

Experts and aficionados argue about when jazz began, but apparently it appeared in the southern United States in the late 19th century and first sprang into notice in the vicinity of New Orleans at the turn of the 20th century, spreading rapidly along the Mississippi River, north to Chicago and fanning out quickly.

As a musical style, jazz owes its origins to the social milieu of the American South with its black fraternal organizations, public band concerts, minstrel shows, red light bistros and Gospel churches. It gathered into itself the rhythms of West African drumming, European functional harmony, Gospel singing, and a blues scale whose origin has not yet been convincingly traced. The principal developers and disseminators were African-Americans.

“Jazz” was unnamed for a time, preceded by the largely instrumental form called “ragtime,” and the largely vocal form called “blues.” But once identified as its own musical style, “jazz” claimed the field sometime between 1913 and 1915.

Jazz has always been a performer's music rather than a composer's music. It relies on a syncopated rhythm, interplay between parts, and improvisation based on a sequence of chords. At first relying on a repertoire of “standard” tunes, jazz soon stimulated composers to expand the list. But its influence spread even more quickly. By 1908, Claude Debussy was incorporating jazz rhythms into his *Children's Corner Suite* which he wrote for his daughter. The American composer, Charles Ives, started even earlier, somewhere around 1903. The list goes on

Whether as a repertoire of melodies and harmonies, or as a rhythmic approach, or as a personal, improvisatory style, jazz has been adapted into many shapes and forms. Tonight's program presents both the improvisatory and the formally-composed aspects.

THE ERIC MINTEL QUARTET

numbers to be announced

“As long as the music attracts dedicated . . . musicians like Eric Mintel and the Eric Mintel Quartet, jazz will continue to thrive and progress as a voice of freedom.” This was said by Dave Brubeck.

The Eric Mintel Quartet (EMQ) offers what have now become “standards”, including Dave Brubeck's own compositions – but not as reproductions. In true jazz spirit, the EMQ offers its own improvisations on well-known pieces, as well as presenting some of Eric Mintel's own compositions. While maintaining clear melodic lines (alto sax, keyboard) over the supporting chord progression (keyboard and bass) and propelled by the drum set, the EMQ conveys the “classic” jazz concept, spiced with the newer flavors of Latin and swing music. And then, there's always the unexpected, the unscripted interplay, the improvisatory . . .

I N T E R M I S S I O N

The second half of the program is based on composed music in jazz style, by Dave Brubeck (1920 -) and Eric Mintel (1967 -)

Let's consider Dave Brubeck himself. Born in California of mixed origins, including what some believe is American Indian, Dave Brubeck, after learning piano technique and repertoire from his mother, early established himself as a remarkable jazz performer, improviser, and composer. From the first he explored different rhythms and meters, resulting in his first and most enduring “hit” *Take Five*, which was the first jazz single to sell over a million copies. In the 1960s, the Dave Brubeck Quartet was the most successful of all the jazz touring and recording groups, reaching the widest popular audience in terms of age, education, and musical interests.

Brubeck expanded his vision to include composed music in various genres, including songs, choral works, ballets, and concert pieces.

Dave Brubeck's embracing of Catholicism led to a commission from a Catholic publishing company for a contemporary Mass (under the influence of Vatican II). The result was, *To Hope! A Celebration*, which, according to the stipulations, could be performed either in a concert setting with full orchestra or by amateurs in any setting. The score includes only brief portions of the polyrhythms that one might expect in Dave's music, and jazz improvisation is allowed in the score but is not required, making it accessible to local groups.

Brubeck describes the joy he felt while composing the Mass: "Working with a great religious text makes you go into a wonderful kind of euphoria. Every moment of your day, and even sleeping at night, is involved with this text. The rite of the Mass has been around for more than a thousand years; it's probably one of the greatest texts a composer can work with. It does something for you personally while you're working on it; you know you're absorbed in a very good thing."

The title, *To Hope*, comes from Brubeck's own outlook which he stated, "What is really important in the community, in the worst of times, is often music. It's the cement for the community that holds it together and gives it hope."

Eric Mintel's compositions continue in the same vein, making use of unusual rhythms and meters without sacrificing melody – eliding the line between written and improvised music.

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