

Hard bop

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A term applied to the earthier music that developed from bebop in the 1950s. Although not a precisely delineated genre, the music is characterized by an elemental, driving urgency inherited from blues, gospel, and rhythm and blues, combined with the harmonic and rhythmic complexity of bebop.

Its practitioners were largely African American, and it thrived in the urban and industrial centers of New York, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Detroit, and Philadelphia. Initially it formed an integrated part of the culture, heard on juke boxes and in clubs as part of the popular music of the day. It is sometimes described as a reaction to cool or West Coast jazz, but is more accurately seen as a parallel development from common roots.

Hard bop had a heavier, earthier feel than bebop and generally relied on a fairly rigid theme-solos-theme structure and a close adherence to the underlying chord progressions in creating melodic improvisations. The standard instrumentation featured trumpet, tenor saxophone, and a piano-led rhythm trio, although larger line-ups often added trombone or guitar, and the related soul-jazz phenomenon centered on a trio format of Hammond organ, guitar, and drums.

Hard bop made less use of standard show tunes than earlier genres had done. Many compositions still employed a notable degree of complexity, often drawing on nonstandard forms and fast-moving chord progressions, but the music was most widely known for its march- and blues-based tunes, which featured simpler harmonic structures, repetitive ear-catching themes, and little in the way of developed ensemble writing. Many became popular hits, notably Horace Silver's "The Preacher" (1955, Blue Note), Nat Adderley's "Work Song" (1960, Riverside), Bobby Timmons's "Moanin'" (1958, Blue Note) and "Dis Here" (1959, Riverside), Benny Golson's "Blues March" (1958, Blue Note), and Herbie Hancock's "Watermelon Man" (1962, Blue Note).

Perhaps the most fundamental constituent of hard bop lay in the more nebulous area of "feel." That reliance on the primal sounds and tonalities of blues, rhythm and blues, folk, and gospel idioms created an emphasis that generated the soulful and funky characteristics associated with the form.

Hard bop's central practitioners included Art Blakey, Silver, Cannonball and Nat Adderley, the Heath Brothers, the Jones Brothers, the trumpeters Lee Morgan and Kenny Dorham, the saxophonists Hank Mobley, Jackie McLean, and Lou Donaldson, the pianists Sonny Clark and Bobby Timmons, the guitarists Kenny Burrell, Grant Green, and Wes Montgomery, and the organ players Jimmy Smith, Richard Holmes, and Les McCann. Some of the work of John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins, and the Max Roach-Clifford Brown group can also be described as hard bop.

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