

Jazz Listening Tips

Here are some tips when listening to jazz:

Listen to the syncopation. Syncopation happens when weak beats are accented--played louder--than the strong beats. You hear beats where you don't expect them.

Listen for improvisation. Musicians improvise--or make up--the melody as they play the song. In other words, they invent what they're going to play right when they play it.

Listen for a cadence, which is a repeated rhythmic pattern.

Listen for a countermelody. A countermelody plays along with the original melody, but it's different than the original melody.

Listen for polyphony. Polyphony is when more than one melody is playing at a time. It's like trying to hear two or more conversations at once. It can be very confusing, but lots of fun, too. Dixieland jazz uses lots of polyphony. That means all the members of the band get to play their own melody at the same time!

Listen to the registers of the different instruments. Instruments play higher or lower than one another so they won't get in each other's way. That's register.

Listen for the trombone to slide. We call this tailgating.

Listen for call and response. This is when one instrument plays something, and another instrument answers by playing back. The instruments are talking to each other.

Listen for a riff. A riff is a section of music that repeats.

Listen for a break. This is when the jazz band stops to let someone play a solo, which is playing on your own.

Listen for the groove, which is the coordination of different rhythms. Grooves are always changing.