

Luther Hughes and the Cannonball-Coltrane Project

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JAZZ SLANG AND GLOSSARY

JAZZ SLANG

axe / horn - any instrument

bad - good

blow - playing music

bread - money

cats - musicians (male or female)

changes - chord progression

chops - great technique - brass player's facial muscles

clams - mistakes

cool - Very good, restrained, or sophisticated - known to only a select few

crib / pad - one's residence

cut - to outdo another person or group in battle of bands

dark - closed as in club's off night

dig - understand

drag - having to do with depression (as in "bummer")

gas - good

gig - a paying job

groove - rhythmic style (bossa, swing, etc.)

head - Melody of a song - also a bathroom on a ship :-)

hip (formerly "hep") - clever

jam session - informal playing situation

jammin' - as verb, playing music - as adjective, a compliment about somebody's playing

joint - club

lick - Short melodic phrase

lid - hat

make the scene - attend the event

man - a person

riff - short melodic phrase, usually repeated many times

shout chorus - basically, new melodic material of an exciting nature played just before the return of the melody. Used a lot in big bands.

smokin' / burnin' - used to describe exceptional playing

split - leave

swingin' / groovin' - strong rhythmic feel (makes you pat your foot)

tubs - drums

SAMPLE SENTENCE: Hey man, the cat's are gonna get their axes and blow some hip licks at a jam session. If you want to be cool, you gotta make the scene and don't split. They're gonna be swingin' and groovin'. You dig?

We encourage you to come up with your own sentences using these phrases and send them to us using the contact form on our website.

JAZZ GLOSSARY

bar / measure - a grouping of strong and weak beats ("ONE-two-three-four")

beat - pulse

bebop - fast paced virtuoso style, started in the 40's (think Charlie Parker or Dizzy Gillespie)

blues - generally a 12 bar form - also describes mood (think "Hound Dog" or "Johnny Be Good")

blue notes - notes that give a "blues" song its characteristic sound (a flatted third, fifth and seventh of the chord)

bridge or **release** - section of contrasting musical material in a song

chord - two or more notes sounded together

chord progression - a succession of chords

cool - laid back introspective style, a reaction to bebop (listen to Miles Davis' "Birth of the Cool" album)

comping - pianist or guitarist playing chord changes behind soloist

counterpoint - different melodic phrases played at the same time

form - the structure of a song made up of different sections (example: "I've Got Rhythm" is 32 bars in a AABA pattern)

hard bop - similar to bop, but with more blues flavor (think Art Blakey or Horace Silver)

harmony - the study of chords and their relationship among one another - the third most fundamental musical element

improvisation - series of notes simultaneously composed and performed on the spur of the moment

meter - beats grouped together by accent (think marching "HUP two three four" or waltz "ONE two three")

melody - (also known as tune) the leading part or voice in a harmonic composition - associated with mental emotion, the second most fundamental musical element after rhythm

modal - derived from ancient church scales, playing is based on just a few chords (pioneered by Miles Davis)

pizzicato / arco - sounds produced by jazz bassist: pizzicato is when the notes are plucked with the finger, arco is when the notes are played with the bow

polyrhythm - different rhythm patterns played at the same time

rhythm - distribution of sound over time, and how sounds are accented - the most fundamental musical element.

rhythm section - the heart of the band - in a jazz group, generally consists of piano, bass, drums, but can also include guitar, vibes, or other percussion

scale - a series of notes in half and whole step increments (think "do-re-mi-fa-so-la-ti-do" or "Do-Re-Mi" from the *Sound of Music*)

step - distance between two notes

syncopation - removal of accent where one is expected, or placing an accent where one is unexpected

tag - repeated chord progression, generally the last few bars of a tune

tempo - rate of speed at which the beat passes

vamp - a repeated short chord sequence

walking bass - a "one-two-three-four" pulse played pizzicato on the bass

Now that you've become acquainted with some musical terms and slang, here's a brief description of what goes on in a typical jazz performance: The whole band states the head (or melody) a couple of times, then while the rhythm section continues to provide the accompaniment (chord changes), different players take turns improvising (playing solos over the form of the song), then the whole band plays the head again to finish out the song.

DIG THESE OLD AND NEW MUSICAL TERMS

a humorous addendum provided by singer/actress Susan Krebs

Adagio Frommaggio: To play in a slow and cheesy manner.

Al Dente Con Tableau: In opera, chew the scenery.

Al Dante: A musical composition that is infernally slow.

Antiphonal: Referring to the prohibition of cell phones in the concert hall.

Approximento: A musical entrance that is somewhat close to the correct pitch.

Bar Line: What musicians form after a concert.

Basso Continuo: The act of game fishing after the legal season has ended.

Basso Profundo: An opera about deep sea fishing.

Cacophany: Composition incorporating many people with severe chest colds.

Dill Piccolo: A wind instrument that plays only sour notes.

Flute Flies: Gnat like bugs that bother musicians playing out-of-doors.

Frugalhorn: A sensible, inexpensive brass instrument.

Gaul Blatter: A French horn player.

Kvetchendo: Gradually getting ANNOYINGLY louder.

Opera Buffa: Musical stage production at a nudist's camp.

Pipe Smoker: An extremely virtuosic organist.

Pizzacato: The act of removing anchovies from an Italian dish with short, quick motions and tossing them to a nearby awaiting feline.

Rights of Strings: Manifesto of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Bowed Instruments.

Tempo Tantrum: What a young orchestra is having when it's not keeping time with the conductor.

Toiletto: The effort on the human voice of reverberation in small rooms with ceramic tiles.

Trouble Clef: Any clef one can't read, e.g., the alto clef for piano.