American invention.
- E. Bebop is far more musically complex than its Big Band Swing forbearer.
  1. Bebop harmonies (chords) are more complex.
  2. Tempos are often much faster (although the bebop style can be played at any tempo).
  3. Bebop heads are more intricate and difficult to play than regular melodies.
  4. Bebop musicians improvise far more complex solos than those of the Swing Era.
  5. Bebop requires musical virtuosity and artistry to play it.
- F. Whereas in Big Band Swing the focus is on the arrangement and the playing of the ensemble, in Bebop the focus is on the soloist.
  1. Bebop combo arrangements are simple and rarely written.
  2. The basic format is simply the head played in unison by the horns for the first and last chorus with a lot of improvised solos in between. The head serves as a “frame” for the most important part: the improvised solos.
  3. The combo is the perfect setting for featuring soloists, i.e., no elaborate arrangements, just good, solid improvised interplay between soloist and rhythm section surrounded by the head at the beginning and the end (very little rehearsal, if any, is required).
- G. Jam Sessions
  1. Jam sessions are informal, non-rehearsed gatherings of musicians where they play together, challenge each other (who can “outplay” whom), and learn from one another.
  2. Bebop, in large part, developed through jam sessions.
  3. Jam sessions can be held anywhere, e.g., someone’s house, a bar, nightclub, etc.; some of the most famous jam sessions in jazz history occurred at a nightclub called Minton’s Playhouse in Harlem in the 1940s.
  4. Bebop was and still is the music most played at jazz jam sessions because all the musicians need to know are the head (the song’s main melody) and changes (the song’s chord progression).\*\*
- H. The two most important bebop pioneers were:
  1. alto saxophonist **Charlie Parker** (his nickname was “Bird”)
  2. trumpeter **Dizzy Gillespie**

#### II. Scat Singing

- A. Scat singing (AKA “scatting”) is a type of singing whereby the vocalist imitates the style of bebop jazz solos (as played by instrumentalists) using nonsense syllables; scat solos, like their instrumental counterparts, are improvised.
- B. One of the most important scat pioneers was **Ella Fitzgerald**.

#### III. Latin Jazz – The combining of jazz with Latin American rhythms

- A. Latin Jazz came into being during the bebop era.
- B. Two of the first jazz and Latin music collaborators were bebop trumpeter **Dizzy Gillespie** and Cuban conga drummer **Chano Pozo**.
- C. The tune, “Manteca,” composed by Dizzy and Chano, was one of the first Latin Jazz hits.

\* All styles of jazz from Early Jazz to contemporary are still being performed and recorded today. The 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.

\*\* In jazz terminology (slang), a *change* is simply a chord. Therefore *playing the changes* simply means playing through a tune’s chord progression (the series of chords that accompanies the tune’s melody and improvised solos).