



Jane Franklin Dance

Jazz on Foot

I. Introduction

The purpose of *Jazz on Foot* is to trace jazz music from its African roots in 19th century New Orleans, through the northward migration to New York's Harlem Renaissance and the Bebop era of the 1950's. Call-and-response pattern, collaboration, improvisation and syncopation are described through narratives and movement and connected to Language Arts and Social Studies SOL's. Audience volunteers partner with company dancers during two samples.

II. African traditions and European influences in New Orleans

New Orleans was the center of the slave trade in 19th century America. A cosmopolitan city with a mixture of races, religions, languages and cultural traditions unmatched anywhere else, it was a port city that had been settled by the French and governed by the Spanish, British and Americans. New Orleans was a city of black and white, with every shade in between, but it also had substantial populations of Spanish, French, Irish, Italian, Jewish, Slavic, German and Greek residents. Everywhere throughout the city, musicians were needed to play for dances and more informal kinds of entertainment.

Africans brought traditions of using music to accompany and define the activities of their lives. There was music for working, for playing, for festivals, for marriages, births and deaths. African oral traditions such as the call-and-response singing pattern, and the rhyming tales of folk heroes were also continued. African cultures and those from Europe and around the world merged in New Orleans. You could hear a Waltz, a music and dance form traced back to Vienna, as well as Italian operas, military marches, and songs from England and Germany. All these cultures lived close to each other in the crowded city and overlapped into trading, sharing and borrowing from each other.

a. Spirituals

Slaves sang soulful songs called "spirituals" to express their religious beliefs, feelings and desire for freedom. The **call-and-response pattern** of singing was the basis for the spiritual. In this pattern the soloist sings something different each time, changing the words and the melody, but the group sings the same response, chorus, or refrain after each solo. The texts for call-and-response spirituals were often taken from European hymns.

b. Blues – Power of the voice to express feelings

Spirituals were sometimes sung in work gangs to keep everyone working at the same speed. Almost certainly, the field secular music was the forerunner of the **blues**, which appeared in the 1890s. The "unschooled" techniques, the slurring and bending of notes, the wild falsetto cries, became common

features of jazz as both an instrumental and vocal music. In performing the blues, singers used the **power of their voices to express their feelings.**

c. Syncopation - Blues plus syncopation equals Jazz

In music, **syncopation** is the stressing of a normally unstressed beat in a bar or the failure to sound a tone on an accented beat. For example, in 4/4 time, the first and third beats are normally stressed. If, instead, the second and fourth beats are stressed and the first and third unstressed, the rhythm is syncopated. Also, if the musician suddenly does not play anything on beat 1, that would also be syncopation. The stress can also shift by less than a whole beat so it falls on an *off-beat*. Ragtime, a type of written piano music and a hybrid of European and African musical traditions, was one probable source of the syncopated rhythms of early jazz. Folk melodies (usually of black origin) and commercial music from minstrel shows were overlaid on West African cross-rhythms.

d. Improvisation - The interaction of the ensemble is the founding principle. Improvisation is the act of making something up as it is performed. Improvisation can be structured with certain rules constraining the improvisation. Improvising as a group means that one has to pay attention to what happens before, after, and behind, while at the same time allowing space for others to improvise.

III. Migration

Segregation (segregate: (*verb*) to separate or keep people or things apart from the main group.)

At the end of the Civil War in 1865, Union occupation freed blacks and there was abolition of slavery. A period of reconstruction lasted for 12 years. In 1877 Union troops are withdrawn and southern society became highly segregated. Blacks and whites went to separate schools, churches, sat separately in public transportation and in theaters; blacks were denied being able to dine with whites or to socialize or conduct business in places designated "For Whites Only." Segregation closed many professions and accelerated the development of jazz because such a large number of talented young men (and some women) went into it who might have, if the society had been less racially restrictive, either played some other form of music or not played music at all. Southern segregation led to black migration from the South. Louis Armstrong joined what came to be called the "**Great Migration**," a northern exodus that sent more than half a million African-Americans northward.

Louis Armstrong's music contains jazz elements of syncopation, call-and-response, improvisation and collaboration.

Selected audience volunteer participation / improvising in unison and call-and-response - Cab Calloway, *Minnie the Moocher* (1931)

IV. Collaboration

In the early 1920s, many African American artists, writers, musicians, and performers lived in a neighborhood in New York City called Harlem and were part of a cultural movement known as the Harlem Renaissance.

The **Savoy Ballroom** was a place where there was no segregation, where people from all races shared the music and the dance. The Lindy Hop, an authentic Afro-Euro-American Swing dance that drew on African and European dance traditions, emerged as one of many popular dances during this time. It was influenced by the Charleston, jazz and tap steps, ballet, and complex movements from the Viennese Waltz. Dance partners separated in a breakaway move as they **improvised**, adding their own tempos, signature moves, and individualized acrobatics to the six- and eight-count step sequences. Elements of improvisation were also a part of Louis Armstrong's music.

a. Merging the talents of individual performers

In the 1930's Duke Ellington's band became nationally know through records, broadcast & film. They toured the United States in a Pullman car, which avoided unpleasant racial incidents in hotels and restaurants and contributed to the band's classy image. By utilizing the talents of individual performers, and by blending thematic material suggested to him by some of his musicians, Ellington created a body of music without parallel in the history of jazz. In the late 1930s, Billy Strayhorn traveled up from his home in Pittsburgh to New York. He had written a composition using the travel instructions Ellington's office had given him to get to the band's venue. It was called *Take the A Train*.

b. The voice as instrument

Langston Hughes wrote about the lives of African Americans between the 1930's and the 1960's with realism and attention to detail. The speaker of Langston Hughes's "The Weary Blues" describes an evening of listening to a blues musician in Harlem. With its diction, its repetition of lines and its inclusion of blues lyrics, the poem evokes the mournful tone and tempo of blues music and suggests an interaction between performer and audience, with the blues offering a communal experience. The complete poem, and associated material may be found at: <http://cai.ucdavis.edu/uccp/workingweary.html>

The Weary Blues

Droning a drowsy syncopated tune,
 Rocking back and forth to a mellow croon,
 I heard a Negro play.
 Down on Lenox Avenue the other night
 By the pale dull pallor of an old gas light
 He did a lazy sway . . .
 He did a lazy sway . . .
 To the tune o' those Weary Blues.
 With his ebony hands on each ivory key
 He made that poor piano moan with melody.
 O Blues!
 Swaying to and fro on his rickety stool
 He played that sad raggy tune like a musical fool.
 Sweet Blues!

Swing

In the mid-1930s, as the Great Depression stubbornly refused to lift, jazz came as close as it has ever come to being America's popular music. It had a new name now — Swing — and its impact was revolutionary.

Swing provided Hollywood with its theme music and offered entertainment, elegance and escape for a people down on their luck. Radios and jukeboxes could be heard playing swing along every Main Street in America.

Born into a large, impoverished Jewish family, Benny Goodman was a jazz clarinetist who had no peer. He was the first white bandleader to adopt and popularize an uncompromising jazz style. He was also among the first to feature black jazz players, an action that might have compromised his own career at a time when racial integration was not a popular concept. Benny Goodman's band historic performance

on August 21, 1935 before a capacity crowd at the Palomar Ballroom in Los Angeles, is often cited as the beginning of the swing era.

Volunteer participation / swing partners – *Jump, Jive and Wail by the Cherry Poppin' Daddies*

Combining jazz and the elements of classical music - Benny Goodman's musical influences were from the classical tradition and from New Orleans musicians such as King Oliver and Louis Armstrong, and many other jazz musicians of his time including Teddy Wilson, Count Basie, Duke Ellington and Lionel Hampton.

In the same period, Goodman became the first famous jazz musician to achieve success performing classical repertory. In 1935, he performed Mozart's Clarinet Quintet before an invited audience in the home of John Hammond, and three years later he recorded the work with the Budapest String Quartet. He appeared in his first public recital at Town Hall in New York in November 1938.

Summertime is the name of a 1935 song composed by **George Gershwin** for the opera *Porgy and Bess*. The lyrics are by DuBose Heyward and **Ira Gershwin**. Gershwin began composing the song in December 1933, attempting to create his own spiritual in the style of the African American folk music of the period. The song has been constantly performed and recorded since it was written.

V. Freedom to Experiment

On December 7, 1941, America entered World War II. Jazz went to war, too, and overseas, swing — still America's most popular music — would serve to remind the men and women of home. Black Americans, however, served throughout the war on a strictly segregated basis. No one could miss the hypocrisy of being asked to fight bigotry abroad while experiencing it at home.

Tenor saxophonist Henry Minton opened Minton's Playhouse at 210 West 118th Street in New York in 1938. In 1940, the club's management began regular Monday-night **jam sessions**, in which visiting musicians took part. The weekly jam session and after-hours playing at Minton's provided an opportunity for musicians such as Dizzy Gillespie and Thelonius Monk to explore new ideas together.

Charlie Parker was one of the most influential improvising soloists in jazz, and a central figure in the development of bop in the 1940s. A legendary figure in his own lifetime, he was idolized by those who worked with him, and he inspired a generation of jazz performers and composers. Parker didn't change any of the notes or chords in the music but he changed the rhythms and syncopation as it had never before been done.

Selected audience volunteer participation Miles Davis *Move* – integrating the elements of written composition and improvisation

VII. Follow-up

a. Coded Messages

A written lesson plan is available for *Follow the Drinking Gourd* at the Kennedy Center's ArtsEdge site <http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/content/2467/>

Sometimes spirituals were **coded with messages** about impending escape attempts, directions for how to head north on the Underground Railroad, or which houses were safe havens while traveling. On the surface, a text might be about Moses leading the Hebrews out of exile, but the message applied well to enslaved Africans who yearned for the "promised land" of the North and the freedom found there.

Follow the Drinking Gourd is a coded song that provided the route for an escape from Alabama and

Mississippi. A portion of the song and the translation are as follows:

When the sun comes back and the first quail calls,
Follow the drinking gourd
For the old man is waiting to carry you to freedom
If you follow the drinking gourd

"When the sun comes back," means winter when the altitude of the sun is higher each day. Quail are a migratory bird that winter in the South, and the drinking gourd is the Big Dipper. Most freedom seekers had to cross the Ohio River, a swift and powerful river difficult to cross most of the year. The song urged freedom seekers to begin their journey in winter, which would enable them to reach the Ohio when it was still frozen and easier to cross.

b. Migration

Color Me Dark lesson plans are available on the Kennedy Center's ArtsEdge site

<http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/content/2487/>

Lesson Overviews:

Capturing History: Through images, students study the political and economic reasons for the African-American migration to Northern cities.

Lift Every Voice and Sing: This lesson explores the origins of the poem and song "Lift Every Voice and Sing."

The Brownies' Book, Past and Present: This lesson focuses on *The Brownie's Book*, a magazine published by the NAACP from 1920-1921.

Organizations that Create Change: Students design a flyer for an organization they belong to or would like to join.

c. African and African –American oral traditions

Talking Blues (Troubadors and Talking Blues: the Roots of Rap, Hip-Hop, Rock and Blues

by John Oughton, www.youngpoets.ca)

The very latest hip-hop album by Lil Bow-wow or Eminem has influences and echoes that go back centuries in many traditions and cross the borders between poetry and music. Talking rhythmically, with or without a musical backing, is not a new idea. Nor is singing about **topical events**, putting down rivals, or boasting about one's own skills.

Musical forms like the "talking blues," originated by black singers and popularized by white performers, have strong similarities to rap and hip-hop. In a "talking blues" song, the performer plays a simple, repetitive, rhythmical pattern on the guitar, while talking in time to it, often telling a funny story or boasting outrageously.

c. Harlem

Five written lesson plans about Harlem are on the Kennedy Center's ArtsEdge site at

<http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/content/2459/>

Lesson Overviews:

Creative Voices of Harlem: In this lesson, students learn about the artists of the Harlem Renaissance.

Portrait of Place, Portrait of a Family: Students learn about portraying places and life stories, both literally and metaphorically, through text and performance.

The Great Migration: Students create a mural to learn about the migration of African Americans to Harlem.

Street Games: Students experience street games of Harlem by learning about and playing established games.

Musical Harlem: Students learn about the musicians of the Harlem Renaissance.

RESOURCES

Gilbert, Anne Green. *Creative Dance for All Ages.* Reston VA: AAHPERD, 1992.

Gilbert, Anne Green. *Teaching the Three Rs Through Movement Experiences*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1977.

Mirus, Judith; White, Elena; Bucek, Loren E.; Paulson, Pamela. *Dance Education Initiative Curriculum Guide*. Minnesota Center for Arts Education, 1996.

DVD *Jazz: A Film by Ken Burns*

Internet

"Dry Bones," *Deep River Quartet*,
<http://www.emp3world.com/mp3/88668/V.A./Deep%20River%20Quartet%20Dry%20Bones>

"Jazz," *PBS Kids Go*, <http://pbskids.org/jazz/time/1700.html>

"Jazz," *A Film by Ken Burns*, <http://www.pbs.org/jazz/>

"Langston Hughes," *The Weary Blues*, <http://cai.ucdavis.edu/uccp/workingweary.html>

"Spirituals," *Wade in the Water*, Arts Edge, <http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/content/2035/>

"Summertime," *Porgy & Bess*, Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Porgy_and_Bess

"Duke Ellington," Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia,
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duke_Ellington

Discography

Charlie Parker: Burnin' Bird. Savoy Jazz 2002 SLG. LLC. SUV 17124

The Definitive Charles Mingus. Ken Burns Jazz, 2000 Sony Music Entertainment Inc. CK 61448

The Definitive Louis Armstrong. Ken Burns Jazz, 2000 Sony Music Entertainment Inc. CK 61440 (CD)

The Definitive Duke Ellington. Ken Burns Jazz, 2000 Sony Music Entertainment Inc. CK61444(CD)

Mississippi John Hurt, Avalon Blues: The Complete 1928 Okeh Recordings. 1996 Sony Music Entertainment Inc. CK 64986 (CD)

O Brother, Where Art Thou? 2000 UMG Recordings, Inc 088 170 069-2

Pure Gold Benny Goodman. 1992 BMG Music 07863-50973-2 (CD)

Scott Joplin Greatest Hits. 1991 BMG Music. 60842-2-RG (CD)

Virginia Roots: The 1929 Richmond Series. Outhouse Records 2002 (CD)

Blue Monk by Thelonius Monk, performed by John Kamman and Alan Lewine

Contact Information:

Jane Franklin, MFA, CMA
3700 S. Four Mile Run Drive
Arlington VA 22206
703-298-3235
FAX 703-212-7680
info@janefranklin.com
www.janefranklin.com