

Martin, Henry (2003/05): Jazz Theory and Analysis. An Introduction and Brief Bibliography. ZGMTH 1–2/2/2–3, 169–171. <https://doi.org/10.31751/523>

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veröffentlicht / first published: 01/04/2005
zuletzt geändert / last updated: 15/01/2010

Jazz Theory and Analysis

An Introduction and Brief Bibliography

Henry Martin

Jazz theory and analysis concerns itself with the kinds of topics investigated by music theorists more generally, but dealing with jazz. These topics include but are not limited to (1) harmony, with investigation of tonal, modal, and atonal grammars; (2) melody; (3) rhythm; (4) scales and their relationship to harmony; (5) coherence and structure of jazz compositions, improvisations, and popular songs favored by jazz musicians; (6) stylistic features and historical development of players, ensembles, and repertory; (7) pedagogy; (8) cultural interactions and the thought processes involved in learning to play jazz; (9) interrelations and intersections of various cultures (African, European, and Caribbean, for example) in the formation of jazz and its substyles; and (10) relationship of jazz theory to classical Western theory. A brief history of jazz theory and analysis can be found in Martin 1996c (an article that also provides the basic material for this overview). Detailed summaries of jazz harmony and improvisation (and other relevant topics) can be found in the *New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*. The *Annual Review of Jazz Studies* and *Jazzforschung / Jazz Research* are journals with significant coverage of theoretical and analytical topics.

Jazz theory can be traced to the 1920s with the first publications of solo transcriptions – the beginnings of jazz pedagogy. Sargeant 1938 is perhaps the first technical discussion of jazz with music examples and analysis. In the 1950s, speculative work on jazz theory begins with Russell 1959 (2nd ed.), which establishes chord-scale theory. Important pedagogical contributions by Mehegan follow in 1959–1965. Schuller 1958 is a significant analysis of a Sonny Rollins performance, beginning a tradition of the close analysis of improvised solos. Schuller 1968 and Schuller 1989 are historical surveys that contain much analysis.

Owing perhaps to Schuller's influence and the increasing recognition of the importance of music outside the Western classical canon, scholarly work in jazz theory begins to expand rapidly during the 1970s. Owens 1974 and Stewart 1974–75 are the first jazz-theory dissertations of consequence. The *Journal of Jazz Studies* and *Jazzforschung / Jazz Research* begin publication in the 1970s. (The *Journal of Jazz Studies* is now the *Annual Review of Jazz Studies*.) Beginning in the 1990s, books and articles on jazz theory and analysis become more common. Articles may now be found in general-interest journals of musicology, ethnomusicology, and music theory as well as in publications dedicated to jazz scholarship.

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