

AFRICAN INFLUENCES ON JAZZ IN THE AMERICAS

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Introduction

Though jazz originated in America, it was influenced by events and musicians from places in Africa and Europe and, in particular, is steeped in a rich West African heritage, derived from the slaves who brought with them their traditions. This is evident in both the United States of America and Cuba.

In these countries slave owners took offence to the African slaves practising their musical rituals, particularly drumming, but allowed them to engage in private gatherings of foot stomping and hand clapping to substitute for drumming. Greater liberty was allowed at the Place Congo, a square in New Orleans, where slaves were allowed to dance, sing, and play percussion, banjo, fiddle and other instruments (Tirro: 6-7) in large circles, referred to as Ring Shouts. These ceremonies were largely based on voodoo culture (Yurochko: 5). New Orleans is generally thought to be the place where jazz began, branching out to the rest of the United States.

Throughout the 19th century, the music at the Place Congo (Congo Square) was a way for African tribes to communicate, as in the talking drums of their homeland. With the resulting interaction between African cultures and that of immigrants from other countries new forms of music developed. This included the development of jazz at the end of the 19th century in New Orleans. The music of the slave dances held in Congo Square, was over time transposed into musical forms used by ensembles led by the likes of Buddy Bolden (1877-1931) and Joe 'King' Oliver (1885-1938) and his Creole Jazz Band of the 1920s (Gioia: 3-6). From there jazz went across America and around the world, multiplying into many different and unorthodox forms such as swing, bebop, free jazz, cool and jazz-rock fusion.

Emergence of Rag and Stomptime

At around the turn of the 19th century, black musicians such as W C Handy (1873-1958) and Scott Joplin (1868-1917) - the 'King of Ragtime' - played a novel style of piano called 'jig piano' or ragtime. This was an outgrowth of Negro dance music practices demanding great rhythmic prowess. In part, it can be traced back to the shout and fiddle music of the Gullahs (descendants of enslaved Africans) along the USA eastern seaboard who were among the last group of blacks brought to the USA from West Africa (Tirro: 6-7). Joplin's style also incorporated music of minstrel shows, camp meetings and itinerant songsters, weaving these together into a melodic and rhythmic tapestry.

Ragtime is actually mostly rhythm. In piano rag music, the left hand provides the percussive dance rhythm, while the right hand performs syncopated melodies, using motifs reminiscent of fiddle and banjo tunes. Popular songs include Joplin's "Maple Leaf Rag" and "The Entertainer" and pieces such as "Cuban Cake Walk" written by Tim Brymn (1881-1946). On becoming popular, after being used as music for the 'cakewalk' dance, ragtime was hurtled away from black communities into the mainstream and adopted by whites. It was also channelled into American jazz. After Joplin's death greater improvisation was used and along with boogie woogie, a simple blues based piano style, ragtime played an important part in the birth of jazz.

Negro worksongs (and children's songs) had also taken on their own peculiarities in the USA, although derived from polyrhythmic patterns and the call and response styles of West Africa.

Their contribution to early jazz music was the New Orleans Stomp or Stomptime. This was further developed by the Creoles, a significant sub-culture of blacks from Africa with French and Spanish ancestry who had a knowledge of Western art music (Yurochko: 10). The most noted musicians were Ferdinand 'Jelly Roll' Morton (1885-1942) with his Red Hot Peppers and Sidney Bechet (1897-1959). Stomptime takes a rhythmic figure and uses it as a melodic line so as to repeat it in an ostinato or riff pattern, leading to a polyphonic accentuation that produces strong rhythmic momentum within the improvising polyphony (Tirro: 129-130).

Jelly Roll Morton brought an exotic style to jazz, which represents the transition from ragtime to jazz. In the piece called "Black Bottom Stomp" instruments are used to percussively stress a syncopated feel, and a call and response is used between the trumpet and rest of the ensemble. Morton wrote music using polyphony, harmonised passages, solo improvisations, and unusual instrumental combinations. From these early days of jazz, all the musical principles and aesthetic values of African music are evident and continued to be influential: interlocking and percussive rhythms, syncopation, density of sound or polyphony, ostinatos, improvised variations, and call and response.

Polyrhythmic and polymetric patterns

Percussion plays a primary role within nearly all Sub-Saharan African music. This involves cross rhythms and multiple rhythms and to a lesser degree simultaneous tempi embroidered with one another (Megill & Demory: 2). Several drummers usually perform at the same time, weaving a pattern of contrasting beats and accents and each player can be within their own 'time signature' (Chernoff: 45). One percussion part may have a 6 beat pattern and another 8 beats, dividing the overall time span of a 24 beat tune into different cycles. This is typical in BaMbuti Pygmy tunes (Turino: 171). Interlocking rhythms are also used in *mbira* (thumb piano) pieces of the Shona of Zimbabwe such as in "Nhemamusasa" (Turino: 166).

The steady pulse or metronomic sense (Chernoff: 49) of an African rhythm ensemble in which additional rhythmic features are superimposed by various percussion instruments over the main instrument's rhythmic pattern has its parallel in the jazz rhythm section (Tirro: 120). The emphasis of where the pulse is placed is important in both forms. African music stresses the 'off-beats' so that in a 4/4 time signature the second and fourth beats would be emphasised (Chernoff: 48). In the Ewe dances of Ghana the placement of stressed beats means that none of the drums play a dominant free beat on the first and third beats (Chernoff: 48). Similarly, jazz drummers often keep time by playing 'boom CHICK boom CHICK' (one TWO three FOUR) instead of 'BOOM chick BOOM chick' (ONE two THREE four). This syncopation is part of what makes a performance sound like jazz (Gridley: 361).

In African percussion, one instrument's down-beat becomes another's up-beat. This can imperceptibly shift revealing a third or even a fourth counter-rhythm in African drumming ensembles. All these different rhythms are used to express the rhythms of life. Jazz pianists, such as McCoy Tyner (born 1938) who played with saxophonist John Coltrane (1926-1967), also use small jazz riffs creating polyrhythmic or polymetric effects so that the piano falls out of sync with the rest of the rhythm section for a short period and then comes back in. Just as in African music, so also in jazz, melodic instruments can be played in a percussive, rhythmic fashion depending on the piece. For example, in Duke Ellington's big bands from the 1930s the lead trumpeter Cootie Williams (1911-1985) used his melodic instrument in a percussive, off-beat manner (Gridley).

Syncopation

Just as in the Ewe drum ensemble where the higher pitch cowbell contrasts against the drums, so also in jazz, the single free-hanging ride cymbal can provide a repetitive, syncopated feel over the dissonant chords of the piano and horns (Gridley: 78). Syncopation is the rhythmic effect produced when the expected rhythmic pattern is deliberately upset by shifting regular accents to weak beats. It can result in creating an effect of uneven rhythm and filling of spaces between beats, and comes from complex African drumming.

In the 1910s, Negro conductors were leading syncopated orchestras (later called jazz orchestras). These dance orchestras and brass bands were another precursor to jazz when they started playing ragtime songs such as "Didn't He Ramble" and syncopated marches on ceremonial occasions. Count Basie (1904-1984) and Lester Young (1909-1959), two eminent names in big band music, in their "Taxi War Dance" allow the trombone soloist, Dicky Wells (1907-1985), to play rapid eighth-notes stressing the off-beats. The result is known as swing (Gridley: 35). Some of Count Basie's other best known works are "One O'Clock Jump" and "Jumping at the Woodside".

Swing is a noted aspect in jazz music. The feel of the pulse is derived from African musical performance and found in pieces such as the "Yarum Praise Song" (a slave song) which has a steady underlying and unwavering pulse but with syncopations added (Tirro: 12).

Polyphony and big bands

James Reese Europe (1881-1919) laid the groundwork for the greatest big bands (Sutro: 34) when he introduced certain innovations to the music such as writing up to as many as 10 or 12 different parts for each group of instruments in his band. This gave the music a full and symphonic quality not heard in other bands of the time (Balliett: 97). Following James Reese Europe was Fletcher Henderson (1898-1952) who really popularised the big band movement. He included exciting music and unorthodox instrumentation by using alto and tenor saxophones, clarinets, and tuba amidst a total of sixteen players. Chick Webb (1905-1939), a master percussionist, elaborated with his fast and explosive style and reigned over the birth of such Negro dances as the 'lindy-hop'.

The jazz innovators of the time drew heavily on various African musical roots in their playing, including complex rhythms, flexibility of pitch, polyphonic melodic structures, call and response patterns, and collective improvisation. When one instrument (such as the trumpet) plays the melody or a recognizable paraphrase or variation on it, and other instruments improvise around that melody, this creates a polyphonic sound. Polyphony is also featured in jazz from New Orleans.

It was Chick Webb who introduced his singing protégé Ella Fitzgerald (1917-1996) to the entertainment world. In the 1940s she used her voice to popularise bebop, a style of jazz that is fast-moving, uses highly intricate melodies, complex rhythms and dissonant harmonies in which the soloist dominates over the rest of the band. She brought to life the bebop style of jazz, with emotional emphasis on the solo, which was an innovation without polyphonic emphasis.

However, polyphonic big bands continued to flourish, even though other styles of jazz such as bebop developed, and they became more innovative. Stan Kenton (1911-1979) with his reputation for offbeat compositions, provocative arrangements and fiery soloists augmented his big bands with extra brass and percussion as a form of innovation.

It was Duke Ellington who came to represent the ideal big 'swinging band'. His rambunctious post-ragtime/boogie woogie style was avante-garde and his compositions began to transcend style. His orchestra had many guises as seen in pieces like "Caravan", "Latin American Suite", "Prelude to a Kiss" and his Africa-based works.

By the 1960s and 1970s when jazz had become electrified, swirls of sound were able to be created and people like jazz trumpeter Miles Davis (1926-1991) did precisely that in albums such as "Bitches Brew" which was essentially the invention of jazz-rock. This form involved electronic instruments, sound flurries, anarchic textures, a freer jazz, but bound by an intense rock-inspired rhythm section. African traditional influences also found their way into the kind of jazz-rock fusion played by bands such as Weather Report.

Ostinato

In many African music traditions everyone has an active role and each person performs in some manner. This is particularly so with respect to the BaMbuti Pygmy culture (Turino: 170-171). To accomplish equal involvement of musicians use is made of constant repetitions of rhythmic patterns or ostinatos. These may seem monotonous and unmoving, but provide a strong way to communicate on one level and maintain stability. In jazz, short phrases, called riffs, are also repeated in this way. These can provide ideas to the jazz soloist or create momentum for the performers and drive within the ensemble. This was evident early on with the style played by the boogie woogie pianists (Gridley: 44).

The professional or *jali* musicians of the Mande people of Mali and other places of West Africa use a repeating *kumbengo* part or ostinato when playing the *kora* (a 21 stringed bridge harp over a gourd sound box). Repeating bass figures and repeating rhythmic patterns on the metallic-sounding *karinyan* are also common in Mali peasant songs such as "Hunter's Dance". Traditional *mbira* pieces from Zimbabwe use ostinatos that descend progressively and then repeat.

Similarly, in Count Basie's piece "One O'Clock Jump" a simple riff pattern, played by the saxophones, is incorporated to give it a swing feeling (Gridley). Likewise, Archie Shepp (born 1937), a 'free jazz' saxophonist, in his piece "Le Matin Des Noire" ("The Morning of the Blacks"), by using African derived patterns, communicates the condition of blacks in American society in his 'musical commentaries' through use of ostinatos in his solos which have a syncopated feel and utilisation of various buzzings in his tone.

Improvisation

The use of buzzings, overblown notes, shrieks and cries are actually techniques used in improvisation. Usually improvisation involves creating personalised melodies and rhythms within the context of the music being performed, but can also extend further than that by use of a wide range of ornamentations. Improvisation is a key element in jazz music and derives from Sub-Saharan Africa where it is used by many tribal groups and drum ensembles. In the Mandinka drum ensemble, the senior player has leeway to improvise more than the others, but all members are allowed to slightly vary their parts as they play (Gridley: 40). The *kora* player will use an instrumental interlude with vocable singing, called the *birimintingo*, as their form of improvisation (Turino: 173-175).

In jazz, improvisational techniques have simply matured and adopted their own style, but the basic element, of the soloist utilising percussive or melodic qualities, still connects to African

music as do the various roughings, buzzes, or ringing sounds that can be incorporated into the soloist's idea. Drummers in the Ewe drum ensembles of Ghana may use bottletops around their drums to create a buzzing sound and the *mbira* players of Zimbabwe will do the same with their gourds covering the *mbira*. Jazz drummers may instead insert rivets into a cymbal so that the vibrations create a sizzling sound (Gridley: 44). Similarly, many jazz instrumentalists create unique sounds to improvise on tone quality and not just melodic or rhythmic ideas. This 'dirtying' of the sound is an aesthetic feature found in much African music, particularly by adding rattling and buzzing to tonal sounds.

Louis Armstrong (1900-1971), the famous jazz trumpeter's style was to leave the melody during his flights of improvisation thereby creating new melodies. This marked the change from group improvisation of the early brass bands to featured artist improvisations. His rhythmic style also saw the transition to free-flowing swing from the rigidity of ragtime. But for Charlie Parker (1920-1955), the bebop jazz saxophonist, swing had become repetitive. Parker's melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic sense and longer, complicated improvisations were extremely fluid and immediately engaging. This was revolutionary for the 1940's.

The great saxophonist, John Coltrane (1926-1967) went to the extreme of utilising unique sounds by producing tones from raspings and buzzings, smooth to guttural and full to shrieking. This is most evident in his major long works such as "Kulu Se Mama" (incorporating many African rhythms) and "Ascension". The rousing free shouts and soul-wrenching jazz hollers of Charles Mingus (1922-1979) also reach with the same emotional punch while he plays bass.

In improvisation, notes 'in-between' notes which derive from a variety of scales can also be employed. This enables a musician to maintain a mood by playing around one scale or mode. It is this modal approach which also forms the fundamentals of African (and European) jazz music. Miles Davis playing his trumpet made prolific albums such as "Milestones" and "Kind of Blue" using the modal style.

Call-and-response

The call and response of the African tradition has carried through into urban jazz and is found in early pieces such as "West End Blues" by Joe 'King' Oliver (1885-1938). Jazz makes use of call and response by employing an antiphonal relationship between two solo instruments or between solo and ensemble. In many forms it involves the lead singer or instrument performing a short phrase or call followed by a response from a congregation or group of instruments.

In Africa, the BaMbuti Pygmies often use a pattern of // C1/R C1/R C2/R C2/R //. Regardless of how simple or complex the pattern, the underlying idea of call and response is that a cyclical rhythm is formed by constant repetitions. This is also employed by the Ewe drum ensembles of Ghana (Turino: 178) between the middle size drums of *sogo* and *kidi*.

Vocally, Louis Armstrong employed the technique of an instrument providing the primary call followed by Louis' vocal scat response which he embellishes and improvises as the interaction between them progresses. For example, he would use scats in his call-and-response dialogue with the guitarist, echoing or mimicking the scat line.

Call and response between the brass ensemble and saxophones within a big band was also very common. For example, in Duke Ellington's "Cottontail" there is a repetitive interaction between both sections and their statements become shorter and more intense in the closing (Gridley).

Cuba

The African influence on jazz did not just extend to the USA. Cuba cannot be overlooked, where the persistence of the slave trade until its late abolition in 1886 is a reason for the density and variety of its African cultural elements. By the end of the 19th century some 14 distinct African 'nations' had preserved their identity in Cuba through mutual aid support societies known as *cabildos* thereby providing an opportunity for the preservation of their culture, on an island where the indigenous population had been virtually exterminated by the Spanish long ago.

The term *Kongo* encompasses the diversity of peoples brought to Cuba from Africa during the years of slavery. Their secular form of music during the 19th century incorporated the use of *yuka* drums played in groups of three. These were made by hollowing out tree trunk sections of various sizes and nailing on cowhides. The largest master drum is the *caja* held between the legs of the drummer. The *caja* player often wears a pair of wrist rattles. Another musician plays a pair of sticks against the body of the *caja*, usually on a piece of tin nailed to the base of the drum. This stick is called the *guagua* or *cajita*, and may be played on a separate instrument. The middle drum is the *mula*, and the smallest is the *cachimbo*. A *guataca* (a hoe blade played with a large nail or spike) is used as a timekeeper. *Yuka* dancing featured the *vacunao*, a pelvic movement found in *Kongo* derived dance styles.

In Cuba, the European instruments like flute, violin, trumpet and guitar met with African *congas*, *bongos* and *claves* and Spanish rhythms fused with that of Africa to create new hybrids, while sharing the same West African, primarily *Yoruba*, roots. New Orleans was the main port of entry for Cuban rhythms and their impact on American jazz. This influence is seen from as early as W C Handy's "St. Louis Blues" as performed by Louis Armstrong and the "Jungle Music" that launched Duke Ellington at the Cotton Club. It is seen in the 1940s and 1950s when Cuban born Frank Grillo (1908-1984), known as "Machito", and trumpet player Mario Bauza (1911-1993) formed a big band called 'Machito's Afro-Cubans' for which Bauza wrote "Tanga" in 1943, the quintessential Afro-Cuban jazz piece.

Machito and Bauza also helped introduce Dizzy Gillespie (1917-1993) and other jazz giants to African strains in Cuban music. Gillespie is largely credited with the invention of Afro-Cuban jazz while collaborating with Chano Pozo (1915-1948), the great *congero* percussionist, in the 1940s. "Dizzy Gillespie Live at the Pasadena Civic Auditorium" contains great examples of seminal Afro-Cuban jazz with compositions like "Manteca", "Tin Tin Deo", "Cubano Be" and "Cubano Bop". As leader of the 1940s bebop movement, Afro-Cuban jazz was often referred to a Cubop.

In the 1950s composer and trumpeter Arturo 'Chico' O'Farrill (1921-2001) of Havana composed the "Afro-Cuban Jazz Suite", which was the first extended composition written in that idiom. He used the big band to explore Afro-Cuban rhythms in large-scale extended compositional works. He also composed symphonic works for jazz.

Son and Afro-Latin jazz

In Cuba songs (and dance) in a style called *son*, (literally 'sound') is one of the most popular and influential musical forms. *Son* originated in the second half of the 19th century in the rural areas but was further developed by the poor working class of Cuba in the 1920s. Larger ensembles were also formed that included a *marimbula* (derived from the African thumb piano), later replaced by the double bass, and percussion such as the *giro* or gourd, *bongos*, *maracas* and *claves*. Now all manner of brass and wind instruments are included.

Son combines African percussion and rhythmic patterns (probably of Bantu origin who came from the Congo) with the Spanish lyrical style of *décima* (stanzas of 10 octosyllabic lines in the form *abba-a/a-abba* in which improvisation plays a major role). The basic rhythmic pattern of the *son* is the *clave* (literally 'key') played on 2 hand-held cylindrical hard wooden sticks, also called *claves* (approximately 12-18 cm long) which are struck together producing a high-pitched, resonant sound.

The *clave* rhythm is a five-note, two-bar rhythm pattern which gives *son* a type of propulsive swing and a strongly syncopated style. Typically, the *claves* player sets the *clave* beat played in common 4/4 time. In the first measure, the musician strikes the *claves* on the first downbeat, on the second upbeat, and on the fourth downbeat (3 strikes). In the second measure, the emphasis is placed on the second and third downbeats (2 strikes). This off-balance beat accenting either one and three, or two and four, in the four beat measure can also be reversed as a 2-3 *clave*.

The *son* had a direct impact on American music coinciding with the dance crazes of the *rumba* in the 1930s in which traditionally dancers come out one at a time, or in pairs, to 'strut their stuff' in front of their peers and rivals, the *mambo* (up tempo versions of the *son*) in the 1940s, and the *chachachá* in the 1950s prior to the Cuban Revolution (Waxer). The *guaracha*, an early Cuban dance genre, also uses the *son* style as does the more general party *salsa* music of the 1970s.

These dances resulted in the appearance of large Latin music bands combining trumpet, trombone, and saxophone sections of American swing era big bands with Afro-Cuban rhythms and repertoire and giving rise to Afro-Latin jazz. This is a genre of jazz that typically employs rhythms that have direct or indirect African influences. The two main categories of Afro-Latin jazz are: the Afro-Cuban style based on *clave*, often with a rhythm section employing ostinato patterns; and Afro-Brazilian jazz noticeably the *bossa nova* and *samba* styles.

***Rumba* and Afro-Cuban jazz**

In Cuban music, *rumba* is a genre involving dance, percussion, and song. The *rumba* style is most influenced by African rhythms. It derives from the Congo Basin in Africa. The modern *rumba* may have grown out of older rhythms (Walser: 208) played on the *yuka* drums made from hollowed out tree trunks. Some forms use the *guagua* stick and wrist rattles. The main stylistic difference is that the lead or co-ordinating *rumba* drum is always the high-pitched *quinto*, the two deeper tone support drums having taken over the ostinato patterns. This reversal is probably an European influence on *rumba* drumming. In addition to brass and woodwind, the cowbell and *shékere* (a large gourd covered with a bead-laden net) may be used.

As well as the jam session or *descarga* (a folkloric *rumba*), there are 3 main rhythms in *rumba*, each with its own dance: *yambú*, *columbia* and *guaguancó*. These rhythms are marked by distinctly African traits such as polymeter, off-beat phrasing of musical accents, and reliance on a metronomic sense (Waterman: 211-214). Singing is done by a chorus (usually large to give it energy) and a succession of lead singers, who compete to lead the songs and uphold their honour as *rumberos*. Use is made of verbal improvisation skills and call and response to build excitement and generate participation by dancers and the chorus.

While the three varieties differ in instrumentation, vocal style and choreography, they all mimic each other to some degree. The *yambú* is performed in slow tempo and is often considered an old people's dance. In *yambú*, there is no pelvic movement. The *columbia* (actually in 6/8 time) began in the rural areas and involves a male solo dance that features many complex acrobatics

and imitations of ball players, bicyclists, cane-cutters and other figures. The dancer may also reproduce steps of the Abakwa religious tradition (from the Cross River region in Nigeria, which the Cubans call Carabali). The *guaguancó* is the modern, urban form of *rumba* popular in Havana. Its dances often involve stylised sexual pursuits.

While Afro-Cuban jazz originated in the 1940s, a more recent development in the 1970s is the *batá-rumba* for a big band setting. Chucho Valdes (born 1941), the great Cuban pianist, introduced the *bata* and other African instruments of the *Yoruba* into Cuban popular music via oral traditions learnt from older musicians. The rumba/jazz fusion synthesis of *Irakere* (meaning 'jungle' in *Yoruba*) was the result, forging a funky, modern rock style while focusing on African elements of Cuban culture, especially rhythmic contributions. *Irakere* helped develop the careers of such internationally recognised musicians as saxophonist Paquito D'Rivera (born 1948) and trumpeter Arturo Sandoval (born 1949) of Cuba.

Conclusion

Even though the direct African influence on jazz in the USA was already several generations removed, that influence did exist as an evolving phenomenon ever since the forced transmigration of people from Africa as slaves. This 'black expressiveness' and undercurrent can be seen in musical characteristics such as improvised and vital emotionalism, spontaneity, swinging beats, moving riffs, and swirling complex rhythms.

The development of Afro-Latin jazz and in particular the form of Afro-Cuban jazz further demonstrates how African influences extended to Cuba and had a more direct impact on its music. Even this separate development found its way into the USA as the 'Latin' influence on jazz. This is yet another demonstration of the variety and colourfulness of jazz and its constant evolution. It also speaks highly of the resilient and dynamic cultures of Africa, despite their past oppression.

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