

LISTEN AND LEARN

To listen well, is as powerful a means of influence as to talk well, and is as essential to all true conversation.

~ Chinese proverb

In This Chapter

- Why Listen?
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Terms to Know

- blow: to improvise
- axe: your instrument
- bag: a person's particular "thing."
Cutting contests just ain't my *bag*.
- cutting contest: a friendly rivalry between players. The best soloist "cuts" the others.
- tubs: another name for drums

WHY LISTEN?

Listening to music requires you only to have a pair of working ears. You don't need the special skills required to actually *play* jazz, you only need the skills required to play your radio, CD player, MP3 player, cassette player, or turntable. Or for those of you retro-rebels, your 8-track, reel-to-reel machines, or Victrolas.

Recordings are the easiest and least expensive way to experience great music made by the Masters. However, it's not the *best* way to experience jazz. The best way is to hear jazz *live*, created in the same room with you. There is no other experience like it and after your first good experience, you'll be hooked. The real-time exchange of improvised ideas is truly amazing. But wait, there's more!

When we watch someone do something the exact same neurons that are required to perform the task we see fire in our own brain! And the more we've practiced that which we watch, the more of the correct neurons fire while we watch. It's not clear whether this counts as practice, but it does explain to me why listening and watching live musicians gives you a sense that it's possible for you to do it, too. That's priceless. Chances are that you can probably talk to these musicians, too, or ask to take a lesson. Goethe said, "Be bold. The mighty forces will come to your aid."

Listening is far and away the *very* best thing you can do for your jazz playing and your musicianship skills. There is no substitute for it. Listening to music is food for your own music. If you don't listen to other players, your road to jazz mastery will be short and lonely. That would be sad. Stuff your ears with wonder!



WHERE TO LISTEN ONLINE

There is *so* much jazz out there for you to hear—over 100 years’ worth—that it can be intimidating even getting started, and a little confusing to the uninitiated.

For recorded jazz, as of this writing, there are three fantastic online resources at which you can listen for free and explore what jazz has to offer. I’m *still* discovering great albums and tunes I hadn’t heard of before. Enter any of the tunes, albums or artists listed below at the following sites:

- www.accujazz.com: *Very* well organized jazz collection. Choose jazz by decade, instrument, style, [musician](#), [region](#), and 14 (yes, 14!) other categories. This is the best place to start if you have no idea what you like or who to listen to, or even if you do. Go there now!
- www.pandora.com: You probably already know this one. Choose a musician, a song, an album, or a [style](#). You’ll also get other musicians/songs that are similar to the choice you made and your own custom radio station is there for you to hear. A great resource that requires a bit of knowledge from you, but totally worth it. In fact, right now, I’m listening to a track by trumpeter Don Byrd I’ve never heard before, and it’s great! I think I’ll click the “buy” button....
- www.youtube.com: Use the two sites above to find the names of jazz musicians who have videos on [YouTube](#). You’d be surprised how far back you can go with video. Some have posted songs with slide-show image montages which can be fun to watch. On some the quality isn’t so hot, but to actually watch Louis Armstrong or Sonny Rollins or Ella Fitzgerald is pretty amazing. Almost as good as live music.

A FAST AND LOOSE JAZZ STYLES CHEAT SHEET

When I was in my early teens in Sitka, a small town on an island in Southeast Alaska, I wanted to find out what this whole *jazz* thing was about. This was long before the Internet. I had heard of Miles Davis and figured I should get one of his albums and chose *Bitches Brew*. Those of you who know this album are probably laughing. It’s a successful jazz fusion album that was *way* out there to my poor untrained ears. My first reaction was, *This is jazz? I don’t think I like jazz.....* Fortunately, I persisted in my search and now that I have a *lot* more listening experience, I enjoy the album and have tasted most of the other flavors jazz has to offer.

I hope to help you avoid any misunderstandings like I experienced back then through these lists. I’d also like to challenge you to open up your ears and your mind to different sounds and different styles of jazz. Something that you may react to unfavorably on first hearing might become an old and dear friend if you keep trying to understand it. Often we dislike what we don’t understand. Here’s a rough overview of the most common jazz styles:

JAZZ STYLE	BRIEF DESCRIPTION
Old-School/Dixieland (1900-1930+)	small groups, group improvisation, improvised harmony (2nd line), often straight-eighth note feel, poor sound quality due to nascent recording technology.
Big Band (1930-1950+)	large (20+) bands, sax, ‘bone, & trumpet sections, full rhythm section (p, b, g, d)
Bebop (1940-1960+)	blistering speed, complex harmony, some believe it’s the pinnacle of jazz skill
Modal Jazz (1959-1970+)	less complex harmony, melodic focus, a reaction to the complexity of ‘bop
Cool Jazz	

JAZZ STYLE

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Hard Bop	
Gypsy Jazz (1930-)	2 rhythm guitars, 1 lead gtr, bass, guitar virtuosity, often no drums, sometimes violin, accordion or wind instruments.
Latin Jazz (1945-)	incorporates Afro-Cuban music: rhythms, instruments, grooves, etc. Fun!
Jazz Fusion (1968-1990+)	
Smooth Jazz (1975-)	R&B/Soul influenced, slow grooves (90-105 BPM), highly processed sound, commercial. Often dismissed and/or reviled by "serious" jazzers.

LISTENING SUGGESTIONS

I'm reluctant to suggest *anything*, because I'll inevitably leave something or someone out and I'll be sure to hear about it, but I'm going to do it anyway, because there are some jazz albums and jazz musicians that *everyone* should listen to, or at least know about.

The lists below are only a miniscule selection of some of my favorite albums, those that I think are most approachable or the most important. I've broken them down into several categories and except for the first, each category contains 5 albums (often boxed sets). This will help keep things simple until you start to branch out on your own into the deeper jazz waters. Use these lists to get a feel for what's out there and what you like. The categories are roughly chronological, with the last few categories separated by instrument and drawn from all of the genres listed and then some. Artists are listed with their instrument: piano (p), bass (b), drums (d), soprano sax (ss), alto sax (as), tenor sax (ts), baritone sax (bs), trumpet (t), trombone (tb), guitar (g), vocalist (v).



You can find all these albums available for purchase as CD or mp3 and many other important resources including transcribed solos and fake books containing most of these tunes at www.BasicJazzTheory.com.

10 EXCELLENT JAZZ ALBUMS (ANY STYLE)

Album Title	Artist(s)
A Night at Birdland, vol. 1	Blakey(d), Brown(t), Silver (p), Russel (b), Donaldson (as),
Saxophone Colossus	Rollins(ts), Flanagan(p), Watkins(b), Roach(d)
Somethin' Else	Adderly (as), Davis (t), H. Jones(p), S. Jones(b), Blakey(d)
Open Sesame	Hubbard (t), Brooks (ts), Tyner (p), S. Jones (b), Jarvis (d)
Bobby Broom Plays for Monk	Bobby Broom (g), Dennis Carroll (b), Kobie Watkins (d)
Diz & Getz	Gillespie (t), Getz (ts), Ellis (g), Peterson (p), R. Brown(b), Roach(d)
Blue Train	Coltrane (ts), Chambers (b), Drew (p), Fuller (t), P.J. Jones (d), Morgan (t)
The Great Ladies Sing Gershwin	Ella Fitzgerald (v), Sarah Vaughan (v), Nina Simone (v), Shirley Horn (v), Dinah Washington (v), Betty Carter (v), various rhythm section players
A Tribute to Miles	Roney (t), Shorter (as), Hancock (p), Carter (b), Williams (d)
Verve Jazz Masters 44	Clifford Brown (t), Max Roach (d), various others

5 ESSENTIAL OLD-SCHOOL JAZZ ALBUMS

Album Title	Artist(s)
Hot Fives & Sevens (2 discs)	Louis Armstrong, (t), various others
Singin' the Blues 1	Bix Beiderbecke (cornet), various others
King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band: The Complete Set	Joe "King" Oliver (cornet), various others
Jelly Roll Morton: 1926-1930 (5 discs)	Jelly Roll Morton (p), various others
The Original James P. Johnson	James P. Johnson (p), various others

5 ESSENTIAL BIG BAND JAZZ ALBUMS

Album Title	Band Leader (soloists)
Duke Ellington Masterpieces 1926-1949	Duke Ellington (p), (Cootie, Hodges, Tricky Sam, Bubber, et al)
The Complete Decca Recordings (3 discs)	Count Basie (p), (L. Young, Sweets Edison, H. Evans, et al)
Self Portrait (5 discs)	Artie Shaw (cl), various others
Consummation	Thad Jones (flugel), Mel Lewis (d), various others
Sing Sing Sing	Benny Goodman (Gene Krupa, Harry James, various others)

5 ESSENTIAL BEBOP/HARD BOP JAZZ ALBUMS

Album Title	Artist(s)
Jazz at Massey Hall	Parker (as), Gillespie (t), Mingus (b), Powell (p), Roach (d)
Tenor Madness	Rollins (ts), Garland (p), Chambers (b), PJ Jones (d), Coltrane (ts-1trk)
The Best of Lee Morgan	Lee Morgan, various others
The Best of Charlie Parker	Charlie Parker (as),
Amazing Bud Powell, vol. 1	Bud Powell (p), Duvivier/Russel (b), Taylor/Roach (d),

5 ESSENTIAL MODAL JAZZ (INFLUENCED) ALBUMS

Album Title	Artist(s)
Kind of Blue	Miles Davis (t), Adderly (as), Evans/Kelly (p), Chambers (b), Cobb (d)
Live! At the Village Vanguard (1961)	John Coltrane (ss, ts)
Speak No Evil	Wayne Shorter (as)
Maiden Voyage	Herbie Hancock (p)
A Love Supreme	John Coltrane (ss, ts)

5 ESSENTIAL GYPSY JAZZ ALBUMS

Album Title	Artist(s)
Best of Django Reinhardt	Django Reinhardt (g), Stephane Grapelli (viol.), various others
Gypsy Project	Bireli Lagrene (g), Niculescu (viol.), Galliano (accor.), various others
Djangologists	Stochello and Jimmy Rosenbergs(g), B. Lagrene, others
Hot Club Records: The Best Of	various: Grapelli (viol), Rosenbergs, Debarre, Lagrene, many others
Les Nuits Manouche: The Best...	various: Reinhardt, Schmitt, Niculescu, various others

5 ESSENTIAL LATIN JAZZ ALBUMS

Album Title	Artist(s)
Bossa Nova (aka Getz/Gilberto)	Stan Getz (ts), Jao Gilberto, Astrid Gilberto, various others
King of Kings: The Very Best	Tito Puente (timbales, marimba, etc.), various others
Dizzy's Diamonds, disc 3	Dizzy Gillespie (t), many others
Latin Soul	Poncho Sanchez (v, cnga, perc.), various others
Stone Flower	Jobim (p, g,), Carter (b), Moreira (perc), Green (tb), various others

5 ESSENTIAL PIANO JAZZ ALBUMS

Album Title	Artist(s)
Saturday Night at the Blue Note	Oscar Peterson (p), Ellis (g), Brown (b), Durham (d)
Sahara	McCoy Tyner (p, koto, perc), Fortune (as,ss,flt), Hill (b), Mouzon (d)
Koln Concert	Keith Jarrett (p)
Money Jungle	Duke Ellington (p), Charles Mingus (b), Max Roach (d)
Portrait in Jazz	Bill Evans (p), Lafaro (b), Motian (d),

5 ESSENTIAL JAZZ TRUMPET ALBUMS

Album Title	Artist(s)
Clifford Brown & Max Roach	Clifford Brown (t), Max Roach (d), R Powell (p), Morrow (b), Land (ts)
The Artist Selects	Freddie Hubbard (t), various others
Night in Tunisia: Best of Dizzy	Dizzy Gillespie (t), various others
Afro Cuban	Kenny Dorham (t), Blakey (d), "Pa tato" (cnga), Johnson (tb), others
Milestones	Miles Davis

5 ESSENTIAL JAZZ SAXOPHONE ALBUMS

Album Title	Artist(s)
Saxophone Colossus	Sonny Rollins (ts)
A Love Supreme	John Coltrane
The Essential Charlie Parker	Charlie Parker
Lester Young with The O. P. Trio	Lester Young (ts), Oscar Peterson (p), Kessel (g), Brown (b), Heard (d)
Body and Soul	Coleman Hawkins

5 ESSENTIAL JAZZ GUITAR ALBUMS

Album Title	Artist(s)
Smokin' at the Half Note	Wes Montgomery (g),
Midnight Blue	Kenny Burrell (g), Turrentine (ts), Holley (b), Barretto (cga), English (d)
Best Of	Joe Pass (g), various others
Gravy Waltz	Herb Ellis (g), various others
Charlie Christian: Genius of the Electric Guitar	Charlie Christian (g), Cootie Williams (t), Lester Young (ts), Gene Krupa (d), Benny Goodman (cl), Count Basie (p), many others

IMPROVISE NOW

These recordings are some of the very best teachers you'll have. After you've found a few tunes that speak to you, that you really like, and that you've listened to enough to have a good idea how they go, grab your horn and start playing along! At first this will probably be difficult and a little frustrating (especially with a bebop tune!), but stick with it. It can take quite a while. In *BJT vol 3* I'll introduce you to some tools to make this easier. For now, just have at it! You can also find many transcriptions of these tunes at BasicJazzTheory.com.



ONLY THE BEGINNING

These short lists barely scratch the surface; I've only included tunes or artists that stand out, are classics of the form, or are easy to listen to. In *Basic Jazz Theory volume 2* and *volume 3*, I'll give you even more listening suggestions, including masters burning bright today. Seek out your own favorites using the tools in this chapter! You won't regret it.