

JAZZ, THEN AND NOW
(The History of Jazz)

FRANK LEANZA

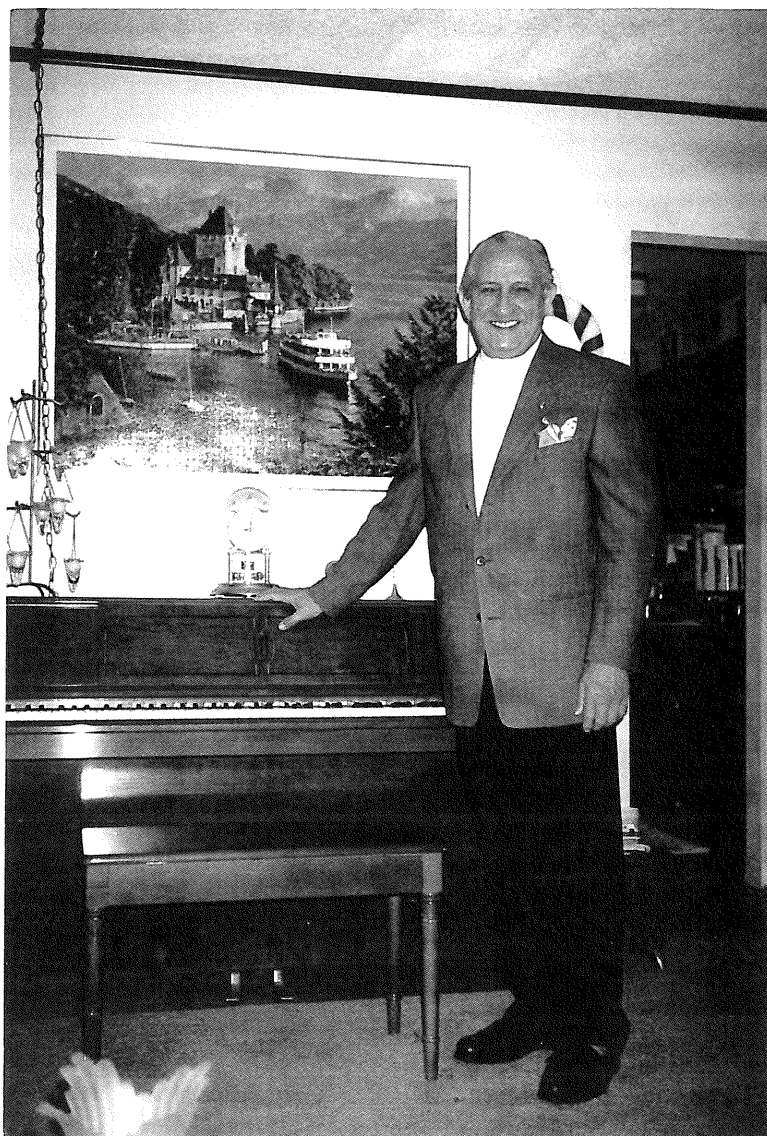
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PREFACE

During the past century, jazz has been the most popular form of music in the United States. The primary purpose of the History of Jazz is to reveal the beginnings of jazz to its present stage.

Jazz was predominantly a creation of the black American musician and was played in parades, dance halls, saloons and brothels in New Orleans and surrounding cities in the south.

The general public on the other hand took offense to jazz labeling it “whorehouse” music because it was frequently associated with the red-light districts of Storyville in New Orleans, Chicago’s South Side “vice Districts”, New York’s Harlem section and the black community in Kansas City.

Jazz however, managed to grow out of its obscure beginnings and develop into many forms and styles that were accepted in respectable hotels, ballrooms, nightclubs and theaters throughout the world.

The variety of styles that jazz gave birth to were Dixieland, swing, bop, cool jazz, modern jazz, free jazz and the fusion of jazz-rock, rock ‘n’ roll, rhythm and blues, folk-rock, reggae and rap.

Prominent musicians associated with jazz were; Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Benny Goodman, Count Basie, Charlie (Bird) Parker, Miles Davis and Elvis Presley.

Today, jazz is very much alive and active. To appreciate jazz in its many forms and style, listen to it with an open mind and enjoy the musical message the musicians are bringing to you.

1

THE ROOTS OF JAZZ

Elvis Presley took the music world by storm in 1956 with such hits as, “Heartbreak Hotel,” “Don’t be Cruel,” “Hound Dog,” and over a hundred more that sold over 350 million records in his career worldwide, that earned him the title “King” of rock ‘n’ roll. Tracing the origin of rock ‘n’ roll however, we find its roots imbedded in jazz

Jazz grew out of the pain, suffering and degradation of African slaves. In 1619, a Dutch sailing ship with a consignment of fifty slaves left Africa for the colonies. After months of tossing and pitching on the rolling seas, twenty surviving black men finally arrived in Virginia in greatly deteriorated condition. They had spent months behind the ship's oars rowing until they thought their backs would break. They had shared filthy, cramped quarters with rats, flies and fleas. They were dehydrated, starved and exhausted. Some showed the scars of whips or other instruments of torture on their backs.

Yet, through all the long voyage, they sang. They sang of homes and families they would never see again. They sang like the ancient Israelites of their captivity. With sweat pouring from greasy heads, with chains of captivity cutting into black ankles, and with moans of pain and fatigue escaping from their lips, they sang. The words in their native language were made up as they sang them. The melodies were familiar tunes handed down from many generations, and these tunes were their only link now to the land of their birth.

In the colonies they were sold at auction by slave traders, like so many heads of cattle. In town squares all over America, farmers, businessmen and plantation owners bid as little as fifteen dollars "per unit" for individual slaves. Families, if still intact after the long sea voyage, were seldom auctioned together.

So, if it hadn't been for their music, most slaves would never have had the will to survive. It elevated their mood and it gave them something to cling to. And when it came to their music, the slaves could be very enterprising. Blacks had the natural ability to conjure up any object capable of producing sound and beat on it with their own primitive form of rhythm. When they got together to play their makeshift drums, they created many different rhythms. Those who didn't play anything would sing, clap their hands and stomp their feet. The result was a beat so primitive, so emotional, it penetrated the hearts of white and black audiences alike.

In 1626, eleven more slaves arrived in Massachusetts. Gradually, more man-of-war slave ships landed in New England. By 1638, the slave trade in this country had begun officially. In 1641, the New England legislators finally passed the "body of

liberties” law, making it legal to sell slaves. So profitable was the slave trade that by the early 1700s, some 75,000 slaves had been auctioned to white settlers. By the 1800s, the total of black people “owned” by whites had grown to more than one million.

Jazz authorities first believed that slaves came from all parts of Africa, and only the weak and illiterates were shipped to the New World and sold into slavery. When analyzing the different customs of the slaves, it became clear that most slaves came from different sections or regions of the West Coast of Africa.

Slave traders searched for blacks in Senegal, Ashantis of the Gold Coast, the Niger Delta, Dahomey, the Guinea Coast and the Congo and purchased from black African rulers the strong able-bodied men and women.

Southern plantation owners used slaves to work in the rice, tobacco, cotton, bean and sugar cane fields. Northern farmers used slaves to work in the fruit orchards, to plant and harvest vegetables, grain and hay, and to tend the livestock. Female slaves were divided between the fields and the kitchen. The slaves’ workday began before sunrise and ended long after dark. Yet, as they ate their meager rations of food, they would sit around a fire and sing their native songs.

Male slave who could work with leather, wood, glass, copper and iron were privileged to work near the main house, and allowed a certain amount of status. Female slaves who could work at spinning, cooking, sewing, embroidering, quilting, cleaning and serving were privileged to work in the main house.

Some of the women attained status as nursemaids or “nannies” to their mistresses’ children. This allowed them privileges other slaves didn’t have, such as larger servings of food and gifts of handed-down clothing. Some mistresses even taught their favorite slaves to read.

But it was their music which brought them the most privileges of all. Plantation balls were lavish affairs, with magnificent decorations and elaborate assortments of meat and pastries. Some of the male slaves acted as servers at these affairs, but those who could sing and dance were allowed to perform for the guests’ entertainment. Outfitted in colorful costumes and with music improvised from crude, makeshift instruments, they delighted audiences until the early hours of the morning. Other

plantation owners would often hire these talented slaves to entertain at their own balls.

The white slave traders of Europe, namely, Spain, France, England, Denmark and Holland fought among themselves to gain control of the slave market. The Africans were well aware they would be transported to America as prisoners, and therefore, they did not submit to these slave traders without a struggle. Philip Drake, slave trader and captain of slave ships for over fifty years reported, "The negroes fought like wild beasts...slavery is a dangerous business at sea as well as ashore."

Once on board ship, the slaves revolted in mutiny in order to escape their captivity. But insufficient food, water and disease left them in a weakened condition so that they were no match for the strong able-bodied crewmen. Many slaves tried to starve themselves to death, but were unsuccessful because the crew members would force-feed them. A dead slave brought in no money for the slave trader. On the other hand, when a slave became too weak from lack of food, water and the outbreak of epidemics, the slave master would order the crewmen to throw him overboard into the sea. His weakened condition would attract sharks, and if he didn't drown first, he would die an excruciatingly horrible death by being eaten alive.

But even with all their hardships on their voyages to America, the negroes were encouraged to sing and dance to relieve the pressures on them and to eradicate the feeling of being despised and rejected.

Slave ships could carry as many as 800 Africans at a time. The strong able-bodied men would be put below deck and the women and children would be kept on the upper deck. At night, the men had to sleep on their sides because there wasn't enough room for all of them to sleep on their backs.

In 1719, slaves were arriving on a regular basis in New Orleans and parts of Louisiana from West Africa, Virginia and South Carolina. Algiers Point located on the west bank of the Mississippi River from New Orleans had a corral that housed the slaves and from which point they were sold.

In the eyes of people from other countries, America was the land of freedom, prosperity, hope and the opportunity to advance to a better life. This was true for most people, but not for the

Africans. They came to America without hope and with no future before them except servitude. While others were finding freedom in this country, the Africans lost all their wild, native spirit and zest for life.

The music of the slaves included spirituals, work songs, gospels, the blues and children's songs. All were sung in a syncopated rhythm, a process that places the strong, accented pulse to the weak beat. These songs later became known as ragtime.

In America, the blacks found consolation in Christianity, identifying themselves with Christ who also had been tortured and crucified. Sorrow songs were the crux of the negroes' religious songs because it reminded them of their oppression.

Each regional tribe brought with them their individual customs, religion, music, songs and instruments. What each tribe had in common was rhythm. For example, the musicians from the tribe of Dahomey, would be playing gongs, rattles and other drum like instruments. From Nigeria, were the Yoruba tribe whose Yoruban drums had an hour-glass shape.

Surviving slaves from all tribes expressed their feelings in melodies, rhythms, songs and dances. In addition to the various types and shapes of their drums, they played a stringed instrument called the banjo, which was later to be developed into our modern four-string banjo.

The unorthodox rhythms came about when several drummers from different tribes would beat on their drums, each with his own distinct pattern. When played simultaneously, this would create a complex rhythm pattern with varying beats and accents.

In various sections of Africa, drumming was a means of communication. No matter what the object that the African used, the rhythmic pattern created was classified as drumming or a means of communication. Rattles, gongs, hollow lumber and skins pulled tightly and secured in place were beaten with wooden sticks. Often two objects would be struck together. The drum, however, was considered the main instrument, because it was the black man's belief that the gods spoke through the drums. Each drummer played his own rhythmic pattern as his individual sign. There were times when two or more drummers would play at the same time creating a polyrhythmic pattern, that is, two or more

rhythms at the same time. More technically, one drummer played a pattern in 2/4 meter, another in $\frac{3}{4}$ meter, another in 4/4 meter and yet another in $\frac{6}{8}$ meter. Played together, these patterns are considered rhythm complexities. The reason for this is that the strong beats are accented at irregular times. An illustration would be when an orchestra plays a song as a waltz and another plays it as a fox-trot and another plays it as a march all at the same time.

Slaves not only sang and beat the drums, they danced. Herbert Asbury in his book "The French Quarter," states; "The favorite dances of the slaves were the Calinda, a variation of which was also used in the voodoo ceremonies, and the dance of the Bamboula, both of which were primarily based on the primitive dances of the African jungle... The entire square was an almost mass of black bodies stamping and swaying to the rhythmic beat of the bones on the cask, the frenzied chanting of the women, and the clanging of pieces of metal which dangled from the ankles of men."

The Juba and Martinique dances are still being performed by Haitians to rhythmic sounds from drums made in West Africa. The large drum is carved from a long piece of wood, leaving it hollow with a sheep or goatskin stretched across one end and open at the other end. The drummer usually strikes it with two sticks or with his hands. The drum is laid down in a horizontal position, stretched out on the ground and the drummer straddles it.

The west African Circle dance was carried over with the slaves into the deep south and was called the ring-shout. This dance took place in the church. The dancers formed a circle in the center of the floor, their arms stretched out touching the shoulder of the dancer on each side and with shoulders hunched and slightly bent forward, they would begin slowly shuffling in a counter-clockwise direction. The tempo and rhythm would be produced by the rest of the congregation. The non-dancers, who would be lined up with their backs to the wall, would clap their hands and stamp their feet.

The preacher would shout out his call, and the response by the congregation members and dancers would cause them to become "possessed" by an emotional hysteria which would make them drop to the floor. Some members of the congregation would

take care of the fallen dancers and assist them back to their feet and into a chair.

French and Spanish slave owners encouraged the slaves to continue their African culture in dancing, music, cooking and any other crafts they possessed. In due time, a slave had the option to buy his freedom by paying his master the amount of money it cost to buy him and his family, if he had one. However, in most cases, slaves preferred to remain under the security of their masters.

When the blacks brought their music from Africa with its distinctive rhythms and songs, they introduced a whole new method of musical expressions. Rarely did they sing a song the same way. Each time they sang they would add a new twist or embellishment and in doing so they inadvertently introduced improvisation.

In addition to its complex rhythms and improvisations, another West African input to jazz was the call-and-answer pattern. In it, two people created a dialogue, or two musicians with their instruments spoke to each other musically. For example, one would play a phrase of music, and the other would answer.

This call-and-answer sequence can be applied between a vocalist and a musician. An excellent example of this pattern can be heard in the recording of Bessie Smith's version of "Lost your Head Blues." As she completes each line of the lyrics, cornet soloist Joe Smith (no relation) response to the lyrics. This is much like the work song wherein the leader would call or sing out a verse, followed by the workers' answer to the call.

Leader: Way down south where I was born.

Workers: Roll the cotton down.

Leader: I worked in the cotton and the corn.

Workers: Oh, roll the cotton down.

The work song was always associated with labor, with workers planting rice, sugar, tobacco, cotton and corn in the heat and humidity. They also built fences, cut down trees, fed the livestock, picked worms off the plants and build dikes. They were always on the lookout for field rats, snakes and mosquitoes plus watching out for the wrath of the overseer and his whip. Although their bodies were aching with pain, the only thing that kept them

going was their music, whether it be a hymn, a spiritual, a gospel or the call-and-answer routine of a group leader.

The call-and-answer sequence can be found in church music. In it the preacher sings or calls out a psalm and the congregation responds. Among jazz musicians this method is known as antiphony... a form of musical response in which one voice answers another. The music is characterized by alternating two or more different parts.

Preacher: One morning I was a walking down,

Congregation: O yes Lord!

Preacher: .I saw berries a hanging down,

Congregation: O yes Lord!

Preacher: I picked de berries and I suck de juice,

Congregation: O yes Lord!

Preacher: Just as sweet as de honey in de comb,

Congregation: O yes Lord!

Preacher: Sometimes I'm up sometimes I'm down,

Congregation: O yes Lord!

Preacher: Sometimes I'm almost on de groun',

Congregation: O yes Lord!

Jazz made its mark on the American public around the turn of the century in the early 1900s. However, it was Charles "Buddy" Bolden, a black cornet player who formed the first jazz band in the 1890s. It was a time when many musicians both black and white were paying dues, an expression that means that the musicians were performing for little or no money, just to be in on the music scene.

Jazz being the offspring of its parent ragtime music has carried its change of rhythm till this very day. It was at that time that syncopation, that is, the placing of strong accents where normally the weak or after beats are was introduced to the modern or dance music of that era.

Let it be noted however, that syncopation was not new to the music world. It was used quite frequently in classical music by such composers as Bach, Beethoven, Schumann, Stravinsky and Tschaikovsky.

It has been accepted by the many authorities that jazz has made its start in New Orleans around 1915 and that it slowly moved its way along the Mississippi River and finally into Chicago where it was quickly accepted and developed into a new type of American dance music.

Often the question would come up. "What Is Jazz?" At best, we could say that jazz can be defined as a combination of three major factors stemming from three different directions and each dependent on the other.

The most prominent factor to be considered is that of rhythm, which is definitely African rooted. Then from European culture comes the harmonic structures from French and Spanish influences. And, third, we have the melodies from American folk music with its blues and various dance patterns. Therefore, we could safely say that jazz is the marriage of African, European and American features of music combined in one composition and commonly called jazz.

West African rhythms were foreign to the European culture. Likewise, the harmony of the melody from European and American sources was strange to the West Africans.

The general public first began to hear about jazz in 1917, when a group of five white musicians formed a band and played this new music all over New Orleans. This was the first band to use the word "Dixieland" in their title. They called themselves the "Original Dixieland Jazz Band." The band personnel were; Nick LaRocca, cornet and leader; Larry Shields, clarinet; Eddie Edwards, trombone; Henry Ragas, piano; Tony Shabarro, drums.

Their big break came on January 26, 1917, when they made their debut at "Reisenweber's Cabaret" on Columbus Circle in New York. They were enthusiastically accepted by the New York audiences and from then on they were booked for engagements all over the country.

The year 1917 is commonly referred to as the beginning of the "Jazz Age."

The New Orleans jazz style was associated with a two beat rhythm pattern. But, as jazz traveled up the Mississippi River into Chicago, it developed a four beat rhythm pattern. While the country is enjoying the innovation of this new music from New Orleans and all along the banks of the Mississippi River clear into

Chicago. There's a trumpeter who is really making the city take notice of this new change in music. The year is 1926 and the trumpeter was Muggsy Spanier.

By this time the whole world was being swept off its feet with this music craze. Everywhere you turn jazz was being played. Musicians all over the country got together, formed small groups of their own and began playing in night clubs, Speak-easys, ballrooms and hotels. Django Reinhardt, the Belgium gypsy guitarist was the first European musician to influence American jazz.

Let it be noted however, that it was the black musicians who pioneered this music craze. They were the first to have brass bands and were called upon to play at picnics, parties, dances, parades and political rallies. Joe "King" Oliver, a black cornet player and band leader was a popular band favorite and is also referred to as the music teacher of Louis Armstrong.

But it was at the funeral procession where they seemed to perform their best. The funeral arrangements usually start at the wake in the home where friends, relatives and neighbors would pay their respect. At the wake which usually was an all night affair, spiritual hymns were sung and food and drinks were served.

After the funeral services were concluded at the home, the funeral procession would begin its slow march through the city to the cemetery. The band would play soulful funeral marches and songs that always included, "Just a Closer Walk with Thee" and "When the Saints Go Marchin' In."

After the final service in the cemetery, the body would be lowered into the ground and the procession would depart with the cadence of a slow drum beat. When the procession reached a point about two or three blocks away from the cemetery, the whole band would let loose and pick up the tempo of the music and they would wail to the tunes of "Bourbon Street Parade" and "Didn't He Ramble?"

Following the band back from the cemetery would be those people who would march behind the band. They are referred to as second liners. Occasionally, the band would play on an open wagon drawn by horses. Invariably, the trombone player always sat on the end of the wagon or on the tailgate. The purpose for this was to give the trombone player enough room for his slide on the

trombone while he is playing. It was from this position that the expression “tailgate” trombone was originated. Jazz music was then and still is today a free style of playing. An improvisation on a given melody.

However, big society bands were prominent at the time. They played the better hotels and ballrooms. Bands like, Paul Whiteman, Guy Lombardo, Vincent Lopez, Ted Lewis and Lawrence Welk. But now it seems that they also wanted to capitalize on the jazz scene. But the problem was how. How were they going to do it? How could they get fifteen or more musicians to play jazz in an organized manner?

When the issue was confronted to the number one band leader at the time, Paul Whiteman suggested that arrangements be written that feature jazz rhythms and style. So, he got his arranger, Ferde Grofe to write a complete jazz library for the big band.

What was the results? When Paul Whiteman and his orchestra appeared nightly at the Palais Royal in New York this new big band style with its clever jazz arrangements caught on and began to spread like wild flower.

The public began to appreciate that not all jazz music was fast and bright. The other side of the jazz picture was expressed in the blues, a counterpart to the religious spirituals. It was however, in 1917, that the blues became the popular music favorite from coast to coast.

The blues sang of sorrow, loneliness, depression and protest. The first to set down the blues was William C. Handy, known as the “Father of the Blues.” It was one of his compositions the “St. Louis Blues,” that Paul Whiteman introduced as a big band jazz arrangement by Ferde Grofe.

This was later followed by the greatest jazz creation ever written. The immortal, “Rhapsody in Blue,” a George Gershwin composition and introduced to the world by Paul Whiteman in Aeolian Hall in New York City in 1924.

The “Original Dixieland Jazz Band” made jazz a household word in 1917, but Paul Whiteman made it respectable in 1924. He was greatly responsible for the advancement of jazz from coast to coast and in that year, he was crowned as the “King of Jazz,”

To arrive at the correct method of true jazz progressions or harmonization, “blue tonality” must be present, that is, the

combining of the blue note, such as the flatting of the third and the seventh note of the major scale.

One major influence of jazz was the brass bands. One of the earliest and most popular brass bands was the Holmes Band from Luther, Louisiana. The eight members. .two cornets. .one clarinet.. one trombone...one French horn, one tuba.. one snare drummer and one bass drummer...played jazz at picnics, parades, dances, rallies, carnivals, riverboat cruises and even funerals. Gradually, every town, village and city had its own brass band. And all members wore uniforms.

Minstrels, spirituals, gospels, work songs, ragtime and the blues, in addition to the blending of the West African and European culture elements, all contributed to the roots of jazz.

2

SPIRITUALS AND GOSPELS

During the period between 1740-1800, a series of religious revival meetings known as the “Great Awakening” took place in the American colonies. Gilbert Tennent, an evangelical preacher began this movement in New Jersey. It was soon followed by other religious leaders, George Whitefield, Samuel Davies, Jonathan Edwards, James Davenport and others carried the revival meetings throughout New England.

One main reason for the great Awakening was to introduce new doctrines that would unify the Congregationalist, Presbyterian and Baptist churches into a single organized denomination. From these revival meetings came the “white spirituals,” originating in the white churches in America. “White spirituals” are categorized as a type of folksong, hymn and religious songs in a ballad-type setting and camp-meeting sing-a-long. They share the same musical elements, symbols and origin as the negro spiritual.

However, each religious denomination had its own concept as to what the lyrical expression should convey. For instance, the Baptists believed that lyrics should be personal, abundant and free of doctrinal issues. Other groups considered only the words from the psalms, or, stories from the bible. After a series of bitter disputes among the leaders and the input from the blacks and whites who attended the meetings, they finally agreed that spirituals should create a feeling of brotherhood and freedom of expression.

Folk hymns were usually sung to a religious text. An example of this was a text written by Evangelist James Davenport in 1742:

“Then should my soul with angels feast on joys that always last. Blest be my God, the God of joy who gives me here a taste.”

Baptist minister John Leland wrote in 1799:

“Come and taste along with me consolation running free from my father’s wealthy Throne sweeter than the honeycomb.”

Additional folk hymns and folk songs can be found in Jeremiah Ingalls’ “The Christian Harmony” (Exeter, New Hampshire, 1805.) Related to the folk songs are the religious ballads composed as “White spirituals.”

The camp meetings were attended by thousands of poor indigent people from all denominations who came to listen to an open-air religious service lasting at times for several days and as long as a week. Among the attendees, both slaves and free blacks mingled with whites. Each group however, conducted their meeting separately.