

## On Developing a Jazz Recordings Collection

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As the proprietor of a recordings store which specializes in jazz and related musics, I'm periodically approached by customers who have a long-standing apprehension about jazz, sometimes bordering on fear. These people often want to know what the fuss is about, perhaps they've heard something they liked (or didn't) and want to explore and conquer this multi-headed monster.

If the customers are librarians, they may feel that the public service that they provide for education, casual interest or entertainment would be enhanced by developing a collection of "suitable" jazz recordings, according to some recognized standard. As a jazz enthusiast (read nut), I can only agree and try to offer some personal reflections.

Let's begin with a working definition: Jazz is a music which has an element of improvisation and which has developed out of what has commonly been accepted as the "Jazz Tradition". Figures as widely respected as Glenn Miller, Anthony Braxton, and Dizzy Gillespie have been accused in their respective times of not playing "jazz". Let's not split hairs, we can simply recognize that jazz is a very large umbrella which continues to grow.

It is interesting and ironic that the history and development of this most ephemeral of musics, "into the air never to be heard again" as Eric Dolphy put it, roughly parallels the development of the recording technology which has transformed it into a commodity. Jazz *is* treated as a product and as such is subject to the vagaries of marketplace and corporate strategies. It's well known that Columbia recorded Duke Ellington in the late 50's and early 60's for the prestige value of his association in spite of

dismal sales. This disdain for the bottom-line is not likely these days.

At the present day, more historical recordings of jazz are in print than ever before. The effect of CD marketing has been to revitalize the recording industry (not just for jazz) by selling peoples' record collections to them again in a new more convenient format. The result is that many companies have discovered that they can make substantial profits by mining their vaults with reissue programs, remastering, bonus tracks, lavish box sets offering the most complete...etc. etc. Giant entertainment corporations (Time/Warner, Sony, and Phillips, for example) have acquired many smaller companies and labels for access to their back catalogues. These comprehensive reissue programs owe more to marketing than philanthropy, but it has provided access to important recordings which have been largely unavailable for many years.

It's not sufficient to look at the major labels to see the whole picture: much of the exciting and controversial developments of jazz are, and have been, documented on smaller international labels such as Hat Art, Soul Note/Black Saint, DIW/Avant, Silkheart, FMP, Tzadik, ECM, Sound Aspects, JSP, and Nine Winds. Many successful contemporary players currently on major labels made their initial recordings on these smaller less-known labels, such as Joe Lovano on Soul Note, Pat Metheny on ECM or David Murray on India Navigation.

Many jazz enthusiasts speculate that the bubble has to "burst" at some point. In 1995 CD sales declined for the first time since their introduction. Indications are that the market for jazz and other music with a mature demographic may be on the wane, at least until the cycle restarts with another "perfect" format.

## Strategies

The most important consideration in developing a jazz recording collection is to *have* a strategy. The strategy may be influenced by clientele, or budget, or current specialization (from a bequest or legacy). It may come from a desire to develop a comprehensive collection representative of all major artists and styles or specialized around theme, personality or genre, e.g. Canadian or Duke Ellington or Third Stream.

My focus is on the development of a representative collection, and I outline some sample strategies to construct a framework from which to begin. I'll finish with some recommendations for resources which I have found useful in developing my own background and collection.

## Sample strategy: Era

This is a thumbnail sketch of the various developments in jazz from the turn of the century to the present day. It is important to realize that jazz, like any art form, does not develop in a vacuum; integral to any complete understanding of jazz is the social milieu in which it has developed: race relations in America, constraints of the recording and broadcast technologies, the marketplace which dictated working conditions and recording opportunities for musicians and so on.

### Pre 1900 - 1917

Early African influences, field hollers, early blues, ragtime, early New Orleans/Creole influence, collective improvisation, Storyville diaspora

### 1918 - 1929

Growth in Chicago, NY, West Coast; early recordings on 78 RPM records with 3 minute limits required tight arrangements, NORKs, development of "regional styles" out of traveling musicians, early big bands, developing into "soloists" art

### 1930s

Growth of radio broadcasts and recordings, strengthened regional styles and "territory" bands: e.g. Benny Moten/Count Basie in Kansas City; many swing and jazz bands for dancing, jazz is the predominant "popular" music

### 1940s

Extended recording ban (because of radio), musicians develop "art" music not for dancing: bebop (complicated, chord-based improvisation, often at very fast tempos), New York's 52 Street is hub of Jazz World, by end of decade most big bands too expensive to be maintained and go into decline, Jazz At The Philharmonic (JATP) tours the world

### 1950s

First LPs - jazz performances and recordings stretch out. Further experiments: Cuban expatriates in New York influence Latin Jazz; some jazz players develop several simplified blues derived styles: Jump blues --> Rhythm n' blues --> Rock n' Roll, Hard Bop, early funk jazz; development of first jazz festivals; strong west coast players; Third Stream attempts to mix jazz improvisation with "classical" composition; jazz organists start some funkier jazz styles in move towards dance music

### 1960s, 1970s

Growth of modal jazz/improvisation (Davis' Kind of Blue); musicians experiment with relaxing constraints moving towards free improvisation; expatriate US musicians in Europe plant seeds for thriving alternative branches of jazz; more cross-fertilization: Soul Jazz, Bossa Nova, Rock-Jazz fusion puts energy into music, growth of funk jazz; rock is predominant popular music

### 1980s, 1990s and beyond

First CD's extensive reissue programs, more use of technology, more cross-influences in jazz: Acid Jazz draws on funk, sampling and hip-hop, World jazz draws on everything from alphorns to gamelans to Moroccan Ganawa to didgeridoo; while music diversifies, big record companies get more conservative - further exploit back catalogue and record many young

players searching for “next big thing”; many interesting new recordings from smaller international labels.

### **Sample strategy: Important Innovators**

These are figures which have played a pivotal and influential role in the development of jazz in their own and following eras. Interestingly, at least two of these figures (Monk & Mingus) have such strong personal styles that they don't fit easily into any of the style categories of the next section.

**Louis Armstrong**

first important jazz soloist, innovations in both playing and singing

**Duke Ellington**

strength of band and compositions in many styles ranging almost 50 years

**Charlie Parker**

prime originator of bebop, gifted soloist

**Miles Davis**

consistently high standards, repeatedly a leader in new directions for music

**Thelonious Monk**

iconoclastic approach to composition and playing style

**Charles Mingus**

iconoclastic approach to composition and playing style, workshop developed many players of high calibre

**John Coltrane**

last of important players from the big band tradition, developed modal and free improvisation in search for spiritual side of jazz

**Ornette Coleman**

iconoclast, strong blues derived playing, experiments in free jazz

### **Sample strategy: Styles**

These are major styles which have developed out of the jazz tradition and a short incomplete list of the important figures associated with each of these styles. Some of these artists (notably Miles Davis) fit into several stylistic categories at various times within their career.

**Pre-Jazz/Blues/Ragtime**

Scott Joplin, Bessie Smith, Robert Johnson, James P. Johnson, Willie “the Lion” Smith, Luckey Roberts

**New Orleans/Dixieland Jazz**

King Oliver, Louis Armstrong, Jelly Roll Morton, Sidney Bechet

**Early Big Band (Sweet bands/Hot-Jungle bands)**

Fletcher Henderson, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Jimmy Lunceford, Benny Carter, Count Basie

**Swing Era**

Benny Goodman, Lionel Hampton, Woody Herman, Artie Shaw, Dorsey Bros., Glenn Miller

**Bebop**

Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis, Bud Powell, Tadd Dameron, Max Roach

**Hard Bop**

Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins, Art Blakey, Clifford Brown, Max Roach, Horace Silver, Sonny Clark, Hank Mobley, Johnny Griffin, Lee Morgan

**Cool Jazz/West Coast/Pacific Jazz**

Paul Desmond, Dave Brubeck, Gerry Mulligan, Chet Baker, Art Pepper, Shelly Manne, Stan Getz

**Modal Jazz**

Miles Davis, Bill Evans, John Coltrane, Keith Jarrett

**“Free” or 60's Avant Garde Jazz**

Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane, Albert Ayler, Archie Shepp, Pharoah Sanders, Cecil Taylor, AACM, Art Ensemble of Chicago, Anthony Braxton, Sun Ra, Sam Rivers

**Latin Jazz**

Tito Puente, Machito, Arturo Sandoval, Dizzy Gillespie, Cal Tjader, Eddie Palmieri

**Fusion (Rock Jazz)**

Miles Davis, Herbie Hancock (Headhunters), Crusaders, Chick Corea (Return to Forever), Weather Report, Blood Ulmer, David Sanborn, John McLaughlin (Mahavishnu Orchestra), Kazumi Watanabe, Brecker Brothers

**Funk/Acid Jazz**

Horace Silver, Jimmy Smith, Big John Patton, Hank Crawford, Ray Charles, Medeski Martin & Wood, James Brown

### Third Stream

Stan Kenton, Modern Jazz Quartet, Duke Ellington, Gunther Schuller, Gil Evans, Ran Blake, George Russell, Vienna Art Orchestra

### World Jazz

Jan Garbarek, Zakir Hussain, Abdullah Ibrahim, Chris McGregor/Brotherhood of Breath, Hermeto Pascoal, Stan Getz, Antonio Carlos Jobim, John McLaughlin/Shakti, Astor Piazzolla, Milton Nascimento, Paul Winter/Oregon

### Contemporary/Later Big Band

Carla Bley, Toshiko Akiyoshi/Lew Tabackin Big Band, Gil Evans, Duke Ellington, Clarke-Boland Band, Maria Schneider

### European Avant-Garde school

Clusone Trio, Willem Breuker (Collectif), Peter Brotzmann, Albert Mangelsdorff, Evan Parker, Barry Guy (LJCO), Misha Mengelberg (ICPO), Alexander von Schlippenbach (GUO), Enrico Rava, Derek Bailey (Company), Steve Lacy

### NY "Downtown" Avant-Garde school/Knitting Factory

John Zorn (Radical Jewish Culture), Jazz Passengers, John Lurie/Lounge Lizards, Mark Feldman, Steve Coleman (MBase), Mark Helias, Dave Douglas

### Neo-traditionalists/Young Lions

Wynton Marsalis, Harper Brothers, Marcus Roberts, Joshua Redman, Teodros Avery, James Carter

### Sample strategy: Instruments

These are innovators on their respective instruments given in roughly chronological order (not in order of importance). There are of course other instruments used in jazz particularly in World Jazz: soprano saxophone, cello, violin, timbales, etc.

### Tenor Saxophone

Coleman Hawkins, Ben Webster, Lester Young, Dexter Gordon, Paul Gonsalves, Sonny Rollins, John Coltrane, Wayne Shorter, Albert Ayler, David Murray

### Alto Saxophone

Johnny Hodges, Benny Carter, Charlie Parker, Cannonball Adderley, Paul Desmond, Art

Pepper, Ornette Coleman, Eric Dolphy, Anthony Braxton, Arthur Blythe, John Zorn  
Trumpet

Louis Armstrong, Bix Beiderbecke, Roy Eldridge, Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis, Clifford Brown, Lee Morgan, Freddie Hubbard  
Trombone

Kid Ory, Jack Teagarden, JJ. Johnson, Curtis Fuller, George Lewis, Albert Mangelsdorff, Ray Anderson

### Piano

Earl Hines, Albert Ammons, Fats Waller, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Art Tatum, Bud Powell, Thelonious Monk, Lennie Tristano, Horace Silver, Bill Evans, McCoy Tyner, Herbie Hancock, Abdullah Ibrahim, Cecil Taylor, Don Pullen, Marilyn Crispell

### Guitar

Eddie Lang, Lonnie Johnson, Charlie Christian, Django Reinhardt, Freddy Green, Wes Montgomery, Grant Green, Joe Pass, Jimi Hendrix, Pat Metheny, John Scofield, Bill Frisell

### Bass

Jimmy Blanton, John Kirby, Charles Mingus, Reggie Workman, Jimmy Garrison, Jaco Pastorius, Dave Holland, Charlie Haden

### Drums

Sid Catlett, Gene Krupa, (Papa) Joe Jones, Max Roach, Philly Joe Jones, Art Blakey, Elvin Jones, Tony Williams, Han Bennink, Joey Baron

### Vocalists

Louis Armstrong, Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan, Billy Eckstine, Nat King Cole, Joe Williams, Eddie Jefferson, Dinah Washington, Lambert Hendricks & Ross, Betty Carter, Cassandra Wilson

### Sample strategy: Samplers & Labels

A good place to start may be with a collection of thematic compilations, each organized around one of the groupings given above. With a little care and good luck, a reasonably small collection can give a representative sample and a good starting point for further development and exploration. However, in these days of

repackage/remaster/remix/remodel, the gems can be hard to find.

An outstanding historical compilation is:

**The Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz**, a 5 CD set which in 94 tracks covers many of the bases touched on in the above strategies.

Compilations of artists associated with a particular label can also be a good starting point. These are some of the more reliable labels which have produced good collections along with their parent company where applicable.

Blue Note, Roulette, United Artists, Pacific Jazz [Capitol]

Original Jazz Classics/OJC, Riverside, Prestige, Milestone, Pablo [Fantasy]

Brunswick, Decca, Impulse, GRP [MCA/Uni]

Verve, Mercury, Emarcy [Polygram]

Bluebird, RCA Victor, ECM [BMG]

Columbia [Sony]

### Print Resources

I have found the following reference works useful as a general survey. I have categorized the following as a biographical reference or historical reference depending on how the information is organized. This is far from a comprehensive list, for example I omit the Leonard Feather *Encyclopedias of Jazz* (which is showing its age) and the many wonderful books on jazz criticism available. One could continue with some of the informative jazz musician biographies and discographies, such as Cuscuna's Blue Note Label Discography or Tom Lord's massive discography.

*Penguin Guide*. Richard Cook & Brian Morton. Biography Reference [Penguin, 3rd Edition 1996].

*Jazz: The Rough Guide*. Ian Carr, Digby Fairweather & Brian Priestley. Biography Reference [Rough Guides 1995].

*Blackwell Guide to Recorded Jazz*. Barry Kernfeld (Ed.). Historical Reference [Blackwell 2nd Edition 1995].

*All Music Guide to Jazz*. Michael Erlewine et al (Ed.). Biography Reference [Miller-Freeman 2nd Edition 1996].

*All Music Guide* Michael Erlewine et al (Ed.). Biography Reference [Miller-Freeman 3rd Edition 1997].

*The 101 Best Jazz Albums - A History of Jazz on Records*. Len Lyons. Historical Reference [Quill 1980, out of print].

*Harmony Illustrated Enc. of Jazz*. Brian Case & Stan Britt. Biography Reference [Harmony 4th Edition 1994].

The periodicals listed here generally provide interesting record reviews and artist profiles. They are listed in decreasing order of importance, *Option* and *Wire* (while interesting for other reasons) have diversified to the point where they only occasionally have content interesting to someone focusing only on jazz.

*Cadence*. The hardcore reference, no fancy layout, just lots of useful information; also a record distributor; Cadence Building, Redwood, NY 13679 Phone: 315-287-2852.

*Coda*. The Canadian connection for Jazz since 1958. Box 1002, Station "O", Toronto Ontario M4A 2N4. Phone: 416-593-7230.

*Downbeat*. Jazz, Blues & Beyond; 64 years and going strong. 102 N. Haven Rd., Elmhurst, Illinois, 60126-3379. Phone: 630-941-3210.

*Jazz Times*. Improved considerably in recent years. 8737 Colesville Road, Fifth Floor, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910-3921. Phone: 800-866-7664.

*Jazziz*. A little on the light side. PO Box 10558, Riverton NJ 08076-0558. Phone: 800-685-7970 (US only).

*The Wire*. Units G & H, 115 Cleveland Street, London W1P 5PN England. Phone: 01-580-7522.

*Option*. 2345 Westwood Blvd. #2, Los Angeles CA 90064. Phone: 310-474-2600.

The internet resources available are still pretty primitive, sadly enough the most useful resource is still the **rec.music.bluenote** usenet Newsgroup although it has suffered a terrible decline in signal to noise ratio in recent years.

There are numerous web sites available containing on-line discographies and label

catalogues but these are not of general usage in this context. The *All Music Guide* does have a searchable website and I plan to install this current article as part of a future Black Swan Records web site.

### Conclusions

One of the attendees of the CAML meeting at which this talk was originally presented (Vancouver, June 1996) noted that the list of important innovators seems to end with Ornette Coleman who made his most significant innovations in the 60s and asked "Is jazz dead?".

Jazz has always been a music of innovation and assimilation, like a tree it is easy to recognize the trunk and branches when it is young, an older tree has many offshoots and influences. The jazz revolution is by no means over, it is just a little harder to recognize.

[An expanded version of a paper given at the CAML Conference in Vancouver, June 1996. The author may be contacted at: Black Swan Records, 3209 West Broadway, Vancouver BC V6K 2H5, or [dadoun@cs.ubc.ca](mailto:dadoun@cs.ubc.ca)]

