



Louisiana

Thinking about the Picture

1. What instrument is this musician playing?
2. What are some different kinds of music?
3. How is jazz different from other kinds of music?

New Orleans, Cradle of Jazz



Jazz is America's own music. Traditional jazz began in New Orleans, Louisiana, in the late 1800s. Like the city of New Orleans, jazz is a mix of many cultures.

At first, Louisiana was a colony of France. It passed to Spain in 1762, then back to France. In 1803 the United States bought the Louisiana Territory. New Orleans was a colorful mix of cultures—Creole, African, West Indian. Creoles were the descendants of French and Spanish settlers. The city had thousands of enslaved African Americans. Their ancestors came from West Africa. There were also many free “persons of color.” Some were blacks from the West Indies. Others were of mixed ancestry. The traditions of all these people influenced jazz.

In New Orleans, slaves were allowed to get together in public. They played West African music and sang work songs and “spirituals.” Later, the black community built a tradition of band music for funerals and parades. On the way to funerals, the music was slow and sad. On the way back, they played lively songs. In the late 1890s, white people hired black marching bands for their celebrations. Two other new musical styles also influenced jazz. One was “ragtime.” The other was the blues.

By 1900, black New Orleans musicians were playing “traditional” jazz in the dance halls of Storyville. The city produced many great jazz musicians. One was Louis Armstrong, a trumpet player with a hoarse singing voice. Another was a pianist, Jelly Roll Morton. Whites soon learned this new music. In 1917, white musicians from New Orleans formed the “Original Dixieland Jazz Band.” They made the first jazz recording.

In 1968, New Orleans held its first Jazz and Heritage Festival. Today jazz lovers from around the world travel to New Orleans to enjoy this unique American style.

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