

Jazz: The Recipe



Jazz began with a “**recipe**” that had many different ingredients. Different groups of people, including Africans and Europeans, were part of the recipe. Different kinds of music, including the blues and ragtime, were also a part of the recipe. All of these ingredients combined to make America’s own music, jazz.

Workers sang songs during the long workday. They sang in fields and on ships. They sang while working on the railroads. The work song was an important part of their day. With tools in their hands, they worked to a **steady** beat. The songs made life a little easier. There were many kinds of work songs, and these songs played a part in jazz.

Church music was important to jazz. African Americans made new kinds of church music. They formed their own churches and rewrote the old songs to express their faith. They changed the words, the beat, and the tune. They used the African “call and response” when they sang. This music became an ingredient in the jazz recipe.

recipe

a list of the things needed and directions for making something

steady

not subject to change; constant

simple

having few parts;
easy to understand

plantation

a large farm where
crops are grown

social

friendly; involving
several people

demand

requirement; need

combine

to put together; to
join

express

to communicate in
words

Music of immigrant Americans added to jazz. The Scotch-Irish had ballads. Ballads tell stories of heroes and their bravery, and these stories are often sad.

The song is usually **simple**. In a ballad, the story is often more important than the music. Ballads became another ingredient in the jazz recipe.

In the early days of America, ballroom dance music provided popular entertainment. In the South, dances were held on **plantations**. They were big **social** events. There was a **demand** for musicians to play at the dances. Many slaves learned how to play fiddles and flutes. African Americans invented the banjo and played it too. Black musicians learned the dance songs and changed them. African and European music **combined** to make dance music. This music became another ingredient in the jazz recipe.

During the 1800s, a new kind of music called ragtime was born. It was loud and fun. Musicians pounded on their pianos. They made up songs to **express** their appreciation for music. They played in dance halls. The tunes were lively, and the rhythm was catchy. Everybody loved ragtime. It had a strong, irregular beat that was surprising. Ragtime became another ingredient in the jazz recipe.

Sometime in the late 1800s, musicians began to play the blues. Slaves had been freed, but life was still hard. People were sad and frustrated. They expressed their feelings in music. They called it the blues. Today, people still sing the blues when they're sad. The blues became the final ingredient in the recipe.

The jazz recipe came together in New Orleans. By 1890, New Orleans was one of America's most musical cities. It had opera houses and concert halls. It had dance ballrooms and street parades. It had Mardi Gras! Many different people lived there. Africans and Native Americans lived in New Orleans. The French and Spanish also lived there. People from many places and cultures created America's own music, jazz.

Adapted with permission from "Jazz Ingredients"
by Heather Mitchell Amey