

# **SOCIAL CHANGE AND JAZZ PERFORMANCE**

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**Keith Ingram**

**American University  
Spring 2011**

## Keith Ingram

### Social Change and Jazz Performance Capstone Project, Spring 2011 Friday, April 22, 2011

#### Performers

Zac Diebel	Trumpet
Colin Wick	Tenor Saxophone
James Reber	Electric Guitar
Keith Ingram	Electric Bass
Sean McIntyre	Drums

#### Cool and Modal Jazz

With the rise of the middle class in the late 1940s and early 1950s came an increased listener market. Higher incomes and shorter work days meant Americans needed to find new activities for their newfound leisure time. In 1948, Columbia Records introduced the long-playing record, giving artists over 45 minutes of recording time per disc compared with 8-10 minutes on 78 rpm discs. Confronted with the new demand for their product and the recording freedom LP's offered, jazz musicians began to create lengthier and more intricate pieces with a more relaxed experimental style than bebop. Thus, jazz continued to move away from the bouncy rhythms and dance music of the swing era and expanded upon the intricacies and direction of bebop to create a more listening oriented style.

Cool jazz and modal jazz are closely related forms that brought a renewed focus on melody. These forms stripped jazz of the complex chord changes that characterized bebop, often holding one chord for several measures and only change two or three times per composition. Tempos were often slower than bebop, allowing soloists to create more melodically accessible lines. At the same time, performers began to experiment with meters other than the basic 4/4 meter, such as the popular triple meter—which lends a waltz feel—and more complex meters, such as 5/4 and 9/8. As jazz progressed through the 1950s and into the 1960s, it began to fall out of popularity as various pop styles and rock n' roll began to take over. As jazz left the limelight, jazz musicians no longer competed for mass appeal and they jazz gained freedom to explore more experimental styles and depart from the strict conventions of earlier jazz eras.

## Bebop

While swing continued to be popular during World War II, the social climate of the United States began to change. After the integration of the armed forces during the war, African-Americans began a strong push for desegregation and equality at home. In this racially charged atmosphere, jazz performers began to experiment with new styles. Younger musicians, such as Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, brought a rebellious spirit to their work and pushed back against the stiff, racially tinged conventions of swing music. At venues such as Minton's Playhouse, a popular jazz club in Harlem, these musicians met for jam sessions and developed a new form of jazz music.

Bebop features more complex melodic arrangements and extended melodic lines than swing music, with an emphasis on a straight ahead style heavy in eighth notes. The bass still plays walking lines, with one hit per beat, but relies less on the simple arpeggios of swing playing and creates lines that lend a feeling of motion to the piece. Back the complex melodic ideas of bebop are sophisticated harmonies, often featuring more chord changes. Many bebop tunes are based on popular swing charts—such as the ever popular Rhythm changes pattern from George Gershwin's hit "I Got Rhythm"—with new chords substituted in some places. Bebop musicians strove to create a more challenging and explorative style, that served to exclude less talented musicians—especially white players—in order to push back against institutional racism that gave white musicians a commercial advantage.

## Program

Don't Get Around Much Anymore  
Duke Ellington, 1940

Take the A Train  
Billy Strayhorn, 1939

C Jam Blues  
Duke Ellington, 1942

Apple Honey  
Woody Herman, 1945

Au Privave  
Charlie Parker, 1951

Anthropology  
Charlie Parker/Dizzy Gillespie, 1945

All Blues  
Miles Davis, 1959

So What  
Miles Davis, 1959

Footprints  
Wayne Shorter, 1966

## **Social Change and Jazz Performance**

From the 1930s through the 1960s, the United States experienced social and political turmoil. But the Great Depression, World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and the Civil Rights movement, etc. left their mark on more than the laws, politics, and social conventions of the era, they also had a profound impact on arts and culture. Jazz performance underwent stylistic changes due to the influence of these events, among others. Swing—jazz at the height of its mass appeal—gave way to the more rebellious bebop, followed by the experimental cool and modal jazz. Analysis of the social and political factors at work during this period reveals that the evolution of jazz was the result of a complex web of factors and the internal and external forces that shaped the lives of the performers. This concert provides a juxtaposition of these three jazz styles.

Jazz began in the early 1900s when it began to develop from earlier styles such as ragtime and blues. Early jazz musicians added improvisational sections to ragtime and blues compositions with a heavy focus on rhythmic components to please dancers.<sup>11</sup> Gridley, Mark New Orleans is considered the birthplace of jazz, but many musicians from New Orleans traveled to Chicago to record, inspiring Chicago musicians to create their own jazz styles. Louis Armstrong, one of the most famous and influential jazz performers, is characteristic of this era: he was born in New Orleans, but moved to Chicago to join a New Orleans style jazz band. Armstrong and his contemporaries formed small combos and performed short compositions with lengthy sections of collective or individual improvisation.

## **Swing**

The swing style began in the early 1930s as jazz combos expanded in size and started playing a more organized, planned style of music than that of the early jazz bands. While Benny Goodman's performance at the Palomar Ballroom on August 21, 1935 is commonly defined as the start of the swing era, the characteristics of swing music had begun to coalesce much earlier. Swing jazz offered structured, often large ensemble playing at the expense of much of the collective improvisation that characterized early jazz. Swing music is characterized by a driving rhythm led by a walking bass playing arpeggiated chords (commonly the root note, 3rd, and 5th note of the chord played in sequence) and an alternating drum pattern on the cymbals. At certain points in each piece, assigned performers take a solo, improvising their own melodic lines over the chord changes of the composition.

The rise of swing is attributable to several factors. The spread of radio lowered the demand for live musicians as audiences could now hear the same music in the comfort of their own homes. Combined with the onset of the Great Depression, this meant that musicians could be hired for less money, which enabled the creation of large ensembles. As nightclubs became more popular after the end of Prohibition, swing—with its driving beat—became the popular form of dance music. Americans demanded a distraction from their troubles and swing offered an accessible, danceable music that served to fill some of the holes the Great Depression created. At the same time, audiences—who were primarily white—demanded an easily accessible product all but forcing performers—who were primarily black—to stick to the swing formula in order to gain mass appeal.

