

Jazz Terms & Lingo

A Section: The first section of a tune, typically 8 bars; the main theme.

AABA: the most common form in pop music.

Axe: one's instrument. Even said of the voice.

B Section: Same as *bridge*.

Back-beat: Beats 2 and 4 in 4/4 time, particularly when they are strongly accented. A term more used in rock 'n roll.

Ballad: a slow tune.

Blow: the usual term for 'improvise'. Also, simply to play an instrument.

Blues: (1) A *form* normally consisting of 12 bars, staying in one key (2) A melodic *style*, with typical associated harmonies, using certain 'blues scales' & riffs (3) A musical *genre*, ancestral to jazz and part of it. (4) A *feeling* that is said to inform all of jazz.

Bridge: The contrasting middle section of a tune, especially the 'B' section of an AABA song form. Traditionally, the bridge goes into a different key, often a remote key. Thelonious Monk once remarked that the function of a bridge is 'to make the outside sound good'.

Changes: (1) The chords of a tune. 'Playing' or 'running' the changes means using suitable scales, etc., over each given chord of the tune. Determining the exact changes to use is a big part of preparing a tune for performance. (2) *Rhythm Changes* (q.v.) for short.

Chops: technical ability, to execute music physically and to negotiate chord changes. Distinct from the capacity to have good ideas, to phrase effectively and build a solo.

Chorus: One complete cycle of a tune, one time through from top to bottom.

Double time: A tempo twice as fast, with the time feel, bar lines and chords moving at twice the speed.

Double time feel: A time feel twice as fast, so that written eighth notes now sound like quarter notes, while the chords continue at the same speed as before.

Fake Book: a collection of jazz charts, published without paying royalties and thus illegal. In the 70s the "Real Book" appeared, out of the Berklee School of Music, with some 400 tunes in excellent calligraphy. This has become the standard and all jazz musicians are still expected to have a copy. Other "fake books" are a series called 'Spaces', and the 'Real Book Vol. II'. In recent years a large number of *legal* fake books have been published. They have much higher standards of accuracy but usually don't have as many tunes.

Groove: an infectious feeling of rightness in the rhythm, of being perfectly centered. This is a difficult term to define. A *Medium Groove* is a tempo of, say, 112, with a slinky or funky feeling.

Half time: a tempo half as fast.

Half time feel: a time feel half as fast, while the chords go by in the same amount of time.

Head: The first chorus of a tune, in which the song or melody is stated without improvisation or with minimal improvisation.

Improvisation (improv): the process of spontaneously creating fresh melodies over the continuously repeating cycle of chord changes of a tune. The improviser may depend on the contours of the original tune, or solely on the possibilities of the chords' harmonies

Intro: Introduction. A composed section at the beginning of a tune, heard only once.

Lay out: Do not play

Legit: the jazz musician's term for music, or styles, that are not jazz (usually referring to classical)

Modulation: The establishment of a new key. This is mainly a matter of harmonic progression, but expectation, emphasis and phrasing also enter into determining whether a new key has really been established. In standards, a modulation to the beginning of the bridge is strongly expected.

Monster: a superior player.

Out: the last chorus of a tune, when the head is played for the last time. On the stand the gesture of a raised clenched fist or a finger pointing to the head indicates that the out chorus is coming up.

Pentatonic: Pertaining to scales of 5 notes to the octave, in particular 1-2-3-5-6 of the major scale. Pentatonic melodies are typical of much indigenous music around the world, and these scales are also an important part of the modern jazz sound.

Pickup: a phrase beginning that comes *before* the beginning of the first bar. A pickup can be one note or a longer phrase.

Pocket: *in the pocket* means perfectly in time, especially bass playing that is 'in the center' of the beat (rather than slightly leading or dragging the beat).

Riff: A relatively simple, catchy repeated phrase. May be played behind a soloist or as part of a head, often in a bluesy style. *Riff tunes* are made up of riffs, characteristic of the black bands of the 30s.

Shout chorus: the section usually played strong and loud by the full ensemble. It is usually played near the end of the piece, just before the final out-chorus. Used in classic (20s) jazz, some bebop, and a few modern compositions,

Solo: any one player's improvisation over one or more choruses of the tune (occasionally, especially in ballads, less than one chorus). A sharp distinction is made between soloing, and playing the head.

Standard: A tune universally accepted and played by many jazz musicians. Many standards are tin pan alley and Broadway songs from the 30s, 40s and 50s. Others are strictly jazz compositions by such as Thelonius Monk, Charlie Parker, John Coltrane and Miles Davis which have become

accepted as standards (these are called jazz standards). A professional jazz musician is expected to know many, many standards.

Swing: (1) The style of the 30s, when the big band was the dominant form of jazz. (2) A rhythmic manner, unique to jazz, in which the first of a pair of written 8th notes is played longer than the second, even twice as long, while the second tends to receive a slight accent (The degree of this effect depends on the overall tempo, and is modified by the requirements of expression and phrasing.) (3) As a direction in a chart, played with a swing feel, as opposed to latin. (4) A mysterious, unexplainable quality in any music

Top: The beginning point of each chorus, the first beat of the first measure.

Trading 4s (or 8s, 2s): A form of discontinuous soloing in which two different instrumental soloists can trade 4s with each other, such as the trumpet and the sax. This is called a *chase*. Trading 4s usually goes on for one or two choruses.

Turnaround: A sequence of chords, or the portion of a tune that they occupy, that forms a cadence at the end of a section of a tune, definitively establishes the key and leads back to the opening chord of the next section, or to the top. Typically the turnaround chords are I - VI - II - V, with half a measure apiece.

Up: in a fast tempo.

Vamp: a simple section like a riff, designed to be repeated as often as necessary, especially one at the beginning of a tune. Also a constantly repeated bass line over which a solo is played.

Walk: in bass playing, to play mostly one note per beat, making a smooth, continuous quarter-note line. A fulfillment of the time-keeping function of bass playing, which many bass players have transcended since around 1960. The pianist can also walk with his left hand.

Woodshed: to practice diligently. Also 'shed'.

X: 'time'. Thus '4X' on a chart means '[play] four times'.