

LISTENING

Listening to master musicians is an essential part of the learning process. While there is no substitute for experiencing live music, recordings are the great textbooks for students of jazz. So, I encourage you to listen to recordings between classes, in the car, or when doing chores. In addition, focused listening, without distraction, can help you understand jazz music at a deeper level and will contribute to your overall development.

Who to Listen To

There are hundreds of great jazz recordings, and it can be difficult for students to know where to start. Today, you can listen to a lot of great music through services such as youtube, Pandora, and Spotify. Many libraries also have wonderful jazz collections. In addition, concerts and television appearances from classic jazz groups are now available on DVD. By their nature, lists of essential jazz recordings are somewhat arbitrary and generally incomplete; the list below is no exception. However, as a reference, I have assembled this list of some of the great jazz rhythm sections and important horn players. They are listed below in rough chronological order.

Important Rhythm Sections

- Count Basie/Walter Page/Jo Jones/Freddie Green (guitar) – This unit is the model for modern rhythm sections. They swing whether they are playing loud or soft. Some more modern Basie rhythm sections can be heard on *Atomic Basie* and *Frankly Speaking*.
- Bud Powell/Charlie Mingus/Max Roach – This is the quintessential bebop rhythm section. A great recording featuring Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie is *The Quintet: Jazz at Massey Hall*.
- Modern Jazz Quartet – John Lewis/Percy Heath/Connie Kay/Milt Jackson (vibes) – This quartet performed together for decades. A good representative recording is *The Artistry of the Modern Jazz Quartet*.
- Ahmad Jamal /Israel Crosby/Vernell Fournier – Miles Davis was heavily influenced by this important trio. *Ahmad Jamal at the Pershing* is a classic album.
- Red Garland/Paul Chambers /“Philly” Joe Jones – As Miles Davis’ rhythm section from 1955-58, these musicians can be heard on *Steamin’*, *Relaxin’*, *Cookin’*, *Workin’*, and *Round About Midnight*.
- Bill Evans/Scott LaFaro/Paul Motian – This is one of the most influential groups for modern jazz trios. Important recordings include *Sunday at the Village Vanguard* and *Waltz for Debby*.
- Oscar Peterson/Ray Brown/Herb Ellis (guitar) or Ed Thigpen (drums) – Oscar Peterson led one of the most-recorded and most swinging rhythm sections of all time. *We Get Requests* is a great example of their signature style.
- Herbie Hancock/Ron Carter/Tony Williams – This rhythm section backed Miles Davis from 1963-68 and recorded albums including *My Funny Valentine* and *Nefertiti*.

- McCoy Tyner/Jimmy Garrison/Elvin Jones – These musicians played with John Coltrane in the early 1960's and recorded two trio records - *Reaching Forth* and *The Real McCoy*.
- Chick Corea/Miroslav Virtuous/Roy Haynes – This is Chick Corea's break-through group that recorded *Now He Sings, Now He Sobs* in 1968.
- Roland Hanna/Richard Davis/Mel Lewis – This rhythm section propelled the Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Orchestra. A wonderful representative recording of this group's compelling sense of swing is *Consummation*.
- Keith Jarrett / Gary Peacock / Jack DeJohnette – This trio was formed in the 1980's and continues to perform today. They have many outstanding recordings on the ECM label, including, *Standards* and *Whisper Not*.

Other important pianists deserving investigation include Art Tatum, Duke Ellington, Teddy Wilson, Thelonious Monk, Horace Silver, Dave Brubeck, Wynton Kelly, and Sonny Clark. In addition to the aforementioned musicians, some wonderful pianists who are playing and recording today include Fred Hersch, Kenny Barron, Jackie Terrason, Danilo Perez, and Brad Mehldau.

Important Horn Players

For developing your solo concept and eighth note feel, it is also very important to listen to horn players. This following list includes some of the more historically significant improvisers in rough chronological order.

- *Alto Saxophonists:* Charlie Parker, Sonny Stitt, Cannonball Adderley, Lee Konitz, Phil Woods, Paul Desmond, Jackie McLean, Chris Potter
- *Tenor Saxophonists:* Coleman Hawkins, Lester Young, Ben Webster, Stan Getz, Dexter Gordon, John Coltrane, Joe Henderson, Wayne Shorter, Michael Brecker, Joshua Redman
- *Baritone Saxophonists:* Gerry Mulligan, Leo Parker, Pepper Adams
- *Trumpeters:* Louis Armstrong, Roy Eldridge, Dizzy Gillespie, Fats Navarro, Kenny Dorham, Clark Terry, Miles Davis, Clifford Brown, Lee Morgan, Freddie Hubbard, Nat Adderley, Tom Harrell, Wynton Marsalis, Roy Hargrove
- *Trombonists:* JJ Johnson, Kai Winding, Frank Rosolino, Carl Fontana, Curtis Fuller, Slide Hampton, Steve Turre, Conrad Herwig

What to Listen For

Listeners new to jazz often respond to its energy, emotion, and rhythms. However, many people also find jazz difficult to follow. While Charlie Parker's recordings resonated with me as a young student, I found them to be incomprehensible. After gaining an understanding of the music's structure and a familiarity with its language, I was able to appreciate and enjoy the recordings at a deeper level. I encourage you to choose one album, listen to it repeatedly, and work to understand how all the pieces fit together. Here are some suggestions to help guide your listening.

- Determine the form of the tune. Is it a blues, an AABA or ABAC form, through-composed, or something else? Identifying the form will help you get your bearing as you listen to the piece.
- Notice the structure of the arrangement. What is the introduction? Who is playing the melody? How many solo choruses does each musician take? Are there interludes between solos? How does the piece end?
- Listen to the soloists. What is the overall shape of the solo? How does the solo begin and end? What are other noteworthy aspects of the solo? Are there specific ideas in the solo that you would like to transcribe?
- Listen to the pianist. How does the pianist play behind different instruments? What voicings, rhythms, and textures are used? When comping, how does the pianist interact with the soloist and other members of the rhythm section?
- What about this performance do you enjoy the most?