

INTRODUCTION: From Doug Goodkin's Notes to his 8th grade students © 2001

"Jaaaaaaaaazz." Say it slowly. Savor the sounds. Whisper it. Just four letters, three sounds, but enough to hold an entire universe of moods and styles and ways for the body to dance, the mind to dream, the heart to feel.

In that small word is so much of the history of the United States—the good, the bad, the ugly, the American dream and the American nightmare. It's the story of our triumph and our shame, our joy and our pain, our happiness and our sorrow, our yesterday and tomorrow. It's the lotus flower growing from the swamp, giving hope, healing and beauty to the world.

Nobody quite knows where the word "jazz" came from, but we know a lot about where the music came from. It was the meeting of West meets West—West Europe meets West Africa. Western Europe—particularly England, France, Portugal, Spain and Holland—developed the technology to travel by ship to lands far away—what are now countries like Ghana, Ivory Coast, Senegal, Gambia, Angola and others. It was a meeting that millions wish never had happened. So much suffering, so much brutality, so much injustice— and we still haven't recovered. But out of all that ugliness, great beauty rose up. How did it happen?

A West African mother is forcefully abducted and made to "marry" a West European father and they have a child. The child has qualities of both the mother and father, but is wholly neither. A new person is born—an *African-American*. The song he or she sings was not recognizable in either England or Ghana, but had some characteristics of both.

On the mother's side, music in all the diverse West African cultures had—and still has— the qualities of a language. It is spoken by all and learned like a mother tongue, absorbed effortlessly by the babies on the back feeling the rhythms of the mother dancing and working, the vibrations of the songs. Music is almost always connected to dance, rising up the body from the toes to the hips to the arms to the whole body. The music and dance carry the important stories, manners and values of the culture, is constantly present in daily life and is one of the primary means of passing on key cultural information to the next generation. Wherever music is happening, all are invited to participate by singing, clapping and dancing. When the adults finish playing, the children rush to the instruments and imitate what they have just heard. Formal study and music lessons are rare and playing instruments a natural outgrowth of expressing what one sings and hears and feels. A chief is expected to drum and dance and a village is often organized by musical ensembles.

On the father's side, music is often an optional expression to the side of more "important things" like reading, writing, doing math and mastering a profession. It is often learned through formal lessons not always available to all and often begins at the instrument before the songs have taken root in the voice and body. It is passed on by written symbols and learned first through the eye rather than the ear. It requires formal practice, often alone in a room. Dance is not required to learn music, though some music still may be used for dancing, again often taught in formal lessons. Power lies more in book knowledge than songs. People may or may not sing in church or school or on occasional holidays and people in the countryside may learn

and carry on folk traditions that still include the ear and the body. But in the mainstream “high culture,” such folk music will have a lower status.

In short, the way life is organized, the way key knowledge is passed down, the role of music and dance in community life, the way such music and dance is learned, the way both personal and political power is recognized was—and still is—markedly different in West Europe and West Africa. The child would inherit the intuition, spirit and soul of the mother and the outward forms, institutions, instruments and language of the father and something new was born from the conversation between the two—an African-American folk music that would lead to jazz and dozens of other musical styles.

The slave trade from West Africa to the “New World”—what is now Brazil, Cuba, Haiti, Jamaica, Dominican Republic, the American South and more created a mix of many specific marriages. In Brazil, West Africa blended with the Portuguese, in Haiti, the French, in Cuba, the Spanish and in the American South, the English. Each would later create many distinct styles of new music.

But jazz came from the American South, where the Protestant English forbade the playing of drums, forcibly converted the Africans to the Puritan form of Christian worship, broke up families so that slaves who worked side-by-side would not speak the same mother tongue or know the same songs and dances. What was remarkable was that these new African-Americans could only borrow from English songs and dances, sing in English, eventually play European instruments. But their African *feeling* for music never died and would transform everything they touched with the gold of their mother Africa sensibility. The way they sang hymns, the way they danced quadrilles, the way they played piano or trumpet was unlike anything people had ever done in Europe, infused with a percussive quality, soulful singing and dynamic energy remembered over centuries from their lost mother culture. And here we come to the roots of the music that flowered into work songs, field hollers, spirituals, blues, gospel, New Orleans funeral music, boogie-woogie, swing, be-bop, cool and other styles contained in that small word *jazz*. And then more yet as it led to rhythm ‘n’ blues, rock ‘n’ roll, Motown, funk, heavy metal, disco, pop, punk, rap, hip-hop and beyond.

If we had the power to go back in time and change history, I imagine all good-hearted people would stop the forces that led to slavery. But how strange to think that by so doing we would have never had Scott Joplin, Louis Armstrong, Billie Holiday, Miles Davis, the Nicholas Brothers, James Brown, Ray Charles, Smokey Robinson, B.B. King, Michael Jackson and hundreds of other musicians and scores of musical styles that have given us so much happiness and inspiration. Since what happened happened, at least we should know who to thank, listen to their story, listen to their music, learn the social and political lessons from the injustices they suffered, learn the artistic lessons from their dedication to their craft, discover what the music has to say to us and what we might bring to it and move it all forward to a bright new future. *That’s* why we study jazz.

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This beginning jazz work is entirely compatible with the Orff pedagogical sequence, but with a few changes in emphasis and vocabulary. To aid the reader, the following is a handy chart that helps us move from one to another.

Orff → Jazz Conversion Chart

Classic Orff Schulwerk

English Rhyme *changes to*
Beat *changes to*
Strong beat accents *change to*
Straight rhythm *changes to*
Rhythmic ostinato *changes to*
Melodic ostinato *changes to*
Do pentatonic *changes to*
Drone *changes to*
Triads *change to*

Beginning Jazz

African-American Game
Offbeat
Syncopation
Swing rhythm
Groove (same principle, different name)
Riff (same principle, different name)
La pentatonic (later, Blues Scale)
Vamp (same principle, different notes)
Tritones

EUROPEAN-AMERICAN ART MUSIC	AFRICAN-AMERICAN FOLK MUSIC
• Beat	• Offbeat
• Straight rhythm	• Swing rhythm
• Head tone in singing	• Chest tone
• Clear timbre	• Mixed timbre (growls, buzz, etc.)
• Precise articulation	• Relaxed articulation
• Long melodic lines (Gregorian chant)	• Short phrases (riffs)
• Polyphony	• Polyrhythm
• I-V	• I-IV
• Variation	• Repetition
• Composition	• Improvisation
• Interpretation	• Self-expression
• Written	• Oral
• Individual (composer, virtuoso)	• Communal
• Serious	• Playful
• Select participation	• Complete participation
• Polite detached audience	• Involved, responsive audience
• Formal study, separated from daily life	• Informal, integrated with daily life
• Dance incidental	• Dance essential
• Absolute music	• Story
• Conceptual meaning	• Emotional meaning
• Linear time conception	• Circular time conception
• Vertical (ascending)	• Horizontal (gettin' down)
• Spirit	• Soul