

## **History of Jazz Music in Chicago, IL**

When many people think about jazz music, their first thought is either of smoky nightclubs or ballroom swing dancing; either way the location is likely in New York City. Actually jazz, and the music that led to jazz, was really born in the southern United States, most notably in New Orleans, Louisiana. Chicago, Illinois, however, has been an important force in the creativity and continued development of jazz music through the years; it was also the biggest jazz scene for many years. Although Chicago has often been overshadowed by other areas of the United States, most notably New York City, it is one of the most important locations in the development and history of jazz music.

The beginning of Chicago's involvement with jazz music is often said to have coincided with the closing of New Orleans' beloved red light district, Storyville, in 1917, and a much larger movement known as the Great Migration in which many black Americans were attracted to the north from the south – to Chicago in particular. Chicago was actually a leader in popular music before World War I, due to the trendy social dancing craze sweeping the city (Chicago Jazz, 3). When Storyville closed, Chicago was able to provide much work to the musicians who moved north along with many other southern blacks.

Jazz in Chicago started off right where it left off in New Orleans: “a combination of folk blues, marching band tunes, social dance music, popular songs, and ragtime” according to W.H. Kenney (Chicago Jazz, 4). Chicago's south side was the area where black Americans lived and

worked, so that is where jazz flourished. However, because the country was so segregated at this time, there were separate music scenes for both blacks and whites, which created twice the demand for popular dance bands (Jazz, 17).

The first important jazz band to make an impact in Chicago was the Original Dixieland Jazz Band (ODJB). The musicians who formed this band left New Orleans in 1916 to join Johnny Stein, a popular bandleader in Chicago. The band was a big success among the white crowds, and played for three months at Schiller's Café. The story goes that cornetist Nick LaRocca wanted to break the contract with Schiller's for a higher paying job offer, which Stein refused. LaRocca decided to quit Stein's band and take his New Orleans friends with him, to start the Original Dixieland Jass Band (Jazz, 17).

LaRocca's new band featured himself on cornet, Eddie Edwards on trombone, Henry Ragas on piano, Larry Shields on clarinet, and Tony Sbarbaro on drums (Jazz, 17). The band became an instant success in Chicago, first taking a job on June 2, 1916 at the Café de l'Abbee and a month later moving to the Casino Gardens. However, the band only stayed in Chicago for about a year, and after a successful concert at the Reisenweber Café in New York City, the ODJB relocated to New York in 1917 (at the same time changing the spelling of their name from Jass to Jazz) to perform and record, creating the very first jazz record for the R.C.A. Victor label (Jazz, 67).

The next band to move jazz forward was the New Orleans Rhythm Kings, simply because they mixed the standard style of ensemble playing with their own addition of short solo features. The core of the all white band was a group of friends from New Orleans, consisting of cornetist Paul Mares, trombonist George Brunies, and clarinetist Leon Roppolo, and featured an ever changing group of sidemen which put the group in sizes from a quintet to a dectet. Mares

was the first to move to Chicago, in 1919, and after two years of playing in local dance bands he organized a group with his friends from New Orleans to back up vocalist Bee Palmer at the Friar's Inn in 1921. Palmer soon quit, and the band became temporarily known as the Friar's Society Orchestra, before quickly being renamed the New Orleans Rhythm Kings (Jazz, 18).

Unfortunately, the band only lasted as long as the Friars Inn gig, which ended in the spring of 1923. The band was able to put together six recording sessions during 1922 and 1923, creating many famous Dixieland standards and some of the earliest recorded examples of horn solos (Jazz, 18). The band did their recording in Richmond, Indiana, which made them the first band to record while basing their band out of Chicago. They did so seven months before the first black jazz band in Chicago did (Chicago Jazz, 128). The band also had two reunion recording sessions a few months after disbanding, which were notable for featuring Jelly Roll Morton. Paul Mares again tried a recording reunion back in New Orleans in 1925, which quickly led to his retirement from music (Jazz, 18).

Joe "King" Oliver was one of the great New Orleans cornet kings, third to reign after Buddy Bolden and Freddie Keppard, respectively. He was extremely important, as he was a friend and mentor of a young Louis Armstrong. Oliver gave Louis a job playing second cornet which brought him to Chicago in 1923. Oliver came to Chicago in 1919 to find work along with many other southern blacks during the Great Migration. His expertise and tone made him quite popular in Chicago in a very short time, and by 1920 he had started his famous band the Creole Jazz Band. Oliver's band featured trombonist Honore Dutrey, pianist Lil Harden, drummer Baby Dodds, and clarinetist Johnny Dodds (Jazz, 19).

In 1922, Oliver got a job at the Lincoln Gardens. He then decided to invite his friend Louis Armstrong to come from New Orleans to join the band. On April 6, 1923 in Richmond,

Indiana, Oliver's Creole Jazz Band was the first black jazz band based in Chicago to record. For their first session in the studio, they recorded nine songs in one day and drove back to Chicago that night because they had nowhere to sleep in Richmond (Chicago, 130).

Even though the Creole Jazz Band had a popular job at the Lincoln Gardens and recorded many famous and popular songs which should have earned plenty of money, the band broke up in 1924 due to monetary disputes among band members. The Dodds brothers left first, and shortly thereafter Louis Armstrong quit at the suggestion of his new wife, Lil Harden Armstrong. Oliver tried to replace them to keep the band together, but had to eventually abandon it completely. King Oliver continued to play in Chicago throughout the 1920's, forming a new band called the Dixie Syncopators which featured an even greater focus on Oliver's trumpet solos. Oliver tried taking his career to New York in 1927, but unfortunately never achieved the level of success that he had in Chicago (Jazz, 20).

Years before the Original Dixieland Jass Band and King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band, a young pianist named Fred "Jelly Roll" Morton brought his mix of ragtime and jazz piano playing to Chicago. In 1914 and 1915, he played in many of the most popular south side cabarets and with many popular vaudeville groups (Chicago Jazz, 11). Jelly Roll was also from New Orleans. He spent his life from 1910 to 1923 traveling the country doing anything he could to make money, and playing piano was just one minor way that he managed to get by. Although Jelly Roll lived in Chicago briefly in 1914 and 1915, it was not until 1923 that he moved there permanently (Jazz 21).

Morton's early career in Chicago was as a solo pianist, and he soon recorded a set of classic tunes. He also put together a group called the Red Hot Peppers, featuring cornetist George Mitchell, trombonist Kid Ory, clarinetist Omer Simeon, banjoist/guitarist Johnny St. Cyr,

and the Dodds brothers after they quit Oliver's band. Jelly Roll was one of the first great arranger's of jazz music, making excellent use of short breaks, ensemble sections, and solo sections which may or may not have been composed. With the Red Hot Peppers he made dozens of ensemble recordings while based in Chicago in 1926 and 1927. Like King Oliver, Jelly Roll moved to New York City, in 1928, because he felt it was becoming the new hotspot for jazz (Jazz, 21).

Arguably the most important force in 1920's jazz music was Louis Armstrong. He was loved throughout his life for his joyful personality, his swinging, and his singing. Louis first came to Chicago from New Orleans at the request of his mentor, King Oliver, in 1923. He quickly outgrew Oliver's Creole Jazz Band, becoming a more powerful cornetist (Jazz, 22). At the urging of his wife, Louis moved to New York to play in Fletcher Henderson's big band. While he only played with Henderson for a year and a half before returning to Chicago, this is significant because he brought his sense of swing and hot rhythm with him, which influenced many musicians working in New York (Jazz, 23).

Back in Chicago, Louis began playing trumpet, eventually switching over permanently. When he was younger, Louis did not think that he could be a trumpet player, saying that "you had to be a music conservatory man or some kind of a big muckity-muck to play the trumpet" (Chicago Jazz, 43). He eventually got through this line of thinking, and revolutionized jazz with his trumpet playing. His first order of business when he got back to Chicago was to form his own band, which he called the Hot Five or Hot Seven, depending on how many people were playing with him. The band featured clarinetist Johnny Dodds, trombonist Kid Ory, pianist Lil Harden Armstrong, and banjoist/guitarist Johnny St. Cry (Jazz, 23). The band added drummer

Baby Dodds, tubaist Pete Briggs, and replaced Kid Ory with John Thomas to round out the septet (Jazz 24).

While Louis' Hot Five and Hot Seven recordings are loved for his ensemble writing and leadership, the inspired and virtuosic solos he took are what make the recordings so amazing (Jazz, 23). Max Kaminsky may have put it best when he said, "Above all-above all the electrifying tone, the magnificence of his ideas and the rightness of his harmonic sense, his superb technique, his power and ease, his hotness and intensity, his complete mastery of his horn-above all this, he had the swing. No one knew what swing was till Louis came along" (Chicago Jazz, 105). In total, Louis made 33 recordings with his Hot Fives and eleven with his Hot Sevens (Jazz, 24).

In 1928, Louis recorded with a new band he had put together, which went by different names (Louis Armstrong and His Hot Five, Louis Armstrong and His Savoy Ballroom Five, or Louis Armstrong and His Orchestra). Although the band had many different members, and was generally a six or seven piece band (despite 'five' in the name), the important musicians in the group was Earl Hines on piano and Zutty Singleton on drums/percussion (Jazz, 24). Hines was one of the first piano players to move beyond the stride style of piano playing, instead moving to a harmonic approach that involved playing chords as they complemented the melody rather than continuously keeping a beat (Jazz, 25).

The collaboration of Armstrong and Hines created a new interactional style that was a strong step away from the traditional New Orleans Dixieland sound. The new style they created involved each responding to the other's solo ideas with a conversational sound, which became standard procedure for nearly all jazz that followed. Their ability to complement each other showed their sensitivity to the music - an element with added suspense and helped propel jazz

from a folk music into an art form (Chicago Jazz, 140). Louis Armstrong, wanting to reach a wider audience, relocated to New York in 1929 (Jazz 24).

The list of notable jazz musicians who made an impact on jazz in Chicago during the 1920s could go on forever. The so called Austin High School Gang are often noted as an important turning point where young white musicians idolized and copied the styles of black jazz musicians such as King Oliver. However, most of the gang had relatively short careers in Chicago, although often having successful careers in other areas of the country. Bix Beiderbecke and Frankie Trumbauer are also known as Chicago musicians, though they as well spent little time performing there. Many musicians from Chicago had almost no effect there, but went on to make a huge impact on jazz nationwide during the swing era, such as Benny Goodman and Gene Krupa. There are many semi-important white Chicago musicians, which were generally either from the city neighborhoods, the suburbs, or from elsewhere in the Midwest entirely (Chicago Jazz, 92).

The story of nearly every major artist in Chicago at this time involves moving from New Orleans during the Great Migration of the late nineteen teens, and heading to New York City in the late 1920's. Despite a thriving local jazz scene, Chicago was fairly insignificant in the 1930's and 1940's with the exception of a growing blues phenomenon. Chicago continued the blues craze into the 1950's (becoming the most significant city for electric blues), but this had little impact on the local jazz scene. Chicago did little to set long term trends in jazz music until the formation of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians in the mid 1960's (Jazz, 27).

Before getting to an extensive discourse on the AACM and its key members, it is very important to mention one musician who was not rooted in the 1920's Dixieland style, nor was he

a member of the AACM, but is important in Chicago history just the same. Tenor saxophonist Von Freeman spent his early years working in various local bands, notably that of Sun Ra in the late 1940's. He shared the stage with legends such as Charlie Parker, Roy Eldridge, and Lester Young while in the house band at the Pershing Hotel in Chicago, also during the late 1940's. In the 1950's, Von and his two brothers formed a quartet with his brothers and pianist Ahmad Jamal, who was later replaced by Andrew Hill (Freeman, Von).

Von also worked with many of the AACM musicians, though he himself never joined the organization. During the 1980's, he toured in a quintet with his son Chico, an AACM member who had overshadowed his father in popularity. During the 1990's, there was a sudden rise in public interest in Von's music, where he became even more popular than Chico. Von's style is often referred to as "tough tenor" playing, which he had a major role in creating (Freeman, Von). His playing combines the melodic chromaticism and speed of bebop with the raw emotion and passion of blues and gospel music into a wonderful sonic palette that is very difficult to explain. Eighty-five year old Von Freeman leads one of the most popular Chicago jam sessions at the New Apartment Lounge, featuring NIU music graduate Mike Allemana on guitar.

The AACM was founded in Chicago in May of 1965. It was an outgrowth of the Experimental Band, an early 1960's free-jazz ensemble led by Muhal Richard Abrams. Abrams was the first president of the AACM, and set some brilliant ground rules: members would be required to contribute original compositions, to give a solo recital, to maintain high moral standards, and experienced players would train the younger musicians. The organization sponsored recording sessions, a weekly radio show, as well as many concerts and jam sessions all over the south side. The group's key members in the early days were Muhal Abrams,

Anthony Braxton, Roscoe Mitchell, and Lester Bowie, who became the organization's second president (AACM).

Muhhal Abrams began playing piano at the age of 17, and soon attended the Chicago Musical College. He began composing, arranging, and performing professionally in fairly traditional jazz styles, often accompanying famous soloists who visited Chicago, such as Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins, and Max Roach. His shining achievements are the creation of the Experimental Band, which was one of the first groups to embrace the radical new free jazz style, and his subsequent formation of the AACM. Abrams moved to New York in 1976, but radically changed Chicago's jazz scene forever (Abrams).

Possibly the most interesting and controversial member of the AACM is alto saxophonist Anthony Braxton. Born in Chicago, he became equally interested in jazz as modern European art music, and he studied both philosophy and composition at Roosevelt University (Braxton). He had an inimitable improvisational style, and a disregard for traditional aesthetic boundaries. Braxton numbered his compositions due to his use of symbols or pictures as titles, and by his tenth he had created a complete symbolic musical notation system that involved lines, dots, asterisks, abstract symbols, and seemingly random words, which sometimes also included traditional music notation as well (New, 122). Along with many other AACM musicians, Braxton traveled to Paris in 1969 due to a lack of steady work in Chicago, and soon moved to New York because he was not well received in Paris. He has since had quite a prolific career with many legends of jazz, including Chick Corea and Dave Holland (Braxton).

The Art Ensemble of Chicago is the most well known band to evolve out of the AACM. Created by reed instrumentalist Roscoe Mitchell and brass instrumentalist Lester Bowie, the Art Ensemble was a free jazz quintet with all members providing vocals and percussion in addition

to their principal instruments. The group was originally called Roscoe Mitchell's Art Ensemble, and was renamed to the Art Ensemble of Chicago when the band relocated to Paris in 1969. All of the members of the band were very interested in the use of dissonance and irregular rhythms which were very popular at the time. However, they also added non-tempered intonation and fast bombardments of notes to create a sound that was unfamiliar to people. The group also added costumes, dances, absurd dialogues, and pantomime. They also used several hundred standard, exotic, and band member invented instruments in their stage show. The group toured until Lester Bowie's death in 1999, which makes the Art Ensemble the second longest lived small jazz group after the Modern Jazz Quartet (Art Ensemble).

Roscoe Mitchell is best known for his work in the Art Ensemble of Chicago, but he began his career leading a hard bop sextet in Chicago. Before joining Abrams' Experimental Band, he played alongside Jack DeJohnette in a free jazz quartet. He was important in the formation of the AACM, and led many band bands of different sizes featuring other members of the AACM. Mitchell went on to establish the Creative Arts Collective in 1974, which was based on the principles of the AACM, taking the styles developed in Chicago in the 1960's and spreading them throughout the United States and Europe. Mitchell's improvisational and compositional style show the influence of Eric Dolphy and his peers in the AACM, but his approach is far more eclectic. He plays many homemade instruments, and uses them to change the timbre of his sound which erratically changes between chaotic flurries of notes, mild and beautiful melodies, and long silences (Mitchell).

Mitchell's right hand man in the Art Ensemble, and the second president of the AACM was Lester Bowie. Bowie is considered among the most original trumpet players in all of jazz. He had virtuosic technique, and a variety of stock effects such as half-valving, growls, bent

notes, and a wide vibrato. Besides playing in Mitchell's Art Ensemble, Bowie led many bands and was very interested with combining jazz and free jazz with rock and gospel. Though he only really spent a couple years based in Chicago, he is remembered in Chicago as the second AACM president and a member of the Art Ensemble (Bowie).

One of the few original AACM members still located in Chicago is tenor saxophonist Fred Anderson. From 1962, he led a group featuring Bill Brimfield, Joseph Jarman, Charles Clark, and Arthur Reed. This group's 1964 performance is considered by many to be the first AACM concert ever. Not only did he help create the AACM, Anderson has also opened two popular Chicago nightclubs. His first club, the Birdhouse, was only open for a year. His second club, the Velvet Lounge, was opened in 1982 (Anderson). The Velvet Lounge remains open to this day and hosts one of Chicago's most important jam sessions.

The first generation of influential AACM members is not many in number, nor did they spend all that much time based in Chicago. Many of the founding members moved to where there was more work, such as Europe and New York City. Even with many members moving away, one remarkable aspect of the AACM is their continuation of a free school of music, which is taught mostly by former students. The AACM has trained thousands of musicians, of which a younger group of talented members have followed in the teachings of the original members as well as bringing many new ideas to jazz, all the while staying put in Chicago (AACM).

Son of the great Von Freeman, tenor saxophonist Chico Freeman originally started playing trumpet after hearing Miles Davis' *Kind of Blue*. He originally set out to study mathematics at Northwestern University, but took up the tenor sax and began to study music education. While working local blues, rhythm and blues, and pop gigs in Chicago, he began to study with Muhal Abrams at the AACM music school. He joined the organization, and began

playing with Fred Anderson and Steve Colson. After studying composition and performance in graduate school, Chico moved to New York to play with many incredible musicians such as Elvin Jones, Jack DeJohnette, Sun Ra, and Sam Rivers. Though Chico may not have had a huge impact on Chicago, Chicago definitely made a big impact on him. The education he received from Abrams and Anderson effected the style he took with him to New York (Freeman, Chico).

The great drummer/percussionist Kahil El'Zabar joined the AACM in 1971 at the age of 18, and served as the president in 1976-77 shortly after finishing the AACM music program. The same year, Kahil formed the Ethnic Heritage Ensemble with Ed Wilkerson. In the mid 1980's he formed Ritual with Malachi Favors. The group became Ritual Trio with the addition of Ari Brown in 1989. Kahil continues to lead both of these groups, as well as performing with numerous other groups. In addition to music performance, Kahil has performed in a movie, written a film score, and published a book of his own poetry and prose (El'Zabar).

Alto and tenor saxophonist Ernest Dawkins took up music after hearing a recording of Lester Young as a teenager. He began playing flute, clarinet, and saxophone, taking lessons at the AACM music school. He went on to attend the Governor's State University where he received both his undergraduate and graduate degrees. His first project was the New Horizons Ensemble which toured internationally. The band featured trumpeter Ameen Muhammad, trombonist Steve Berry, guitarist Jeff Parker, bassist Yoset Ben Israel, and a rotation of drummers. In 1997, he joined El'Zabar's Ethnic Heritage Ensemble, replacing Ed Wilkerson. Dawkins has spent much of his life teaching music, beginning by giving back to the AACM music program, and going on to teach at Columbia College and in the Chicago public school system (Dawkins).

Through the years, Chicago has shown a lot of influence locally, nationally, and even internationally. The extremely creative music that came out of Chicago in the 1960's and 1970's has pushed the boundaries of jazz just as much as (if not more than) the more well known free jazz and fusion groups of the same time periods. Despite all of the modern and cerebral music that was created, Chicago still has its roots firmly in blues and swing, and you need not look further than guitarist Bobby Broom for it.

Bobby Broom actually followed the opposite path as nearly every other major musician, moving from New York to Chicago instead of vice versa. Broom has made what some might consider huge career blunders, such as declining to tour with Sonny Rollins as a teenager. After spending a year at the Berklee School of Music, Broom moved back to New York and played a show with Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers. He turned down an invitation from Blakey to join the group, opting to tour with a jazz/funk group instead. At the age of 23, he moved to Chicago to study at Columbia College, where he took on a gig with Kenny Burrell. By taking this job, Broom had to turn down an offer to join Miles Davis' band (Broom).

Broom may have turned down jobs with some of the biggest names in jazz, but he is making some of the most exciting music around. His style is a wonderful mix of blues and bebop, putting his music right in the traditions of hard bop and soul jazz. His best work is with the Deep Blue Organ Trio, an extremely tight group which takes the best of these traditions with a playful and high energy approach that sums up what Chicago jazz is and always has been.

There are many more musicians in Chicago who are making an important impact on the creative expression of other musicians in the area, more than can possibly be named here. One last person that must be mentioned is guitarist Jeff Parker. Though he is not a native of Chicago, and really never wanted to be a Chicago resident, he has nonetheless settled there and has been

creating great music that spans and transcends genres. Parker has broken into the mainstream with his post-rock band Tortoise, which does not play improvisatory music but brings their instrumental craft to create danceable, often odd meter grooves, with long thematic and textural instrumental works (Genre, 144).

Parker works plenty as a jazz musician. Often augmenting the Chicago Underground Duo into a trio or quartet, Parker has pushed the limits of modal jazz with electronic elements and strong and steady grooves. This band has been very influential, though often does not get their credit. Parker remarks, “They did this big cover story in *Jazz Times*...on jazz-tronica, and you know there was absolutely no mentioning of the Chicago Underground projects at all...they mentioned all the people, Dave Douglas, Matthew Ship-guys that are just starting to do it now, man. We were doing it seven or eight years ago. They didn’t mention it, and they got this huge backlash from the readers... And the editor had to apologize: ‘Oh yeah, we know that they’re leaders in their field but...,’” (Genre, 131).

Parker has been a member of many popular Chicago groups. He has spent some time in Dawkins’ band, the New Horizons Ensemble. He mixes hard bop with free jazz elements in Ted Sirota’s Rebel Souls (Genre, 120). It is worth noting that Parker is no longer in Sirota’s band, but has been replaced by NIU graduate Dave Miller. Parker also leads with his own group, mixing many elements of 1960’s post-bop harmony and rhythm with the modern and modal sounds of the Chicago Underground, as well as adding in a rock element like that of Tortoise (Genre 140).

Jeff Parker may have accidentally summed up Chicago’s music as a whole. While discussing the disadvantages of Chicago’s music scene, he says “A lot of the musicians, myself included, don’t play really have the confidence, don’t play with the same authority that a lot of

the musicians out in New York do. Probably without a doubt, jazzwise, the best musicians in the world live in New York, man. Definitely. I wouldn't say the most creative because... I think I'm getting off the subject here..." (Genre, 113). It seems that Parker wants to say that the music coming out of New York is very technical and confident, but in terms of creativity and inspiration, Chicago will always be leading the way.

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