

Hotlanta Dixieland Jazz

Educational Guide



What is Jazz?

Jazz is music that is improvised.

This is what makes jazz different from most other forms of Western music.

Improvised! What Does That Mean?

It means you make it up at the moment...on the spot. We all improvise. When you speak casually with your friends you are improvising. You are saying things that come to your mind at that moment. Jazz musicians play music that comes to their mind at the moment. When you are in a conversation, what you say may depend on what others just said. So it is with jazz musicians. Their improvised music is influenced by what others just played or are playing. This is a challenge for the musician and for the listener. The musician is challenged to create something that is musical, something that sounds “right” at that moment. The listener must listen carefully, not knowing where the music is going.

Why Is It Called Dixieland?

In the 1760’s, before the American Revolution, there were border disputes between the British colonies in America. To calm these disputes Britain ordered certain colonial boundary lines drawn by two British surveyors, Mr. Charles Mason and Mr. Jeremiah Dixon. Although originally used for colonial boundaries, this Mason-Dixon Line later became the division between “free” states and “slavery” states during the Civil War. Since that time it has become a symbol of a cultural boundary between the Northern states and the Southern states. The states south of this line became known as The Land of Dixie or simply Dixie. Jazz was born in this Land of Dixie in the city of New Orleans, Louisiana about 1900 and the music took on the name “Dixie”.



How Did Jazz Get Started?

This is an interesting story. After the Civil War, (1861-1865) the Union Army stayed in many large Southern cities for a few years to make sure the war wouldn't start up again. This period was called Reconstruction. When the army finally left New Orleans in the late 1880's the military band gave all of its band instruments to local schools, churches, and orphanages in the city. Suddenly young people, especially African Americans, had a new way to make music. Congo Square, in the heart of New Orleans, had long been the scene of much singing and dancing during the hot summer nights. But now, with the introduction of these marching band instruments, Congo Square rang out with music never heard before. The work songs and church gospels no longer were just sung. Now the music included the sounds of the trombone ...the clarinet ...the cornet....the drums....and the tuba. The music was new, exciting and full of emotion. Most importantly, the music was improvised. Nothing was written down. Nothing was played the same way twice. These instruments were no longer just playing the written notes of marching band music. The music was free as a bird....full of energy and joy as never before heard.

How Did The Music Spread?

America in the early 1900's was very different from the America we know today. Not only was there no television, but only a few people had radios or record players. Those things just were not common in people's homes. The movies were silent. Telephones and cars were a rarity. The only airplane in American was owned by the Wright Brothers in Kitty Hawk, NC. It could carry only a single person a few hundred yards. So, how did this music spread across America? Well, two things happened.....a world war....and the first jazz recording.

America went to battle in the Great War (World War I), 1914-1918 and used New Orleans as a main naval port. New Orleans was a rough and rowdy place, especially the part of New Orleans that was next to the Naval Base. This area of New Orleans was called Storyville, (now known as The French Quarter). Jazz was a big part of the entertainment in this district. The U.S. Navy did not want it's sailors to go into Storyville, so they closed it down. With Storyville closed the many jazz musicians were out of work. They had to leave New Orleans and find new places to

play jazz. They ended up in cities like, Chicago, St. Louis, New York, and Los Angeles. This turned out to be a good thing because it caused Dixieland Jazz to be heard in cities other than New Orleans. Also, in 1917 a band called the Original Dixieland Jazz Band made the first ever jazz recording. The phonograph was just becoming a popular form of parlor entertainment and this jazz recording became the most popular recording of its day. Jazz music became so popular during the years 1918 to 1930 that we now call it The Jazz Age.



Louis Armstrong

Of all the musicians who played this new jazz music, the most famous was a trumpet player named Louis Armstrong. His nickname was “Satchmo” or “Pops” and was America’s first music idol. He lived from 1901 to 1971. Louie Armstrong made hundreds of jazz recordings, and became a movie and television star as well. Because he was loved all over the world the U.S. government sent him on many international tours to promote the culture of America. His achievements were all the more remarkable because he was an African American orphaned as a young boy. I hope you will become familiar with his amazing life and music because he is one of America’s most important artists. Other important early jazz musicians will be listed later in this study guide.

The Concert

Hotlanta Dixieland Jazz recreates the music first heard in New Orleans in the early 1900’s. The instruments you will hear Hotlanta play are the kind used back at that time. You will hear the banjo, clarinet, trumpet, trombone, tuba, and drums.... not very different from today’s school marching or concert band. The songs will be very new to you. Most will have some singing. As we discussed earlier, jazz is music that is improvised, so most of what you will hear is being made up in the moment.

Here is how it typically works:

1. We all play together one time through the song. The trumpet plays the melody while the rest of us make up music to fit around this melody.
2. The second time we play through the song there might be singing.
3. The next time through the song there will be solos by different instruments. The band leader will point to someone to play a solo.

4. These solos are improvised. If you think the solo was good you may clap right after the solo even though the music continues on.
5. After a couple of solos we will return to the melody and maybe some singing.
6. When it is time to play the ending the leader will signal by holding up his fist.

All of this takes about 5-6 minutes

So, you see, the song also is really put together at the moment. The leader will count off the tempo so everyone starts together. Then he will decide when someone will play a solo. Then he shows the signal to end the song. The band members must stay alert not to miss these signals and at the same time listen carefully to what each player is doing. If a signal is missed you will probably know it because there will be confusion on the stage. We hope this doesn't happen, but every now and then it does. (Yes, we know you hope this happens.☺)

The important thing about attending a Dixieland Jazz concert is that you have a good time. Give it a chance to show you its' many faces, from the blues, to marches, to high energy dances. Try to pick out one of instruments and follow it along to see what it does different from the others.

Activities

For those with computer access, either in class or at home, go to YouTube.com to see and hear some of the early jazz musical masters. We mentioned Louis Armstrong as one of the foremost musicians of Dixieland Jazz. He has many video clips on YouTube.com. Other musicians to see and listen to are Jelly Roll Morton, Fats Waller, Bix Beiderbecke, Kid Ory, Sidney Bechet, or simply enter **Dixieland Jazz** for tons of choices. You can also see the Hotlanta website at hotlantajazz.com.

Ken Burns did a series called "Jazz" a few years back for Public Television that is simply superb. The first episode is all about early jazz. It is called "Gumbo" and is narrated by Wynton Marsalis. There is no better introduction to this music. Many libraries have this video series.

Saturday nights, in the early evening, National Public Radio broadcasts a weekly show called "Riverwalk Jazz", a live show featuring some of today's best Dixieland musicians. This is one of the few examples of this music on the radio today.



(Note: all photos are members of Hotlanta Dixieland Jazz)