

# Hot Jazz

## Study Guide for the performance of Bria Skonberg



### Objectives

Through a presentation of the music of The Bria Skonberg Quartet and study guide materials, students will:

- develop an understanding of beginnings of Jazz music
- be able to define improvisation
- be able to determine what makes Jazz music sound different from other musical forms
- be introduced to the Jazz age, including the influence of prohibition and speakeasies
- be exposed to a high quality, inspirational arts experience

### A Good Audience Member Will...

- behave respectfully towards the performers and other audience members.
- listen attentively to the music, narration, and instructions.
- participate at appropriate times in the program.
- attempt to remember elements of the program for later discussions.

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# Hot Jazz and the Music of The Bria Skonberg Quartet

## HOW DID JAZZ START

Jazz is America's music. Jazz was born in the United States.

When West African tribes were brought to the New World in chains, they carried their music and traditions with them. Slave work songs were created in the African tradition of call-and-response.



To tell a story, a song leader would call out a line and the workers would respond to the call. Many slaveholders did not allow the slaves to speak to each other, so the only way they could communicate was through song. They developed many different ways of getting their secret messages across in the lyrics. Slaves also sang soulful songs called "spirituals" to express their religious beliefs, feelings and desire for freedom. Spirituals and work songs are part of the foundation of the American art form, known as Jazz.

Following the American Civil War, many brass instruments were discarded by the military. These were eagerly taken up by black, untrained, would-be musicians, who taught themselves to play. Gradually a new music was created, which came to fruition in New Orleans at the turn of the 20th century.

Around 1900, the people of New Orleans were from many different cultures – French, Spanish, English, Scottish, German, and Italian people migrated to this prosperous city. As new settlers arrived in the New Orleans' seaport, musical traditions from all over the world began coming together. African American musicians merged these European traditions with the blues, ragtime, marching band music, and many other elements to create a new style of music known as "Jazz."

What differentiated Jazz from these earlier styles was the widespread use of improvisation, often by more than one player at a time. Jazz represented a break from Western musical traditions, where the composer wrote a piece of music on paper and the musicians then tried their best to play



exactly what was in the score. In a Jazz piece, the song is often just a starting point or frame of reference for the musicians to improvise around. The song might have been a popular ditty or blues that they didn't compose, but by the time they were finished with it they had composed a new piece that often bore little resemblance to the original song.

Many of the virtuoso musicians were not good sight readers and some could not read music at all, nevertheless their playing thrilled audiences and the spontaneous music they created captured a joy and sense of adventure that was an exciting and radical departure from the music of that time...

### **Jazz is Improvisation**

Jazz is partly planned and partly spontaneous; while the musicians play a pre-determined, song, they create their one version of the song in response to their own tastes and to what the other musicians are playing "in the moment". This is called improvisation.

Improvisation is the key element of Jazz. Improvisation is inventing something on the spur of the moment and in response to a certain situation; in Jazz, it is when musicians perform a different interpretation each time they play the same tune. A tune is never played the exact same way twice.

Every time you talk to your friends, you are improvising - exactly what you are going to say is not planned ahead of time, it depends on what your friend says, then what you say, then what your friend says, and so on.... Jazz musicians do the same with their instruments, but rather than using words to communicate, they use music; it's kind of like musical conversation.

### **EARLY NEW ORLEANS JAZZ MUSICIANS**

The first Jazz was played by African-American and Creole musicians in New Orleans around 1890 and into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The cornet player Buddy Bolden is generally considered to be the first real Jazz musician. Other early players included Freddie Keppard, Bunk Johnson and Clarence Williams. Although these musicians' names are unknown to most people, then and now, their ideas are still being elaborated on to this day. Most of these men could not make a living with their music and were forced to work menial jobs to get by.



The second wave of New Orleans Jazz musicians like Joe "King" Oliver, Kid Ory and Jelly Roll Morton formed small bands that took the music of these older men and increased the complexity and dynamic of their music, as well as gaining greater commercial success. This music became known as "Hot Jazz", because of the often breakneck speeds and amazing improvised polyphony that these bands produced. In the Red Light District, piano players like Jelly Roll Morton played jazz in houses of ill repute. Music could be found on every street corner. There was a hierarchy among the

trumpeters. Buddy Bolden was known as 'King' Bolden, a title which was then given to Joe Oliver.

- Polyphony is music in which several different tunes are played or sung at the same time



A young virtuoso cornet player named Louis Armstrong was discovered in New Orleans by King Oliver. Armstrong soon grew to become the greatest Jazz musician of his era and eventually one of the biggest stars in the world. The impact of Armstrong and other Jazz musicians altered the course of both popular and Classical music. African-American musical styles became the dominant force in 20th century music. Every jazz musician was being influenced by the meteoric rise of Louis Armstrong's genius, evidenced by his wonderful Hot Five and Hot Seven recordings.

## **THE JAZZ AGE – PROHIBITION, SPEAKEASIES, AND JAZZ**

Jazz in the 1920s was influencing the population of America whether people liked it or not. Many cried out that Jazz was spreading corruption to the youth of America. The New York Times even went as far as reporting a story about the Salvation Army of Cincinnati protesting the building of a Jazz theater near a hospital, saying that it was not right to “force the Jazz attitude” on any babies being born in the maternity ward of the hospital. This bad press that Jazz had could most likely be tied to the Prohibition movement.

The Roaring Twenties began on a dry note on January 29, 1920, at 12:01 a.m. when the 18th Amendment was put into effect. The Anti-Saloon League of New York and others who wanted to make the sale and manufacture of alcohol illegal — thereby combating the related moral and social ills associated with drinking — had successfully lobbied Congress to pass the amendment. Prohibition had begun.

As law enforcement officials shut down saloons across the country, speakeasies — illegal bars — sprouted up quickly. They were given their unique name for the need to whisper, or "speak easy," as patrons attempted to cross their illegal thresholds.

A secret knock, password or handshake could get a prospective drinker through a door that appeared to lead to an ordinary apartment, deli, tailor, or soda shop. Once inside, however,



there was plenty of drinking and entertainment, including torch singers, cabaret singers, vaudeville acts, and, of course, Jazz.

However, since alcohol was illegal most of these nightclubs were closely tied to gangsters or



bootleggers such as Al Capone who were needed to illegally supply alcohol for the customers' enjoyment. This led to many Jazz musicians finding themselves in debt to gangsters or owing them favors. Soon the protest against nightclubs and alcohol was also aimed towards Jazz and Jazz musicians. Jazz was immediately associated with the "carnal pleasures of the cabaret" rather than part of a fad that was swept up with the country's post war celebration and fast paced lifestyle. Jazz marked a time of youthful rebellion and easy living which caused the younger generation of the country to be at odds with the

older generation. It was said that after the First World War it "was hard for the veterans" to "slow down to the prewar tempo" and that once you "get into a higher gear you never quite drop back". Jazz helped to confirm this notion with its fast upbeat tempo. This led many to mark Jazz as an inappropriate and indulgent music to suite the lifestyle of the younger generations.

The growth of speakeasies had tremendous ramifications for the development of Jazz. As noted jazz critic Gary Giddins from New York's Village Voice explained,

*"Then in 1920, the best thing that could have happened for jazz, they passed the most idiotic law in the history of the United States, prohibition... Well, from a handful of saloons around the country, you now have thousands and thousands of speakeasies, especially in all the major cities. I mean, at one point in New York City alone, Manhattan had 5,000 speakeasies. And in the competition, you want to bring in people, you have music. So suddenly, there's work. There's tons of work for jazz musicians. Also, Prohibition is loosening up morals. It's doing exactly the opposite of what it was supposed to do. Women, for example, did not drink in saloons. They sure drank in speakeasies ... So the Jazz Age became a kind of umbrella term to this whole loosening up, this whole lubrication thanks to Prohibition when everybody was drinking more than they should just to defy an absolutely unenforceable law"*

By the late 1920s, it was obvious that Prohibition was failing. Bootleggers made gin and bribed public officials in order to keep their businesses thriving. More people were drinking than ever before. Many Americans challenged the law by carrying hidden flasks, though some drinkers paid a high price for this illegal habit, dying of wood alcohol poisoning. The social ills caused

by the consumption of alcohol worsened as gang murders, turf wars, and booze smuggling became commonplace. Controlling the presence of speakeasies was futile. They opened as quickly as they were shut down. Finally, on February 20, 1933, the 21st Amendment was passed, repealing the 18th Amendment and ending Prohibition. Herbert Hoover and other republicans referred to the Prohibition Era as a "noble experiment," and as legal bars, saloons and clubs opened once again, speakeasies became a memory of the past.

It wasn't just Prohibition that helped spur Jazz's popularity; the 1920s were a period of profound transformation in American life. The nation's population continued to shift from rural areas to cities, and more and more people embraced the automobile as a new and independent mode of transportation. At the same time, the template for our modern media culture began to form, with phonographs, radio and talking pictures connecting Americans through an increasingly electronic network of sound. Jazz caught the buzz, in more ways than one.

As the '20s drew to a close, the Jazz bands were becoming bigger and more arranged with less of the wild element that dominated early Jazz. The era of Traditional, or Hot Jazz, was coming to an end. Eventually the music evolved into Swing. Usually played by Big Bands, this became the pop music of the day in the latter half of the 1930s.

The big band era which dominated the 1930s music scene incorporate Jazz into a more palatable format but did so while integrating other forms popular music in their sets. We can think of 1930s as the decade that Jazz became civilized, sophisticated and popular throughout the culture. The outcome was that Jazz evolved and began to merge with many musical forms. That evolution continues to this day, which demonstrates the versatility of Jazz music to adapt to culture and reflect the outlook of culture back on its listeners as well. Because 1930s Jazz forced the format to "grow up", it also assured that Jazz would continuously change and grow as the country grows (Chicago Jazz, Bebop, Cool Jazz, Smooth Jazz, etc.), but also insured that Jazz would be a musical style that would continue to be part of the American culture forever.



**What you will be hearing during the Bria Skonberg concert is a return to the early era of Hot Jazz that was so popular during the 1920s.**

## SUGGESTED AUDIO AND VIDEO CLIPS TO GO WITH THIS GUIDE

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YTkxHboqRR8>

From the Alex Lomax Collection of Negro Work Songs & Calls  
As close as we can get to an actual field holler

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ONDr4zau53c>

Jelly Roll Morton - "I Thought I Heard Buddy Bolden Say"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P5k9E717QVM>

King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band - "Sobbin' Blues"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ByK16U5Cs-k>

Louis Armstrong – "Lawd, You Made the Night Too Long"

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n\\_09vgN9HHw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n_09vgN9HHw)

Louis Armstrong and the Hot Five – "Basin Street Blues"

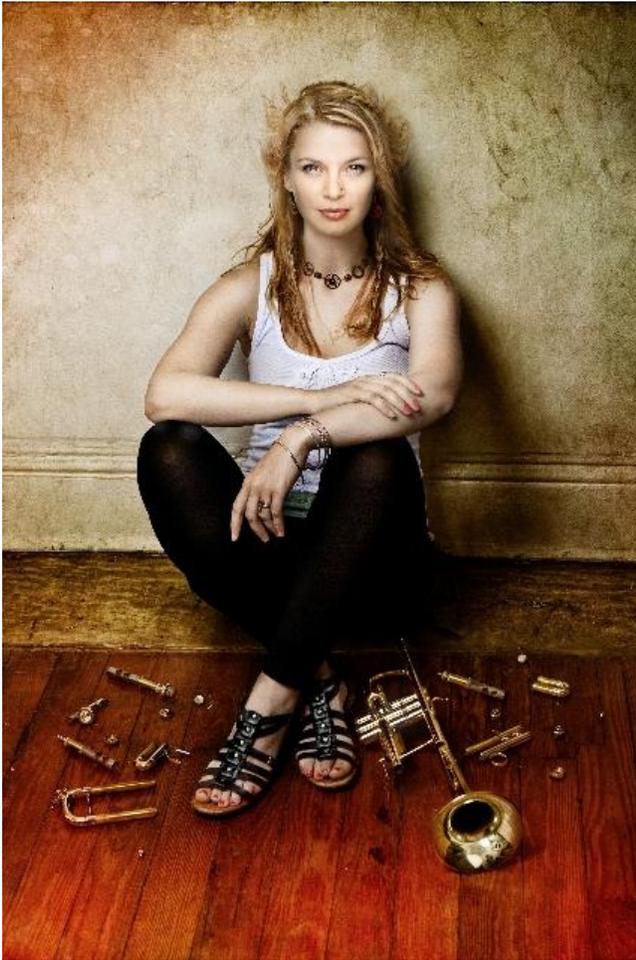
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=in1eK3x1PBI>

Fats Waller – "Your Feet's Too Big"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hLsf4-kiozQ>

Bria Skonberg – "So Is The Day"

# The Bria Skonberg Quartet



Hailing from Chilliwack, BC, and now living in New York City, award winning trumpeter/vocalist/ composer BRIA SKONBERG is "poised to be one of the most versatile and imposing musicians of her generation." She has earned a 2013 Jazz Journalists' Association nomination for "Up and Coming Jazz Artist of The Year" and is included in DOWNBEAT Magazine's Rising Star Critics' Poll for 2013.

Bria got her start as a professional big band singer at age sixteen doubling on trumpet and has since performed as a bandleader and guest artist all over North America, Europe, China Japan. Since arriving in New York three years ago she has appeared in concert halls and clubs such as Symphony Space, Birdland, The Iridium, and Dizzy's among the likes of Nicholas Payton, Anat Cohen, Wycliffe Gordon, Bucky Pizzarelli and Scott Robinson.

Bria focuses on innovating while honoring tradition: She has studied with Warren Vache, experimented with fuzz pedals and presented a gig fusing jazz and stand up comedy. Best known for her knowledge of classic jazz and

pursuit of worldwide adventure, she is creating a style all her own rooted in swampy New Orleans grooves, featuring world percussion and contemporary soul influenced vocals. Her debut American release, "So Is The Day", peaked at #7 on the US National jazz charts and features an all-star ensemble including John Pizzarelli, Victor Goines and Wycliffe Gordon. Released on Random Act Records, 10% of all proceeds go to support the Jazz Foundation of America.

She currently tours the world, headlining major clubs and festivals as well as programming music education workshops for all ages.

[Briaskonberg.com](http://Briaskonberg.com)