

IN 271 STYLES AND MEANING IN JAZZ HISTORY

Competence: A-1-E. Ask about negotiated competencies.

Hi! Welcome to "Jazz History." This is a faculty designed independent study. The instructor is Joe Cunniff, and the best way to reach him is by phone rather than e-mail. Call Joe at (773) 728-0357.

Jazz is a unique American art form which draws on a variety of influences, plus the skill and creativity of the individual artist, and in many cases, the collective imagination of a group of performers. The roots of jazz lie in African, European, Caribbean, and native American music as well as in blues, ragtime, and church music. The history of jazz is highlighted by some of the most creative and exciting musicians of the century.

Learning Experience:

This class will explore both great individuals in jazz as well as the historical and social context in which they created their music. Students will be able to draw on the wonderful resources which Chicago has to offer and the variety of styles which can be heard in clubs and on radio. Students will enjoy directed listening and reading plus a visit to hear live jazz.

Learning Tools:

1. We have a new book: compact, paperback, well-organized, and with an excellent CD. Please phone instructor for details on book.
2. Students will have a choice of working with a series of cassette tapes prepared by the instructor featuring classic recordings along with commentary or working with "Jazz," a series of videos by filmmaker Ken Burns featuring the story of jazz with classic stories and music.
3. Jazz radio assignments as given by the instructor.

Learning Strategies:

Students will keep a journal of listening, their work with the tapes, the book, the CD, and directed radio listening.

Learning Outcomes and Criteria:

At the conclusion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Understand the overall history of jazz as an evolving art form;
2. Describe the major periods in jazz history within a historical framework;
3. Develop abilities to recognize form and styles and to make distinctions in listening;
4. Understand the work of great jazz musicians within a social and historical context. Enjoy!

"JAZZ HISTORY: STYLES AND MEANINGS"

By Joe Cunniff

Welcome to Jazz History! This is a class you are sure to enjoy, and to benefit from continually as the years go by. Whether you are a complete beginner to jazz or an experienced record collector, this class can help you grow further in knowledge and appreciation.

This course features some tapes on the history of jazz a book about jazz, and some jazz radio listening assignments.

As you listen and keep notes during the independent study, you are asked to keep a journal, a notebook in which you feel comfortable writing. The things that you hear and learn as the weeks go by are jotted down in the journal, which become a record of your learning.

THE BOOK: Please phone instructor, Joe at (773) 728-0357 about the book, which is a new compact paperback, very well-organized and with an excellent CD.

THE TAPES: Students have their choice of working with a series of cassette tapes prepared by the instructor or with "Jazz," a series of videos by filmmaker Ken Burns available both for sale and in the libraries.

JAZZ RADIO: Currently some of the best jazz in Chicago can be heard as follows: Daytime, from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., Mondays through Fridays, WDCB, 90.9 FM has outstanding jazz. Night time, from 8 p.m. and all night, WBEZ, 91.5 FM has mostly outstanding jazz as well.

Weekends, a truly special show is the Dick Buckley Show, on Sundays from noon to 3 p.m. on WBEZ, 91.5 FM . Buckley has been on the air for many years, has a tremendous collection of jazz records, and is a walking encyclopedia of jazz. Make sure to listen and take notes to a minimum of one Buckley show.

HOW TO DO THE STUDY: Listen to the tapes and keep notes on them as if you were keeping notes in a regular college classroom. Tape Number One--write what you heard. Tape Number Two--write what you heard, etc. You are given below some great names from the history of jazz to write about in the journal. For each name, write something in the journal about their life (when and where they were born, etc.) and something about their music. So here are the names. Again, for each name write a bit about their life and a bit about their music. I include some general notes about them.

1. Louis Armstrong. Called "Satchmo," Satch," and "Pops." A great trumpeter and singer. Born in New Orleans around 1900. Perhaps the greatest of all jazz musicians—Miles Davis once said that "No one ever played anything on a trumpet that Louie Armstrong didn't play first."
2. Coleman Hawkins. Called "Hawk" or "Bean." Father of the tenor saxophone in jazz. Played with a wide vibrato (vibrating tone). HE comes from the style of jazz called "Swing," which reached its peak of popularity in the '30s and early '40s.
3. Lester Young. Another great tenor saxman and a star of swing, Once married to Billie Holiday. Musicians always call him "Pres," short for "The President." He got that nickname when he "cut" everyone (bested everyone) in a Kansas City "jam session" (a competitive blowing session). The highly influential cool and lighter sound of "Pres" is reflected in the sound of tenor sax men who followed him, including Stan Getz and Zoot Sims.
4. Billie Holiday. A great blues singer. You can check out a movie about her, "Lady Sings the Blues."
5. Ella Fitzgerald. One of the greatest singers in the history of American music. Master of swinging a song and of "scat-singing."
6. "Count" Basie. Bandleader and pianist. Leader of the DEFINITIVE swing band, the model for all the big bands which have come after. The Basie Band: 5 saxophones, 4 trumpets, 4 trombones, and a rhythm section consisting of piano, bass, drums, and rhythms guitar. Still touring the world as a great band!
7. "Duke" Ellington. Like Basie,a great pianist and bandleader, but also a great composer. With his associate Billy Strayhorn, composed some of the music that is the basic repertory of jazz: "Satin Doll," "Don't Get Around Much Anymore," Sophisticated Lady," Mood Indigo," and many more. Led an incomparable band including many star players who stayed with him for years and years. Hundreds of CDS available. Also composed fascinating sacred music. Known for elegant manners, and for saying "We love you madly!"
8. Charlie "Bird" Parker (1920-1955). The greatest alto saxophonist in the history of jazz. Always referred to by musicians as "Bird" or "Yardbird." Co-founder with trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie in the '40s and '50s of the new style of jazz called bebop or bop, which emphasized small groups instead of big bands; new angular melodies, new harmonies; and very fast tempos. You have to have virtuosity to play bop. A VIRTUOSO is someone who has very great technical skill on an instrument. "Bird" showed musicians for all time just how great it was possible to become on an instrument. Unfortunately, he also had a very bad influence on musicians of his time through his heroin addiction, with some musicians thinking that to PLAY like Bird, you should DO like Bird. Today's jazz musicians are much more educated about the dangers of hard drugs. You may want to see the movie "Bird," directed by Clint Eastwood. You can also find a great book about him, "Bird Lives," by Ross Russell.
9. Dizzy Gillespie. Great trumpeter and co-founder with Bird of bop.
10. Thelonious Monk. Pianist and composer. Monk's music, which seemed at first so strange and eccentric now seems simply beautiful, if somewhat quirkily so. It is often said that he put together notes that did not belong together, and seemed to want to play the cracks between the keys! But it sounds so . . . "Monkish."

A video on him worth renting and putting in the journal is "Straight, No Chaser," a documentary which shows overhead views of Monk at the piano, putting together those unique chords. A worthwhile TIME magazine cover story on him from 1964 can be looked up.

11. Miles Davis. Unique trumpet stylist with a cool and plaintive sound. Went to New York as a teenager in the '40s to play with Parker and Gillespie. Led great bands in the '50s, '60s, and '70s. A Picasso-like figure who kept changing styles, and others would follow. Many great recordings.

12. John Coltrane. Played both tenor and soprano saxophones. A "saint" of music who played with great intensity and spirituality and changed music more than any saxophonist since Bird. Played sometimes 45-minute solos with what were called "sheets of sound." Added the sound and feel of the music of India to jazz.

13. Dave Brubeck. Exciting pianist, composer, and bandleader who pioneered in playing jazz in different rhythms and in presenting jazz at college campuses. Worked with the great alto saxophonist Paul Desmond and the great drummer Joe Morello.

A LIVE PERFORMANCE! Call Joe and you can meet him for a live performance of jazz at a top club with a no-smoking policy. You may bring whoever you want to the live performance.

When you are finished writing up your course journal, it should include the notes on the names, radio, tapes, and performance. Call Joe and he'll tell you where to mail it.

The course will strive to pursue Vincentian ideals and will adhere to university policies on plagiarism and on incompletes. Joe will work with you to get the job done and to make sure the independent study is a worthwhile and exciting course. Please contact Joe not by e-mail but by phone, at (773) 728-0357.