

Jazz Clinic
Wallace Roney
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You know the names: Duke, Basie, Satchmo, Dizzy, Charlie Parker, Monk, Bud Powell, Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Herbie Hancock, and Clark Terry. They are some of the great Jazz musicians. More importantly, however, they are geniuses. Their musicianship transcends all styles of music. The fact that they are jazz musicians shows the importance of this music and its greatness.

Jazz is spiritual music and a virtuoso art that was born in America. It is America's only true classical music. It is innovative and vibrant music that has influenced all streams of music from modern, classical, to pop, to R & B, and hip-hop. Where do you think hip-hop got its name? It got it from Be-Bop.

This music was created by Africans and brought to America as a way to overcome strife and oppression. It expressed their feelings of anger, joy, faith, hope, fortitude and love. Of course, its expression of love was and is from the most spiritual form of love to the most sensual form of love.

Jazz borrows and utilizes harmonic sophistication and melodic symmetry from its European classical brethren. The use of melody and its polyphony comes from Jazz's cradle, Africa. The rhythmic foundation that infuses every

aspect of the music, including the melody, is African, as is the tradition of improvising the music.

Jazz traveled from African ritual and traditions across the water and developed in cities like New Orleans, South Carolina, and Tennessee. It traveled up the Mississippi River to places like St Louis, Kansas City, Chicago and, believe it or not, even to places like New York and Washington, D.C.

As Jazz matured so did its sophistication. It became a highly developed music, earning the respect of great classical artists. At some point, it was not uncommon to see great classical musicians like Vladimir Horowitz who came to see the great Art Tatum, or Stravinsky who came to see Duke Ellington, or Leonard Bernstein who came to see Miles Davis.

To really appreciate this music, you need to be able to listen to five parts playing in synchronicity just as you would listen to a Bach fugue. To play Jazz takes great respect for this music and discipline. You must go to school and study your instrument. You must continue your studies through the university level and then seek out master musicians and practitioners of this music to study with them. Learn the finer points from them. All serious musicians must do this. Even Beethoven learned from Mozart.

The traditions of jazz come directly from Africa. As the African master drummer seeks out a protégé worthy to continue his legacy, so it is with the African Griot who passes his stories down for legacy sake. The musicians today are part of that legacy and so are you. You are the new lions of the jazz tradition. Carry on the flame of the jazz Griot. Your job is to help extend the music and insure it is alive and vibrant.

The leader of the group, Wallace Roney, is unique among his peers. He is blessed to have gone through the tradition of being accepted by the Masters. He has played with almost every great jazz musician and innovator of his time. He can claim to have been taught and mentored by the greatest trumpet players in history, Clark Terry, Dizzy Gillespie and Miles Davis.

Wallace met Clark Terry when he was 12 years old, not much younger than many of you. Terry taught him the finer points of playing the trumpet. As a matter of fact, Mr. Terry use to tell him, "I am going to teach you things that a lot of classical teachers only teach to their pride students."

Mr. Terry, one of the greatest trumpet players in the history of jazz, was also Duke Ellington's star trumpet soloist. He was such a phenomenal musician that he could sight-read anything. Clark Terry could play solos with amazing articulation. He was so awesome that when the NAACP demanded that the NBC Orchestra hire a black musician, he was chosen. If he had not been good enough

as NBC had hoped, he would have been their excuse as to why they had never hired a Black before, or why they would ever have to hire one again. Instead, Terry played so well, better than all the musicians there that it led to them slowly hiring more black musicians. He became a star in the NBC Orchestra. The irony of this story is when the music conductor retired, Terry, who was first in line for the position as the new conductor, was stepped over for another trumpet player who was under him. Although he opened the door for many minority musicians, he still couldn't break that racial barrier.

Mr. Roney also learned from someone who is universally considered the greatest trumpet player ever, and Clark Terry's musical brother, the great Dizzy Gillespie. Dizzy was a true innovator in music and of the trumpet. Dizzy was the creator of modern music known as be-bop because of its melodic and rhythmic complexity. Sing pop was Dizzy's approach to playing the trumpet in the highest registrar with dizzying speed and velocity. He could play the most complicated runs effortlessly with fun and joy. Dizzy was the successor to the lineage of the trumpet from Buddy Bolden to King Olivier, to Louis Armstrong and Roy Eldridge. The heir to Dizzy Gillespie was the innovator Miles Davis.

Miles Davis became the most innovative genius of the trumpet. His ability to distill the ideas of Dizzy Gillespie and Clark Terry and play it with a new sophistication was truly innovative. Miles Davis became Mr. Roney's mentor

after hearing him play and noted that he reminded him of himself in his attitude and approach.

Mr. Roney will perform some selections for you.

Jazz is a music of freedom. The rhythms of Jazz and its Polyrhythmic complexity suggests and implies freedom in every way. The rhythms of pop music especially rock, rock n roll, funk, R& B and even hip hop betrays the subliminal message of slavery with its backbeat infused rhythm. The backbeat or the slave beat is a reminder or subliminal suggestion of the slave masters whipping the slave with their whip using a 2 and 4slashing beat to make the captured slave row in unison. Where as jazz is free flowing rhythms abolish those ties. And as Dr. King said so eloquently “Triumphant over Oppression”.

On the Importance of Jazz

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Opening Address to the 1964 Berlin Jazz Festival, WPFW News (Washington), [23 August 2002]

God has wrought many things out of oppression. He has endowed his creatures with the capacity to create—and from this capacity has flowed the sweet songs of sorrow and joy that have allowed man to cope with his environment and many different situations.

Jazz speaks for life. The Blues tell the story of life's difficulties, and if you think for a moment, you will realize that they take the hardest realities of life and put them into music, only to come out with some new hope or sense of triumph.

This is triumphant music.

Modern jazz has continued in this tradition, singing the songs of a more complicated urban existence. When life itself offers no order and meaning, the musician creates an order and meaning from the sounds of the earth which flow through his instrument.

It is no wonder that so much of the search for identity among American Negroes was championed by Jazz musicians. Long before the modern essayists and scholars wrote of racial identity as a problem for a multiracial world, musicians were returning to their roots to affirm that which was stirring within their souls.

Much of the power of our Freedom Movement in the United States has come from this music. It has strengthened us with its sweet rhythms when courage began to fail. It has calmed us with its rich harmonies when spirits were down.

And now, Jazz is exported to the world. For in the particular struggle of the Negro in America there is something akin to the universal struggle of modern man. Everybody has the Blues. Everybody longs for meaning. Everybody needs to love and be loved. Everybody needs to clap hands and be happy. Everybody longs for faith.

In music, especially this broad category called Jazz, there is a stepping stone towards all of these.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Opening Address to the 1964 Berlin Jazz Festival