Towards the jazz avant-garde:

Contexts and directions

Bebop

- Name comes from nonsense syllables used in scat-singing
- Style of instrumental jazz prevalent c. 1945-1960
- Role of jazz musician as serious musician (no longer the entertainer)
- Smaller ensembles more common: rhythm section of bass, drums and piano, plus trumpet and saxophone

(as opposed to swing orchestras of 14+ musicians)

- Stylistic changes: no longer dance music (as in swing era)!
 Music for attentive listening
- Musicians: Charlie Parker (the Bird), Thelonious Monk, Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Dizzy Gillespie

 Listen: Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, 'Ornithology' https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8-U9XsYqRwY

Charlie Parker, 'Koko'

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=okrNwE6GI70

Charlie Parker, 'Confirmation' https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zV6y1f7CU-A

Thelonious Monk, 'Round Midnight'
 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKayR1oqC7w

Bebop characteristics

- Fast, complex chord changes,
- dazzling fast melodies with assymetrical phrasings
- Form: typically a 'head' (the statement of the song) followed by improvisation
- improvisations based on harmonic structure
- virtuosic solos

Bebop's discontents

- Based on harmonic structures, bebop is quite formulaic
- Musicians wanted to explore other musical approaches with greater freedom.

Towards a freer jazz

- 1959 a big year in jazz
- Miles Davis, A Kind of Blue
 - Modal jazz, e.g. 'So What' https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qNcPwrfK9tY
- Ornette Coleman, The Shape of Jazz to Come
 - No piano or guitar
 - Abandons use of chord structures
 - E.g. 'Lonely Woman'

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OIIyCOAByDU

Other notable albums of 1959:

Charlie Mingus, Ah Uhm (reimagination of big band recalling Dixieland heterophony, freer roles of band members than fixed arrangements of swing era big bands)

John Coltrane's Giant Steps (recorded in 1959, released in 1960. Introduces Coltrane changes – harmonic progressions based on relationships of intervals of a third – and 'sheets of sound')

The jazz avant-garde: approaches

By moving away from traditional sixteen- and thirty-two-bar song structures, standard chord progressions, and the general rules of tonal harmonic practice, they [the jazz avant-garde] opened up new possibilities for improvisation by drawing on non-Western music; experimenting with tonality, flexible parameters, and variable rhythms; and developing forms of collective improvisation based on linear rather than harmonic qualities. The music may or may not have a tonal center; it may have a fixed pulse or some recurring rhythmic pattern, or the music may be suspended "out of time"; and there may be composed themes or pre- arranged rules for improvisation. In other words, free jazz is hardly chaos, and it certainly is not uniform.

Robin D.G. Kelley, 'New Monastery: Monk and the Jazz Avant-Garde', *Black Music Research Journal*, 19(2), 137.

The jazz as (perpetual) avant-garde

Rather than view the avant-garde as a specific era in jazz history, authors like Robin D.G. Kelley and Salim Washington has argued that jazz is in a perpetual state of avant-garde:

'Jazz at its best has always been a perpetual avant-garde movement in at least two ways. Jazz musicians have conducted a continuous search for expansion of the formal parameters available for artistic expression and have often related these breakthroughs in "structures of feeling" to a simultaneous yearning for progress in the concomitant social arrangements of its society.'

Salim Washington, Uptown Conversation, 28.

The avant-garde's second other: commercial popular music

From rhythm and blues to rock 'n' roll

For an early history of commercialization and popularization of rhythm and blues: watch documentary on Chess Records:

Part 1

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFbny5oToD4

Part II

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v79YtTYRbKs

Part III

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QfK6kWYJmUE

Part IV

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FuV5_9G3Fcc

Muddy Waters, 'I can't be satisfied' https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vTgwDknZlkA

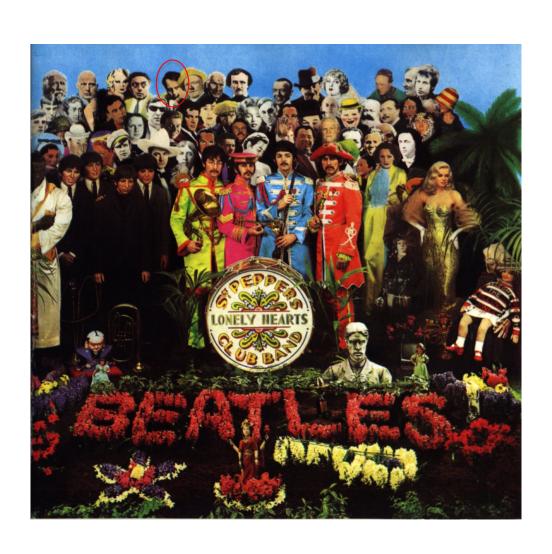
Chuck Berry, 'Roll over Beethoven' (1956)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EOrMg3pY7hw

Elvis Presley, 'Hound Dog' (1956) – a cover of Willie Mae "Big Mama" Thornton's 1952 hit:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lzQ8GDBA8I

Elvis Presley, 'Jailhouse Rock' (1957)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gj0Rz-uP4Mk

The Beatles' Stockhausen tribute



Stockhausen, Gesang der Jünglingen (1956)
 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y1Psx24n3r
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The Beatles, 'Tomorrow Never Knows' from *Revolver* (1966)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Z9cnZkq
WvU