

When someone mentions the word “jazz,” nearly everyone will automatically have at least a few images pop into their mind even if they’ve never had any tangible experience with it or true interest in it. It seems such a wide genre of music that encompasses so much that it is only natural that the possibility that someone can recall a jazz piece is much more probable than, for example, a classical piece. However, when one begins to dig deeper into the world of jazz, they find that there is just so much more there than anyone could have ever imagined. Only after having examined the various artists, each an individual in his own right, and the different times and types of music jazz went through, can one at least start to grasp at what jazz is and try to gain a better understanding of both the music and its message; this is the experience that this class and the Ken Burns’ documentary offered.

I have had nearly no experience with jazz and so nearly everything was new to me. It was amazing to see a vast world of music going through so many movements and, perhaps paradoxically, gaining most of its energy and allure from hard times and the negativity and hardships the musicians had to face. Jazz has had so many “faces” that it is nearly impossible for someone to say “I hate jazz.” True, there was music from certain movements that did not appeal to me, such as bebop and hard bop, and some that I could not listen to at all, like fusion. However, I learned a lot more about the movements that did interest me, such as swing and blues, not to mention the history of the music itself as well as the musicians who played it.

I chose the musician Max Roach for my presentation and knew nothing about him when I started. I approached him with a slightly negative attitude when I found out he was a drummer. Yet, research into the person led me to realize that jazz drummers did not simply sit in the back and play simple steady beats. Quite the opposite: Roach demonstrated that the drums are just as important an instrument in jazz as the more readily identified saxophone, trumpet or piano. This not only let me see jazz in a broader context but also helped me develop a much greater respect for the drums as an instrument.

In my opinion, one of the great things about jazz is that it is a music that one can apply to almost any sphere of life and, in this way, be changed somehow by it. After having taken

this class, my music knowledge has widened and my own personal love for music has been enriched. The jazz I had the opportunity to listen to I can now take back and adhere to the music I myself play and in this way explore new musical horizons that had been closed to me earlier. I am also quite sure that I will gladly pass on some of my new found jazz interests to others.