

Jazz Fan Guide

Just as some people appreciate fine gourmet food and wine, jazz fans crave expressive music rich in technical nuance. Just as writers study vocabulary and classic literature, jazz musicians spend decades studying music. Just as sports fans follow particular athletes, jazz fans track releases and performances of their favorite artists.

- Within the first few notes of each tune, experienced jazz fans will identify the following features of each tune:

I) Lead Instrument

- Although there can be several different instruments taking the lead at different times throughout each jazz tune, there is usually only one lead instrument playing (or singing) at a time.
 - Focusing on one instrument at a time during a jazz performance enables the jazz fan to concentrate on the jazz artist's "story".
 - While not playing a lead role, the function of the other instruments is provide rhythmic and/or harmonic support to the lead instrument. For example, the main function of the rhythm section (usually piano or guitar, bass and drums) is to support the singer or instrumentalist playing the lead (either during the melody or during solos). See "Arrangement" for additional information.
 - Even the most experienced jazz fan will not focus on multiple instruments simultaneously.

II) Melody

- Like nearly all other forms of music, jazz tunes have a unique melody (pre-defined series of single notes), harmony (two or more notes played at the same time) and rhythm (or beat). Although harmony and rhythm are also important, most jazz tunes can be identified solely by their melody.
 - The melody is most often played at both the beginning and repeated at the end of each jazz tune.

III) Jazz Style

- Most jazz performances feature a variety of tunes in different jazz styles within a single set (i.e., a series of different tunes performed consecutively, usually from 45 minutes to an hour).
 - For example, it is not uncommon to hear classic standards from the "Great American Songbook", bebop tunes (e.g., jazz standards written by jazz artists), bossa-novas (jazz style based upon Brazilian rhythms), ballads and avant-garde (often totally improvised without any pre-defined melody) within a single 45 minute set.

IV) Rhythmic Style

- Besides varying jazz styles, jazz performances often feature a variety of tunes in different rhythmic styles within a single set of music.
 - For example, it is not uncommon to hear ballads (slow romantic tunes), swing, waltzes (3 beats per measure), rubato (no recurring rhythm), and/or Latin jazz within a single 45 minute set.

V) Recurring Form

- Most jazz tunes feature a recurring pattern of chords (recurring chord patterns have been compared to the boards used in games such as "Monopoly").
 - Most jazz performances contain the same theme and variation (e.g., improvisation) techniques also found in European music (see "Arrangement", on the next page, for more information).

VI) Arrangement

- See next page.

VI) Arrangement Jazz fans enjoy following the different sections (i.e., arrangement) of the tune.

Although arrangements vary, below is a common jazz arrangement:

A. Intro

- Optional first few notes are often used to set the mood for the rest of the tune.

B. Head (Theme/Melody)

- **Melody** Lead instrument (e.g., horn, guitar, piano) plays (interprets) a pre-determined melody line over a background of rhythm and harmony.
- **Harmony** Piano, guitar and/or other accompanying instruments play a pre-determined pattern of chords designed to support the melody.
- **Rhythm** Bassist outlines both the harmonic and rhythmic structures. The drummer accompanies the performance with the specific rhythmic style of the piece, along with the (different) specific supporting role.

C. Improvisation (Variations on the Theme)

Jazz improvisations are variations on the main theme or melody (referred to as the *head*), based upon a pre-determined set of chords (referred to as the *chord progression*).

- **Melody** Lead instruments each take turns spontaneously creating melodies (i.e., “improvising”, also called “soloing” or “blowing”) as variations of the head (theme).
- **Harmony** The piano, guitar and/or other accompanying instruments all repeat the same pre-determined pattern of chords used during the head, but provide subtle rhythmic and harmonic variations to support the soloist as he/she improvises.
- **Rhythm** The bassist continues to outline the harmonic and rhythmic structure, while the drummer improvises in response to the soloist, within the prevailing rhythmic style.

D. Head (Theme/Melody)

- Head is repeated after all improvisations are complete.

V. Outro

- Optional brief final statement ends the tune.



During live performances, jazz fans often applaud after each solo. New jazz fans are sometimes confused as to why everyone else seems to know when to clap during the tune.

Per Thelonious Monk, “You’ve got to dig it to dig it, you dig?”

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