

What to listen to. ... Recordings you can't teach jazz without!

Jazz is an aural tradition. Like any language, you must learn to speak it before you can study it and learn to truly express yourself. Therefore to learn and teach jazz we must listen to the great musicians who spoke the jazz language with grace, style, and soul!

If listening to jazz music is the only "real" way to learn how to play and understand jazz then what should we listen to and why? Here is a VERY condensed, bare bones version of what will help you get to where you need to be. I tend to buy my CD's from Amazon.ca as they have a good selection and I know what I am looking for. The advantage of going to a CD shop is they will let you listen first before buying. It makes no sense buying a CD you can't stand because someone told you it was "good".

** Since this article was first published the Internet has exploded as the primary distributor of music. YouTube is an amazing resource, but doesn't allow you to hear entire albums. iTunes is great; just make sure to get the liner notes as they can be very informative. PLEASE buy the music. Not many jazz musicians can afford for you to steal their art. **

All big band music really comes from two band leaders; **Duke Ellington and Count Basie**. Clark Terry, the great trumpeter, is quoted with saying "Playing with Basie was like going to College and playing Ellington was like going to University". Plus the great thing about both these groups is students will find solo's or parts of solos learnable!

Basie was all about swing, soul, greasy ribs (Ha), dancing with your honey and sassy stank! Most (all) of the Jr. High swing charts out there are from the Basie tradition. Most are blues tunes and require kids to swing at a medium tempo. Argh!!! This is by far the hardest task for Jr. High/High/University/Pro level musicians. There is simply no hope of any swing happening if the kids (or anyone else) haven't listened to Basie. An un-named adjudicator once said into the microphone; "This band swings like a granite pillar in a slight breeze." ... My guess is they weren't doing a lot of listening to Basie or anything else for that matter. Basie bands were also famous for their dynamic control. They could swing just as hard at *fff* as they could at *ppp*. Basie CD's to check out;

April in Paris, Atomic Basie, Basie Straight Ahead, Basie Plays Ellington, Live at New Port, Basie Live at the Sands with/without Sinatra

Ellington music, while containing all the soul of Basie's music, was more refined and paved the way for a lot of modern jazz. Ellington was the cat who made jazz a true art form while still keeping true to the jazz/blues tradition. He wrote suites, music based on Shakespeare plays. There are books and books on Ellington's work so I'll not digress. I will say however students must be aware of the most prolific composer of the 20th Century. All things come from Ellington. Ellington CD's to check out;

Live at Newport, The Blanton-Webster Years, Money Jungle, Three Suites, And The Far East Suite.

Because most of these Ellington's recordings are old it is hard to find really "good quality" recordings of Ellington's music. The Jazz @ Lincoln Centre Essentially Ellington program provides just that. Every year the Jazz at Lincoln Centre Jazz Orchestra records Ellington charts for the Essentially Ellington. If you join the program (a high school competition) you receive 6 charts (\$60 USD) and The Lincoln Centre Jazz Orchestra performing these classic Ellington charts. I can't say enough about this program. You should also go out and buy **The Lincoln Centre Jazz Orchestra** - Live at Swing City - Swingin' with Duke. It is an amazing recording and it's live so kids get to hear the very appreciative audience.

Other big bands to check out would be; **Dizzy Gillespie Orchestra, Stan Kenton, Woody Herrman, Maynard Ferguson, Glenn Miller, Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey, Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Orchestra, Mingus Big Band** - Nostalgia In Times Square, Blues and Politics, **Marie Schneider Orchestra** - Evanescence, Concert in the Garden, **Dave Holland Big Band, Boss Brass**

For small groups you must check out the big three - Charlie Parker, Miles Davis and John Coltrane. These jazz giants formed some of the most important jazz groups and styles.

Charlie Parker – Now's the Time, Jazz at Massey Hall, The Verve Years

John Coltrane - Blue Train, Giant Steps, A Love Supreme, Crescent, Lush Life, Live in Stockholm with Miles Davis

Miles Davis – Kind of Blue, Relaxin', Miles Smiles, Live at the Nighthawk, ... so much stuff from every era!!!

There is just so much material out there!! I feel terrible for leaving so many artists off my puny lists. So here is a top ten list (sort of) of Cd's I can't teach jazz without.

1. Miles Davis – *Kind of Blue and Relaxin'*
2. Count Basie – *April in Paris*
3. Cannonball Adderley - *Something Else*
4. Charlie Parker – *Now's the Time*
5. John Coltrane – *Giant Steps, Blue Train, Love Supreme*
6. The Lincoln Centre Jazz Orchestra - Live at Swing City - Swingin' with Duke
7. Sonny Rollins - *Saxophone Colossus*
8. John Scofield – *Up All Night*
9. Jaco Pastorius – *The Birthday Concert*
10. And an assortment of modern stuff including Medeski, Martin and Wood (MMW), Dave Holland, The Bad Plus, Brecker Brothers, Metalwood, Soulive, The Sex Mob

Of course the problem with all my yapping about listening is kids rarely ever listen to jazz. So if you fire in April in Paris, Count Basie on day one of Gr. 8 jazz band you are going to lose some of the band. I grew up listening to Heavy Metal, progressive rock and even some blues, so jazz was a bit of a stretch for me so I understand where kids are coming from. Most of our drummers will be into Metallica and an odd assortment of other metal/rock bands. If you are really lucky maybe they are into Led Zeppelin or even better hip-hop/rap! I know, I know, many adults can't stand rap but if your kids listen to it your job will be much easier. Hip-Hop/Rap is full of jazz rhythms and jazz sensibilities. Like improvisation! The first jazz I really got into was John Scofield's Pick Hits Live. It is funky and the drummer (Denis Chambers) was killin'. So I had an immediate attraction. That of course led to Miles Davis, because Sco played with him which led to ... well pretty much everything because Miles was involved in every jazz style out there. So what is my point? I use modern groups to hook kids in. Bands/performers like John Scofield, Metalwood, Medeski, Martin and Wood (MMW), Sex Mob, Bad Plus, Brecker Brothers among many others. Bad Plus' version of Iron Man (Black Sabbath) is an instant hit with your "metal-heads". It is truly awesome!! Then I tell them it is jazz. Well sort of! I at least point out the jazz influences.

Kids will dig jazz if they are guided the right way. Most come with a concept of jazz that it is quiet and relaxed... not how I would define most Jr/Sr students. To get them connected, play them some jazz that is loud, dancing, swingin and all wound up. They will learn to appreciate the more relaxed jazz when they have unwound a bit themselves.

I would like to start a question forum strictly about teaching jazz or just jazz music in general. Please send questions to grahamj@fsd38.ab.ca. If I can't help you find the answers I'll find a person who can.

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