

# Defining Jazz...

Constructed by Ole Izzard Høyer

Copyright 2010 Ole Izzard Høyer

# What defines jazz?

Music?

Kenny G.?

Swing?

**Art?**

Culture?

People?

Sound?

Tradition?

*Improvisation?*

“...Ellington’s music is jazz”

( 1933 )

Wilder Hobson in Fortune

“...Rhythm is the first thing you associate with the word “jazz”.”

Leonard Bernstein in “the World of Jazz”( 1955 )

“Attempts at a concise – even a coherent definition of jazz have invariably failed”.

Dictionary of  
( 1980 )

Max Harrison in The New Grove  
Music and Musicians

# **“Three Approaches to Defining Jazz”**

Mark Gridley, Robert Maxham and Robert Hoff, (1989),

The Strict Definition

A “Family Resemblances” Approach

Approaching Jazz As A Dimension

# Framing A Strict Definition (Gridley)

“...requires a performance to be improvised and to swing in the jazz sense.”

“the quality and extent of swing feeling is frequently the topic of discussion among listeners who are describing a jazz performance.”

“a musician’s playing needs to elicit swing feeling from his listeners in order to qualify the player as a jazz musician.”

# A “Family Resemblances” Approach

“there may be no hidden unity in the diverse forms called “jazz”.”

“some words simply resist strict definition, and we must content ourselves with observing their use instead of trying to frame definitions”.

“no SINGLE element is necessary and no SINGLE element is sufficient.”

# Approaching Jazz As A Dimension

“those elements that have been previously associated with jazz, the more that are present, and the more clearly they can be heard, the more a particular performance qualifies as a jazz performance...jazz is not an all-or-none event, but is instead a continuum, a dimension: jazzness”.

# Three steps of definition

1. taking each element that has, in the past, been associated with jazz, and accepting it as a dimension of its own.
2. then weighing the relative representation of each element and
3. taking the number of elements together as the aggregate stimulus leading to a listener's decision of whether to call a given performance jazz.

# An important point

“Any attempt to define jazz requires reference to elements which themselves require definition.”

# All About Jazz

**What is jazz?:** “Those three words form one of the toughest questions in music...the music that falls into the jazz idiom takes on infinite faces and influences...”

musician)

Alan Lawrence (Drummer, freelance

**Language and a Voice for the 21 Century:** “Jazz is not just the music, it is a way of life. Everybody feels it...Jazz offers a universal way of communicating with other people”

Composer)

Misha V. Stefanuk (Pianist, TV and Film

# All About Jazz

**Thinking Outside The Musical Box:** “Improvisation is definitely an essential element. Remove creative improvisation and we don’t have jazz.”

Donald Fox (Pianist, Composer)

**What is Jazz? Good question:** “According to Wynton Marsalis jazz is music that swings. According to Pat Metheny jazz is not the music of Kenny G...each of us is left with our own purely subjective views on jazz.”

“My guess is that, if asked, even musicians – the men and women who are currently dedicating their life to creating this music – would likely disagree on the meaning of jazz.”

Jason West (Freelance writer and jazz

# The Cambridge Companion

“...the term is routinely applied to musics that have as little in common as an improvisation by Marylyn Crispell and a 1923 recording by King Oliver and his Creole Jazz Band...If today we call something jazz, it has much more to do with the utterances of critics, journalists, record companies and club owners than with the music itself”.

Krin Gabbard,, Cambridge University

Pres (2002)

“For ultimately music doesn’t have meaning, people do. There is no essential, foundational way to ground musical meaning beyond the flux of social existence”.

Power,  
Metal Music  
1993 )

Rober Walser Running with the Devil –  
Gender, and Madness in Heavy  
( Wesleyan University Press,

# The **Social Constructionist's** Approach to Jazz (in the

# The **Social Constructionist's** Approach to Jazz (in the

What defines jazz?

# The **Social Constructionist's** Approach to Jazz (in the

What defines jazz?

The **performed** and the **performer**

# The **Social Constructionist's** Approach to Jazz (in the

What defines jazz?

The **performed** and the **performer**

The **music** and the **musician**

# The **Social Constructionist's** Approach to Jazz (in the

What defines jazz?

The **performed** and the **performer**

The **music** and the **musician**

The **art** and the **artist**

# Hypothesis

**Jazz cannot be defined** just as music nor beyond social context.