

Biographies of Jazz Greats

The Golden Era, 1920-1960

Course #	19FBJ
Format:	Seminar
Moderator(s):	Neil Novik
Co-Moderator:	Robert Cohen
Date and Time:	Wednesday, 9:30-11:30 10 weeks, starting September 25
Location:	Smith College, Lilly Hall, Room 308
Maximum number of participants:	18
Auditors accepted:	Yes, up to 2

Purpose: The purpose of this seminar is to learn about the history and significance of the Golden Age of jazz through the exploration of the lives and music of a select number of musicians.

Description: The story of jazz, arguably the only pure American art form, is highlighted by individuals whose extraordinary lives and talents intersected with critical moments of American cultural, economic, and racial history. This seminar will focus on artists who made their mark during what is often called the “Golden Era” of Jazz, from 1920-1960, or from the start of recorded jazz through the bebop era.

Participants in this seminar will explore and discuss the lives and music of a select number of artists of that era. In each session, we will learn about the artist’s life, as well as the societal and historical influences contributing to his or her achievements. In addition, we will listen to a sample of the artist’s music and discuss the music’s place in the history and development of the genre.

The list of artists to consider includes Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Billie Holiday, Charlie Parker, and many others. A complete roster will be available at Preview.

Role of participants: Each participant will select one musician from the moderators’ list. He or she will give a brief presentation on the artists’ life, play one or more recordings, and lead a discussion on not only the artists and the music, but also the historical contexts and influences on the genre.

Resources: *Jazz: The Golden Era*, by Richard Havers and Richard Evans, Chartwell Books, 2009
Jazz: A History of America’s Music, by Geoffrey C. Ward and Ken Burns, Knopf, 2000
These are large format books, available as used books and through interlibrary loan (Neither is required). There are also many biographies and websites on individual artists, including www.jazzbiographics.com (useful for short bios).

About the Moderator: Neil Novik has moderated several seminars, including those on the 1930’s, old-time radio, and the history of comedy. He has been listening to jazz, mostly from the bebop era, since he was a boy.

Robert Cohen grew up in Westfield, attended Cornell and Boston University and has a BA in psychology. His passions are music, theatre, art, film and reading. He still hopes to write the Great American couplet.