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Concise Guide to **Jazz**

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Mark C. Gridley

Concise Guide to Jazz

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Preface

This book is intended as a brief introduction to jazz. It outlines the ways jazz is made and the major jazz styles that have evolved during the twentieth century. It tells why the big names are important and how their styles differ from each other. Listening guides are provided to accompany selections on the Concise Guide Cassette/CD, and they give the reader more information about general principles and techniques of making jazz, allowing the listener to get more and more out of each repeated hearing. Chapters end with lists of recordings and books to supplement the information that is introduced in the chapter. Most of the selections on the Concise Guide Cassette/CD complement those on the *Jazz Classics Cassette* (of the *Jazz Styles* textbook) and the *Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz* rather than duplicating them. They were chosen so that each of the three sources would begin filling the historic and stylistic gaps within each other.

This book came about because professors and students have been asking for an introduction to jazz that was as clear and accurate as *Jazz Styles* but without as much detail. (*Jazz Styles* profiles 144 musicians and mentions an additional 1200 others.) Many professors said they wanted a book that was easy to complete in a ten week college quarter. Some said the ideal introductory text would focus on only about ten major figures. Reducing jazz history to a maximum of ten musicians was not feasible, however, because jazz historians and professors don't agree on which ten to discuss. But it was found that by increasing the minimum number of musicians to 38, we could accommodate the combined preferences from most instructors' "top ten" lists and still not overload their students. Though this approach neglects some of the richness of jazz history, it also makes conveniently comprehensible a diversity of approaches in a way that provides a basis for further explorations. If students or professors want to begin fleshing out the basic skeleton of styles

treated in the present book, they can start with three resources that are already available in most colleges: 1) *Jazz Styles: History and Analysis* and its accompanying compact disc and cassettes, 2) the recordings in the *Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz*, and 3) the *Recorded Anthology of American Music* on New World Records. If your school does not have these resources, contact Prentice Hall (College Marketing, Prentice Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, NJ 07632; 1-800-526-0485), Smithsonian Press (Smithsonian Records, P.O. Box 2071, Colchester, Vermont 05449-9988; 1-800-336-5221), and New World Records (701 Seventh Avenue, NY, NY 10036).

Acknowledgements

Since this book is basically an abridged version of *Jazz Styles: History and Analysis*, all the people who helped put together the first four editions of *Jazz Styles* deserve thanks for working on this book as well. Their names are found in the acknowledgements sections of those volumes. I am especially grateful to the hundreds of students who spoke with me, wrote critiques, and corresponded with me about the best ways to approach the preparation of this book. Their names are too numerous to mention since this has been a continual process since 1973.

A few individuals who are mentioned in the acknowledgements sections of *Jazz Styles* must be singled out for their contributions to this volume. The biggest influence on the thinking and organization in this material is Harvey Pekar, who contributed almost continuously to my work since 1971. His original ideas and penetrating observations can be found in every chapter. Much of the research for these books was made possible by Pekar's generosity in giving me unlimited access to his collection of over 14,000 albums and his intimate knowledge of jazz history. Chuck Braman served as a technical consultant and a copy editor on every edition of *Jazz Styles* as well as a copy editor and prime figure in the conceptualization of the *Concise Guide to Jazz*. He is additionally responsible for the layout and format of the text and illustrations on each page in this book. As in the past editions of *Jazz Styles*, Bill Anderson has continued to provide indispensable suggestions and updating regarding discography, bibliography, and overall organization. Thanks also go to Ed Huddleston for making a number of editorial improvements in the fourth edition of *Jazz Styles* that were incorporated into this book. Susan Carty read the entire manuscript and made many useful suggestions for improvement.

Joel Simpson began supplying suggestions in 1985 that were incorporated into the 1988 and 1991 editions of *Jazz Styles*. He rewrote portions of the manuscript for this present book as well and contributed concepts of writing and organization that helped give it a somewhat different tone from its parent text.

Karl Koenig and Lawrence Gushee generously shared the results of their recent research on the origins of jazz, just in time to be used in both the fourth edition of *Jazz Styles* and the first edition of the *Concise Guide to Jazz*. Carl Woideck performed a similar function with respect to Charlie Parker and John Coltrane, as well as contributing a considerable amount of last-minute proofreading and fact checking. Woideck also worked on the test banks. Listening guides were prepared with the help of Anita Clark, Bart Polot, Dave Berger, David Such, Carl Woideck, Karl Koenig, Kean Sakata, Bob Belden, Wayne Shorter, Joe Zawinul, Jerry Sheer, and Pat McCarty. If I have omitted the names of any other contributors, I apologize.

The accuracy of coverage in this textbook is due in part to the cooperation of many musicians whose music is discussed on its pages. Unfortunately several of them passed away before seeing the

finished product. The following players helped by means of conversations, proofreading, and/or correspondence with the author: Benny Goodman, Stan Kenton, Bill Evans, Wayne Shorter, Joe Zawinul, Eric Gravatt, Herbie Hancock, Tony Williams, Joe Venuti, Al McKibbin, Dizzy Gillespie, Paul Smith, Richard Davis, Bob Curnow, Jimmy Heath, Jaco Pastorius, Red Rodney, and others who are mentioned in the acknowledgements sections of the first four editions of *Jazz Styles*.

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1

What Is Jazz?

The world of jazz includes many different kinds of music. Some is light and happy. Some is heavy and serious. Some makes you want to dance. Some makes you think. Some is filled with surprises. Some is smooth and easy. Some is fast and complicated. Some is slow and mellow. Jazz is played by big bands and small groups. It has been played on almost every musical instrument. It comes in varieties called Dixieland and swing, bebop and cool, hard bop and fusion. But most jazz has no style designation. We refer to the sounds just by naming the musicians, for instance, Duke Ellington, Miles Davis, or John Coltrane.

Jazz is heard in numerous settings. Many bands present it as serious music in concert halls. Much jazz is played in ballrooms for dancers. There is jazz in background music on the radio. A lot of jazz is offered in night clubs where people gather to hear music while they drink and talk with their friends.

Jazz has an impressive reputation. It is so interesting that it is played and analyzed in hundreds of colleges. Almost every high school and college has at least one jazz band. Though it originated in America, jazz is so compelling that musicians on every continent have played it, and today there is no city without it. The sounds of jazz have influenced the development of new styles in popular music and the work of symphonic composers. Jazz is so sturdy that the old styles are still being played, and new styles are always being developed. In fact jazz is regarded as a fine art, not just a passing fad.

Defining Jazz

The term "jazz" has a variety of meanings because it has been used to describe so many kinds of music. And the term has different meanings according to who is using it. Different people use different ways to decide whether a given performance is "jazz." Some consider only how it makes them feel. Some rely on what it reminds them of. Some people decide it must be jazz if the performers have a reputation for jazz. Others consider how the music is made. They look at what techniques are being used. But despite these different attitudes toward defining jazz, there are two aspects that almost all jazz styles have in common—improvisation and swing feeling.

Improvisation

To improvise is to compose and perform at the same time. Instead of saying "improvise," many people say "ad lib" or "jam." This means that jazz musicians make up their music as they go along. Much of their music is spontaneous. It is not written down or rehearsed beforehand. This is like the impromptu speaking all of us do every day when we talk "off the cuff." We use the same words and phrases that we have used before. But now we improvise by using them in new ways and new orders that have not been rehearsed. A lot of originality can result. This is significant because being original is very important to jazz musicians. They try to be as spontaneous as possible. In fact, they try never to improvise the same way twice. Several versions of a tune made during the same recording session may be entirely different from each other because of this.

Improvisation is essential to jazz. If you are not very familiar with jazz, however, you might not be able to tell what has been written or memorized beforehand from what is being improvised. One clue is that if part of a performance sounds improvised, it quite often is. Improvised parts sometimes sound less organized than the written or memorized parts.

Another clue comes from knowing about a routine that most jazz musicians use. The players begin with a tune they all know. First they play it once all the way through. The melody is played by the horns. The accompaniment is played by the piano and bass. Then the piano and bass keep doing what they did before. But this time the horns make up and play new melodies of their own. They improvise their own melodies to the tune's accompaniment chords. The way the chords progress in that accompaniment guides the notes they choose to play for their new melodies, which we call improvisations. In other words, when the melody of the piece itself ends, what follows is improvised. Then it is all improvised until that same melody begins again. This kind of improvisation distinguishes the practices of jazz musicians from most pop musicians

who merely decorate a tune by changing some of its rhythms or adding notes to it.

Even though improvisation is the big emphasis in jazz, not everything is spontaneous. Most jazz bands use arrangements of some sort. In the case of large jazz bands where the players are seated with written arrangements in front of them, a player is usually improvising when he stands up alone and takes a solo. Otherwise the music is coming from the written parts. In the next chapter, we will examine more practices that can help us know what parts in a jazz performance are worked out in advance.



Charles Mingus, jazz bassist known for his composing and improvising. He is important for getting his musicians to improvise their own parts to fit with his prewritten music in colorful and provocative ways.

Photo by Bob Parent, courtesy of Don Parent

Swing Feeling

Next we are going to consider the way that jazz makes people feel. This has been called “jazz swing feeling.” To begin, let’s discuss a few elements which contribute to swing feeling in all music, not just jazz. If music makes you want to dance, clap your hands, or tap your feet, it has the effect we call “swinging.” This effect can be created by almost any kind of music that keeps a steady beat and is performed with great spirit. In that sense, many non-jazz performances can be swinging. But to specify the unique ways a jazz performance swings, let’s first discuss the general characteristics of swinging. Then we can discuss the characteristics that are specific to jazz swing feeling.



Photo by Ray Avery

Chick Corea (electric piano), Dave Holland (bass), Jack DeJohnette (drums), Wayne Shorter (tenor saxophone), leading musicians in jazz of the 1960s and 70s.

One of the clearest causes of swing feeling is a steady beat. This helps us distinguish it from the kinds of symphonic music where conductors are free to vary the tempo while playing a piece. A steady beat is nearly always kept in jazz pieces. Constant tempo brings a certain kind of momentum that is essential to swing feeling. Much of the excitement in jazz comes from musicians in the band tugging against this very solid foundation by playing notes slightly before or after the beat.



Dizzy Gillespie, modern jazz trumpeter who devised a highly syncopated style of improvising. He specialized in rhythmic surprises.

Photo by William Gottlieb

To call music “swinging” also means that the performance conveys a lilting feeling. This property is also sometimes referred to as a “groove.” In fact, verbs derived from the nouns “swing” and “groove” are commonly applied to the sound of jazz: “The band is swinging tonight.” “That pianist is really grooving.” For many listeners, swinging simply means pleasure. A swinging performance is like a swinging party. Both are very enjoyable. Jazz has a reputation for being highly spirited music. In fact, the word “jazzy” is sometimes used instead of the word “spirited.” To “jazz up” and to “liven up” are often used interchangeably, and some people call clothes “jazzy” if they are gaudy or extroverted.

Music that swings, then, has constant tempo and is performed with lilt and spirit. But for music to swing in the way peculiar to jazz, more conditions have to be met. One is an abundance of syncopated rhythms. “Syncopating” means accenting just before or just after a beat. You might think of syncopation as off-beat accenting, or the occurrence of stress where it is least expected. Jazz swing feeling requires certain combinations of these off-beat accents. The tension generated by members of a band accenting opposite sides of the beat is essential to jazz swing feeling.

One more component of jazz swing feeling is not actually a rhythmic element. It is the continuous rising and falling motion in a melody line. This pattern makes you alternately tense and relaxed, tense and relaxed, over and over again.

We must keep in mind that listeners disagree about whether a given performance swings, and, if so, how much. So, just as we often hear that “beauty is in the eye of the beholder,” it is also true that swing is in the ear of the listener. In other words, swinging is an opinion, not a fact about the music. Ultimately this becomes another reason that it is difficult to reach a workable definition for jazz. We find that the same music one listener calls jazz will not necessarily be what another calls jazz because the listeners disagree about whether it swings.

Studying Different Jazz Styles Historically

Jazz comes in many varieties. The easiest way to introduce a lot of these varieties is to group them into categories called styles. Every jazz musician has a personal style of playing. But this can be a confusing way to use the word “style” because we also use it to designate a larger category of ways musicians like to play. These larger categories have names such as bebop and Dixieland. Each of these styles includes particular ways the musicians like to improvise and the types of accompaniment harmonies and rhythms they prefer. Throughout this book we will be examining the particular styles of famous jazz musicians. But we also have to categorize them within the larger styles, such as Dixieland and bebop, so that we can divide the book into chapters. Grouping the players in these ways is not always fair because styles vary considerably, and some players from the same era don’t play at all like each other. But because some musicians’ approaches have more in common than other musicians’, we rely on the common aspects to help us decide which musicians to discuss in each chapter.

As we study styles in a chronological order it is important to keep in mind several considerations. First, the musicians discussed in this book did not create their styles entirely by themselves. Their work reflects the influence of other players in addition to their own original ideas. Second, jazz history is not a single stream of styles that developed smoothly from Dixieland to swing to bebop and so forth. Several streams exist at the same time and streams overlap, merge, and influence each other all the time. Third, each new style does not render the previous ones obsolete. Many different styles of jazz exist at the same time, though some are more popular during one era than another. Fourth, jazz history is not merely a series of reactions in which one style made musicians angry and so they invented another to oppose it. However, many journalists and historians believe this because they look for conflict, and they attach great drama to the development of new styles. The truth is that most musicians find their own favorite ways of playing. Often it is an existing style they like. Sometimes they choose one traditional approach and modify it to suit their tastes and capabilities; some-