

## Evolution and Development of Big Bands: 1920-1960

August 3-17, 2020

### **Classes meet 10 times on Zoom:**

Mondays 12:30-1:30 pm EDT

Tuesdays 5:30-6:30 pm EDT

Wednesdays 5:30-7:15 pm EDT

Thursdays 5:30-6:30 pm EDT

Fridays 12:30-1:30 pm EDT

### **Deliverables:**

Confirmed attendance at all sessions (12.5 hours total)

Daily listening journal (see below)

Weekly essays (see below)

### **Monday, August 3**

#### **Class 1: Dance Orchestras of the 1910s**

*James Reese Europe*

*Art Hickman*

We kick off our course by looking at the pre-Jazz dance bands of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and their importance in America's ballroom dance craze.

**Listening Journal:** Listen to Art Hickman's "Whispering." What do you note within it that reminds of Jazz? What does not? Where would you place this in the spectrum of Jazz's history?

### **Tuesday, August 4**

#### **Class 2: Earliest Big Bands**

*Fletcher Henderson*

*Paul Whiteman Orchestra*

By the early 1920s, Jazz musicians begin to find ways to fuse the sounds of Jazz into the larger ensemble size of the dance orchestra. While a number of paths to doing so are found (some more successful than others), we see a perfect template established through the working relationship of bandleader Fletcher Henderson and arranger Don Redman.

**Listening Journal:** Pick any two recordings of the Fletcher Henderson Orchestra from the 1920s and listen to them for their arrangements. How did the arranger (likely Don Redman) make use of the ensemble to maximize textures?

### **Wednesday, August 5**

#### **Class 3: Arrangers and Musical Thumbprints**

*Don Redman/McKinney's Cotton Pickers*

*Jean Goldkette Orchestra*

*Casa Loma Orchestra*

The 1920s into the 1930s show us the importance of arrangers in the big band setting. Arranging decisions, more than soloists, ensured each band's unique musical thumbprint. In our third class, we look at some Jazz Age big bands and explore the impact arrangers had on their sounds.

**Listening Journal:** Pick a recording of the Jean Goldkette Orchestra and compare it to a track of McKinney's Cotton Pickers and/or the Fletcher Henderson Orchestra. Note how the arrangers achieved vastly different visions.

### **Thursday, August 6**

#### **Class 4: Duke Ellington, 1923-1932**

*Duke Ellington*

Duke Ellington, America's most influential composer, first rose as a band leader in the Jazz Age. With an incredible vision for composing and arranging, Ellington would find national acclaim through his late 1920s run at the famed Cotton Club. In this class, we look at some of his earliest masterpieces.

**Listening Journal:** Pick one of Duke Ellington's 1920s works and listen for how he writes to his ensemble's strengths. What do you note?

### **Friday, August 7**

#### **Class 5: Kansas City's Sound**

*Bennie Moten*

*Andy Kirk*

With the ballroom dance craze a national pastime, and with Jazz continuing to rise in prominence, cities throughout the United States became home to big bands, in addition to touring ensembles. One city in particular will have an outsized impact on the development of Swing. We'll look at the early big band sounds of Kansas City in today's class.

**Listening Journal:** Pick any of the recordings of Bennie Moten or of Andy Kirk. How do these recordings compare to the recordings you've heard in the earlier classes?

**Essay:** Write a 2,000-word essay (due August 10) that outlines the rise of dance orchestras, and explains how Jazz musicians fused their styles with Jazz orchestras, citing musical examples covered in class. Outline the role of an arranger.

### **Monday, August 10**

#### **Class 6: Swing Era and Jazz's Popularity**

*Benny Goodman*

*Cab Calloway*

*Artie Shaw*

We mark 1935 as the advent of the Swing Era. Why? What shifted in listeners' priorities? In today's class, we look at the birth of the Swing Era, and listen to key figures of the period.

**Listening Journal:** Compare Benny Goodman's recording of "King Porter Stomp" to Fletcher Henderson's recording of "King Porter Stomp." Outline how they differ.

### **Tuesday, August 11**

#### **Class 7: Evolution of Swing**

*Count Basie Orchestra*

*Jimmie Lunceford Orchestra*

*Chick Webb Orchestra*

While we might talk about "Swing" as a monolithic idea, but bands of this era had uniquely different approaches to swinging. We'll look at Count Basie's iconic "All-American" Rhythm Section, Jimmie Lunceford's singular rhythmic drive, and Chick Webb's iconic ensemble.

**Listening Journal:** Pick a 1930s recording of Count Basie's, Jimmie Lunceford's, or Chick Webb's, and discuss how the band swings.

### **Wednesday, August 12**

#### **Class 8: Late Swing Era**

*Benny Goodman 1940s*

*Blanton-Webster Band*

*Woody Herman Orchestra*

The Swing Era meant ensemble expansions and ambitious new ideas, and bands evolved and changed throughout the decade. We'll look at Duke Ellington's iconic ensemble of the early 1940s (dubbed The Blanton-Webster Band), hear how a change in arrangers altered Benny Goodman's sound, and check out how Woody Herman's Orchestra adapted to a rising new style.

**Listening Journal:** Compare an early 1940s recording of Duke Ellington's to a 1920s record of his. How did his writing and arranging change? How did the band change?

### **Thursday, August 13**

#### **Class 9: BeBop Big Bands and Beyond**

*Billy Eckstine*

*Dizzy Gillespie*

*Gerald Wilson*

*Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Orchestra*

While Big Bands began to decline throughout the 1940s, the final years of Big Bands and the advent of BeBop did overlap with some amazing results. We'll hear the early BeBop big bands of Dizzy Gillespie, and Gerald Wilson, and we'll also check out some later ensembles like the Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Orchestra.

**Listening Journal:** Listen to a recording of the Dizzy Gillespie big band of the 1940s. How do you hear the influence of BeBop in the writing and playing?

### **Friday, August 14**

## **Class 10: Ongoing Experiments**

*Sauter-Finnegan Orchestra*

*Such Sweet Thunder era Ellington*

While we associate big bands with dances, concert music was a crucial component for many big bands. In our final class, we'll check out ambitious suites of Duke Ellington, and hear from intriguing experimental ensembles like the Sauter-Finnegan Orchestra.

**Listening Journal:** Listen to any track from *Such Sweet Thunder*. Discuss it and compare it to earlier Ellington. Discuss what you hear in the context of the decline of big bands as dance orchestras.

**Essay:** Write a 2,000-word essay (due August 17) that explains what happened to big bands in the 1940s, and how that affected big bands from the 1950s onwards.