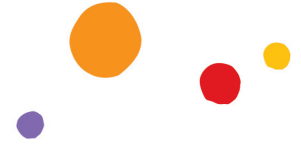


3

BEBOP AND MODERNISM



ACTIVITY ONE: JAZZ, THE BEAT GENERATION

The Beat writers and poets of the 1940s and 1950s, such as Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, were strongly influenced by bebop musicians. Jack Kerouac, in books such as *On the Road*, attempted to adapt the rhythms and improvisation of bebop to prose. In a 1968 interview, poet Allen Ginsberg said that Kerouac “learned his line ... directly from Charlie Parker and Gillespie and Monk. He was listening to Gillespie’s ‘Symphony Sid’ and ‘Night in Tunisia’ and all the Bird-flight-noted things which he then adapted to prose line.” Ginsberg himself noted that his seminal poem, *Howl*, was influenced by tenor saxophonist Lester Young’s “Lester Leaps In.”

The Beats also saw bebop as a form of protest against white middle-class conformity in the post–World War II period. Sal Paradise, a character in *On the Road*, remarks, “This is the story of America. Everyone’s doing what they’re supposed to do.” Kerouac and other Beat writers saw bebop musicians as rebels and “prophets” that represented the best of American genius and artistic innovation.

Read the following excerpts from *On the Road**. On a separate piece of paper describe how Kerouac’s perspective on American culture differs from the traditional middle-class culture of the 1950s. See if you can identify characteristics of the prose that are similar to the musical characteristics of bebop.

“They danced down the streets like dingedodies, and I shambled after as I’ve been doing all my life after people who interest me, because the only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones that never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars and in the middle you see the blue centerlight pop and everybody goes Awww!” (p. 5)

“I was adventuring in the crazy American night.” (p. 100)





“And as I sat there listening to that sound of the night which bop has come to represent for all of us, I thought of my friends from one end of the country to the other and how they were really all in the same vast backyard doing something so frantic and rushing-about.” (p. 12)

“Once there was Louis Armstrong blowing his beautiful top in the muds of New Orleans; before him the mad musicians who had paraded on official days and broke up their Sousa marches into ragtime. Then there was swing, and Roy Eldridge, vigorous and virile, blasting the horn for everything it had in waves of power and logic and subtlety—leaning to it with glittering eyes and a lovely smile and sending it out broadcast to rock the jazz world. Then had come Charlie Parker, a kid in his mother’s woodshed in Kansas City, blowing his taped-up alto among the logs, practicing on rainy days, coming out to watch the old swinging Basie and Bennie Moten band that had Hot Lips Page and the rest—Charlie Parker leaving home and coming to Harlem, and meeting mad Thelonious Monk and madder Gillespie—Charlie Parker in his early days when he was flipped and walked around in a circle while playing. Somewhat younger than Lester Young, also from KC, that gloomy, saintly goof in whom the history of jazz was wrapped; for when he held his horn high and horizontal from his mouth he blew the greatest; and as his hair grew longer and he got lazier and stretched-out, his horn came down halfway; till it finally fell all the way and today as he wears his thick-soled shoes so that he can’t feel the sidewalks of life his horn is held weakly against his chest, and he blows cool and easy getout phrases. Here were the children of the American bop night.” (p. 241)

ACTIVITY TWO: LISTEN UP!

Listening One

Listen to the following musical excerpts. Note the similarities or differences between bebop and cool jazz, considering musical characteristics such as: (1) instruments, (2) articulation, (3) use of vibrato, (4) dynamics, (5) timbre, (6) phrasing, and (7) rhythmic devices (see the **glossary**, p.54, for definitions).

- Bebop: Charlie Parker’s Reboppers, “Ko Ko”
 **CD2: Track 2**
- Cool Jazz: Miles Davis Nonet, “Boplicity”
 **CD2: Track 9**
- Gerry Mulligan Quartet, “Bernie’s Tune” (with Chet Baker)
 **CD2: Track 10**
- Dave Brubeck Quartet, “Take 5”
 **CD2: Track 44**

*Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (New York: Penguin Group, 2003).

Listening Two

Bebop, cool jazz, and hard bop jazz soloists expanded the jazz vocabulary in the 1940s and 1950s. Their innovations, however, were solidly built upon the work of their jazz predecessors. Listen to the following excerpted trumpet solos. Describe similarities and differences in timbre, phrasing, articulation, use of vibrato, range, dynamics, rhythmic devices, and interaction with other musicians.

- Louis Armstrong, “West End Blues”
🔊 **CD1: Track 25**
- Roy Eldridge, “Rockin’ Chair”
🔊 **CD1: Track 42**
- Dizzy Gillespie, “Shaw ’Nuff”
🔊 **CD2: Track 4**
- Miles Davis, “If I Were a Bell”
🔊 **CD2: Track 15**
- Clifford Brown, “Blues Walk”
🔊 **CD2: Track 12**

Listening Three

Vocalists have always played an integral role in the shaping of jazz. Their moans, cries, bent notes, and timbral shadings have long been imitated by instrumentalists. And vocalists, in turn, have often turned their voices into instruments, improvising new melodies with scat syllables of every variety. Listen to the following examples of vocal jazz. Describe similarities and differences in timbre, phrasing, diction, treatment of the lyrics, use of vibrato, range, dynamics, and interaction with other musicians. Do changes in vocal styles reflect innovations in instrumental jazz and vice versa?

- Bessie Smith and Louis Armstrong, “St. Louis Blues”
🔊 **CD1: Track 24**
- Louis Armstrong, “Lazy River”
🔊 **CD1: Track 26**
- Billie Holiday, “Strange Fruit”
🔊 **CD1: Track 44**
- Ella Fitzgerald, “How High the Moon”
🔊 **CD1: Track 45**
- Sarah Vaughan, “Shulie a Bop”
🔊 **CD2: Track 11**

ACTIVITY THREE: INDEPENDENT RESEARCH

1. Investigate the military experiences of African Americans during and following World War II. If possible, focus on the area where you live using primary and secondary sources. You may consider focusing on the experiences of jazz musicians drafted into war. These include Lester Young, Buck Clayton, Sy Oliver, Jo Jones, and Clark Terry.

2. Learn more about bebop, cool jazz, hard bop, Latin jazz, and the artists described in the lesson. Possible topics include: (1) Dizzy Gillespie’s use of Afro-Cuban musicians and their influence on his music, (2) orchestration and arrangements by Gil Evans, (3) big bands of the postwar period (such as Dizzy Gillespie’s) as compared with bands from the Swing Era, and (4) exemplary soloists and the changing role of drummers in bebop bands.

3. Research the history and impact of the worldwide jazz tours organized by the U.S. State Department in the 1950s. Jazz ambassadors like Louis Armstrong and Dizzy Gillespie were considered by the State Department to be “goodwill symbols of American democracy.” Yet promoting black artists as symbols of a racial equality that didn’t even exist undermined the premise of the tours. Gillespie, for one, refused to attend State Department briefings, saying he “wasn’t going to apologize for the racist policies of America.” Armstrong refused a 1957 State Department tour to protest President Eisenhower’s initial inactivity in response to the racial conflicts at Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. Were these State Department tours effective as propaganda? How did jazz artists use the tours as platforms for their own political expression? Are there any comparable events today? What is the role of patriotism in American music?