

Activity Idea

JAZZ

A Musical Exploration

Recommended for Adults

Jazz music in the United States has roots dating back to the arrival of the first African American slaves in North America. Originally, the blues sound was a combination of rhythms made by instruments brought from Africa, combined with the fiddle strains and songs from white settlers from the British Isles. This blend evolved until it emerged in the 1890s as a type of music called ragtime. Ragtime eventually evolved into jazz.

New Orleans, Louisiana, is considered the birthplace of jazz. Most early residents of New Orleans were Creole, people of Spanish, French, or African descent, and mostly Catholic. After the Louisiana Purchase, the area also welcomed protestant Anglos and Africans. In the 1800s people from Germany, Ireland and Italy began to migrate to the area. The close interaction between these different cultures gave way to a unique culture and an early jazz sound. This early genre of jazz that became known as Dixieland. Another term for this type of music, which was played on brass instruments, is creole jazz. Dixieland music is marching band music with offbeat rhythms and improvised solos. Early Dixieland musicians included pianist Ferdinand “Jelly Roll” Morton (1885–1941) and cornet player Joe “King” Oliver (1885–1938). Morton is widely considered to be the first jazz composer.¹

Films

“What Is Jazz?” Smithsonian Jazz at the National Museum of American History on YouTube
<https://tinyurl.com/y748wmk3>

“The Girls in the Band” on Kanopy <https://tinyurl.com/y77zcc7r>

“Jazz: A Film by Ken Burns” (The History of Jazz Music in America) on Kanopy
<https://tinyurl.com/yaqjs2x8>

Music:

“Midnight Jazz” playlist on Freegal <https://tinyurl.com/yderuoum>

“Sightseeing: A Jazz Playlist” on Freegal <https://tinyurl.com/ybq9gn47>

¹ Gale eBooks: *UXL Encyclopedia of U.S. History*, vol. 4. <https://tinyurl.com/ydepgq7h>



“Yesterdays: Giants of Columbia Jazz” playlist on Freegal <https://tinyurl.com/y9q57alz>

Music Classes: from Smithsonian Jazz, National Museum of American History
“Duke’s Music Class”

Try these exercises from Duke Ellington. <https://tinyurl.com/y7ggeupk>

Louis’ Music Class

Listen and learn from Louis Armstrong. <https://tinyurl.com/yb73f3n2>

Ella’s Singing Class

See how you can use familiar nursery rhymes to sing like Ella Fitzgerald.

<https://tinyurl.com/y7bmna8f>

Books:

Jazz: A People’s Music by Sidney Walter Finkelstein on Hoopla <https://tinyurl.com/y9pu29qr>

Jelly Roll, Bix and Hoagy by Rick Kennedy on Hoopla <https://tinyurl.com/ybnc9ng2>

Los Angeles’s Central Avenue Jazz by Sean J. O’Connell on Hoopla <https://tinyurl.com/y73tbwfv>

Jazz in the New Millennium by Rick Mitchell on Hoopla <https://tinyurl.com/ya6suynu>

Know It All Jazz in Dave Gelly on Hoopla <https://tinyurl.com/yatlvu34>

The Jazz Book by Joachim Ernst Berendt on Hoopla <https://tinyurl.com/yaj6u49z>

Spark an Idea!

Jazz is uniquely American. Just as it was influenced by the cultural diversity of New Orleans it has influenced countless musicians and musical genres. Listen to your favorite musical style and see if you can find a little jazz in it.