

Jazz week!

Key artists : Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington and John Coltrane.

Timeline : beginning in late 18th century, continuing until now

Instruments : trumpet, trombone, saxophone, clarinet, piano, guitar, upright bass, drums

To learn about jazz, we need to go back to the beginning of jazz history, to where it all began. Jazz music originated in the slave trade, when people from America brought people from the Caribbean to their farms to work as slaves. Have you ever heard the phrase “I’m feeling blue”? That is where the name of a style of jazz called blues comes from. People would sing the songs of their home while working on these farms in America because they were homesick, and this eventually developed into a much more complex and refined musical style called blues. Jazz then evolved into many different forms, including ragtime, bebop, scat and more.



Louis Armstrong was the first great jazz soloist, born in New Orleans in 1901, he began to create a more rhythmically interesting and fluid style of jazz, moving away from traditional ragtime music. Louis played the trumpet and sang, and was extremely famous for his

contribution to the development of small ensemble jazz, recording extremely successful records with his “hot five” and “hot seven”. Take a listen to this track and you’ll hear not only his trumpet playing both in the band and during solos, but you can also hear him singing “scat”, a wordless vocal improvisatory style of jazz.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TV5J24we_dQ

Duke Ellington was another giant in the development of new styles of jazz, bringing together a large group of musicians to play together as part of his Jazz Orchestra (typically including trumpets, trombones, saxophones and a rhythm section with piano, bass, guitar



and drums). Duke Ellington helped to create swing jazz, which was hugely important during the 1930's and 40's. Swing jazz is characterised by smoother beats and more flowing phrases than the music that Louis Armstrong would have played. The music Duke Ellington wrote would have been intended to be played to a large hall of dancers, making commercial jazz much more possible as a career. Typically Duke Ellington would write out solos for people in the band to play, but occasionally he would give them chords and let them do whatever they wanted. Have a listen to this recording of one of Duke Ellington's most famous recordings - "Take The A Train"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cb2w2m1JmCY>



Jazz in the 1950s and 60s started to move towards something a bit less obviously harmonic, and no-one was more influential than the pairing of Miles Davis and John Coltrane. John Coltrane was a jazz saxophonist who pushed forward with the bebop jazz movement -

people began to abandon traditional harmony and freer styles of improvisation became more popular. Solos typically moved pretty fast across different chords and virtuosic, fast-paced solos became more common than ever before. For many jazz saxophonists even now, Giant Steps is a super important piece, presenting big technical challenges for players wanting to move forward into a professional career.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=30FTr6G53VU>

If you'd like hear what some of my favourite modern jazz music sounds like, take a listen to Gordon Goodwin's Big Phat Band. They recorded their own version of The Incredibles soundtrack, and continue the tradition of big band music that began with Duke Ellington so long ago! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zGPe0haLAZ0>