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# The Lady

23 FEBRUARY 2018 WEEKLY

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# ALL THAT (BRITISH) JAZZ

As an exhibition on 100 years of jazz in Britain opens, Melonie Clarke speaks to the curator about why the genre has such an enduring appeal

**S**itting in my vintage dress, driving my classic car, my home full of knick-knacks from times gone by - when my grandparents said, 'You should have been born in a different era,' I couldn't disagree.

But what brings together my love for all things vintage is certainly the soundtrack to eras past, in particular the jazz sound from the 1920s - what you will usually find playing in my house should you pop in for tea (served of course using vintage crockery).

This year is an exciting one for jazz lovers across Britain, as it marks 100 years since its syncopated tones hit our shores. In celebration of this, *Rhythm & Reaction: The Age of Jazz in Britain*, at Two Temple Place in London, explores the genre and how it had such an influence on so many aspects of our lives.

The exhibition's curator, Professor Catherine Tackley (who completed a PhD on early jazz in Britain and plays in her own band, Dr Jazz and the Cheshire Cats), explains. 'This exhibition tells the story of the ever-popular Jazz Age in new ways, focusing on British depictions of jazz to understand what the music meant to artists, assessing the resultant image of jazz in the public sphere as well as considering how jazz was encountered in everyday domestic environments,' she says.

'Above all, the exhibition links the music with the aesthetics of art produced in response to it, uniquely foregrounding the impact of jazz music on Jazz Age art.'

Bringing together paintings, prints, cartoons, textiles, ceramics, film clips and, of course, instruments and the all-important jazz sound, it's

clear that as a genre it had a huge influence on British art, design and wider society. But why did jazz have such an effect where other musical styles perhaps didn't?

'There was that sense of freedom, which other music has, but jazz has always painted quite a vivid discourse of its freedom and of its spontaneity, and that was quite appealing,' says Catherine. 'There was other popular music at the time, like the tango, and that had a cultural impact as well, but it's difficult to think in that period of another type of music that would have had that wider artistic and aesthetic impact.'

Jazz influenced everything from high art to domestic design, she says: 'Some of the ceramics and textiles at the time, often the designs are actually called "Jazz" - it's a real connection. What's been so interesting for me is



Above: Bar shoes, c 1920



Right: The Original Dixieland Jazz Band in London, 1919



## FEATURE



**The Dance Club (The Jazz Party)**  
by William Patrick Roberts, 1923

often those designs were in objects that weren't intended as high art, they were intended as pieces you would buy for your home, so this is the idea that it was a popular music that was made accessible by technology, but also, whether it was a piece of material you could make a cushion from or a vase you could have on your shelf, you could actually buy into that aesthetic in terms of things you could own, and I think that's really significant.

'The ceramics are so vivid and they are absolutely based on jazz, you can completely see where they were coming from in terms of their inspiration.'

Catherine tells me how jazz very much split opinions when people in Britain first heard it. 'Most of the

*'It's difficult to think in that period of another type of music that had a wider artistic and aesthetic impact'*

earliest jazz that came over from America came over in a variety format, the Original Dixieland Jazz Band were part of a variety review show. We've got a programme from the London Palladium in 1919 with the band, and they were alongside the normal kind of turns, a comedian, someone riding a unicycle, an opera singer...

'Some people said they'd never heard anything like it and they wanted to hear more, for some people it was, "What is this and how are we supposed to think about it?" so there was a real mix. There was downright opposition

from some people, saying it wasn't right, but for others it was what they had been searching for, in terms of a new way forward artistically.'

Despite not everyone being on board with the new jazz sound, it began to spread, and jazz was firmly established in Britain by the end of 1945.



Right: Jazz 3353  
vase by Enoch  
Boulton for  
Carlton Ware



Left: Enoch Boulton's design for Jazz 3353



## FEATURE

the 1930s; the famous American band leader Duke Ellington came to the UK for the first time in 1933. 'The first American bands coming over, the most notable of which was the Original Dixieland Jazz Band in 1919, they were mostly restricted to London; obviously there was a lot going on in London, it was where people went.'

'I suppose the musical side came a little later in terms of people being able to encounter the music, either through live performances or records or radio broadcasts. The BBC were quite careful about how they integrated it. By the end point of this era, there were starting to be specialist jazz programs, Duke Ellington was heard on the BBC, so it did expand.'

It was in the 1930s that jazz really took off in this country: 'The spread of jazz was really rapid and I think the important point that sometimes gets lost is, it was as much the idea of jazz as the sound of jazz that spread, and, in fact, there is really strong evidence to suggest that the idea of jazz was actually around in Britain before the word was being used in association of something that was modern or up to date - often being used as an adjective and not a noun, so to have something that was jazzy meant that it was modern and up to date. I think that's very much part of it, being bright or colourful in whatever sort of sense.' ■

♦ *Rhythm & Reaction: The Age of Jazz in Britain* is on until 22 April at Two Temple Place, London WC2: 020-7836 3715, [www.twotempleplace.org](http://www.twotempleplace.org)



The Band by Edward Burra, 1934



Melody Maker magazine, 1929.  
Below: Drummer of the London Sonora Band, 1926 Pathé film clip



BRIGHTEST LONDON AND HOME BY UNDERGROUND

Brightest London and Home by Underground, Horace Taylor, 1924



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