

**The Lively Arts
Fall Semester 2009
Topic Guide**

Topic #7

JAZZ: AMERICA'S CLASSICAL MUSIC

October 21, 2009

Dr. Billy Taylor

Dr. Taylor is the Wilmer D. Barrett Professor of Music in the Department of Music and Dance at the University of Massachusetts; Artistic Advisor on Jazz, John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, DC; Founder and Former President of New York's Jazzmobile; Host of National Public Radio's "Jazz Alive;" Music Editor of CBS's "Sunday Morning;" Former Music Director of the "David Frost Show;" Former Member of the National Council of the Arts; Winner of two Peabodys and an Emmy; Recipient of the National Medal of the Arts, selected by former President George H.W. Bush; and an internationally acclaimed performer, composer, recording artist, conductor, author, teacher, and jazz advocate.
<http://billytaylorjazz.com/>

Our guest artist this evening is a preeminent jazz musician, Dr. Billy Taylor, revered for his life-long career of solo performances and concerts with most of the world's greatest jazz musicians. Dr. Taylor will demonstrate how he thinks and what he does when he improvises--i.e. varies musical elements to spontaneously create new music while an audience listens. Improvisation has been at the heart of jazz music throughout its evolving history.

- I. Why is jazz called "America's Classical Music"? What conditions peculiar to America contributed to its development?
- II. Consider the following quotation (Dr. Billy Taylor, *Jazz Piano: A Jazz History*. Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Company Publishers, 1982, pp. 3-5):

Jazz emerged from the need of black Americans to express themselves in musical terms... Even though jazz has developed its own traditions and parameters as indigenous American music, its roots and value system are African.... Afro-Americans, in providing music which expressed themselves, not only developed a new musical vocabulary but created a classical music...which eventually came to transcend ethnic boundaries.

- III. Why has jazz so often been suppressed or banned by non-democratic governments, yet eagerly sought after by *people* throughout the world? In what sense is jazz a "democratic" form of music?
- IV. What is improvisation? Why do jazz musicians regard improvisation as the very essence of jazz? How does a jazz musician use basic elements of music (such as melody, harmony, rhythm, tempo, and dynamics, texture, timbre) as bases for improvising? What can we listen for when we hear a musician improvise?
- V. Why do musicians often define improvisation as *spontaneous composition*? What would happen if we named several musical notes and asked Dr. Taylor to "improvise on them"?

Reminders:

- Jazz response paper due in lecture Wednesday, October 28
- Required Theater Event: *Romeo & Juliet*, Tuesday, November 3, 7:30pm, Bowker Auditorium
- Quiz #4 in lecture Wednesday, November 4
- Classical music response paper due in lecture Wednesday, November 4
- Required Dance Event: Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Co., Thursday, November 5, 7:30pm, FAC Concert Hall
- Alternate Jazz Event: Dafnis Prieto Sextet, Thursday, October 22, 7:30pm, Bowker Auditorium
- Alternate Classical Event: Opus One Chamber Orchestra, Wednesday, November 4, 8:15pm, Bezanson