

Teenagers and Their Familiarity with Jazz

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to understand what teenagers think of jazz. The authors hypothesize that most teenagers do not listen to jazz music because it is not in “trend” and that it is not “cool” to listen to. An anonymous 20-question survey was conducted amongst students in Miami Dade County in Florida. 101 students responded to the survey. Results were analyzed for teenagers’ lack of familiarity with jazz and reasons for it. The results show that less than half of responding teenagers listen to jazz and that it is not very popular amongst the youth. The survey results provide insight into the reasons how teenagers perceive jazz as an art form. The survey also presents different reasons why jazz is unpopular among teenagers. The authors use data from the survey to justify their hypothesis. The paper makes multiple recommendations on how jazz as an art form can be revived and kept alive for future generations. The authors acknowledge that jazz is not a static artform and is constantly evolving. The authors conclude the article by questioning whether the historical and current versions of jazz should be preserved and promoted, or just be let to evolve in the future just like it has done in the past.

Teenagers and Their Familiarity with Jazz

Jazz originated in New Orleans, Louisiana in the late 19th century (National Museum of American History, n.d.). It originated and developed as an African American art form. The city was a melting pot of Caribbean, African, and European influences. This led to ragtime, blues, improvisational, and brass styles. All these styles combined into one style which became known as jazz.

One period in history that propelled jazz music was the Roaring Twenties. Many jazz historians call it the Jazz Age (Peretti, 1992). This time heard the likes of Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, and many more wonderful jazz musicians. Jazz bands were becoming more popular, record labels were being created, and most of all, many young children were being inspired to play an instrument. Jazz became the cornerstone of cultural revolutions, entertainment, dance, and media. Jazz represented one of the most important ideals in life, freedom. In the words of Dave Brubeck, “Jazz stands for freedom. It is supposed to be the voice of freedom: Get out there and improvise and take chances (Gans, 2012).”

The Great Migration also had a profound effect on jazz music. Pushing African Americans toward major northern hotspots, such as Chicago and New York, allowed jazz styles to blend and evolve into many newer and distinctive styles and approaches (The Jazz Renaissance, n.d.).

During WWII, a revolutionary style of jazz music appeared. Bebop saw fast tempos, complicated melodies, and intricate improvisation from the world’s finest musicians (The Jazz History Tree, n.d.). The most prominent in this period was saxophonist Charlie Parker. In many ways, he was the father of modern jazz and became an inspiration for many artists in the future (The Famous People, n.d.). “Charlie Parker was the beacon who showed us the way,” said Thelonius Monk. “The man who changed the course of jazz,” said Leonard Feather.

In the subsequent years, jazz kept evolving and saw the emergence of fine musicians such as Miles Davis, Thelonius Monk, and John Coltrane (Irvine, 2023). The innovative works of these unforgettable jazz musicians solidified the genre as an ever-evolving art form.

A credit to jazz is that it combated racism in its unique way. Even though jazz emerged in a racially segregated America, musicians mentioned earlier such as Charlie Parker, Duke Ellington, and Louis Armstrong, showed amazing talent that transcended racial prejudice (Deseret News et al., 2000). Their extraordinary performances and collaborations with musicians of many diverse cultural backgrounds highlighted the power of music to bridge gaps; it also contributed to the dismantling of segregation in the music field. Through their talent, hard work, and perseverance, these jazz musicians helped pave the way for greater inclusivity and the appreciation of talent, regardless of racial origins.

In many ways, jazz is one of the few truly American art forms (McLaughlin, 2012). Its history, growth, and evolution are emblematic of the contemporary social struggles and evolution of the United States. As the country continues to absorb people from countries around the world and transform into a multicultural society, one would expect a similar transformation in Jazz.

If jazz has such a unique American history as detailed above, then what is its future? Does it have a future? Do people still listen to jazz or have other styles of music such as pop and hip-hop taken over from jazz? Jazz was born as an African American form of music. Rap and hip-hop are now the most popular contemporary African American forms of music. So, is jazz a remnant from the past, likely to die a slow death and be confined to history museums? The best way to understand the future of jazz is to see what the youth of today think of this musical style. Teenagers are the future of this nation. They are open to ideas, and most likely to innovate as they have yet to be set in their ways.

It is also fair to ask if teenagers should learn about jazz. A viable argument is that jazz is a true American art form and so they should learn about it. Also, according to some studies, jazz increases confidence, self-esteem, and coordination. This is backed up by valid evidence from Fluther.com (Fluther.com, 2010) and Sax on the Web Forum (n.d.). It also helps develop creativity and provides a healthy environment for socialization. The most important reason teenagers should learn to play jazz is that it allows them to be original and gives them the freedom to improvise and personalize the tune. This is vastly different from classical music where there is minimal room for improvisation, everything is set in stone.

There is extraordinarily little research that explores the topic of teenagers and their relationship with jazz. However, there are online forums such as Quora and Slate, with potentially valid explanations about why teenagers would not be so attracted to jazz. One explanation is that jazz is not widely advertised or shown to a young audience. Today, teenagers find out about jazz on their own. There are no “young” or teenage jazz artists that teenagers can relate to.

Hypothesis

This research aims to understand what teenagers think of jazz. The authors wanted to discover if they liked it, listened to it, and reasons for both. If they did not listen to it, what do they listen to and what do they know, if anything, about jazz? The authors hypothesize that most teenagers do not listen to jazz music because it is not in “trend” and that it is not “cool” to listen to. Other reasons why teenagers might not listen to jazz are because parents or friends do not listen to it, it does not reflect their culture, and they are less attracted to jazz music because jazz they are familiar with does not include lyrics.

Methods

Based on the hypothesis mentioned above, the authors felt that a survey of teenagers was needed to better understand their perceptions of jazz music. The method of data collection was via an online survey. The authors created the survey to prove/disprove the hypothesis, which is that many teenagers do not listen to jazz because it is not in style. The survey was designed in such a way that the pattern would be familiar to teenagers and took

less than three minutes to complete. Participants were incentivized to participate through a raffle for a gift card upon completion of the survey. Multiple individuals reviewed the survey questions. These included a director of a school music program, a director of a community arts program, and a retired professor of jazz from a reputable university. This helped to ensure that the right survey questions were asked.

The survey was sent to high school students in multiple private and public schools in Miami-Dade County, Florida. Participants were between the ages of 15 and 18 male and female.

The data was collected using Google Forms. Google Forms is a popular software that students are familiar with. It is highly dependable and can be individualized to the needs of the project. It automatically takes the data from each time the survey is completed and provides graphs that help the analysis.

The survey consisted of twenty multiple-choice questions. The questions were designed to understand the participants' familiarity with jazz, willingness to listen to jazz, the type of music the participant listened to currently, and the type of music that the participant's friends and family listened to and checked if the participant was familiar with the sole jazz radio station in the region. The questions were framed to obtain enough information to prove or disprove the author's hypothesis. Most questions had one correct answer, but a few were designed to allow participants to agree with more than one choice.

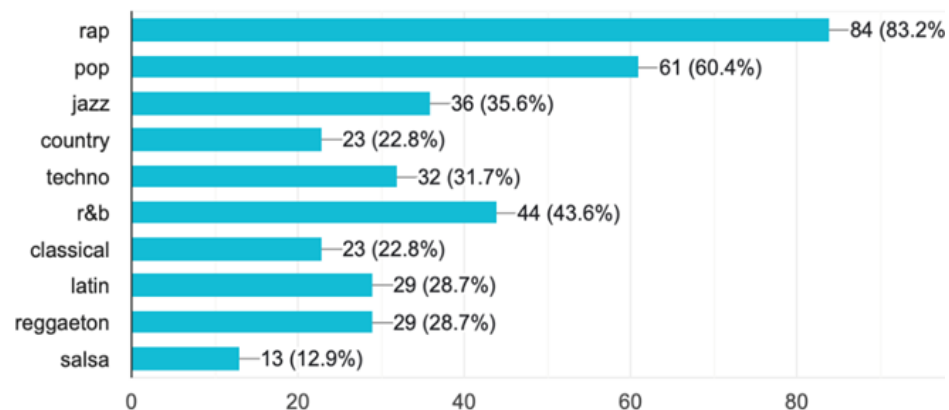
A total of 150 surveys were sent out to teenagers. A total of 101 responses were received. The graphs shown below describe the responses obtained in this survey.

Results

1.

Which genres of music do you listen to

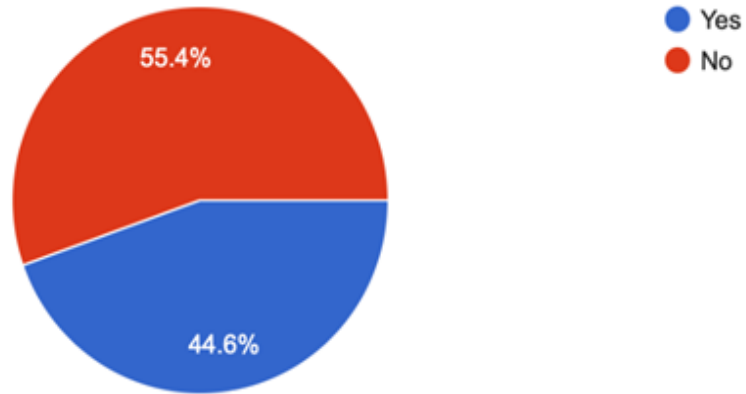
101 responses



2.

Do you listen to any jazz?

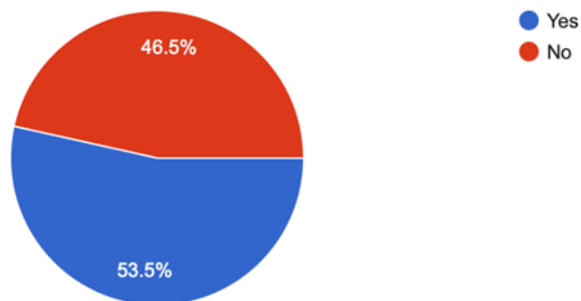
101 responses



3.

Would you ever spend your free time listening to jazz?

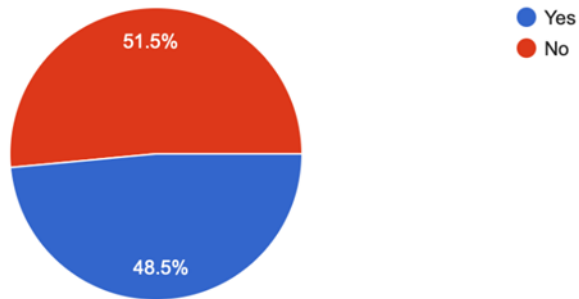
101 responses



4.

Would you ever listen to jazz while driving?

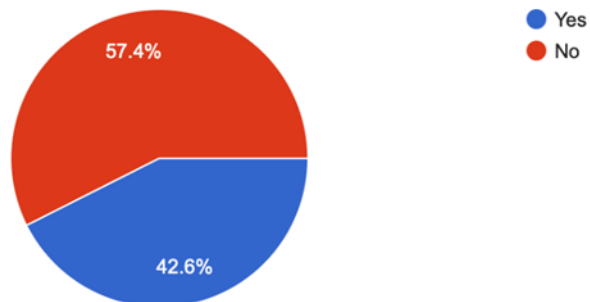
101 responses



5.

Would you ever tune the radio to a jazz station

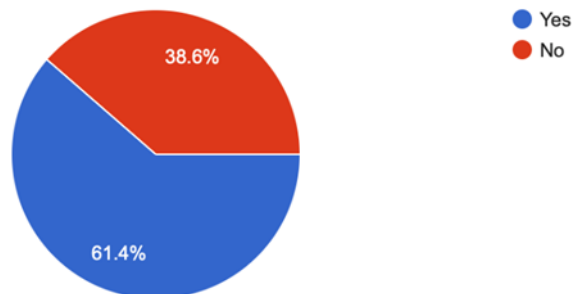
101 responses



6.

Do you think that people who are not in the school music program will listen to jazz?

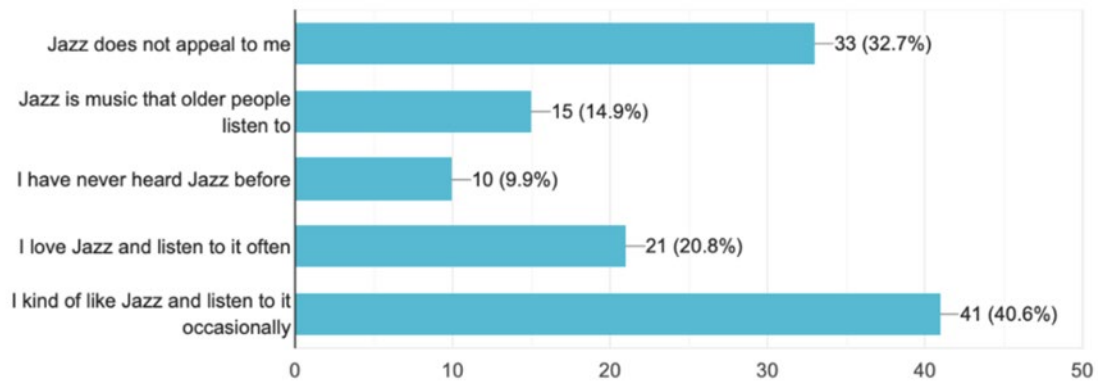
101 responses



7.

What is your opinion of Jazz music?

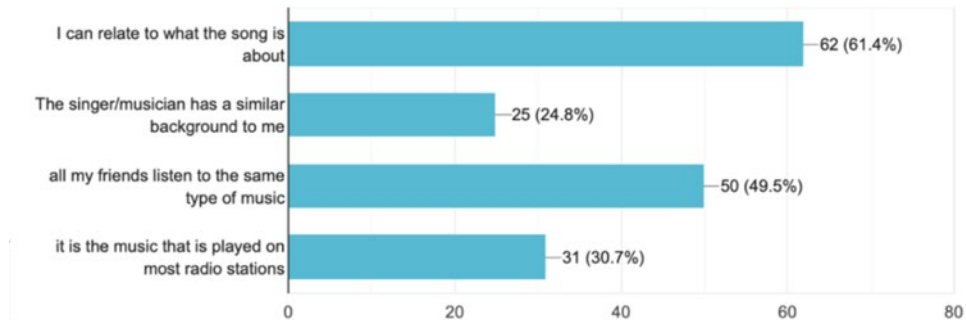
101 responses



8.

The music I listen to appeals to me because

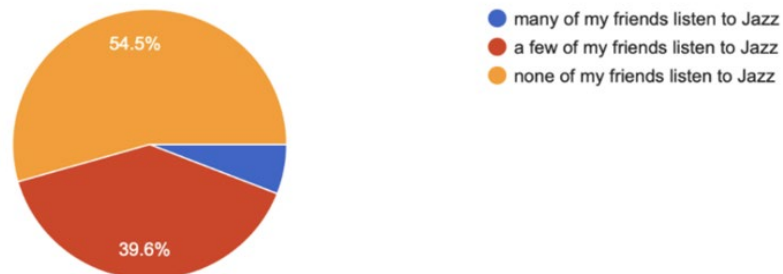
101 responses



9.

Do any of your friends listen to Jazz?

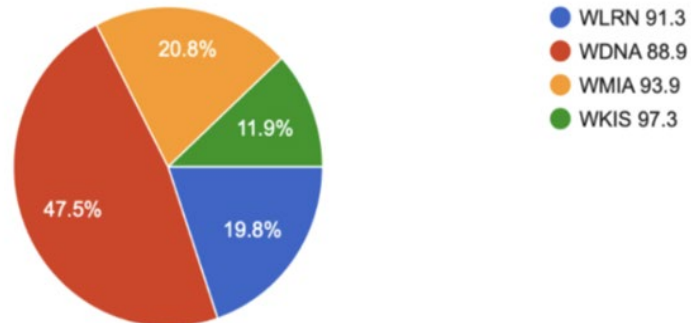
101 responses



10.

Which of the following radio stations is a Jazz radio station

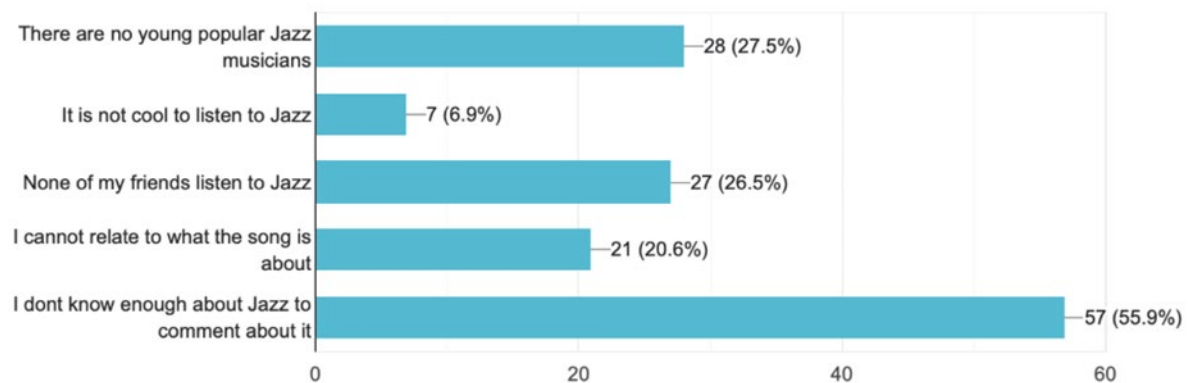
101 responses



11.

I cannot relate much to Jazz because

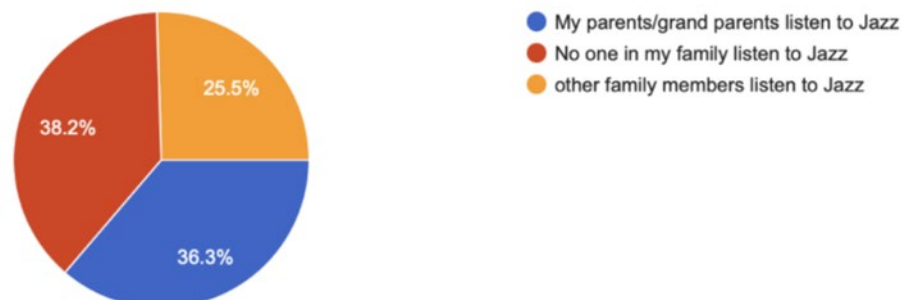
102 responses



12.

Does anyone in your family listen to Jazz?

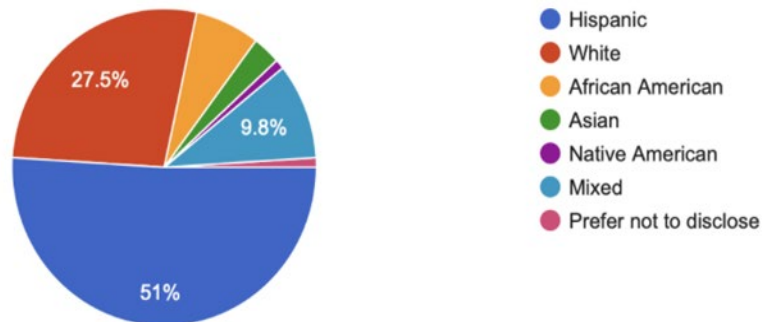
102 responses



13.

What is your race/ethnicity

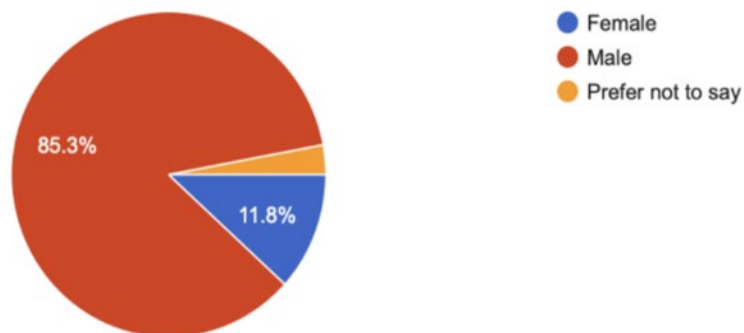
102 responses



14.

What is your gender

102 responses



Analysis of Results

The results of the survey show the following. All respondents were between the ages of 15 and 18. Of the 101 responses received, 85% of the respondents were male (graph 13). Over 50% identified as Hispanic and only 5% were African American (graph 14). These findings are important as they could significantly impact the responses. Hispanics have a rich heritage of music different from Jazz that they were exposed to growing up. They may not be as familiar with jazz as a young person from an African American background. Whether the fact that the cohort of respondents was predominantly male would impact the results is unclear. Music choices of males vs females is an area that is yet to be explored and understood.

When asked if their friends listen to jazz, fifty-four percent of respondents did not have a single friend who listened to jazz and only nine percent said many of their friends listened to jazz (graph 9). Fifty-six percent of the respondents answered that they do not listen to jazz (graph 2). This is almost identical to the fifty-four percent of respondents who did not have a single friend who listened to jazz.

Based on these answers, one can clearly state that there is a generational loss of over fifty percent in the audience for jazz music. This number seems foreboding and suggests a gradual decline and disappearance of jazz as an art form. However, the results of the remaining questions in this survey allow us to understand better why this number is so high and whether there is any hope of decreasing these numbers and reviving the fortunes of jazz.

It is interesting to see that sixty-two percent of respondents say that a parent or other family member listens to jazz (graph 12). This shows that teenagers have exposure to jazz at home. This is especially important given that over fifty percent of respondents were Hispanics. This confirms that being of Hispanic origin does not preclude listening to jazz. This information is important to note as the demographics of the United States now show a Hispanic population that has a sizable proportion and is expected to grow even more in the future.

The answers to graph 11 are even more revealing. Over 50% of teenagers who answered this survey admit that they do not know enough about jazz to comment about it. The graph also shows that the lack of visible young jazz icons may play a significant role in not attracting youth to jazz music.

Graph number 7 goes on to explore the interest in jazz amongst the respondents. The answers to this graph show that 20% of the respondents listen to Jazz often and another 40% listen to jazz occasionally. Only 33% responded saying that jazz does not appeal to them at all. These numbers should give hope that all hope is not lost for jazz and that there is a chance for revival even now.

Graph 1 and graph 8 provide a better understanding of what teenagers listen to and what appeals to them. Graph 8 allowed for students to pick more than one answer. It shows that rap, pop, and R&B are the most popular forms of music among teenagers. It is interesting to see that 22% of teenagers listen to classical music and 30% include Jazz as one of the types of music they listen to.

The information from Graph 8 is where we get to understand why the respondents listen to a particular type of music. The answers to this question allow us to get into the respondent's mind and understand what makes a particular type of music appealing to teenagers. This information is critical to understanding the audience better. It clarifies the importance of being able to relate to music. It emphasizes the importance of peer influence on the type of music a teenager listens to. The answers to this question also confirm the importance of radio stations and what they play in influencing a teenager's choice of music. All this information is extremely useful in developing a strategy to promote jazz music among teenagers.

Graphs 3, 4, and 5 show that a considerable number of respondents are open to listening to jazz in their free time or while driving. They are open to tuning into a jazz radio station. That 47% of the respondents knew that WDNA was the local jazz radio station is itself a very heartening piece of information (graph 10).

Some of the potential biases that could affect the results of the survey responses include the following.

1. The overall number of responses was 101. While adequate for an initial study, larger sample sizes may alter the overall results of the survey.

2. Over fifty percent of teenagers who responded to the survey came from Hispanic families. This cohort may not be truly representative of the teenage population in the United States.

A considerable number of teenagers who answered this survey were participants in their school music programs. So, they were exposed to assorted styles of music and had more interest in learning music than students who were not part of their school music programs. This could result in a bias that would influence the answers to the survey.

This article is likely to be the first effort to understand the perception of Jazz among teenagers. The information from this survey clearly shows that Jazz is in deep trouble due to the generational loss in audience. However, the information from this survey also shows that there are many opportunities to revive Jazz by making some concerted efforts.

Recommendations

The efforts to revive Jazz should include the following.

1. Increasing exposure to jazz among teenagers by having more Jazz played on more popular radio stations.
2. Increase exposure to jazz through social media such as Instagram and TikTok which are more popular amongst teenagers.
3. Actively promote young jazz musicians who may be more relatable to other teenagers.
4. Promote jazz radio stations amongst teenagers by inviting more teenagers to perform and promoting radio stations on social media.
5. Promote jazz through social media influencers who have the attention of large audiences, especially teenagers.
6. Encourage High School Music program directors to include one jazz music piece for students to learn every year.
7. Have Jazz artists showcase their talent to high school music program students with particular emphasis on improvisation.
8. Add a jazz piece to the options for district and state level solo and ensemble music competitions.
9. Obtain sponsorship and organize inter school jazz band competitions with good prize money for winners to entice more students to participate.
10. create a documentary on the history of jazz and present in every school to encourage more students to join the music program.
11. Include at least one jazz piece as part of the program for every high school annual music concert.

Conclusion

This article traces the history of jazz and highlights the fact that it is a unique American art form. The results of the survey provide the reader with a more in-depth understanding of teenagers and their perception of jazz. The results of the survey support the authors' hypothesis. Finally, the article details ways this art form can be revived and sustained for future generations. Whether an art form must be "kept alive" is itself highly debatable. This question is especially pertinent given that jazz is not a static art form and is ever evolving. Jazz as it was known in the 1920s and 1930 is very different from what is known as jazz in the contemporary era. Classic jazz of earlier eras has already taken its place as historic music and is more repertory music along the lines of classical music. Younger artists are finding radically different directions in which they are taking their music. The authors acknowledge that a forced revival will not be effective and sustainable. The authors understand and accept that Jazz will continue to evolve as it absorbs influences from new waves of immigrants to America, each of whom bring their own styles of music with them. The authors support this evolution of jazz and encourage improvisation which is unique to jazz as an art form.

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