

IMMERSED

IN JAZZ HISTORY

An Interactive Virtual Jazz History Unit With Ken Burns' Jazz Series

Presented by Elliot Polot at the California All-State Music Education Conference (CASMEC)
Saturday, February 20, 2021 | 10:00 AM

Why watch Ken Burns' Jazz in class?

- Distance learning friendly
- An engaging, memorable way to learn jazz history
- Great opportunities for social-emotional learning (SEL)
- Important conversations about race, gender, and politics
- Builds improvisation skills and style through the transcription process
- Students return to big band and combo music with a newfound appreciation and understanding

How to view the series:

- <https://www.pbs.org/show/jazz/>
- PBS requires a minimum \$60 donation to access the show
- Also available on DVD and from the iTunes Store

Transcription Assignments:

- Transcription assignments are a fun, engaging way for students to “immerse” themselves in each episode. Best of all, they help students become stronger players!
- Below are the guidelines we have used in our class. Feel free to structure your assignments however you like.
- One solo or head transcription \geq 30 seconds per episode (more than one is ok/encouraged)
- Students have the option of playing the material on their instrument AND/OR doing a written transcription
- Should be from the period covered in the episode, preferably from an artist mentioned in the show
- Students should choose material that challenges them
- Students play along with the reference recording, but should be significantly louder so they don't blend in

Transcription presentation process:

- Create or have a student create a Google Slide deck for each episode. ([Click here for an example.](#))
- Prior to the start of the presentation, students embed or link the reference recording, as well as their performance video and/or written transcription in their individual slide.
- During the presentation, you (or a trustworthy student) screen shares the slide deck and goes through each slide
- First, play the reference recording and follow along in the written transcription (if applicable). Then play the student's performance video.
- Give feedback verbally, via chat, in the grade book, or allow peer review

Artist journals:

- Artist journals are a way for students to keep track of the many artists featured in the show, and also hold students accountable for their learning in a fun way. In theory, the students keep their artist journals after the unit ends and continue adding to them for life as they learn about new artists.
- Below are the guidelines we have used in our class. Feel free to structure your assignments however you like.
- Each student creates a Google Doc with a title page. Each page is an artist “entry.”
- Each entry has the name, birth/death dates, salient biographical information, the musical era, famous works, influences, legacy, and any additional information of an artist featured in the corresponding episode.
- Minimum of five (5) entries per episode.
- [Click here for a sample artist journal.](#)

Quizzes and/or discussions:

- Discussions have worked better for my class
- [Click here for a sample quiz of episode 1.](#) (Please make a copy before editing/sharing)

Tech considerations:

- PBS allows screen sharing over Zoom ✓
- Amazon Prime blocks screen sharing over Zoom, so it will not work ✗
- Consider having a second computer, monitor or tablet nearby so you can work while streaming, since you will be sharing your full screen for the entire class period. Alternatively, you can have a trustworthy student screen share the episode for you.

Show considerations:

- The show does not go in great depth on the topics of free jazz, fusion, hip-hop and other developments. Moreover, because it aired in 2001, the history stops there. Consider supplementing the show with further recordings, videos, and readings so the narrative continues to the present day.
- The show pays inadequate attention to **WOMEN** in jazz. Our class took a break halfway through the series to do a Women In Jazz unit. Students chose a prominent woman jazz musician ([here is a sample list](#)) and did a standard transcription presentation based on their chosen artist. Consider doing the same.
- The show has explicit language and graphic imagery at times. Some of the racial hate crime imagery (i.e. lynchings) is particularly disturbing. Racial slurs are used at times. Consider checking with your principal and students’ parents before proceeding.

Sample two-week outline (If you want to watch Ken Burns only)

- I’ve found that with class announcements, etc., it takes 3 block class periods to watch one episode.
- Week 1: Monday- Start episode (1/3) | Thursday- Continue episode (2/3)
- Week 2: Monday- Finish Episode (3/3) and hold discussion | Thursday- Transcription presentations

Sample four-week outline (If you want to watch Ken Burns AND hold rehearsal)

- I’ve found that with class announcements, etc., it takes 3 block class periods to watch one episode.
- Week 1: Monday- Rehearsal | Thursday- Start episode (1/3)
- Week 2: Monday- Rehearsal | Thursday- Continue episode (2/3)
- Week 3: Monday- Rehearsal | Thursday- Finish episode (3/3) and hold discussion
- Week 4: Monday- Transcription presentations | Thursday- Rehearsal

Episodes:

1. **Gumbo** (1:21:48)

1. -1917
2. Themes: Blues, Louisiana Creole music, minstrel shows, New Orleans jazz, Original Dixieland Jass Band, ragtime.
3. Features: Sidney Bechet, Buddy Bolden, Freddie Keppard, Jelly Roll Morton, James Reese Europe, Nick LaRocca.

2. **The Gift** (1:48:52)

1. 1917–1924
2. Themes: Chicago jazz, Harlem Renaissance, New Orleans jazz, World War I
3. Features: Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, James Reese Europe, Fletcher Henderson, James P. Johnson, King Oliver, Willie Smith, Paul Whiteman

3. **Our Language** (1:46:40)

1. 1924-1928
2. Themes: Cotton Club, Harlem Renaissance, Savoy Ballroom
3. Features: Louis Armstrong, Sidney Bechet, Bix Beiderbecke, Duke Ellington, Benny Goodman, Earl Hines, Artie Shaw, Bessie Smith, Ethel Waters

4. **The True Welcome** (1:58:57)

1. 1929-1935
2. Themes: Great Depression, Lindy hop, swing music
3. Features: Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Benny Goodman, John Hammond, Fletcher Henderson, Billy Rose, Art Tatum, Fats Waller, Chick Webb

5. **Swing: Pure Pleasure** (1:28:38)

1. 1935–1937
2. Themes: Discrimination in public accommodations, Great Depression, Savoy Ballroom, swing music
3. Features: Louis Armstrong, Tommy Dorsey, Duke Ellington, Benny Goodman, Billie Holiday, Jimmie Lunceford, Glenn Miller, Artie Shaw, Chick Webb, Teddy Wilson

6. **Swing: The Velocity of Celebration** (1:39:45)

1. 1937-1939
2. Themes: Great Depression, Kansas City jazz, swing music
3. Features: Count Basie, Harry Edison, Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, Benny Goodman, Coleman Hawkins, Billie Holiday, Jo Jones, Chick Webb, Mary Lou Williams, Lester Young

7. **Dedicated To Chaos** (1:53:09)

1. 1940-1945
2. Themes: Bebop, racism, swing music, World War II
3. Features: Dave Brubeck, Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie, Billie Holiday, Glenn Miller, Charlie Parker, Django Reinhardt, Artie Shaw, Billy Strayhorn, Ben Webster

8. **Risk** (1:58:35)

1. 1945-1956
2. Themes: Bebop, drug abuse, West Coast jazz

3. Features: Louis Armstrong, Dave Brubeck, Miles Davis, Paul Desmond, Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, Dizzy Gillespie, Norman Granz, Billie Holiday, John Lewis, Thelonious Monk, Gerry Mulligan, Charlie Parker

9. The Adventure (1:54:32)

1. 1956-1961
2. Avant-garde jazz, free jazz
3. Louis Armstrong, Art Blakey, Clifford Brown, Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Duke Ellington, Billie Holiday, Sonny Rollins, Sarah Vaughan

10. A Masterpiece by Midnight (1:48:32)

1. 1961-2001
2. Bossa nova, civil rights movement, jazz fusion, jazz revival
3. Louis Armstrong, John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Duke Ellington, Stan Getz, Dexter Gordon, Wynton Marsalis, Charles Mingus, Max Roach, Archie Shepp, Cecil Taylor

Questions? Don't hesitate to ask!

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