

BEBOP

Bebop came around in the 1940s as a style of jazz that had great contrast to the big bands. It included a small group of musicians mostly four to six players - rather than the 10 or more associated with the big bands. The smaller size allowed more solo opportunities for the players. There were more complex melodies and chord progressions in bebop, as well as more stress on the role of the rhythm section. Also, the music is different in length, making bebop interesting to listen to, but in contrast to music of the big bands, not fit for dancing.

Excellent jazz players have come from different ethnic groups and, indeed, different nations. Most of the music's innovators and leading voices, however, have been black Americans, the descendants of slaves. This agreement between the black population in the United States and jazz music has led to all sorts of biased debate, most of it taking place on a very low level. The essential lines of the dispute place those who see jazz as an art which transcends questions of race against those who contend jazz is a black product which, therefore, "belongs" to black people. The latter position has, not surprisingly, been actively embraced by black nationalists.

"Bebop," as used in the title of DeVeaux's book refers to the modern jazz pioneered by alto saxophonist Charlie Parker, trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie, pianist Thelonius Monk and other young jazz musicians during the early 1940s. An onomatopoeic play on the quick staccato rhythms that sometimes appeared in its melodies, the name was meant sarcastically of course. But however, it managed to stick and is used respectfully by musicians today, often in its shortened form of "bop."

When bebop exploded on the scene just as World War II was ending, the rhythmic details, advanced harmonies and sometimes frantic tempos of its genius improvisers, primarily within small combos, seemed a huge departure from the big dance bands that took over popular music during the pre-war years. Many established jazz musicians, including the founder Louis Armstrong, condemned the new music as noisy and unswinging. With 50 years of hindsight, however, the change appears much less dramatic. In fact, bebop's musical advances were firmly embedded in, and to a certain extent anticipated by, the best jazz players who preceded it.

The development of bebop is attributed in large part to trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie and alto saxophonist Charlie Parker. The unique styles of Gillespie and Parker contributed to and typified the bebop sound. They experimented with unconventional chromaticism, discordant sounds, and placement of accents in melodies. In contrast to the regular phrasing of big band music, Gillespie and Parker often created irregular phrases of odd length, and combined swing and straight eighth-note rhythms within the swing style.

Other influential bebop musicians included saxophonists Sonny Stitt and Dexter Gordon, trumpeters Red Rodney and Kenny Dorham, trombonists J.J. Johnson and Bennie Green, guitarists Tal Farlow and Kenny Burrell, pianists Oscar Peterson, Bud Powell, and Thelonius Monk, drummers Kenny Clarke and Max Roach, and bassists Charles Mingus and Paul Chambers.