

Decoding Jazz for Newcomers

The Ten Main Classic Jazz Styles over 50 Years (~1917 to ~1967)

@JimLecinski | #JazzForNewcomers | <http://bit.ly/1CtsphT>

To the Newcomer, jazz can be inscrutable. Maybe you've said, "It sounds like a bunch of musicians playing anything they want, all at the same time--I don't get it." Yet from time to time you've heard some jazz that really hits you, maybe in a movie soundtrack, during [Charlie Brown](#), "[Boardwalk Empire](#)", in [Grand Theft Auto](#) or playing in your favorite [coffee shop](#)...and you'd love some of **that kind of jazz** in your playlists.

I've often been asked by Newcomers for a "[jazz decoder](#)" to help them unlock what's going on and navigate the world of jazz. While there is no one single "right way" to decode or understand classic jazz, I prefer to start explaining jazz as a collection of 10 regional "dishes" or styles.

Think about barbecue. To explain barbeque to Newcomers you might say there are [four basic regional styles](#) to understand: Memphis, Kansas City, Texas and Carolina. Knowing each of these styles, you can then navigate your way around any barbeque menu--wet versus dry rubs; pork versus beef; vinegary versus spicy etc...and importantly know which style you like best (and like least) and what to order (or not) next time.

Likewise, jazz got started as a "musical dish" in one region and subsequently migrated over a 50 year period to other locales, each making its own new "flavor" of jazz. If you know these ten main styles, then you are well on your way to decoding and enjoying classic jazz! Now let's look at those **ten specific styles of jazz**:

1. The Beginning: New Orleans



Coming together of ragtime (Scott Joplin, [The Entertainer](#)), light opera, hymns, spirituals, tin pan alley and brass bands with african influenced poly-rhythms. Precursor is military band of James Reese Europe [Memphis Blues](#) 1919. Storyville area (Mahogany Hall) employs musicians (closed by Navy in 1917). Early New Orleans style has "flat four" beat, syncopation, polyphony--trumpet leads with trombone & clarinet in front line. Rags, Stomps, Rambles, Blues. 1st jazz record: Original Dixieland Jazz Band (1917 [Livery Stable Blues](#)); Original Memphis 5 [Shimmy Like Kate](#) 1922; Kid Ory (first recorded in 1922) [Do What Ory Say Eh Le-Bas](#); New Orleans Rhythm Kings [Bugle Call](#) 1923. >Later: Bunk Johnson [Go Crazy](#) 1944; Louis Armstrong [Basin St Blues](#) 1956; Mugsy Spanier [Jazzband Ball](#) 1960. >Today: [Tuba Skinny](#); Shotgun Jazz Band [Dinah](#); Preservation Hall [Tailgate Ramble](#)

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2. North to Chicago



Work in New Orleans slows, musicians migrate up Mississippi. Roaring 20s. [Compared to the New Orleans style](#), now piano is added; string bass+guitar (=concert) replace tuba+banjo (=marching). Soloist & improvisation emerge. “Two beat” feel, 1-3. Earl Hines Orch. at Sunset Cafe (Grand Terrace). King Oliver at Lincoln Gardens [Dippermouth Blues](#) 1923; Jelly Roll Morton [Black Bottom Stomp](#) 1926; Merritt Brunies [Sugarfoot Stomp](#) at Friar’s Inn 1925; Louis Armstrong’s Hot Five w Earl Hines [West End Blues](#), [Weatherbird](#) 1928; [Wild Man Blues](#) 1927 (Hot Seven); Bix Beiderbecke [Swinging the Blues](#) 1927 >Related style often called “Dixieland.” Bob Crosby [Coquette](#) 1928, [That Dada Strain](#) 1942 (orig 1922), [Austin High Gang](#) Bud Freeman & Eddie Condon [Nobody’s Sweetheart](#) 1939, [That’s a Plenty](#).

3. Off to NYC



Scene moves to glitz & high style of Art Deco era NYC (Empire State Bldg 1931; Chrysler Bldg 1933). Paul Whiteman “King of Jazz” [Lonely Melody](#) 1928 (with [Bix Beiderbecke](#) 1927); Fletcher Henderson [Wrap it Up](#) 1934, [Christopher Columbus](#) 1936. Duke Ellington in residence at the Cotton Club (10,000 hour rule) [Mood Indigo](#) 1930, [Cotton Tail](#) 1941. Other big halls include the Apollo, the Savoy, the Roseland. >Today: Wynton Marsalis plays Ellington’s [C Jam Blues](#) 2012 at Lincoln Center. >Also at this time: the Harlem stride pianists: James P Johnson [Honeysuckle Rose](#) 1930; Fats Waller [Sit Right Down](#) 1935 (hit #5 on charts); [Willie the Lion Smith](#) and Eubie Blake (played with James Reese Europe in the Teens) establishes long tradition of jazz solo pianists ([Art Tatum](#), [Erroll Garner](#), [Oscar Peterson](#)) that continues thru [Keith Jarrett](#) & today the astonishing master stride pianist [Stephanie Trick](#).

4. Swing! The National Dish



This is the jazz your grandma listened to on the radio. Jazz becomes THE popular music, what the kids screamed for before Elvis and the Beatles. Jazz continues to be dance music, spreads via radio broadcasts. Chicagoan Benny Goodman became “King of Swing” influenced by [New Orleans](#) jazz clarinetists in Chicago ([Johnny Dodds](#), [Leon Roppolo](#), [Jimmie Noone](#)). Weekly NBC radio show “[Let’s Dance](#).” Landmark concert @Carnegie Hall [Dont Be That Way](#) 1938; Bunny Berigan [Hi Ho](#) 1937; Jimmy Dorsey [Parade of the Milk Bottle Caps](#) 1936; Glenn Miller’s [PA6-5000](#) and [7-0-5](#); Glenn Gray Orch plays Miller’s famous “[In the Mood](#).” Charlie Barnet [Skyliner](#); [Kay Kyser](#) had eleven #1 hits (but he’s a little “hokey” for my taste honestly). >Today: Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra with Wynton Marsalis plays [Roll’Em](#) 2009, tune Mary Lou Williams originally wrote for the Goodman band.

5. Some Kansas City Heat



Meanwhile in the midwest, centered in Kansas City run by Mayor [Tom Pendergast](#), “territory bands” were touring with hotter, driving style. “Head arrangements” (riffs vs written parts). Bennie & Buster Moten ([Moten Swing](#) 1933) + Walter Page’s Blue Devils from Ok.City become Count Basie Orchestra. Basie in-residence at the Reno Club 1935-36 featured in nationwide radio broadcasts (again 10,000 hours) [Jumpin at the Woodside](#) 1938; [Blow Top](#) (1940); [One O’Clock Jump](#) at Newport 1957. My favorite Basie: “Atomic” album [Flight of the Foo Birds](#) 1957. Jay McShann [Swingmatism](#) 1941 (with Charlie Parker). >[Related](#) is the [Lindy hop](#) style (popular dance): Jimmy Lunceford [Taint what you do](#) 1939; Lionel Hampton [Flyin Home](#) 1942. >Today: KC riff style soundtrack in [this Acura car ad](#)

(A Brief Vocal Interlude)



We've been listening to instrumentals (all instruments, no singers). In 20s Armstrong created idea of using voice as another instrument, est. "jazz singing." Singers present across all styles & periods. Early great Bessie Smith [Wild About that Thing](#) 1929; Billie Holiday (w Teddy Wilson) [Moonlight](#) 1935; Ella Fitzgerald at Apollo Ballroom Chick Webb [St Louis Blues](#) 1939. Ella "Scat" singing 1974. You must buy the fantastic [Ella & Louis](#) album. Other greats incl. Sarah Vaughan, Anita O'Day [Takin' Chance on Love](#) 1957; Johnny Hartman (w Coltrane) [My One & Only Love](#) 1963; Jimmy Rushing [Gee Baby](#) 1965; Sinatra live [At The Sands](#) w Basie 1966 >Today: Diana Krall [Deed I Do](#); Natalie Cole [Almost Like Being in Love](#); Cecile McLorin Salvant [Shimmy Like Kate](#); Rachel Price [Ol Black Magic](#). I especially like the singing of [Catherine Russell](#), her dad Luis was in King Oliver's band then was Armstrong's longtime musical director, she was backup singer for Cyndi Lauper!

6. Late Night NYC Bites: Bebop



Several factors drove major change in jazz style away from Swing: WW2 fuel & rubber shortages made big band bus touring hard to sustain. Tax on dance halls imposed; many close. Musicians union strike/recording ban 1942-44. After hours at [Minton's](#) 1941 guitarist Charlie Christian experimented with [free-flowing style](#) that went beyond stiffer simple Swing style. Small groups vs big bands, faster tempos, nervous virtuosity, unison, advanced harmonies, frenetic sound, jagged lines. Cymbal keeps the beat. This jazz now intentionally not for dancing for first time. Became known as [Bebop](#). Starts shift of jazz out of mainstream. >Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, Bud Powell. [Cherokee](#) 1943; [Dizzy Atmosphere](#) & [Salt Peanuts](#), 1945; [Koko](#) at Carnegie Hall 1947; Miles Davis +Parker [Night in Tunisia](#) 1947; Fats Navarro [Boperation](#) 1948.

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7. Detroit & Philly: “Hard Bop” or “East Coast” style



The 50s are apex of jazz, peak of the “[Blue Note](#)” years. This is what most think of as “jazz.” Some call this style “Mainstream.” Refines, polishes off the harsh edges of bebop style of Diz and Bird. State the melody, give each player a solo chorus to improvise, then end together with melody. Many players from Detroit and Philly. Transition--Dizzy Big Band [Hey Pete](#) 1956. (Elvis records Hound Dog in 1956) Great examples of hard bop: Miles Davis + John Coltrane [Tune Up](#) 1957; Coltrane + Freddie Hubbard [I'm a Dreamer](#) 1958; Clifford Brown + Max Roach [Joy Spring](#) 1954, [Sandu](#) 1955; [Flossie Lou](#) 1956; JJ Johnson [Groovin](#) 1954; Cliff Jordan [Blue Lights](#) 1957; John Coltrane [Blue Train](#) 1957. Sonny Clark [Cool Struttin](#) 1958. Art Blakey + Horace Silver & the Jazz Messengers [Sister Sadie](#) 1959.; Wes Montgomery [Incredible Guitar](#) 1960; Dexter Gordon [Cheesecake](#) 1962; Lee Morgan [The Sidewinder](#) 1963; Donald Byrd [Beale Street](#) 1967.

>>> [Later in this period](#) (or is it another new period altogether?) strong **Soul Jazz** (church, preacher) flavor emerges. Jimmy Smith's HammondB3 jazz organ [Back at the Chicken Shack](#); David Fathead Newman [Hard Times](#) 1958; LaVern Baker [Revival Day](#) 1958; Bobby Timmons [This Here](#) 1960; Grant Green [Sunday Morning](#) 1961. Cannonball Adderley [Mercy Mercy Mercy](#) 1966. >Today: Jared Gold [Preachin.](#)

8. The West Coast Scene: “Cool Jazz”



At same time in the 50s, musicians in Los Angeles (central location is [Lighthouse Cafe](#) in Hermosa Beach) “cool things off.” Quieter, chamber music volume, laid back easy sound. Experiment with piano-less ensemble. Traces to Miles Davis’ [Birth of the Cool](#) nonet in 1948-1950; Lee Konitz + Lenny Tristano [Subconscious Lee](#) 1949; Shorty Rogers [Popo](#) 1951; Howard Rumsey [Out of Somewhere](#) 1952; Modern Jazz Quartet [Softly Morning Sunrise](#) 1955; Chico Hamilton+Jim Hall [Sleepy](#) 1956 Art Pepper [Star Eyes](#) 1957; Gerry Mulligan [DJ Jump](#) 1957; [Walking Shoes](#) orig 1952; [Jazz Casual](#) 1958; Bill Holman [If You Were No One](#) 1959 >Today: [Joe LaBarbera](#), [Bill Cunliffe](#) and Lee Konitz still playing at 87!

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>>Related to Cool West Coast Jazz style: a cerebral, relaxed mellow piano-forward style emerges here. Trio of piano, bass+drums. Ahmad Jamal [Live at the Pershing](#) 1958; Dave Brubeck w alto sax Paul Desmond [Time Out](#) 1959; Bill Evans Sunday at Village Vanguard [Waltz for Debby](#) 1961; Vince Guaraldi (wrote Charlie Brown music) [Cast Your Fate the the Wind](#) 1962 >Today: George Shearing [The Masquerade is Over](#) 1992; Cedar Walton [In Paris](#) 1992; Mulgrew Miller [What a Difference](#) 2003; Ben Paterson [Lucky Southern](#) 2013.

9. Ongoing Cuban/Brazilian Influence



Jazz has long had Latin influence. Juan Tizol with early Ellington band wrote [Caravan](#) and bop standard [Perdido](#) (at famous Diz-Bird Massey Hall concert 1953). Machito, Chano Pozo ([Manteca](#)). Charlie Parker [Suede Shoes](#) 1951; Howard Rumsey [Mambo Los Feliz](#) 1953. Sonny Rollins [St Thomas 1956](#). Tito Puente [Dance Mania](#) 1958. 60s bring Bossa Nova craze: Stan Getz [Jazz Samba](#) 1962; Coleman Hawkins [Four Leaf Clover](#) 1962; [Black Orpheus](#) 1963. Cal Tjader [Soul Sauce](#) 1964; Getz/Gilberto hit (now cliché “muzak”) [Girl from Ipanema](#) 1964. > Today: Eddie Palmieri, Danilo Perez, Arturo Sandoval, Michel Camilo, Joe Henderson [Double Rainbow](#) 1995; Maria Schneider [Choro Dancado](#) 2004; Eliane Elias’ [Made in Brazil](#) 2015

10a & 10b. FreeJazz & JazzRock

By mid/late 1960s in post-JFK/MLK Vietnam era as rock invades (Beatles on Ed Sullivan in 1964), jazz had hard time deciding where to go next. Forked to two extremes: the overtly-commercial & totally non-commercial...and drifted to edges of music world, while rock permanently takes over as America’s popular music.



(10a) Free Jazz. No/few rules. Avant-garde. Ascension. Mysticism. Epiphany. First to be called “Free Jazz” is Ornette Coleman’s Free Jazz [Double Quartet](#) 1960. Epic: John Coltrane [Love Supreme](#) 1965. Other notable names include Eric Dolphy, SunRa, Albert Ayler, Henry Threadgill, Archie Schepp, Muhal Richard Abrams, AACM group in **Chicago**, Pharoah Sanders [Creator Has Master Plan](#) 1969. Some amazing (“out there”) stuff, but not best starting point for Newcomers. Really hard to follow for Newcomers. You will find this very hard to listen to if it’s your first taste of jazz!

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(10b) Jazz Rock and then Smooth Jazz. (Overly?) commercial. Intended to sell! Jazz Crusaders [Freedom Sound](#) 1961; Herbie Hancock [Watermelon Man](#) 1962 & [Chameleon](#) 1973; Ramsey Lewis [The In Crowd](#) 1965; Hugh Masekela [Grazing in the Grass](#) 1968; Charles Earland [More Today than Yesterday](#) 1969; Miles Davis [Bitches Brew](#) 1969 (Miles “sells out” ?); Joe Henderson [Black Miracle](#) 1975; Return to Forever w Chick Corea [Romantic Warrior](#) 1976; Weather Report [Birdland](#) 1977; Maynard Ferguson [Gonna Fly Now](#) 1977 & [Birdland](#) 1978; Chuck Mangione [Feels So Good](#) 1977; Spyro Gyra [Morning Dance](#) 1979. [Joe Sample and the Jazz Crusaders](#) continue into the 80s. Other names: George Benson, Al Jarreau, David Sanborn, Grover Washington Jr., Bob James, and yes (arrrrrh!) Kenny G. → this flavor of jazz became the “[smooth jazz](#)” on FM radio, elevators and your dentist’s office. @Newcomers please don’t start or focus your jazz listening here!

Epilogue:



Jazz did not “end” in 1965 or 1970! Much great jazz comes after this and is being played today in clubs and at festivals. My point is when you know these ten classic styles from ~1917-1967, most jazz thereafter will make sense to you. Whatever contemporary jazz you are hearing today is likely rooted in one of these 10 styles. Look at [this line-up](#) for the 1979-2008 Chicago JazzFests. You can roughly match each group to one of the ten styles above (even though musicians do not like to be “classified.”) Find one or two you styles you like and explore! Go to a club or concert--nothing beats listening to live jazz. As the great drummer and leader of The Jazz Messengers [Art Blakey](#) once said, "**Jazz shakes off the dust of every-day life.**"

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Ten Tips & Resources for Newcomers to further Decode Jazz

1. **Listen** to the great KC pianist Mary Lou Williams narrate and play the [History of Jazz](#) and [here](#)
2. **Read** Ben Ratliff's excellent [Essential Library of Jazz](#) book about 100 most essential jazz recordings
3. **Watch** the movie about 1957 Newport Jazz Fest (famous event in jazz) [Jazz on a Summer's Day](#); and also watch the Oscar nominated documentary short: [A Great Day in Harlem](#) (1995) about the special day in 1957 when all jazz greats came together in Harlem for Esquire cover photograph.
4. **Read** great short online text/elearning "[Jazz](#)" by UCLA profs Tanner et al. See esp. chapters 5-10
5. **Listen** to [Kinda Blue](#) the #1 jazz record ever. Quadruple Platinum. Still sells 5,000 copies per week
6. Then **listen** to some [Thelonius Monk](#), [Lester Young](#) ("Prez") & [Charles Mingus](#), contrarians (some might say iconoclasts or geniuses) who are hard to categorize but essential to jazz history & listening for sure. Then **listen** to 1,000 hours of classic jazz steamed free from the [Niven Collection](#)
7. If you've got a 19 hour flight to Australia, **watch** [Jazz: A Film by Ken Burns](#). Long but well done.
8. **Do not buy** the [Tony Bennett + Lady Gaga](#) album. IMO feels like it could be an old Saturday Night Live skit by the late Phil Hartman & Jan Hooks--this album is a parody of jazz vs the real thing.
9. **Buy** the big [Jazz Tree poster](#) that shows all the key artists and strains of jazz in detail beyond the ten reviewed here; or instead **keep handy** and refer to this [Map of Jazz Styles](#) below adapted by @JoeGermuska from Joachim-Ernst Berendt's excellent reference tome, "[The Jazz Book](#)"
10. **Use** the "beat cheat sheet" below right (also from J. Berendt) to help identify the style of a jazz song. **Listen** to the drums and bass who keep the pulse!

