

Introduction

A trend in recent jazz history texts has been to focus on the entire history of the genre. While most are excellent, it comes at the expense of the individual eras of jazz history, where the same people, songs, and facts are repeatedly emphasized. There is a need for updated books on individual jazz eras that would allow for a more nuanced reading and detailed understanding of the music. Gunther Schuller's *Early Jazz* is one of the most important books ever written about this topic. But it was published over fifty years ago, and an update has been long overdue. My book fills in the holes left from Schuller's book, while summarizing research from the last fifty years. It is a concise introduction to jazz from its nineteenth-century roots through 1929, when elements of the Swing Era began to emerge.

Schuller's main thesis was to present jazz as an art form, and those who most contributed towards then-modern jazz were highlighted. I define jazz more broadly, as encompassing the artistic and the commercial. This allows for an inclusive reading of jazz history with a diverse spectrum of musicians including not only pioneering African American and white musicians, but also those that are commonly skipped or skimmed over in jazz history textbooks including lesser-known sidemen, prominent musicians by instrument, entertainers or novelty performers, women, vocalists, and American jazz musicians who introduced jazz on their travels around the world.

Schuller's book was part of a larger agenda held forth by Schuller, Martin Williams, and other jazz scholars and critics who successfully posited jazz as an American art form, leading to the institutionalization of jazz, with colleges and universities subsequently offering courses and degrees in jazz studies, the assimilation of jazz within the Smithsonian

Institution and other similar prestigious programs, and the establishment of jazz-centric corporations such as Jazz at Lincoln Center, SF Jazz, and others. The objective was to highlight the outstanding contributions of African Americans to the general American public. White musicians, from Paul Whiteman to Benny Goodman to Dave Brubeck, have always been the face of jazz, and those scholars were successful in redirecting the understanding of jazz and jazz history as an African American art form. It was an important moment and led to the increased visibility of Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Jelly Roll Morton, and scores of other African American jazz musicians who have since been rightfully acknowledged for their work.

Jazz had grown from being a bad word to a prestigious one, but to deny the contributions of whites, or other similarly ignored musicians, is to deny jazz's malleability as an art form. At heart jazz is a flexible art form that is and has always been open and adaptable to different styles of music by musicians of any race or background. Right from the beginning in New Orleans, musicians black, white, Creole, and otherwise were playing nascent forms of jazz and it stayed that way. Everyone played jazz in their own way and in the process injected a little of their own nuances and culture into the music. An African American-based music, jazz is a living and breathing thing that continues to thrive in the hands of its practitioners. This is what makes jazz great yet difficult to define.



Though early jazz sounds foreign to modern ears, in fact, so much of what jazz is and what jazz musicians do was established during the early jazz era and have remained in place, while other characteristics of early jazz have since been reworked, revived, or recast in different contexts. For example, the skill set of jazz musicians has not changed. They balance formal and informal styles of playing: reading or sight-reading music versus playing music by ear or by feel; this unique quality makes jazz musicians versatile, able to play in a wide variety of musical styles and contexts such as orchestras, concert bands, theater bands, circuses, or musicals. Such a skill set lent itself well to studio work; during the early jazz era, Fletcher Henderson, Louis Armstrong, Red Nichols, Eddie Lang, Benny Goodman, and others supplemented their income by working as sidemen in the studios, backing singers and playing a wide range of music. This practice continued throughout jazz history: in the 1960s, Hank Jones, Bob

Brookmeyer, Jim Hall, Jerry Dodgion, and others worked for television network orchestras; in the 1970s and 1980s, the Los Angeles and New York studio scenes were dominated by Michael and Randy Brecker, Larry Carlton, Steve Gadd, and countless others. Many early jazz musicians backed singers (Fletcher Henderson behind Ethel Waters or James P. Johnson recording with Bessie Smith), and this continued with Hampton Hawes playing with Joan Baez, Michael Brecker with Chaka Kahn, and even today with seasoned New York jazz pianist David Cook working as the pianist and musical director for mega-pop star Taylor Swift. J. J. Johnson, Lalo Schifrin, Chico Hamilton, and Dave Grusin are a tiny sampling of jazz musicians who had successful careers as performers as well as composers and arrangers in film and television. The end product is not always jazz, and this may be part of the issue. Still, it demonstrates what jazz musicians can do.

Novelty sounds of the 1920s are often cringe-inducing for modern listeners, but at the time such sounds were popular and a staple on vaudeville where musicians were keen to stand out. Brass players playing with plunger mutes originated from this era and is one of the few holdovers of unusual sounds that included novel instruments such as the comb, kazoo, washboard, slide whistle, and others. Later generations of musicians in the bebop and hard bop eras continued this notion of standing out by developing individual sounds on traditional musical instruments. The philosophy was the same but was recast as expressing one's individuality.

Though such novel sounds are anathema in standard jazz practices, forward-thinking jazz musicians from the 1960s revisited and revived such rejected performance practices in adventurous settings that looked ahead to postbop and free jazz. Eric Dolphy's experimentations with tone recalls forgotten "gaspipes" clarinetists of the 1920s who specialized in playing squeals, honks, laughing sounds, and other such humorous sounds on the clarinet. His duck-imitation sounds on the bass clarinet heard on Ornette Coleman's *Free Jazz* album from 1962 also revives animal-imitation practices that had not been heard since the early days of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band and New Orleans jazz. Played in a "serious" setting, these effects are no longer as humorous and contributed to the vocabulary of free jazz. Multi-reeds player Rahsaan Roland Kirk adopted many unusual instruments (the stritch, manzello, nose flute, etc.) and even played three saxophones simultaneously in the manner of Wilbur Sweatman, who did the same with three clarinets during the early jazz era. But even when he played on one horn, Kirk, like Dolphy, recalled the

novelty sounds of the past; he further deepened his ties to early jazz by recording songs and styles from the era. Others who have followed these musicians' lead are members of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians including the Art Ensemble of Chicago. In this light, free jazz's origins are a reflection of a forgotten past.

Finally, there is the reworking of jazz as art. This has been a dominant theme that spurred the bebop movement, whose leading figures rejected the dance and entertainment aesthetic of the Swing Era; Third Stream, with the merging of jazz and classical forms of composition; and the assimilation of jazz as an institution with the founding of jazz education. Yet, Paul Whiteman was already doing this in 1924 with his "Experiment in Modern Music" concert at New York's Aeolian Hall. Why is this issue continually revisited? Perhaps because entertainment played such a strong role in the early days that jazz cannot escape its past with musicians having played for dancers and their resumes including road shows, carnivals, circuses, vaudeville, musicals, and other forms of light entertainment. The same holds true today, though commercial jobs have grown to include film, television, radio, and jingles.

Jazz is unique, as artists, in the traditional meaning of the word, have traditionally focused only on their work and their vision. A select few jazz musicians have done this, but the vast majority are freelancers, with the ability to play different styles including pop, rock, country, soul, R&B, funk, hip hop, electronica, and other styles. Many have applied their skills to other mediums either as teachers, composers, arrangers, managers, producers, engineers, or other roles in the music industry. This is why jazz as art is not the only definition of jazz and certainly not the only kind of music that the jazz musician is capable of playing.



Early Jazz serves as an introduction to the great music from this period and is aimed towards those interested in early jazz and/or jazz history. Because Schuller was advocating for jazz as art, his work includes numerous transcriptions and musical analysis. For my book, musical knowledge certainly helps but is not required to understand the content. Song descriptions and tables that outline the details of select performances are included to aid towards better understanding of the music. The material is divided into thirteen chapters.

Chapters 1 and 2 outline the musical roots and beginnings of jazz from its genesis in African American folk songs, blues, and ragtime and include a discussion of the impact of different commercial work on the development of early jazz musicians. Chapter 3 focuses on the development of jazz in New Orleans through the first recorded white bands from the late 1910s and the early 1920s. Chapter 4 centers on King Oliver and Jelly Roll Morton, African American New Orleans musicians in Chicago. Chapters 5 through 7 focus on different aspects of jazz in New York, including the white studio jazz scene (chapter 5, a continuation of chapter 4), stride piano (chapter 6), and an overview of important dance bands (chapter 7).

Chapters on Louis Armstrong and Bix Beiderbecke (8 and 9 respectively) cover two of the most important soloists in the history of jazz. The Beiderbecke chapter also brings in a discussion of a key group of white musicians known as the “Chicagoans.” Chapter 10 acknowledges those who are pioneers and leaders on their individual instruments, while chapter 11 broadens the scope of early jazz beyond New Orleans, Chicago, and New York with an overview of territory bands, particularly those in the Southwest. Chapters 12 and 13 focus on traditionally neglected groups within jazz history including vocalists and pioneers around the world. Though jazz has become globalized, the focus is on pioneering American musicians whose travels around the world helped introduce and popularize jazz.

Early jazz is among the most foreign of jazz styles to modern listeners, a fact Schuller himself acknowledged even in 1968,¹ yet it is perhaps the most fascinating as one can listen song by song to the development of the music. The definition of what jazz was and could be varied tremendously, from Original Dixieland Jazz Band to Paul Whiteman to Louis Armstrong to Duke Ellington, and musicians were quick to adapt to new changes and trends. One could make the argument that all early jazz artists were to some degree experimental. Reviewing the repertoire of artists through the early jazz era, one can notice substantial changes in the music. Even a major star such as Paul Whiteman did not rest on his past success in the early 1920s; he went on and hired the best white jazz musicians, in the process, radically changing his sound.

Early jazz is a dusty road that few have traveled, but one that is well rewarded. I hope that this book provides for the reader a better understanding of jazz and of this wonderful music.