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Marcus Printup, jazz trumpet

&

Dizzy Gillespie's Con Alma

Lesson Plan for K9-12: Rhythmic Improvisation

Dizzy Gillespie's *Con Alma*

Warm Up - Terminology

Ostinato: A repeated pattern found within music. This pattern can be a rhythmic pattern or a pitched accompaniment pattern.

Improvisation: Making up or embellishing a musical element on the spot. This can be a melody, harmony, or rhythmic pattern.

Some biographical info...

John Birks "Dizzy" Gillespie (1917-1993) was an American Jazz trumpet player, jazz band leader, composer, and singer. He is credited with pushing the style of bebop jazz into more mainstream and wide acceptance. He was also a huge part of the development of Afro-Cuban jazz. Gillespie was born in South Carolina and attended the Laurinburg Institute in North Carolina for two years before moving to Pennsylvania with his family.



Gillespie spent most of his career as a jazz trumpeter and band leader for several bands, playing with other musicians such as famous jazz musicians John Coltrane and Charlie Parker. Gillespie even performed with Stevie Wonder in the 1980's!

Concepts to Explore

What exactly is Jazz?

Jazz is a style of music where soloists improvise with other musicians. A typical jazz ensemble consists of a melody section, which improvises the melody over the rhythmic section. Trumpets, clarinets, and saxophones usually carry the melody, while the trombone, bass, and drums usually drive the rhythm. Any section can improvise while the other instruments provide harmonic support, though!

Bebop Jazz

Bebop allows musicians to riff more often, allowing for more improvisation. It is usually very fast with quick key changes, but this particular song slows the tempo down and makes it more danceable. Bebop developed out of traditional swing, but because it is typically faster, the biggest complaint was that it was un-danceable. Examples of Bebop jazz can be [found here](#).

Latin Jazz

There are two predominant types of Latin American Jazz - Afro-Cuban Jazz (which typically has lots of ostinato) and the Afro-Brazilian Jazz (includes the samba and bossa nova). Listen to some examples of [Afro-Cuban jazz here](#) and [Afro-Brazilian Jazz here](#).

How are the rhythmic figures different in bebop and Latin jazz? Which of the styles are swung (uneven notes – usually a longer note followed by a shorter) and which of them are played straight (even notes)?



How about harmonically? Do these pieces of music stay in one key for the entire piece, or do they change keys?



Listen to Marcus Printup's performance of Dizzy Gillespie's *Con Alma*. The recording can be found [here](#). This particular piece was featured on Gillespie's 1954 album, titled "Afro". It is a blend of the bebop and Latin styles of jazz.

After listening to some of the different styles of jazz, what did you notice about *Con Alma*? What elements does it incorporate from each of the styles? How are these elements similar and how are they different?

Improvisation

Con Alma is a great piece to explore rhythmic improvisation. Listen to Printup's performance again with the link above!. Find the large beats – is this in 3, in 4, in 6? Once you find the beats, explore clapping or tapping some other rhythms that fit in with the music. There you have it, you've got basic improvisation down!

Create Your Own Rhythm Track

Improvisation means that you're making up a rhythm on the spot, but it doesn't mean that you don't have a plan! Click on the following link to go to a [rhythm generator](#). There are several different types of percussion instrument sounds, so play around with the different rhythms and textures. Play around with the site and see what sorts of rhythms you can come up with that might work with *Con Alma*!