

ACT Practice Activity

History of Jazz

Exam ID: N/A

PRACTICE ACTIVITY
THE HISTORY OF JAZZ

Try your hand at the following humanities passage and questions. Use question-answering tactics that you learned while working on the preceding sample questions. Answers and explanations follow the questions.

Historically the journey that jazz has taken can be traced with reasonable accuracy. That it ripened most fully in New Orleans seems beyond dispute although there are a few deviationists who support other theories of its origin. Around 1895 the almost legendary Buddy Bolden and Bunk Johnson were blowing their comets in the street and in the funeral parades which have always enlivened the flamboyant social life of that uncommonly vital city. At the same time, it must be remembered, Scott Joplin was producing ragtime on his piano at the Maple Leaf Club in Sedalia, Missouri; and in Memphis, W.C. Handy was evolving his own spectacular conception of the blues.

Exactly why jazz developed the way it did on the streets of New Orleans is difficult to determine even though a spate of explanations has poured forth from the scholars of the subject. Obviously the need for it there was coupled with the talent to produce it and a favorable audience to receive it. During those early years the local urge for musical expression was so powerful that anything that could be twanged, strummed, beaten, blown, or stroked was likely to be exploited for its musical usefulness. For a long *time* the washboard was a highly respected percussion instrument, and the nimble, thimble fingers of Baby Dodds showed sheer genius on that workaday, washday utensil.

The story of the twenties in Chicago is almost too familiar to need repeating here. What seems pertinent is to observe that jazz gravitated toward a particular kind of environment in which its existence was not only possible but, seen in retrospect, probable. On the South Side of Chicago during the twenties the New Orleans music continued an unbroken development.

The most sensationally successful of all jazz derivatives was swing, which thrived in the late thirties. Here was a music that could be danced to with zest and listened to with pleasure. (That it provided its younger auditors with heroes such as Shaw, Sinatra, and Goodman is more of a sociological enigma than a musical phenomenon.) But swing lost its strength and vitality by allowing itself to become a captive of forces concerned only with how it could be sold; not how it could be, enriched. Over and over it becomes apparent that jazz cannot be sold even when its practitioners can be bought. Like a truth, it is a spiritual force, not a material commodity.

During the closing years of World War II, jazz, groping for a fresh expression, erupted into bop. Bop was a wildly introverted style developed out of a certain intellectualism and not a little neuroticism. By now the younger men coming into jazz carried with them a GI subsidized education and they were breezily familiar with the atonalities of Schonberg, Bartok, Berg, and the contemporary schools of *music*. The challenge of riding out into the wide blue yonder on a twelve-tone row was more than they could resist. Some of them have never returned. Just as the early men in New Orleans didn't know what the established range of their instruments was, so these new-musicians struck out in directions which might have been untouched had they observed the academic dicta adhering even to so free a form as jazz.

The shelf on jazz in the music room of the New York Public Library fairly bulges with volumes in French, German, and Italian. It seems strange to read in German a book called the *Jazzlexikon* in which you will find scholarly résumés of such eminent jazzmen as Dizzy Gillespie and Cozy Cole. And there are currently in the releases of several record companies examples of jazz as played in Denmark, Sweden, and Australia. Obviously the form and style are no longer limited to our own country. And jazz, as a youthful form of art, is listened to as avidly in London as in Palo Alto or Ann Arbor.

Arnold Sungaard, "Jazz, Hot and Cold"

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1. Based on the passage, one can infer that the origin of modern jazz is:
 - A. traceable to the streets of New Orleans.
 - B. too obscure to be precisely identified.
 - C. the blues songs of the early twentieth century.
 - D. the music of slaves in the South.
2. According to the passage, early jazz was primarily a form of:
 - F. funeral music.
 - G. piano music rearranged for other instruments.
 - H. music arranged by bandleaders.
 - J. songs performed by- street musicians and vocalists.
3. The passage indicates that swing declined in popularity because:
 - A. bop replaced it.
 - B. swing is not a true derivative of jazz.
 - C. swing became too commercialized.
 - D. musical tastes changed as a result of World War II.
4. According to the passage, the appeal of swing music lies primarily in its:
 - F. beautiful melodies.
 - G. brassy sound.
 - H. catchy lyrics.
 - J. rhythms.
5. The author's main purpose in the passage is to:
 - A. explain why jazz is played all over the world.
 - B. trace the origins of jazz.
 - C. show the influence of jazz on popular music.
 - D. describe the main characteristics, of jazz.
6. It can be inferred from the passage that New Orleans was a hospitable place for jazz to develop because of the city's:
 - F. flamboyant social life.
 - G. proximity to the Mississippi River.
 - H. acceptance of Baby Dodds.
 - J. musical tradition.
7. That the author finds it "strange" (line 51) to read foreign books about jazz and to hear recordings of jazz from abroad implies that:
 - A. non-Americans lack the spirit and soul for jazz.
 - B. jazz played abroad is an imitation of the real thing.
 - C. future developments in jazz may come from unexpected places.
 - D. jazz is a uniquely American art form.
8. All of the following descriptions of bop also apply to jazz EXCEPT:
 - F. bop arose out of a need for a new form of music.
 - G. bop was improvised and spontaneously performed.
 - H. bop began as a reaction to existing schools of musical thought.
 - J. bop was influenced by earlier forms of music,
9. By calling the rise of Shaw, Sinatra, and Goodman a "sociological enigma" (lines 30-31), the author implies that the three musicians:
 - A. were not appreciated solely for their musical talent.
 - B. do not seem like typical heroes for young people.
 - C. took a long time to become popular.
 - D. enjoyed enormous popularity in their day.
10. The author's assertion in lines 38 and 39 that bop "developed out of a certain intellectualism and not a little neuroticism" means that bop musicians:
 - F. knew that jazz could benefit from musical techniques invented by classical composers.
 - G. understood modern music and needed to experiment with newer musical techniques.
 - H. made a thoughtful effort to push jazz to its limits.
 - J. tried out new musical forms to show their dissatisfaction with the state of contemporary music.