

Music Makers

All that Jazz

Jazz music is considered the truest expression of African American life ever created.

Jazz music was the newest sound around in 1920. It was loud, bouncy, fast, and created by African American musicians. A Harlem Renaissance author wrote, "The true spirit of jazz is a joyous revolt from convention, custom, authority, boredom, even sorrow--from everything that would confine the soul of man and hinder its riding free on air."

Jazz musicians jamming on **trumpets**, **saxophones**, **pianos**, **string basses**, and other instruments played for excited fans in theaters and clubs all over New York City. Jazz music was often **improvised** (made up on the spot), so it remained fresh and new.

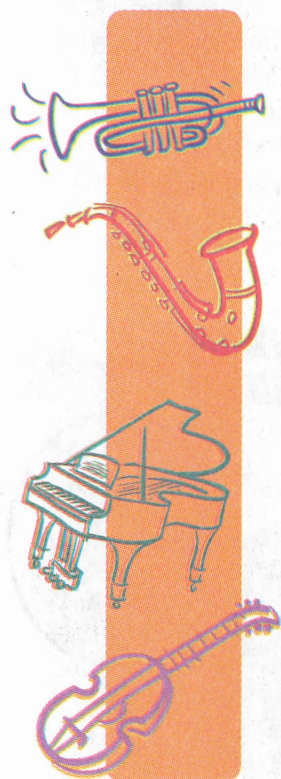
The music sounded like nothing else most people had ever heard--lively, wild, and free, and people couldn't help but dance to it that same way. One reporter observed, "They fling their limbs about without stopping to make sure that they are securely fastened

on." Every night, crowds of dancers--black and white--packed popular dance halls such as the Savoy Ballroom, in New York City, which held 4,000 people! ■



A popular Kansas City jazz band was Chauncey Downs and the Rinky Dinks.

Courtesy of the Kansas City Museum



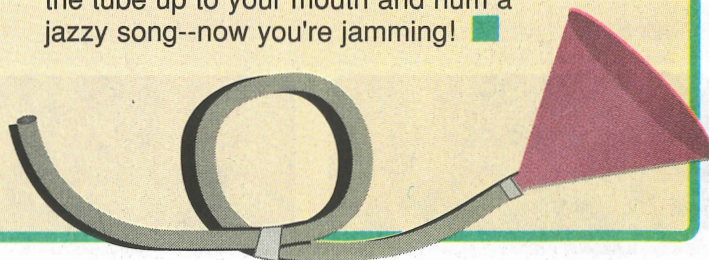
Couples enjoy a night of dancing at a Leavenworth club.

Make a Trumpet

Use your imagination just like jazz musicians did and improvise: sing one of your favorite songs, only try to sing it in a different way than you've ever heard it before. Speed up some parts of the song, or sing other parts very slowly. Add new sounds or tunes to the song.

Try playing your improvised songs on a trumpet you make. Buy a three-foot length of clear vinyl tubing which measures one-half inch inside the tube, from the plumbing department of a hardware store. Make a circle with the tube, as

in the illustration (with long ends on each side), and use clear tape to hold the circle together. Get a medium-sized funnel with a narrow spout and stick it in one end of your tubing, taping it on, if necessary. Put the other end of the tube up to your mouth and hum a jazzy song--now you're jamming! ■





Kansas City Jazz

Kansas City was an important center of African American music in the 1920s and 1930s. Music called "the blues" and the newer sounds of jazz filled the night. At one time, the Kansas City jazz district had more than 50 music clubs where famous players performed.

Courtesy of the Kansas City Museum



Benny Moten's Radio Orchestra gathered for a jam session.

Jazz bands had contests with one another to see which band could play the best. Band musicians went to **jam sessions**. Music at these sessions wasn't written down on paper; it was improvised instead. Players had to listen carefully to each other. The challenge was to make up good sounding music without practicing it beforehand. Jam sessions were creative surprises!

Bands "jammed" privately or in front of audiences. Either way, there were rules to jamming: if a musician wasn't a good listener or player, he could be kicked out of the session. Musicians learned and improved by trial and error. ■

Have you ever heard the phrase "singing the blues"? It is a form of music where you sing about your troubles.

The Papa of Be-bop

A Kansas boy named Charlie Parker was raised in the 1920s on Kansas City jazz music. His mother worked nights as a nurse, so Charlie hung around nightclubs listening to exciting music. Band was Charlie's favorite class at school.

His mother bought him an alto saxophone just like the ones he heard played in the jazz clubs.

Parker was a good listener and he learned to play along with his collection of jazz records. The more he played, the more he played around--with different sounds and beats.

He improvised his own musical style. His experiments helped him to create a new form of jazz music which was called "bop," or be-bop. The music was a fast, lively, repeating rhythm. He was among the first musicians to record be-bop music, and his records became very popular with young people. ■

Activity: Word Beat

Say the following nonsense poems aloud. Do you hear or feel their beat? That's the beat of Charlie Parker's be-bop!

Crocodile, crocodile, crocodile, croc
Antelope, antelope, antelope, ant
Bumble bee, bumble bee, bumble bee, bum
Alligator, alligator, alligator, alligator!

El-e-va-tor bells DING!
El-e-va-tor doors SLIDE!
People get off, some SING!
Others get on, short RIDE!

Courtesy of the Kansas City Museum



Charlie Parker is one of the most important jazz musicians of all time.