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Jazz music in the twentieth century in Renaissance Harlem

Introduction

Jazz music in the twentieth century was a product of Renaissance Harlem when blacks attempted to raise voices against inequality and social ills. African-American musicians created Jazz in New Orleans. This was a prominent way for blacks to take pride in their African heritage and culture. Jazz Age allowed the African-Americans to take pride in black folklore and blackness. All African singers were motivated to reject the social stereotypes and fought for the status equal to whites. A prominent reason was to eliminate the gap between blacks and whites. The Jazz Age represented the period of the 1920s to 1930s when people in Harlem recognized the brutality of Jim Crow laws. After suffering consistent discrimination and injustice, African-Americans used their music for highlighting the issues of the blacks.

Renaissance’s importance in Jazz music

Jazz Age of renaissance holds great significance in the lives of African-Americans because it followed the agenda of free blacks. Many black musicians used their voices to represent their concerns by criticizing racial inequalities and black segregation. Many events in Harlem supported blackness and their mission of achieving equality. “Harlem Renaissance: Art of Black America” opened a museum showcasing over 200 artworks that narrated the stories and contributions of black musicians in Harlem (NYTimes, 1987). Musicians during renaissance created a unique style of music that was seen as a rebellion against American injustice and social inequalities. Prominent singers like Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong transformed music in a way that was adequate for showcasing black sufferings and white brutality. In the Renaissance, musicians had encouraged black singers to raise their voices against racial discrimination. This allowed blacks to show that they have equal rights in America and that whites cannot deprive them of this. Musicians, writers, and artists shared the common purpose of making African-American strong and powerful. Renaissance is of great importance because it motivated blacks to cling to their cultural roots and reject racial segregation. The movement had been an effective tool for spreading awareness among the black community regarding their rights. Music was first time used by black singers to evoke emotions and feelings among Africans.

The impacts of Jazz Age can still be witnessed in the current world because it gave birth to a new form of music. Black singers in the current world also use the same musical style of the Jazz Age to highlight the issues of race and black segregation. Jazz was later broken down different intro forms including blues, swing, ragtime, and Bebop. Jazz is considered as a product of spirituals of African-Americans that became popular in the 1920s. Jazz music was played in the nightclubs, and the entire community participates for making the movement successful. Renaissance has created importance because it provided several platforms to the black singers such as Harlem's Cotton Club and other nightclubs. The music evokes a deeper sense of connectivity with the black heritage in African-Americans. The club was also opened for white patrons that provided Africans the opportunity of sharing their side of the story with them. Harlem was the only place that was giving a musical platform in the days of prohibition. It was thus possible for the blacks to develop new music for targeting the majority black population and spreading the message of social equality. Jazz music also gave birth to another form of African music including rock and roll. The music emerged from the spiritual chants and worked songs to allowing blacks to communicate with the people of their community. Blues was also part of jazz music that was derived from the African culture as the term was used in the mourning ceremonies. The jazz singers used this genre for expressing the sufferings and pain of African-Americans. Renaissance promoted young talented singers to criticize the social ills prevalent in American society by their music. The features of jazz music involved boldness, expression, and criticism. The rhythm and the fuller sound are effectively used for highlighting the miseries of the black population. Renaissance is of vitality because it was for the first time that art was used to express reality and bitter truth. This was a practical way of opening the eyes of the people who were part of society's brutality. The themes of jazz music revealed that African-Americans were not outsiders and have equal rights in America. The music was used to convey the folklore and tales from the past regarding black slavery, harsh treatment of whites and unfair laws.

Historical and social context

Harlem Renaissance is popular for the movements between the 1920s and 1930s when African-American art evolved in the form of writing and music. The black voices raised the issue of race and social injustice. Music was used to address the socio-economic issues of the African-Americans by a black singer. In the twentieth century majority of the black population was living in the southern territory. Harlem Renaissance refers to the period before the civil war in 1860 when blacks were kept in slavery. The Africans were living in adverse conditions apparent in racial segregation and socio-economic deprivations. Blacks suffered the brutalities of their white masters who forced them to work for long hours in fields. Harlem Renaissance was the response to inhumane Jim Crow laws that focused on treating blacks differently from whites. The laws claimed that blacks couldn't eat from the same restaurants, use the same restrooms or go to the same restaurants as whites. This developed feelings of rejection among blacks and many attempted to move to other cities of America. Jim Crow laws were prevalent in the south, so blacks tried to migrate to other regions. Many people migrated to the north that gave birth to black neighborhood and Harlem in northern Manhattan. The Jazz Age reflects the period of the 1920s in America when African-Americans used their music to destroy the perceived social conventions of black slavery. As blacks moved to the north, a new culture was formed that navigated against the unfair social norms. They developed complex ways of responding to their secondary statuses and racial segregation. Jazz Age redefined music in a way that it portrayed the concerns of African-Americans. It was witnessed as a bold reaction of Africans to the socio-economic injustice and blackness. “Jazz music has never existed in isolation: it has always impacted and been impacted by the cultural climate and other art forms” (Misra, 2017). Jazz is thus recognized as a prominent form of art that is based on the ideology of expressionism and openness (Allen, 2001).

The singers Ellington and Armstrong hold profound importance because they introduced new ways of singing that allowed Africans to create their own musical identity. This was important for generating a sense of belonging and connectivity with the African heritage and culture. Many artists like Ted Joans stated that Jazz was not less than religion for them (Misra, 2017). The Black Art Movement of the 1960s also captures the themes of Jazz age and renaissance. The blacks event in the current world uses jazz for raising their voices against racial discrimination (WILLIAMS, 2002).

Musical analysis

Jazz is the only true art form that conveys the stories of African-Americans who served as slaves to the whites. Jazz makes better use of melody and song that makes it interesting for the listeners. Harmony is a dominant element of Jazz that makes the song fuller. The rhythm remains the heartbeat of the song and is effective in evoking emotions. Jazz is also considered as improvisation because it is the product of a black singer's efforts. The genre represents black identity and African heritage. Geoffrey explains, “it’s easy to express your emotions. You get the sheet music, and you read it top to bottom. You're more focused on technically making it perfect. In jazz, your main focus is being creative and using your imagination” (McLaughlin, 2012). In jazz artist takes turns in improvising and playing kind of crazy notes such as high, low, short and clear. Another amazing feature of Jazz is that the melody returns at the end. Improvisation has made the song pleasing and gentle for the listeners. Jazz is capable of building strong connectivity with the listeners. The lyrics and the notes are sufficient for inciting the feelings of the people. The rhythmic surprises are known as syncopation that creates the effective listening environment. The listeners enjoy the melody and the beats of Jazz music. The use of piano and different musical instruments also add more vividness and clarity to the song (Misra, 2017). The style and persona of jazz music make it indifferent from other genres.

Conclusion

Harlem Renaissance was the prominent period used in the creation of jazz music. The period plays a significant role in the creation of black identity. The central purpose of creating jazz was to highlight the issues of black segregation and racism. Jazz Age redefined music in a way that it portrayed the concerns of African-Americans. Jim Crow laws were prevalent in the south, so blacks tried to migrate to other regions. Many people migrated to the north that gave birth to black neighborhood and Harlem in northern Manhattan.

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