

## Jazz: Eldar

Friday, May 20

Grades 6–12

11 a.m.–12 p.m.

**Curriculum Connections: American History**  
**National Standards for Music: 6, 7 & 9**



### About the Program

A 2008 Grammy®-nominated jazz artist at age 21, Eldar is described as "one of the finest jazz pianists of his generation" (*CMJ Magazine*). Having already produced five albums and performed in Carnegie Hall, the Hollywood Bowl, and some of the most notable jazz venues around the world, Eldar is known for his extraordinary technique, musicality, and virtuosity. With his trio, Eldar guides students in how to listen to jazz and performs some of his original compositions.

### What is Jazz?

Jazz is a distinctly American musical form. It is difficult to define jazz because it is so unique and since its conception it has been continually developing in new directions. The roots of jazz are found in West African musical traditions, as well as some European conventions. The distinguishing characteristics of jazz are syncopation, improvisation and its creativity. Syncopation is a shifting of accents from what are normally strong beats to weak beats. It often means playing one rhythm against another between different instruments in such a way that listeners want to move, nod heads, clap hands or dance. The instruments also communicate with each other through improvisation.

Improvisation is the spontaneous invention of music or song, and is a very important part of jazz. The musicians do not play printed music from the page; they create it on the spot. It is still thought of as a composition because good improvisation must have a beginning, middle and end. Jazz composition incorporates the three most important elements in music: melody, harmony and rhythm.

When you listen to music you can hear the tune or melody, the notes that provide counterpoint to the tune, called harmony, and you can feel the beat of the music, also known as the rhythm. When a jazz ensemble performs, the rhythm is usually played by the drums. The string bass or bass guitar helps the drummer "keep time," and also plays the low notes that sound good with the melody or harmony. Traditional rhythmic patterns emphasize the first and third beat; however, jazz's swing rhythm emphasizes the second and fourth beat. In jazz, the melody is a building block not the end product. It is a recipe for the overall creation of the song. The melody may be played by any instrument, or it may also be sung. Jazz features complex chord progressions that move like a landscape with dipping valleys and rising mountain peaks. This is the harmony and is usually played by the piano and guitar. The harmony can be played in any time, for example the 3/4 waltz, ballad or Latin beat.

Today, there are many different jazz genres that have spawned from traditional jazz. Still, all jazz musicians think of playing jazz the same way, as a conversation between their instruments using the given chords, while at the same time exploring how far they can travel away from the original, written melody. Every member of the ensemble is an equal player in that exploration.



Notation of the jazz ride pattern with accents on beats 2 and 4

### The Language of Jazz

Here are some specific jazz terms you should remember...

**Improvisation** Creating music or a song spontaneously, a technique that requires great musical skill and creativity

**Tempo** The speed of the music

**Rhythm** Music made up of strong and soft beats played in a repeating pattern

**Syncopation** Stressing a note in an unexpected place, between beats, or on a weak beat

**Dynamics** The loudness or softness of the music

**Individual Personality** When musicians create a unique personal sound while playing their instruments

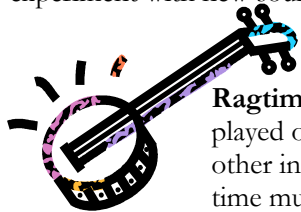
## Jazz: An Evolving Art Form

Many people consider jazz one of America's best contributions to the world of music. Jazz first emerged about 100 years ago in the Southern city of New Orleans. African American musicians fused West African musical traditions with the syncopation of **ragtime**, spiritual expression of the **blues**, harmony of classical music, and instrumentation of the big band to create a distinct new type of music. Jazz spread quickly as African Americans moved from the South to the urban North, broadening the reach of this unique music while bringing separate regional styles into contact with each other. Jazz developed rapidly through the early 1900s when musicians discovered new ways of playing classic instruments. By the 1920s jazz was America's popular music. An upbeat energetic sound played by big bands and known as **swing** filled the dance halls. Despite its popularity, the 1940s marked the end of swing and the birth of **bebop**. Prior to the development of bebop, jazz improvisation came from the melody line, but in bebop, the soloists used chordal improvisation, often avoiding the melody altogether. In the 1950s, musicians continued to extend the limits of jazz. In the early part of the decade, a handful of musicians looking to create quieter, more relaxed music developed **cool jazz**. The softer dynamics of cool jazz made it music for listening, not dancing. However, some musicians believed that those aspects of cool jazz made it challenging for audiences to relate to it. To further connect with their audiences, jazz players returned to a more expressive and accessible style of playing that became known as **hard bop**. The 1960s were defined by cultural upheaval and activism. Mirroring the atmosphere around them, jazz musicians attempted to break down and challenge the conventions of jazz, ushering in **free jazz**. In free jazz, the performers would spontaneously respond to each other, often improvising entire pieces with little or no written composition. Other solo musicians found inspiration in the "modal" music of India and Asia. Like Eastern music, **modal jazz** was based on modes instead of chord progressions. In the 1970s, jazz continued to explore and absorb influences from outside sources. By attempting to fuse the elements of rock with elements of jazz, musicians developed **jazz rock** or **fusion**. This idea of fusing different styles and instruments remains a hallmark of jazz to this day. **Contemporary jazz** is influenced by modern styles like hip hop, rap, urban contemporary and electronica. Generally, jazz is now divided into musicians who prefer to remain true to tradition and musicians who continue to experiment with new sounds. Jazz, America's classical music, continues to evolve while paying homage to the past.



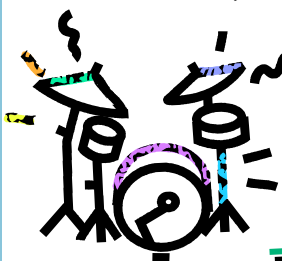
Ella Fitzgerald, Dizzy Gillespie, Ray Brown, Milt Jackson & Timmie Rosenkrantz, 1947

Photo by William P. Gottlieb  
Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Music Division



**Ragtime** was the earliest form of jazz. It was sung and played on banjos, fiddles, harmonicas, and whatever other instruments were available. It became the leisure-time music of slaves on Southern plantations, as well as being performed in taverns and other social gathering places.

**Swing** was the dominant jazz form of the 1930s and into the early 1940s. One of its distinctive features was the accent of four beats to a measure. It expanded the rhythmic patterns of ragtime. It was played mainly by big bands and some smaller bands, and was used mostly for dancing.



**Cool jazz** was an attempt by jazz musicians to reorder the basic elements of jazz. They used subtle rhythms, impressionistic harmonies, melodies which were not rugged or aggressive, and combinations of instruments which were not typical in ensembles.

**Free jazz** of the 1960s was a period of spontaneous exploration for jazz musicians. They expanded on the existing notion of improvisational playing by letting go of preconceived rhythms, harmonies and melodies.

**Jazz rock** or **fusion** was influenced by diverse musical forms such as world music, avant-garde and popular music like rock and disco. For the first time, musicians also began to incorporate electronic instruments.



**The Blues** evolved from spirituals and work songs, and like them began as vocal music. The blues developed its style and repertory almost entirely from African musical concepts and was folk-oriented jazz in the beginning.

**Bebop** was the jazz style of the 1940s. It featured long melodic lines and impressionistic harmonic patterns, many of which ended on an accented upbeat. Differing greatly from swing, bebop established itself as "the" jazz form by 1945.

**Hard bop** was an aggressive return to bebop concepts with a more direct approach to "hot" phrases and rhythms. Musicians also revisited elements of traditional, participatory styles of jazz to further develop a new way of playing.

**Modal jazz** combined bop and free jazz with exotic (to Western ears) sounds derived from half-steps, the smallest pitch interval in Western music.

**Contemporary jazz** is characterized by more experimentation, especially between traditional idioms and popular music genres. Contemporary jazz is combined and influenced by modern styles as easily as it references the traditional styles of the past.



## From Child Prodigy to Mature Jazz Musician



Eldar Djangirov on piano

**Eldar Djangirov** (pronounced EL-dar jan-GEER-off) was born in 1987 in Kyrgyzstan in the former Soviet Union. At age three, Eldar began playing piano. His mother, a university music teacher, started him on the basics of classical music. His father, an avid jazz fan, introduced him to jazz recordings at the age of five. It didn't take long before Eldar became hooked on jazz. In the summer of 1996, a jazz enthusiast from New York City named Charles McWhorter heard Eldar play at a jazz festival in Russia. Mr. McWhorter arranged for the young pianist to attend the prestigious Interlochen Center for the Arts summer camp in Michigan for three years running. When he was 11 years old, Eldar and his family left Kyrgyzstan and moved to Kansas City, Missouri, a city famous for its jazz history. Eldar received national recognition in April 1999 when he performed on National Public Radio's Piano Jazz with Marian McPartland. He is still the youngest guest ever to play with Ms.

McPartland on her show. Eldar and his family eventually moved to California. He attended the University of Southern California's Thornton School of Music. Eldar independently released his first album, *Eldar [D&D]*, in 2001. In 2003 he released a second independent disc, *Handprints*. Eldar signed with Sony Classical in 2004. He has since released four more highly acclaimed albums with the label. Eldar's album *Re-Imagination* received a 2008 Grammy® nomination for Best Contemporary Jazz Album. He has also performed at many festivals and toured throughout North America, Europe and Asia. A hard bop/post-bop pianist, Eldar's playing is characterized by exceptional technique and musicality. He just released a sixth album, his first solo piano collection, *Three Stories*. Eldar currently lives in New York City.

### Eldar's Rhythm Section

**Armando Gola**, who has played bass since age 13, is a native of Havana, Cuba, where he attended the Amadeo Roldan Conservatory. He plays both upright and electric bass and has worked with many revered jazz musicians, performing on their critically acclaimed albums. Gola toured and performed with Eldar to promote the pianist's 2009 album *Virtue* on which his bass playing is featured.

Drummer **Ludwig Afonso**, born in 1978 in Havana, Cuba, came to Miami, Florida in 1980. Afonso's father, his first and most influential teacher, was a drummer and took his young son to gigs. Since then he has received a bachelor's degree in studio music and jazz performance from the University of Miami and moved to New York where, in addition to playing with Eldar, he works on several important, independent projects.



Jazz Trio: Armando Gola, Eldar Djangirov and Ludwig Afonso

## Things You Should Look and Listen For

### Songs You Will Hear

*Moanin'* composed by Bobby Timmons

*Daily Living* composed by Eldar Djangirov

*What Is This Thing Called Love?* composed by Cole Porter

*Bésame Mucho* composed by Consuelo Velázquez

*Embraceable You* composed by George Gershwin.

*Exposition* composed by Eldar Djangirov

*Place St. Henri* composed by Oscar Peterson

- You will hear a mixture of original jazz compositions, classical work, and “standards” from the American Songbook. These “standards” represent the body of musical works created for Broadway shows and musical theater between the 1920s and the 60s.
- At times, Eldar performs at lightning speed; watch how fast his fingers move up and down on the keyboard.
- In each composition, Eldar “explores” music, shaping melodies, reshaping them, and alternating rhythm, tempo, and dynamics.

## Instructional Activities

- ⇒ **syn-co-PA-tion** “Happy Birthday” is usually accented like this: HAP-py BIRTH-day. If different, unexpected syllables are stressed, it might be pronounced: hap-PY birth-DAY. With a partner, first practice repeatedly changing “Happy Birthday” with the usual, expected accents, then practice with the unexpected syncopated accents. As you chant, clap your hands and move your bodies to the beat. Repeat this activity with other phrases or with the names of your classmates. For example, the name “Melissa” is usually pronounced: mel-LIS-sa. A syncopated pronunciation could be: mel-lis-SA.
- ⇒ Draw a timeline of the twentieth century, listing important events in American History above the line and tracking the progression of new jazz styles on the bottom. How did certain historical events change the way jazz sounded?
- ⇒ In the program, you will hear Eldar perform the song *Embraceable You* composed by George Gershwin. This song is a jazz standard, which means that it is a widely known and often played tune. Many famous musicians throughout the history of jazz recorded *Embraceable You* in various jazz styles. Listen to different recordings of the song and compare the similarities and differences of each style. Some notable recordings are:
  - Swing Jazz: Billie Holiday on *The Commodore Master Takes* (Polygram Records, 2000)
  - Bebop Jazz: Charlie Parker on *Cool Bird* (Tko Collectors, 2000)
  - Cool Jazz: Chet Baker on *Embraceable You* (Blue Note Records, 1995)
  - Free Jazz: Ornette Coleman on *This Is Our Music* (Sepia Tone, 2002)
  - Contemporary Jazz: Herbie Hancock on *Gershwin's World* (Polygram Records, 1998)

## Internet Resources

### Eldar Websites

- \* Eldar’s official website: [eldarjazz.com](http://eldarjazz.com)
- \* Eldar’s NPR Music Profile: [npr.org/artists/17974186/eldar](http://npr.org/artists/17974186/eldar)  
Here you can find recorded interviews, concert performances and studio sessions with Eldar spanning from May of 2005 to April 2011.
- \* Jazz and the New Generation II: [kennedy-center.org/education/pwtv/archive.cfm#yr2004](http://kennedy-center.org/education/pwtv/archive.cfm#yr2004)  
In the Performing Arts Series archives you will find a broadcast hosted by Dr. Billy Taylor featuring young jazz performers including 17 year old Eldar.

### Teaching Resources

- \* Smithsonian Institute: [smithsonianjazz.org](http://smithsonianjazz.org)  
The Smithsonian preserves and promotes jazz as an American national treasure through collections, exhibitions, performances, recordings, publications, oral histories and educational programs. You will find these resources on their website as well as classes on Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, Benny Carter, and Louis Armstrong.
- \* Jazz in America: [jazzinamerica.org](http://jazzinamerica.org)  
Developed by the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz, Jazz in America is the first jazz curriculum to use current internet technology and is offered free of charge on a national basis. Materials cover the elements of jazz, history of jazz, as well as audio snippets, photographs and a complete jazz resource library.
- \* Jazz Roots: [jazz.com](http://jazz.com)  
Here you can study and enjoy the music of early jazz musicians, focusing on the era before jazz became America’s popular music. The site includes an extensive list of jazz band discographies, musician biographies and a large collection of essays.
- \* All About Jazz: [allaboutjazz.com](http://allaboutjazz.com)  
Here you will find information and opinions about jazz from the past, present and future. The website shares reviews of current releases and interviews with musicians, and covers jazz from around the world.

### Additional Kennedy Center Resources

- \* Kennedy Center Millennium Stage: [kennedy-center.org/programs/millennium](http://kennedy-center.org/programs/millennium)  
Visit the Kennedy Center’s Millennium Stage website to find live and recorded broadcasts of various jazz groups who have performed there. You can easily search their Archives by artist or genre to find videos specific to your interest in jazz.
- \* ArtsEdge Jazz in Time: [artsedge.kennedy-center.org/multimedia/series/AEMicrosites/jazz-in-time](http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/multimedia/series/AEMicrosites/jazz-in-time)  
Visit the Kennedy Center’s ArtsEdge website to learn more about the history of jazz and the development of its various styles in a multimedia timeline.
- \* ArtsEdge Jazz in D.C.: [artsedge.kennedy-center.org/multimedia/series/AudioStories/jazz-in-dc](http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/multimedia/series/AudioStories/jazz-in-dc)  
Visit the Kennedy Center’s ArtsEdge website to take an audio tour through jazz history in Washington, D.C.