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COMM 110A

Dr. Darnell

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Jazz is The Definitive Musical Representation of American Democracy

Topic: Jazz

Specific Purpose: To persuade my audience of the fact that jazz represents the American political structure and the fabric of American society.

Thesis Statement: Jazz is the definitive musical representation of American democracy.

Introduction

Attention Material: “We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.” Let’s talk about jazz. When we think of jazz, we usually think of a place it’s being performed. Maybe we think of a street corner in New Orleans, the place where jazz was born. Maybe we think of an underground club in New York City, one of the largest jazz communities in the world. But when we think of jazz, we always think of America.

Credibility Material: I’ve been exposed to jazz music for as long as I can remember, and learning and performing it for the past six years. Throughout that time, I always felt it was part of my national heritage, but only in recent years did I realize how inseparable jazz is from the American experience.

Thesis Statement: Jazz is the definitive musical representation of American democracy.

Preview: This is because jazz reflects America's multicultural society, our concept of freedom, and our complex political structure.

(Transition Statement: It's important to think about the origins of jazz: it all started in 19th Century New Orleans, a cultural melting pot of a city.)

Body

- I. Jazz reflects American society by being a mixture of many different cultures.
 - A. One of the most important influences on jazz was African music. (Burns)
 1. This music entered New Orleans through slaves from the West Indies who were allowed to play traditional African music in Congo Square every Sunday.
 2. These slaves would have also brought were exposed to Caribbean and Latin culture to New Orleans as well.
 - B. The other notable influence on jazz was European music. (Burns)
 1. 19th Century New Orleans was filled with march music and arias.
 2. The city even had two full professional orchestras.
 3. Many of the Creole musicians who would become the first to play jazz were classically trained.
 - C. Uniquely American influences helped to formed jazz as well. (Burns)
 1. African-American slaves from the interior South shared the blues and gospel, which had grown from the work songs of Southern plantations.

(Transition Statement: What was at the core of this music was hope, that either at the bottom of a bottle or the top of a steeple, there was coming day of freedom.)

- II. Jazz reflects American freedom unlike any other kind of music.

A. In 1957, Dave Brubeck (the top-selling jazz artist of the day) was instructed by President Eisenhower to tour around the world, in places including Poland and Russia, during the Cold War. (Crist)

1. Eisenhower and his administration saw this as “fighting another front of the Cold War.” (Crist)
2. Brubeck concluded that wherever jazz was abundant, there was also freedom there. (Crist)
 - a. Communist Soviets at that time put jazz concertgoers on a political watch list, knowing that those who loved the musical freedom jazz offered might also be yearning for political freedom as well. (Gerlach)
3. Brubeck himself compared jazz’s creative freedom to America’s political freedom. (Crist)
 - a. Quote from Dave Brubeck: “In jazz you have the freedom of expression within the structure of the musical form. In the United States, we have individual freedom within the structure of the constitution.” (Crist)

(Transition Statement: Joel Griffin, Director of Jazz Studies at Evangel University, goes in even further in his ideas on jazz’s structure.)

III. Jazz reflects America’s political structure by representing the three branches of our American government through what’s known as the rhythm section: the drums, piano, and the bass. (Griffin)

A. The executive branch is represented by the drums. (Griffin)

1. The drums are not the most powerful instrument, but certainly the loudest.
2. The drums guide the rhythm of the song, the element that all other instruments must abide by.

B. The legislative branch is represented by the piano. (Griffin)

1. A skilled piano player will wisely choose different notes and chords that represent the key the song is being performed in.
2. The piano keys represent all the different notes and chords in all possible scales, just as the legislative branch represents all the different demographics of people in our country.

C. The judicial branch is represented by the upright bass. (Griffin)

1. The bass player has the final say on the tonality of the chord and rhythm of the song.

D. The citizens are represented by the brass. (Griffin)

1. Citizens get to do their own thing against the background that the rhythm section creates.
2. In an ideal situation, everyone gets a time to say what they want to say, and no one tramples on the rights of anyone else.

E. The whole system functions in the terms of the song.

1. When anyone involved tries to go outside of the framework, it falls apart.
(Griffin)

(Transition Statement: When any jazz player fails to remember the form, they've lost their place in the big picture. What should do we need to remember from today?)

Summary Statement: Jazz is the musical idiom in which we can best understand our nation and our place in it.

Conclusion: In other words, “We, the musicians of this wildly diverse combo, pledge to take turns keeping the music of freedom alive, for ourselves and for generations to come, continually expanding and improving on the song we have established. Every generation gets its own turn to join in, and put its own unique spin on the form. Sometimes it sounds like chaos, when the melody is lost and the beat just falls flat. But eventually, we return to the sweet old melody we all already know; the song of days gone by, the song of days yet to come, the song of America: the song of jazz.”

Works Cited

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- Gerlach, David. *Dave Brubeck on Fighting Communism with Jazz. Blank on Blank*, PBS, 10 Jan. 2013, www.youtube.com/watch?v=CVfVTQmiRJs.
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