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Categories and networks in jazz evolution: The overlap between bandleaders' jazz sidemen from 1930 to 1969



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ABSTRACT

This paper expands on Peterson's process model for historical changes in jazz. Peterson suggests that, given certain circumstances, musical genres migrate from 'low-brow' to 'high-brow'. I test this proposition for jazz by investigating whether bandleaders were associated through the same sidemen ('sidemen overlap') across time, and the underlying logics leading to these overlaps. I confirm Peterson's model to the extent that sidemen overlap shifts from a 'commercial' logic to a 'style-based' logic. From 1930 to 1949, sidemen overlap between bandleaders is mainly predicted by recording session volumes (akin to 'commercial logic'). From 1945 to 1969, style similarity emerges as an important predictor of sidemen overlap. I extend Peterson's process model by providing a more nuanced account, based on social networks. I show substantive collaboration across styles. As a consequence, stylistic shifts are not as abrupt as originally depicted. I also explore how past associations become increasingly stronger in terms of explaining sidemen overlap. Furthermore, race emerges as an important variable in explaining the same phenomenon. During the thirties, non-African-American homophily is high. After this period, African-American homophily increases steadily until the late fifties, decreasing again during the sixties.

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1. Introduction

Richard Peterson's (1972) process model of style evolution successfully explained why certain genres follow the trajectory from folk through pop to avant-garde phases in response to both 'exogenous' forces (including technological disruptive events) and 'endogenous' forces (such as the emergence of a stronger professional identity). In Peterson's account, shifts in styles are comparable to disruptive events – analogous to Kuhn's idea of scientific revolution – in which younger musicians abruptly switch from one style to another, simultaneously promoting the development of distinct social formations. Peterson explores jazz history to illustrate this process. In this paper, therefore, I retrace the history of jazz in order to review Peterson's model and provide a more nuanced narrative. I shall claim that the shift from one style to another was not abrupt. Much the opposite: there was significant collaboration among musicians playing a mixture of styles.

A core assumption informing this paper is that musicians, when playing and recording together, are motivated by choices and constrained by social forces. Adopting Peterson's process model, we would expect to observe that associations between musicians are closely linked to style identification. Consequently, using a social network analysis to explore what impels associations between musicians should afford us insights into how key social trends influence musical production and how stylistic shifts take place. Over the course of this paper, I shall focus specifically on understanding how bandleaders were connected to each other, revealing and exploring the extent to which their recording sessions included the same (overlapping) sidemen.

My analysis concentrates on a time period spanning from 1930 to 1969. In the early thirties, following the Great Depression, the music industry resumed its growth and swing led jazz to enjoy huge popularity. By the late sixties fusion and free jazz had emerged as important tendencies, challenging jazz's boundaries.

Throughout this paper, I test and discuss the following hypotheses in dialog with Peterson's model. First, similarity in style is positively related to sidemen overlap between bandleaders. This hypothesis supports the idea that styles and social ties are closely linked, and might occur in higher intensity once the field becomes more autonomous, but also more fragmented. This hypothesis was supported for the period from 1945 to 1949, as well as later. Second, the number of sessions recorded is a strong predictor of sidemen overlap in the early 1930s. This insight reinforces Peterson's idea that during this period jazz was strongly dominated by commercial interests. This pattern becomes weaker during later periods. Third, time in the field was partially supported, suggesting points of inflection. These variations in turn suggest inter-generational connections. Peterson's model receives a more nuanced account insofar as new styles do not displace older ones. Furthermore, while associations between musicians are increasingly explained by a similarity in style, other mechanisms such as popularity, race and past association remain important as 'social glue' and sustain the jazz's community cohesion.

Among the control variables, I have also explored how race, gender, nationality, instrument similarity, and past associations affected the overlap between bandleaders' sidemen. It is worth noting that past association emerges as a strong predictor of sidemen overlap as we approach the late sixties. Additionally, as emphasized by cultural studies scholars, race boundaries prove to be an important factor in determining associations, though their effect decreases during the sixties.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Bourdieu's model of style emergence

Although Peterson's original proposition does not focus on Bourdieu's insights, I believe that the latter's model of style emergence shows close proximities to Peterson's ideas on why musicians abandon pop styles and espouse avant-garde alternatives. In the following text, I shall draw on Bourdieu's ideas of struggle and distinction within artistic fields. Bourdieu's model associates style

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