

What is Jazz? The Answers.

Amiri Baraka (1934-2014)

“... to restore the polyrhythms of Africa, the primacy of improvisation and the blues, and the fundamental AFRICAN-American reidentification of ourself back to ourselves” (“Masters in Collaboration”).

“Negro music is essentially an expression of an attitude, or a collection of attitudes, about the world, and only secondarily an attitude about the way music is made.” (“Jazz and the White Critic”)

- **Jazz is Blues, Bebop, Free; Jazz is not Swing, Cool**

Ralph Ellison (1914-1994)

“long history of interchanging musical styles between the races” (“Territorial Vantage”)

“True jazz is an art of individual assertion within and against the group. Each true jazz moment . . . represents (like the successive canvases of a painter) a definition of [the artist’s] identity as individual, as member of the collectivity and as a link in the chain of tradition.” (“The Charlie Christian Story”)

- **Jazz is New Orleans, Swing, Fusion; Jazz is not Bop, Free**

Wynton Marsalis (1961 -)

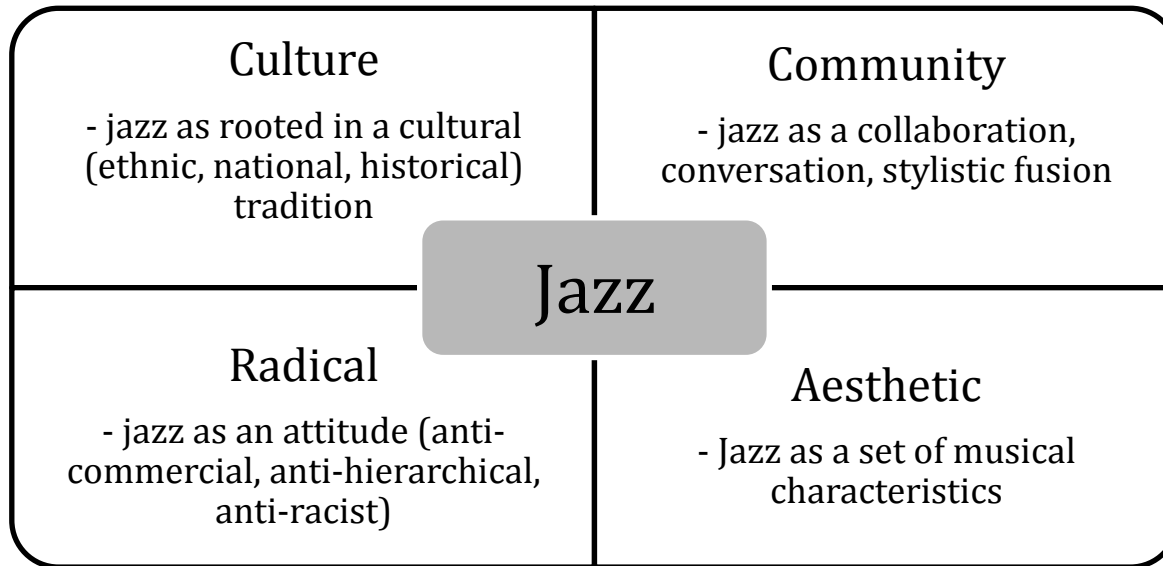
“You have the conception of New Orleans jazz: group improvisation, cooperative ensemble playing, which functions exactly like a democracy. Which means each person has the right to play what they want to play, but the responsibility to play something that makes everybody else sound good.” (Interview 3/2008)

- **Jazz is New Orleans, Swing, Bop; Jazz is not Fusion, Free**

Ingrid Monson (Contemporary)

When a [jazz] musician successfully reaches a discerning audience, moves its members to applaud or shout praises, raises the energy to dramatic proportions, and leaves a sonorous memory that lingers long after, he or she has moved beyond technical competence, beyond the chord changes, and into the realm of “saying something.” (*Saying Something*)

- **Jazz is improvisational, small ensemble**



Virgil Thompson (1896-1989)

“[Jazz is] a compound of (a) the fox-trot rhythm, a four-four measure (*alla breve*) with a double accent, and (b) a syncopated melody over this rhythm” (“Jazz”)

- **Jazz is Ragtime, Dixieland, Swing; Jazz is not Free**

Theodor Adorno (1903-1969)

“Jazz is not what it ‘is’. . . . Rather, it is what it is used for . . . a mass commodity” (“On Jazz”).

- **Jazz is Dixieland, Swing**

Kimberly Benston (Contemporary)

On Coltrane: “an irrepressible dislocating of the ‘standard’ . . . a quality of discontinuous repetition, an insistence on breaking the very patterns that he discovered” (*Performing Blackness*)

- **Jazz is Blues, Bebop, Free; Jazz is not Swing, Cool**

Wikipedia (Accessed 9/26/14)

“Jazz makes heavy use of improvisation, polyrhythms, syncopation, and the swung note, as well as aspects of European harmony . . .”

Ground We Stand On Questions

1. Whose definition do you find most compelling?
2. How might a person’s definition of jazz influence his/her performance?