The Swing Era

Big Band Takes Over!!!
(chapters 7 & 8)

Rock Bottom & Bouncing Back

- The Great Depression killed the Roaring 20’s
  - 15 million unemployed
  - Movies overtook nightclubs
  - Record sales dropped 96%

- Getting back up
  - Roosevelt’s New Deal, WPA
  - Prohibition repealed
What is Swing Music?

- America’s popular music in the 30s
- Fast, exciting dance music for teens
- Big business
- Raised the bar on musical skill
- Ellington coined the term “Swing”
- The dancing style came from The Savoy Ballroom
- The Lindy Hop: high-energy Swing dance

Types of Swing Bands

- **Sweet Bands**
  - Played “society” music

- **Dance Bands**
  - Commercial dance groups

- **Big Bands**
  - Exciting solos with danceable arrangements
  - The Pop stars of the 30’s & 40’s

- **Territory Bands**
  - Less structured, highly artistic “Hot” bands
Big Band Instruments

- Reed Section
  - 5 Saxes

- Brass Section
  - 4 Trumpets
  - 4 Trombones

- Rhythm Section
  - Piano
  - Bass
  - Drums
  - Guitar

The Big Band Rhythm Section

- Bass: “walking” notes on all beats
- Drum Set
  - The swing ride cymbal (or hi-hat) pattern
  - 4-on-the-floor: bass drum on all beats
  - Fills: short, rhythmic solos by the drums
- Piano
  - Comping: compliment or accompany
  - Usually simple and sparse
- Guitar: 4-to-the-bar strums on all beats
- “The All-American Four”, Basie’s rhythm section, is the pinnacle of this style
Arrangements

- Songs adapted for specific groups
- Bands hired “arrangers” to write charts
- More structure, less solos
- **Soli**: melodies in block harmonies by a section
- **Shout Choruses**: full band harmonized melody
- **Call & response between sections**

Kings of Swing

The Big Bands
Benny Goodman

- (1909 - 1986)
- The “King of Swing”
  - Clarinet virtuoso & most famous Big Band leader
- John Hammond, manager in 1932
  - Legendary jazz promoter, civil rights advocate
- 1935: Rise to fame launches the Big Band Era
  - Gig at the Palomar Club in LA is aired nationwide
- An integrated band after 1939
  - 1st integrated band to play a major stage

Dance Bands

- Artie Shaw (1910 – 2005)
  - Brilliant clarinetist, Goodman rival
  - A sex symbol and pop star
  - Into art over commercial success
  - Quit in 1954 to escape the spotlight
- Jimmie Lunceford (1902 – 1947)
  - High-class, all Black band
  - Strong commercial style
  - Signature block-chord style
Dance Bands

* **Glenn Miller** (1904 – 1944)
  * The biggest commercial band
  * Little improvising... “not a jazz band”
  * V-discs & USO shows for WWII troops

* **Cab Calloway** (1907 – 1994)
  * Colorful singer, strong scat style
  * Music about Harlem’s dark side
    * Mobsters, drugs, sex
  * An eye for talent
    * Launched many careers

The Count & the Duke

**Southern Swing**
Boogie Woogie

- A high-energy style of Blues piano
  - Uses ostinato: a repeated melodic pattern

- Very popular and danceable
  - One of the first R&B styles

- The Big Names
  - Clarence “Pine Top” Smith: father of Boogie Woogie
  - “Big” Joe Turner: Rolling, baritone-voiced showman

Territory Bands

- Niche bands that stayed in one region
  - Widely varied in style

- Head chart: a simple arrangement of a standard (a commonly known tune)
  - Bluesy
  - Based on traditional forms (Blues, AABA...)
  - Riff-based: short repeating melodies
Kansas City Bands

- Thriving city, corrupt mayor
- Big Jam Session scene
- Main hub for territory bands
- The Big Names
  - Andy Kirk’s 12 Clouds of Joy
  - Mary Lou Williams: brilliant composer
  - Bennie Moten
    - Perfected the Bluesy, riff-driven tune

William “Count” Basie

- (1904 – 1984)
- Pianist and band leader
  - Sparse style, relaxed swing
- Band Style:
  - Head arrangements
  - Hard, shuffling swing feel
  - Lots of solos
- John Hammond discovered Basie in 1936
- Longest running big band, over 40 years
Ellington in the Swing Era

- After the Cotton Club...
  - Ellington’s range truly emerged
  - Very prolific...more than 1000 compositions
  - A person, not just an instrument
  - A wide variety of composition types
    - Jungle Music
    - Features
    - Large-scale symphonic works
    - Dance band hits
    - Mood pieces ("pastels")

Billy Strayhorn

- (1915 – 1967)
- Ellington’s co-composer
  - Joined in 1938
- Respected for his openness and confidence
  - An openly gay, civil rights activist
- Wrote / co-wrote many of Ellington’s best works
  - “Take the A Train”
  - “Satin Doll”
  - “Lush Life”