

Jazz—Voice of Heart

---- MAS 2013 -Xiao Yi

The block seminars on jazz at the HCA have been an eye-opening experience with jazz. They added yet another aspect to my understanding of American culture. Previously, jazz was only a term which sounded familiar, but about which I did not really have much knowledge. Before the first session of the block seminar, I went through the preparatory material, coming to understand that under the glamorous artistic façade, jazz has its own struggles and painful origin, which partly contributes to the fact that jazz is an important cultural legacy in America.

Jazz has its own ways to express the musicians' thoughts, feelings, and emotions, which is very much different from other forms of music. For example, it is different from classical music. Classical music is formal, well organized and “rational,” perhaps also a little aloof. Audiences may have very different interpretations of the works of classical music; jazz, on the other hand, is not as mysterious. It expresses what the musician thinks about in a more direct way, either through the lyrics (direct articulation), or the music itself (rhythm, tone and melody).

Take the lyrics of “*My Man*” for example:

“ ...

Oh, my man, I love him so

He'll never know

All my life is just despair

But I don't care

When he takes me in his arms

The world is bright

... ”

People can see clearly what the musician is thinking about. It pours right from his heart without much sophisticated polishing, which makes it much easier for listeners to feel close to the music itself. It is the music which everyone can get close to,

Jazz is the music of freedom, especially Bebop. It focuses on improvising. No other types of music are as free as jazz. Each musician in a Bebop band is given enough room to improvise.

Improvisation, in essence, is a direct expression of what the musician truly thinks and feels. My personal experience is that Bebop is seemingly disorganized, yet it is free expression of emotions. It represents the Bebop musicians' musical identity, which does not conform to any rules or standards. It is just the way it is. Bebop sounds to me nervous and disturbing. This might be exactly how the musician feels – anger and frustration possibly caused by a troubling personal life, or, if considering a more general social background, racial segregation and discrimination.

On the whole, jazz gives me an impression of sadness. It is the kind of sadness which is neither so strong as to be depressing, nor so whiny as to be shallow. It is just the right level of sadness, full of emotions deeply rooted in historical background, coming right from the musicians' hearts, and resonating with the hearts of the listeners.