

THE JAZZ SCENE

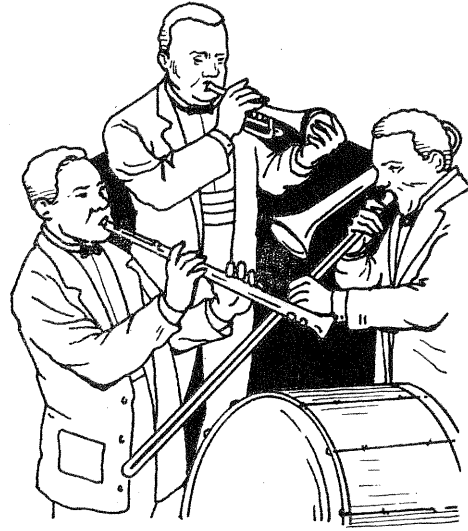
While Schönberg and his colleagues were changing the sounds of classical music in Europe, a new style was developing in America known as “jazz.” Jazz music combines the traditional harmony of European music, the rhythms and percussion and a style known as “call and response” of western Africa, and the fresh new style of playing known as “ragtime” from America. Scott Joplin was the leading ragtime composer and performer of the early twentieth century. Some of his most famous pieces included the “Maple Leaf Rag” and “The Entertainer.” Jazz was also influenced by the “blues,” which is a style of vocal music that came from the African-Americans and can be traced to the slave work songs.

The earliest jazz groups consisted of a rhythm section (piano, string bass, a drummer with a snare drum and cymbals, and sometimes a banjo or guitar) that kept the beat and provided the chords or the harmonies over which the other horns or singers played or sang. The main solo instruments of jazz included the coronet or trumpet, the saxophone, piano, clarinet, and trombone. The very heart of jazz is its improvisational nature. This, perhaps more than anything else in its nature, sets it apart from traditional European or classical music. Often in jazz the musicians take a simple melody, play it through once, and then improvise on that melody, changing it, adding notes to it, and sometimes going completely away from the melody. The Dixieland band, which was the main type of group in jazz from 1900 to 1917, originated in New Orleans. It included the rhythm section that we talked about, as well as a coronet or trumpet, clarinet, and trombone.

The center of jazz moved from New Orleans to Chicago, Illinois, in the early 1920s. There, a new style of jazz developed known as “swing.” The swing era ran from about 1930 to 1945, and during this time “big bands” developed. These bands had a rhythm section and three woodwind sections: the saxophones, the trumpets, and trombones. Typically there would be three or four saxophones, three trombones, and three trumpets. Some of the most important names in the big band era were Count Basie, Glenn Miller, Tommy Dorsey, Duke Ellington, and Benny Goodman.

Early in the 1940s a new style of jazz began to develop that was called “bebop.” In this style of music the emphasis was placed on solo playing, so there were many *quartets* (groups of four players) or *quintets* (groups of five players). They usually had a piano, bass, and drums, and a solo horn player. This style of music emphasized fast, lively rhythms and fluid solos by the players. Some of the most famous performers of bebop were Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker.

Bebop remained popular into the early 1960s. Then jazz saw a resurgence in big band music with such notables as Stan Kenton and Maynard Ferguson. The jazz music that we hear today is sometimes very different from the jazz music that we would have heard back in the 1920s. Most of this is due to the revolution and development of electronic music and electronic instruments. Still, the very heart of jazz is and will always be the element of improvisation and spontaneous performance.



The clarinet, trumpet, and trombone were some of the solo instruments featured in jazz.