

Lecture of musical pieces with significant historical connections in the 20th century, with relevant information about the musical context of each.

## **Black and Tan Fantasy - Duke Ellington**

### **▶ Duke Ellington - Black And Tan Fantasy [1927]**

- "Black and Tan Fantasy" by Duke Ellington, composed in 1927, is a groundbreaking piece blending musical innovation with racial commentary pertaining to the struggles of African Americans during this time period.
- "Black and Tan Fantasy" was composed during the Harlem Renaissance, a time when African American culture was gaining prominence in arts, music, and literature.
- Ellington lead his big band at the Cotton Club (a segregated club in Harlem) and aimed to showcase the richness and sophistication of black music to both black and white audiences.
- The piece merges blues elements with classical and jazz influences, symbolizing the intersection of black and white cultural traditions.
- "Black and Tan Fantasy" features a somber, bluesy melody, evoking African American spirituals.
- The tune is built on a 12-bar blues structure, which has become a staple form of American music. This piece tends to convey feelings of melancholy and dignity.
- Ellington famously ends the piece with a reference to Chopin's "Funeral March," adding depth to its commentary on racial divisions and struggles.
- The title "Black and Tan" alludes to interracial relationships and integration; controversial topics during the 1920s.
- By blending African American musical roots with European influences, the piece symbolically bridges racial divides. This piece can be interpreted as a reflection on the complex and painful coexistence of black and white cultures in America.
- "Black and Tan Fantasy" became one of Ellington's signature pieces, showcasing his unique style and ambitious cultural commentary.
- The song influenced subsequent jazz compositions by blending blues traditions with orchestration, setting the stage for future jazz symphonies and suites that explore deep social themes

## Strange Fruit - Billie Holiday

(Video from 1959)  **Billie Holiday: Strange Fruit (Live 1959)**

- "Strange Fruit" is one of the most haunting and powerful protest songs in American history, famously performed by Billie Holiday in 1939. This song was originally a poem written by Abel Meeropol, a Jewish schoolteacher from New York. This piece condemns the practice of lynching African Americans in the South. Here's an analysis of its background, impact, and enduring significance:
- Meeropol was inspired to write "Strange Fruit" after seeing a photograph of a lynching, which left a deep impression on him.
- He initially published it as a poem titled "Bitter Fruit" in 1937 under the pseudonym Lewis Allan. Later, he set it to music and offered it to Billie Holiday, who agreed to perform it despite its controversial message.
- The song's lyrics use metaphor and stark imagery to convey the horror of lynching, describing the bodies of Black Americans hanging from trees as "strange fruit."
- The contrast between the serene, almost beautiful Southern landscape and the horrific violence speaks to the duality of American society; one that romanticizes the South while ignoring or condoning racial atrocities.
- Holiday began performing "Strange Fruit" at Café Society, which was New York's first racially integrated nightclub, and her delivery was marked by solemnity and emotion.
- Her performances often left audiences silent and stunned, and she insisted that the song be played at the end of her sets with the lights dimmed, making it a kind of ritual of remembrance and protest.
- Her recording of "Strange Fruit" in 1939 became iconic, even though many radio stations refused to play it due to its provocative message.
- "Strange Fruit" was one of the first popular songs to directly address racial violence, and it became an anthem for the civil rights movements.
- The song's raw, direct message forced listeners, including white audiences, to confront the reality of racial violence.
- Its impact was profound, leading Time magazine to call it "the song of the century," and it has been covered by numerous artists, each carrying forward its message.

## Fables of Faubus - Charles Mingus

(Video with lyrics and media)  **CHARLES MINGUS: ORIGINAL FAUBUS FABLES.**

LYRICS (Possibly don't include, and just allude to them):

Oh, Lord, don't let 'em shoot us!  
Oh, Lord, don't let 'em stab us!  
Oh, Lord, no more swastikas!  
Oh, Lord, no more Ku Klux Klan!

Name me someone who's ridiculous, Dannie.  
Governor Faubus!  
Why is he so sick and ridiculous?  
He won't permit integrated schools.

Then he's a fool! Boo! Nazi fascist supremacists!  
Boo! Ku Klux Klan (with your Jim Crow plan).

Name me a handful that's ridiculous, Dannie Richmond.  
Faubus, Rockefeller, Eisenhower.  
Why are they so sick and ridiculous?

Two, four, six, eight:  
They brainwash and teach you hate.  
H-E-L-L-O, Hello.

- "Fables of Faubus" was composed by Charles Mingus in 1959 as a protest against Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus.
- Faubus became infamous for deploying the National Guard to prevent Black students from entering Little Rock Central High School in 1957, defying desegregation orders.
- Initially recorded on Mingus Ah Um (1959) as an instrumental due to Columbia Records' refusal to include its politically charged lyrics.
- The instrumental version features call-and-response phrasing between horns, an aggressive bassline, and a satirical tone.
- The recording includes lyrics that mock Faubus as a "fool" and directly address the evils of segregation.
- "Fables of Faubus" was part of a broader jazz movement addressing racial injustice, with artists like Max Roach and Abbey Lincoln contributing to the conversation.
- The piece marked a shift in jazz as a medium for social commentary, capturing the frustrations and aspirations of the African American community during the Civil Rights Movement.
- Mingus's blend of musical innovation with political criticism established him as both a jazz pioneer and a bold social commentator.
- This work utilizes instruments such as the Alto saxophone, Tenor saxophone, Baritone saxophone, Trumpet, Trombone, Piano, Bass guitar, and Drums.