

Course Content - Introduction to Jazz

Introduction and History of Jazz

- Born in New Orleans during the early 1900's, Jazz is a completely American music.
- A long time ago New Orleans was mostly made up of French and Spanish settlers, during the 1800's settlers from England, Ireland, Scotland, Germany and Italy migrated to New Orleans.
- As these new settlers came together, so did their musical traditions.
- African American musicians living in New Orleans combined European music with their own music like marching band, ragtime, and blues, to create a new style of music called "jazz"!
- **Improvisation** is a very important part of Jazz.
- The most common type of improvisation in jazz is a 'call' and a 'response'. For example: a piano player plays a phrase... the drummer 'answers' him... Jazz players are making things up as they go through the song! They're having a musical conversation! And the more they talk, and listen, the more new words they learn.
- Scat singing is when a singer uses nonsense syllables to create melodies and rhythms in a song.

Instruments of Jazz

- There are some instruments that seem to go great with jazz, but really, jazz can be played on any instrument you can imagine. But like we said, a big part of jazz is taking a musical idea and improvising around it... so it doesn't really matter what instrument you're playing... it's HOW you're playing it, that makes it Jazz.
- **Piano and modern electric keyboards:** The pianists can adjust the speed or "tempo" of a song, they can quickly change the volume and they can easily change the pitch of the notes... meaning how high or low the notes go. These factors make the piano the "most valuable player" (MVP) of jazz.
- **Stand-up bass or bass guitar:** In jazz music, the bass is very closely connected to the drums or percussion. The bass and drums are the 'home' that all the other musicians can come back to after improvising a cool solo.
- **Drums and or percussion** is the backbone or the glue that holds all the other instruments together. Percussion is a really big group of instruments that need to be 'hit' to make sound... like congas, Marimbas, vibraphones, shakers, and maracas.
- **Horns are instruments like trumpets and trombones:** The trumpet is cool because you can play it really loud and then easily switch to a really soft and quiet sound which is a big help when you're improvising! And Trombones can make some really fun sounds. When a jazz bandleader is making up arrangements for a jazz song, horn instruments are used like crazy.
- **Saxophones and Clarinets** are good examples of woodwinds. They're in lots of jazz music! Even though the saxophone is a woodwind or 'reed' instrument, it has a brass sound that fits in perfectly with the rest of the horn section. The clarinet is just as versatile because it can be used in an up-tempo song, or a slow smooth groove.

Jazz Styles

There are a lot of different 'styles' of jazz. There's Cool Jazz, Acid Jazz and Jazz Fusion, Smooth jazz, West Coast Jazz, Ragtime, Swing, Funk, Dixieland, Bebop...the list goes on and on.

Music in Life Lesson:

The Music in Life lesson is a moment to engage in active listening. The Music in Life lesson song for this course is "Take Five" by Dave Brubeck. Students are invited to think about how the music makes them feel, think and move. Music is an individual experience; active listening encourages students to choose their own musical path.

Highlighted Classic Jazz Artists:

Louis Armstrong, Charlie Parker, Ella Fitzgerald, Duke Ellington, Miles Davis, Billie Holiday and Benny Goodman

Highlighted Contemporary Artists:

Esperanza Spalding, Chick Corea, Diana Krall, Branford Marsalis and Norah Jones