

“Jazz: The Recipe”

Background Information

Music is an important part of human culture and has been for a least 50,000 years. It's hard to say where it started. It could have been when humans first made sounds, discovering their voices. Or it could have been the beating of tools on rocks and the ground to make a steady rhythm.

The earliest musical instruments to have been discovered are two flutes found in southern Germany. These flutes were made of bird bone and mammoth ivory. Other ancient flutes found were made of bone from a vulture's wing and the leg of a bear. Thousands of years ago, groups of people were enjoying music just as we do now. Music could have been used for religious purposes or just for fun. Our ancestors were more similar to us than we may have thought.

Each culture has its own musical history and unique instruments. The earliest Chinese flute was made from bamboo instead of bone. In the Xia, Shang, and Zhou Dynasties, Chinese royal families enjoyed music played on chimes and bells. African music is closely tied to drums and dancing. Like African music, Native American music also relied on drums. Different tribes had different traditions about making and playing their drums.

Modern music might seem very different from the music of centuries or even decades before. Beethoven didn't rap. Egyptian pharaohs didn't listen to hip-hop or R&B. Famous explorers didn't play jazz music on their ships. But they are all tied together. Beats from African and Mohawk drums, melodies from Germanic flutes, and chimes from Chinese bells are the backbone of all music today. Without someone blowing through a hole in a mammoth's tusk, we might not have Beyoncé, Janelle Monáe, or Lady Gaga.

Jazz is a genre of music unique to America. This type of music has a strong, lively beat. Players often improvise, or make up, parts of the tune as they play. There is often a strong bass line in jazz music. A jazz band often includes brass instruments. Some famous jazz musicians of the past are Louis Armstrong, Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Ella Fitzgerald, Charlie Parker, and Billie Holiday. More recently, jazz has been mainstreamed by artists such as Wynton Marsalis, Esperanza Spalding, and Harry Connick, Jr.