

Chapter 13 Jazz Rock and Fusion

In many ways, jazz has always been a part of rock. Because it developed in the early part of the 20th century, jazz had already evolved into many different styles before rock ever began. Various jazz styles influenced rock in different ways at different times. Bill Haley and the Comets, for example, was influenced by both big bands and the blues. The blues became rockabilly when performed by Elvis Presley and others. Jazz instruments, such as the saxophone, were used to play jazz-style improvisations in bands that backed rock performances by many African-American artists, from Little Richard to Motown, to funk, and beyond.

While most rock has some characteristics that come from jazz, jazz-rock and fusion did not refer to any combination of jazz and rock. Rather, they had specific meanings and related to specific styles that developed in the late 60's. Jazz rock combined the horn section sound of swing dance music with rock rhythm section and rock beat. It almost always used vocals, an element more important to rock than to jazz. Fusion was primarily an instrumental music. Vocals that might be included were not given any more prominence than the instrumental solos. **Jazz rock tended to be more closely related to rock while fusion tended to be more closely related to jazz.**

Typical instruments common with jazz combos included brass (trumpets and trombones) and woodwind sections (saxophones---players sometimes doubled on related instruments such as clarinets and flutes). Jazz rhythm sections included piano, acoustic or electric guitar, string bass, and drums. When rock styles like soul and funk included instrumentations like these, they automatically created a link with jazz.

Jazz is not easily defined. Rather, it is understood that jazz has certain feel to it. Classical musicians may have the necessary skill to play jazz music, but many lack the feel and, as a result, the jazz music sounds somewhat stilted when played by these musicians.

Likewise, rock music developed its own *feel*. When mixed with jazz to create jazz rock or fusion, this feel may be emphasized or de-emphasized, depending on the backgrounds of the musicians. Rock solos tend to stay in the same *mode*, whereas jazz solos move from one mode to another to create harmonic complexities with chords played by the rhythm section. Rock guitarists will even stay within notes of a particular finger pattern rather than move to avoid repeated patterns. Rock solos tend to be less rhythmically complex than jazz solos. Jazz soloists set up rhythmic patterns that contrast with the rhythm patterns played by the rhythm section. Rock solos tend to be very fast, flashy, and continuous whereas silence is important in jazz solos.

Jazz rock often took fairly conventional rock forms and simply enhanced them with the addition of a horn section playing jazz-influenced arrangements. Fusion often included rock-styled solos played on amplified instruments using distortion and feedback, as well

as various types of synthesizers that had become standard rock equipment by the late 60's. Jazz rock was pretty easily understood as rock and did not sound foreign because horn sections were used in much earlier rock music. Fusion, however, was often barely recognizable as rock.

Jazz Rock

Much of the jazz rock of the late 60's was played by former blues revivalists who added sections of brass and/or woodwind instruments to their rock instrumentation. In Chicago, in 1967, guitarist/singer Terry Kath and clarinetist/saxophonist Walter Parazaider decided to form a jazz-rock band, calling it the Big Thing. The group consisted of a horn section backed by a rock rhythm section. Most of the group were also singers and group vocals were often featured in their recordings. They changed their name to Chicago Transit Authority before recording their early recordings, but objections by city officials caused them to shorten their name to Chicago. Their early recordings captured the energy and spontaneity of a jazz band and included jazz-style improvisations by individual group members, but they eventually attracted a larger audience by recording in a more pop style.

Listen to Chicago---Hard to Say I'm Sorry (1:1)

Chicago added Brazilian percussionist Laudir de Oliveira in 1974. They had to replace Terry Kath after his accidental death in 1978. The band continued and still tours in 2004.

Singer/keyboardist Al Kooper had played sessions with Bob Dylan. He liked the idea of combining rock and jazz instruments and styles and formed his own jazz rock group in 1968. The group, Blood Sweat and Tears, experienced significant turnover throughout their career. Yet, they always maintained a strong brass-oriented sound. Soon after the group recorded its first album, Kooper left the group and was replaced by David Clayton-Thomas, from England.

Listen to Blood, Sweat and Tears---Spinning Wheel (1:8)

This piece contains rhythmic complexities of a well-arranged jazz piece.

In addition to the combination of jazz and rock styles, Blood, Sweat and Tears was also influenced by classical music. Its album, *Blood, Sweat and Tears*, included Erik Satie's work, *Trois Gymnopédies*, with a jazz rock arrangement. This album opened and closed with this piece, producing *closed form*---a classical form.

Fusion

The music of Chicago and Blood, Sweat and Tears was rock or pop music influenced by jazz. A style that was more jazz influenced by rock was called fusion. This style was created by Miles Davis mid to late 60's. It was called fusion by musicians who came after Davis. Davis had been playing bebop and later recorded the cool-jazz sound that was popular with the beat poets of the 50's.

In 1968, Davis began to add rock elements to his music. Among them were the use rock instrumentation, rhythms that were more similar to rock than to jazz, and short, simple, repeated bass lines. By 1969, Davis had begun to use heavy rock-styled drum patterns.

***Listen to Miles Davis---Miles Runs the Voodoo Down* (1:10)**

After the albums of 1969, *In a Silent Way* and *Bitches Brew*, Davis continued to incorporate rock elements into his work. This was done even to the point of altering the sound of his instrument. He added electronic devices to his trumpet so he could alter its sound much like Hendrix and other rock guitarists did with their guitars.

Jaco Pastorius was a virtuoso bass guitarist. His work on the bass guitar had an impact on the way bass guitar was played in fusion bands. He was featured in workshops at the University of Miami.

***Listen to Jaco Pastorius---Freedom Jazz* (1:11)**

Joni Mitchell add jazz elements when she recorded with LA Express in 1974. The album, *Miles of Aisles*, included fusion versions of several of her folk hits. Mitchell played the guitar, mountain dulcimer, and piano while the LA Express added their full fusion band sound.

***Listen to Joni Mitchell---Big Yellow Taxi* (1:13)**

Pastorius and Mitchell collaborated often in the late 70's.

When Mitchell sang jazz-styled pop, she included scat singing. This style of singing was made popular many years before by Louis Armstrong. Scat singing is singing nonsense syllables in a style that imitates the sound of instruments. It was most commonly used in jazz.

Pastorius continued to tour and record with Weather Report until he formed his own group, Word of Mouth, in 1982. While Pastorius was a very sensitive and gifted bassist, he also became known for his misuse of alcohol and his violent behavior. He died 1987 of head wounds received from a club owner who would not let him enter the establishment from which he had earlier been banned.

***Listen to Jaco Pastorius and Weather Report---Birdland* (2:10)**

Pianist Donald Fagen and guitarist/bassist Walter Becker had already played with other groups and had written for other performers when they decided to form their own group, Steely Dan, so they could have more control over their own work. Steely Dan started out with four and later grew to six members. By 1974, all the members of the original group except for Fagen and Becker had left the group. One significant reason for this was their leader's reluctance to tour. So, Fagen and Becker continued to work together writing and recording. As they worked together, jazz influences became more and more important. On their album, *Pretzel Logic*, tributes were given to Charlie Parker and Duke Ellington.

Listen to Steely Dan---Parker's Band (2:1)

In 1985, British songwriter, Gordon Sumner---a.k.a. Sting---left his new-wave band, the Police, to start a solo career. He used jazz and fusion musicians on his first album, *The dream of the Blue Turtles*, giving him a new reputation in the field of jazz.

Listen to Sting---Russians (2:3)

Listen to Sting---Shadows in the Rain (2:4)

Musicians in his band included Branford Marsalis, as well as other noted jazz musicians.

Listen to Sting and Marsalis---Roxanne (2:6)

Sting's cover of Jimi Hendrix is also worth noting.

Sting---Little Wings (2:5)

Jazz, rock, and R&B were important in the work of Morphine, formed in 1992 in Boston. Morphine lacked guitar, keyboards, of any middle and high register melodic instruments. While those instruments were present on some tracks, they were not part of the group's standard instrumentation. Singer/bass player Mark Sandman played a two-string electric slide bass and sang in low registers and timbre similar to the sound of his instrument. Dana Cole usually played the baritone saxophone.

Listen to Morphine---Candy (2:7)

Listen to Morphine---Miles Davis' Funeral (2:9)