

## Bop [bebop, rebop]

Scott DeVeaux

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One of the main styles of jazz, generally considered to be the foundation for modern jazz. It was developed in the early to mid-1940s by musicians such as Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, and Bud Powell. By the mid-1950s, it was used more generally to describe the musical language underlying various substyles, such as Cool jazz, Hard bop, Soul jazz, and Postbop.

The word “bop” derives from the syllables “re-bop” or “be-bop,” an onomatopoeic reference to a two-note rhythm created by the alternation of snare drum and bass drum accents found in the drumming of Kenny Clarke (immortalized in his nickname “Klook-mop”). While the syllables had long been commonly used in scat singing, their specific connection to bop emerged in 1944 with Gillespie’s composition *Be-bop* (first recorded in 1945). Critics such as Leonard Feather, who chronicled the style for the jazz press, found the term a convenient way to refer to new jazz styles.

Bebop’s first innovations began with the rhythm section. Before bebop, the large swing orchestras relied on the piano, acoustic guitar, bass, and drums playing in tandem to create a solid, danceable four-beat rhythmic foundation. In the late 1930s, Clarke developed a new style of drumming that shifted time-keeping from the bass drum to the ride cymbal. The drummer’s other hand and feet were now free to interact with the rest of the ensemble through spontaneous accents (“dropping bombs”) on the snare drum, bass drum, or tom-toms. While such playing was discouraged on the bandstand by swing bandleaders, it was admired and widely imitated at Minton’s Playhouse, where Clarke was hired in 1940, and in after-hours clubs such as Monroe’s Uptown House that featured jam sessions. Younger, more progressive soloists tested their skills improvising alongside the polyrhythmic drummers, as one can hear on a recording from Minton’s in 1941 that pairs Clarke with the electric guitarist Charlie Christian. By the time bebop emerged publically in the mid-1940s, timekeeping was pared down to the drummer’s steady ride-cymbal pattern and the four-beat walking bass line of the string bass. Pianists learned to add their own rhythmic layer by playing their accompanying chords in a rhythmically unpredictable manner, or comping.

Bop built upon and extended the chromatic harmony of the more progressive artists of swing. Throughout the 1930s and 40s, composers and pianists used increasingly complex chords, featuring chromatically altered extensions such as 9ths and 13ths. Improvisers worked with this harmonic landscape, often adding new chords to the original progression. Perhaps the most popular chromatic alteration was the tritone substitution, which replaced the root of a dominant chord with a root a tritone away, for example, substituting a D7 for an A $\flat$ 7, as Coleman Hawkins had done on “Body and Soul” (1939, B $\flat$ ). Other substitutions increased the harmonic rhythm by adding chromatic passing chords. Through jam sessions, which placed improvisers with unfamiliar rhythm sections and challenged them with harmonic obstacles, this more flexible approach to chromaticism spread through the jazz community. In this way, both rhythm sections and improvisers became comfortable playing fluently with the new chords.

For soloists, bop demanded a startling leap in technical virtuosity. Throughout the swing era, gifted young musicians competing for positions in the top big bands set higher and higher standards for range, speed, and the ability to improvise over complex chord progressions. In the front of the pack were Parker and Gillespie, each of whom had independently developed an intricate method of improvising before meeting one another in 1942. Gillespie, who had been prominently featured with national big bands since 1937 including a lengthy stint with Cab Calloway, had learned to play elaborate 16th-note runs in the trumpet's highest register. Parker fused his equally complex rhythms with a bluesy sensibility honed in his hometown of Kansas City.

Even as Parker and Gillespie pursued their careers as big-band soloists (they performed together in Earl Hines's band in 1942 and Billy Eckstine's band in 1944), broader social and economic factors pushed the music toward the small-combo format. One was racial segregation. Throughout the 1930s and 40s, African American swing musicians endured Jim Crow segregation while touring throughout the South. In the North the bands that employed them were barred from commercially sponsored radio programs as well as engagements as house bands in major New York hotels (which offered free broadcasting as well as an opportunity to rest from touring). Another factor was a growth in the audience for small-combo jazz, including jam sessions. Under pressure from the musicians' union, which refused to tolerate unpaid performances by its members, these small-group performances became an alternative source for income for the most gifted musicians. While many, especially Gillespie, pushed to adapt the idiom to large jazz orchestras, bop ultimately became known as a small group style.

The first engagements by bop bands began in late 1944 in clubs on New York's 52nd Street, with recordings following in 1945 by small companies including Savoy, Guild, Manor, and Dial. The repertory of these bands was based on the blues as well as popular songs favored in jam sessions. Rejecting the melody and lyrics, which were protected by copyright, musicians composed new melodies on these familiar chord progressions, startling audiences with their intricate rhythms, pungent dissonance, and off-putting titles such as "Anthropology," "Salt Peanuts," and "Ko-Ko".

Bebop reached a peak in popularity from 1947 to 1949. During those years Gillespie and Parker were featured at Carnegie Hall, and new nightclubs in New York such as Bop City and Birdland cited the music in their names. This brief flurry did little to sustain bebop commercially, but the new style steadily gained ground among young musicians as diverse as Max Roach, Miles Davis, Dexter Gordon, Fats Navarro, Tadd Dameron, J.J. Johnson, Sonny Stitt, Jackie McLean, Sonny Rollins, Stan Getz, Art Blakey, and Gerry Mulligan. The rapid acceptance of bebop as the basic style by an entire generation of musicians helped pull jazz away from its previous reliance on contemporary popular song, dance music, and entertainment and toward a new sense of the music as an autonomous art.

As the novelty of bebop faded, its fundamental principles became the foundation for later jazz styles. The experimentalism of cool jazz moved well beyond bebop in areas such as instrumentation, meter, and form, while softening the music's impact through less interactive rhythm sections. By contrast hard bop insisted on retaining bebop's jam-session instrumental format, as well as its repertory of blues and pop-song forms. Bebop retreated from the vanguard in the 1960s when increasingly chromatic harmonies weakened

or dissolved the tonal framework and the widespread use of modal improvisation directly attacked the harmonic foundation. Yet bebop has retained a central position in jazz education, where mastery of its core repertory has often been seen as a minimum standard of competence.

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