Jazz Essay, Research Paper

Jazz

When it comes to music, most people don’t say they like it. People say they like heavy metal, pop, rhythm and blues, or any other type of music, since they have their own preference to what type of music they like, not just enjoying the broad area of music. One of those types of music which many enjoy is jazz. Actually right now jazz is really big and popular in Europe, and is rising in its popularity in the USA through its many forms. Jazz does have many forms, so many that some people wouldn’t consider just saying they like jazz, they would say they enjoyed bebop, ragtime, blues, or other types of jazz. Jazz has survived longer than many types of music, and it has always influenced the ways people involved in jazz compose or perform. It has also brought out many famous people. Although jazz is not the most influencing music currently in the nation, its history proves that it is a great form of music with many origins, a multigenerational life span, numerous styles, many legendary musicians, and its own creative, independent interpretation. Jazz is over 100 years old, probably making it one of the longest, lasting forms of music so far. Jazz was not created by Europeans, it was created by Afro-Americans who descended from ancestors in Africa. These Afro-Americans learned how to play these European instruments well, including percussion or the drum set, trumpet, cornet, saxophone, trombone, tuba, and many other instruments. They wanted to show what they were like to other races, so they attempted to express themselves and their feelings through music and the instruments which were so foreign to them. A lot of the music which they played came from black folk music. Jazz did have a part of it come from Europe. The instruments of course, and the basic beginning forms of music helped jazz to be created. Another part of jazz which is not of African origin is improvisation, which is similar to interpretation but has no melodic restrictions. Improvisation began with the Greeks and their music over 2,000 years ago, before the many emotional and creative types of music were even composed. At one time, baroque and classical music used a lot of improvisation in their music. It was very important, and composers such as Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, and Liszt used it in their unique composing. These composers were also good at improvising themselves, and were among the best in the world in their time. Many types of music are created from other types of music, and jazz is among the many. Many people influenced jazz along its development, and it was usually a performer or composer. This includes Buddy Bolden, Benny Goodman, Louis Armstrong, Art Tatum, Billie Holiday, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis, and John Coltrane. There are even more jazz greats who have contributed to jazz. The form of music we know as jazz has existed ever since the late 19th century, and is still alive. It consisted of many different eras, each one with one or two different styles of jazz. Each era also had many good performers and composers which made a certain era stand out. Through the late 19th century to about the early 1920s the form of jazz we know as New Orleans Jazz, which included Dixieland jazz and ragtime. The 20s and 30s developed the Swing Era, which made many performers famous through the first recordings. The 40s and the postwar decades led to bebop, also called bop for short. Bebop’s performers also changed the way jazz was looked at. The 50s through the 70s created a few types of jazz which were very loose and had no limits, but could be critized. The 80s and to the present developed a type of jazz which was more calm and smooth than other types of jazz. The present has brought back all the forms of jazz, and now is experimenting with the many different instruments from the orchestra, including the french horn, bassoon, or violin. There are so many styles in jazz that jazz could not be defined clearly without ignoring one of its forms. It included vocals, ragtime, blues, New Orleans jazz, Chicago and New York City jazz, Big Band, bebop, modal or free jazz, fusion, and modern jazz. Vocals were definitely a style of jazz which performers could easily express moods or feelings, since the instrument was the human voice. The singing of the performers had great freedom and color, and could be expressed by many syllables. Grunts, vibrato, and the impersonation of instruments could all be done by voice. These many possiblities made this form of jazz very popular by bringing out many famous singers, such as Ella Fitzgerald. Vocals can be put into any form of jazz, and make it even better. Ragtime emerged near the end of the 19th century and continued through World War I. It combined many elements, such as syncopated rhythms, harmonic contrasts, and formal patterns of European marches. It is usually played in the time signature of 2/4. Scott Joplin’s “Maple Leaf Rag” made ragtime very popular throughout the whole nation. Other ragtime composers included Thomas Turpin, James Scott, and Eubie Blake. The piano and banjo are the most common used instruments in ragtime. Blues was another popular form of jazz in the late 19th century. It was derived from the banjo music of black slaves and was very popular among the southern part of the United States. It developed all the way through the 1950s. Blues worked its way from vocals to the instruments such as the piano, electric guitar, and saxophones. Blues has been considered to be separate from jazz but it is very similar in many aspects, including the instrumentation and the use of vocals. Many famous singers and performers were created through the blues, such as Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, and B.B. King. New Orleans jazz was one of the first types of jazz to be fully documented, and it came from New Orleans, Louisiana. From the early 20th century and up to the mid-1920s New Orleans jazz was well known. The instruments used were the cornet, trumpet, clarinet, trombone, tuba, string bass, and rhythm secton. Buddy Bolden was one of the big figures in New Orleans jazz, and he led some of the first jazz bands. One of the first bands included the Original Dixieland Jass Band, which was later changed to the Original Dixieland Jazz Band. Chicago and New York City jazz was one of the first periods of time where jazz was being experimented with, and many new things were being discovered in music. Throughout the 20s and 30s jazz piano was developed, it was called stride piano. It was called this for the hard-driving and highly technical soloing with the piano. Boogie-woogie is another piano style which developed in Chicago and New York City jazz. It related back to a form of the blues, where the pianist solos with his right hand while keeping a repetitive bass line in his right hand. Chicago and New York City jazz included one of the highest figures in jazz, Louis Armstrong. It also included a musician who was considered very different in his style when compared to Armstrong, his name was Bix Beiderbecke. It also included Benny Goodman, the famous clarinet player. The Big Band style of jazz can be explained easily, it involved a big band of about 18-20 members. It included 4 sections: the saxophones, trombones, trumpets/cornets, and the rhythm section consisting of the piano, bass guitar, and drums. It was invented during the 20s to the 40s, when jazz musicians decided to have large groups play together. In New York City a man named Duke Ellington led a big band. Ellington was famous for his songs, which many are considered jazz standards. Some of his songs are “Sophisticated Lady” and “Koko”. In Kansas City during the mid-30s a man named Count Basie also lead a band. His style involved improvisation to be used more than the melody, or the “head” of the song. Once again vocals were involved with another type of jazz, Big Band. This era was ultimately one of the largest developing. Bebop is an exciting, energetic form of jazz which involved big bands but was used a lot more in jazz combos. Bebop totally redefined the way to improvise in a song, and it is full of creative and unique musical ideas, also called “licks”. Famous people such as the saxophonist Charlie Parker, the trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie, and the drummer Max Roach created bebop during the 40s and the Postwar Decades, which was definitely a big leap for jazz. This style of jazz is less restricted, and improvisation involved longer phrases, more choruses, and more emotions. Modal jazz, also called free jazz, has no rules at all. It was created during the late 50s through the 70s. Improvisation has ultimate freedom and so does the songs. A famous trumpeter named Miles Davis helped created modal jazz by arranging songs so certain parts of each song would be kept in the same key, chord, and mode for up to 16 measures. This allowed the improvisor to have more freedom. John Coltrane, a tenor saxophonist and composer, had participated in the bebop period by composing the complex and famous song “Giant Steps”. Later he composed songs which were for modal jazz, such as “My Favorite Things”. Jazz began to fall in the late 60s when younger audiences were exposed to soul music and rock. Jazz musicians developed fusion, a combination of jazz and rock, to gain back the interest of the nation. Once again Miles Davis participated, totally changing his style to record and play in fusion bands. From the 80s to the present all forms of jazz are coming back, each one influencing the other. People such as Pat Methany have composed songs which involve ideas from bebop, swing, fusion, and other mixtures of the many styles of jazz. Currently the most influencing form of jazz is bebop. These many forms of jazz will never disappear as long as their musical ideas are implemented into new songs. Of those who contribute the most to jazz, the musicians themselves have done the most. Buddy Bolden, the first jazz legend, contributed to jazz by leading the first jazz bands and influencing many others to lead bands or compose. He was considered the first jazz trumpeter, and he was a very driving, rhythmic, and emotional player who was an inspiration to all jazz musicians. Benny Goodman contributed to jazz by helping to start the Swing Era of jazz. He played clarinet in the big bands he lead, and he improvised amazingly. He went from rags to riches very quick, and other than jazz he appreciated classical a lot. Louis Armstrong contributed to jazz by being one of the first virtuoso improvisors. He also sang very well, with the perfect attitude and tone for each song he sang in. Art Tatum was a very famous soloist who played the piano. He helped develop stride piano. Tatum accomplished much in his life, with many recordings. What made him famous was for his virtuosity on the piano, just like Louis Armstrong was on the trumpet. Billie Holiday was a leading singer among many in the 1930s. She was very talented in taking regular songs and jazzing them up or making them “blue”. She worked with many famous people such as the saxophonist Lester Young and the composer Count Basie. Duke Ellington was one of the most respected figures in jazz. He was a composer, conductor, and pianist in the 20s through the 60s. As he led famous jazz bands, usually big bands, he composed many jazz standards, such as the song “Take the A-Train” and “Sophisticated Lady”. Ellington went to Carnegie Hall and conducted the first 9 annual concerts. Count Basie was another popular bandleader, but from the 30s to the early 80s. His band was always known for being a big band with many good soloists, such as the saxophonist Lester Young. He was also a great pianist, whose style was thought to be elegant and graceful. Charlie Parker was the ultimate king of bop, the style created in the 40s. He was a saxophonist with a talent for improvising. There was a story once that when he first started playing, Parker decided to play with a band. Parker really messed up during the performance and everyone ridiculed him. Even the drummer threw his symbol at him. So Parker went home, practiced 11 to 15 hours a day for 3 to 4 years, and came back to the same place he performed that embarrassing night. Parker blew everyone away. His improvising was creative beyond anyone’s imagination, and so were the songs he composed. Usually he played very fast songs, and Parker himself played so fast that no one could see his fingers. He had totally redefined improvising in jazz. Dizzy Gillespie was another bopper like Charlie Parker, but he played the trumpet. Dizzy improvised exactly in the same style as Parker, and the two of them often were in a combo together. Miles Davis was a man of many styles. He was first influenced with bebop, and he improvised on the trumpet with a “cool” style soon to be copied by many other musicians. Later in his life he was influenced by rock, and he helped develop fusion. John Coltrane was a tenor saxophonist and composer. Appearing famous in the 50s and 60s, Coltrane was known for his awesome soloing on the tenor sax and the complexity of the songs he wrote. He wrote the songs “Giant Steps” and “A Love Supreme”. Interpretation of jazz has been questioned many times. What distinguishes it from other types of music? It could be explained in this quote: “The conventional symbols could, in other words, indicated in a general way what should be played, but could not indicate (precisely) how it should be played” (Pleasants 32). This means that what is shown as music on the paper is not exactly what should be played. You are allowed to change the music a little, speed it up or slow it down, or articulate it different. One important factor in jazz is rhythm. The musicians do not always play directly on the beat or tempo. Players can be “on top” of the beat, which means ahead of the beat, or play “laid back”, which is to play behind the beat. Improvisation is another factor of jazz which separates it from other styles of music. The standard way to improvise in jazz is to keep the original melody in mind while improvising and invent a new melodic line. “Free form” or “free improvisation” is when a person’s improvising is only restricted that he/she improvises related to the musical sounds of the other musicians. Basically when improvising you are allowed to play anything you want to, to show off your talent and abilities to please the audience. Another important factor of jazz is syncopation. Syncopation is to place an accent or extend the note value of a weak beat. Syncopation may give a song better feeling and movement, basically improving the feel of the song. The form of jazz, when related to notes, scales, and modes, is very complex. Songs can be in any key, including any pitch of any octave, and the song may be built on many complex music scales and modes. Chord progressions, where certain chords are played in order, can also be complex, such as the II-V-I progression. Jazz has unlimited possiblilties since it is not so restricted to certain scales, notes, or sounds. Jazz’s interpretation can only go so far, since it splits into many different styles. Here is another person’s idea of jazz: Jazz, then, is not a composer’s art. The particular melody and harmonies which formed the basis of a performance, improvised or arranged, are of secondary importance. Rather jazz is the art of the performer, the performing ensemble, the arranger. And the quality of the art is dependent upon their creative ideas. (Ulrich 449) Jazz still has a even better future to come, and it will develop into a even greater influence than it is now. Jazz will never have an echo, where people reminisce about the old times. It has survived for a very long time, and the musicians and styles of jazz will continually change the interpretation of jazz itself. People will even to have to get more specific when they say they love jazz, but variety is good. Variety in jazz allows many to express their feelings and musical ideas. Without it, variety in the world of music would drastically reduced.

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