

Swing It!

By the mid 1920s, the jazz style of Louis Armstrong had taken hold in the city of Chicago and influenced a number of other famous musicians. The style of swinging the eighth notes had spread, permeated the entire jazz scene, and become the norm.

Chicago jazz had retained the front line and the rhythm section of New Orleans jazz. Toward the end of the 1920s and into the 1930s the horn section, or the *front line*, was expanded to include additional instruments until

finally there were four or five saxophones (two altos, two tenors, and a baritone saxophone), three or four trombones, and three or four trumpets. The rhythm section remained about the same except that the piano became the constant member of the rhythm section, along with the bass and drums. Often the guitar was added as a member of the rhythm section. This became the set number of instruments that would be used in the 1930s style, which came to be known as the *swing era*.

The swing era lasted from approximately 1935 to 1950. Swing music was heard most prevalently in New York City, which had taken over as the communications and cultural capital of America. In New York the recording industry first took hold and would later help in the further development and popularization of this type of music.

During the swing era there were two main directions that were taken by leaders of the enlarged ensembles. One direction was to feature a solo performer, often the leader of the band. Many of these bands employed a number of the leading jazz musicians of the time, and often the musical arrangements would be designed to feature these individuals, as well. An important development in this style of *big band* was the use of a *riff*, which is a short melodic line, usually quite rhythmic, that could be repeated either as the main melody of the piece or as a background for the soloists. Many of the works for this style of big band jazz were original compositions or blues tunes. The leaders of these bands were generally black and included such greats as Duke Ellington and Count Basie.

The other direction that developed in the 1930s can be seen in the bands of white band leaders such as Benny Goodman, Glenn Miller, Tommy Dorsey, and Woody Herman. These leaders incorporated many of the elements of the style used predominantly by black band leaders, but made adjustments to it in order to appeal to their predominantly white audiences. In their arrangements, the overall band sound was the most important aspect. While occasionally either the leader of the band or other special soloists would be featured, most arrangements featured ensembles. Instead of using original compositions, most band leaders created special arrangements of popular tunes such as pieces by Cole Porter and George Gershwin or other popular tunes with which their audiences were familiar. They were more interested in making their music successful with their audiences than in being artistically innovative.



**Benny Goodman
and his orchestra**

Name _____ Date _____

Questions for Consideration

1. What new style permeated the jazz scene?

2. What was expanded toward the end of the 1920s?

3. What types of instruments made up the saxophone section?

4. How many trumpets and trombones were there?

5. What became a constant member of the rhythm section?

6. What was this era known as?

7. In what city was the swing era most prevalent? Why?

8. What city was no longer the major jazz city of America?

9. Name one of the leaders of the big bands that featured black performers.

10. List three of the predominantly white band leaders.