

THE GENESIS of R&B

Text Type: Magazine article
Suggested finishing time: 25 mins

Oliver Wong

Let's think!

1. What kind of music do you like? Why?
2. Do you like R&B music? Why or why not?

Do you know what kind of music R&B is? Have you ever had doubts about why popular singers with varied musical styles, like Jay Chou and Bruno Mars, are all labelled as R&B singers? Nowadays, R&B seems to be a dominant music genre, alongside pop music, but few of us know what it really is.

R&B, which stands for 'Rhythm and Blues', originated from Afro-American communities in the United States back in the 1920s to 1930s, when a number of Afro-Americans moved from rural areas to big cities in the United States. Back then, Afro-American musicians gathered together in cities and played songs or music with gloomy lyrics and melodies. This contributed to the rise of Blues—a form of music that expresses homesickness.

In the 1940s, lots of Afro-American musicians like Lazy Bill Lucas formed small bands to work at bars and clubs. Many youngsters, however, thought Blues was outdated. Therefore, a new genre, namely 'Rhythm and Blues' or 'R&B', was created to attract the newer generation. This earliest form of R&B music, which combined jazz and blues, was loud and energetic. Most of the time, it was played on drums, double basses, and electric guitars, with accompanying strong vocals. Its liberated and upbeat tempo makes people get up and dance rather than just sit quietly and clap. This new style of music was later getting more and more popular across the United States. As a result, larger bands emerged everywhere, adding piano,



▲ Lazy Bill Lucas

More to Take Away

Afro-Americans (or African-Americans) are North Americans with ancestry from any black racial groups of Africa. Barack Obama, the 44th president of the United States, is Afro-American.



▲ Louis Jordan

STEAM WORKBOOK

Cantonese is a language with steady rhythm, since every syllable is stressed. English, on the other hand, is rhythmically more unstable than Cantonese, as there are strong, stressed syllables as well as soft, unstressed syllables. Such difference is crucial to songwriting.



▲ Michael Jackson



▲ Mariah Carey



◀ Bruno Mars

trumpet and saxophone to their music. With its growing popularity, many bands even started to sell
 25 records. T-Bone Walker, Louis Jordan, Ruth Brown, Bo Diddley, Muddy Waters and Ray Charles were
 some of the biggest names in R&B music at that time. From the 1970s, 'R&B' had been evolving into
 a blanket term for blues, soul, funk and gospel music, with legendary artists Michael Jackson and
 Mariah Carey as its epitome.

Throughout the years, Michael Jackson and Mariah Carey, as the cream of the crop in the league,
 30 have not only taken R&B to its next phase but also witnessed its vicissitudes. Under the inspiration
 of these two influential souls, R&B has been fused with elements of funk, soul, pop and hip hop,
 bringing forth a new genre known as 'contemporary R&B'. This type of music has a more refined
 production, in which it can go without the piano or the saxophone. Powerful vocals and vibrant
 beats, instead, take on a major role. Some of the most popular contemporary R&B performers, like
 35 Beyoncé, Rihanna and Bruno Mars, captivate numerous audiences and continuously make forays
 into the soulful melodies and groundbreaking fusion of music genres. In 2018, Bruno Mars won three
 Grammy Awards, including Record of the Year for his album *24K Magic*, proving that contemporary
 R&B has gained mainstream approval for its eclectic style and seamless blends of vintage and
 modern melodies. His tracks resembled the 80s funk and 90s soul, whereas Rihanna's latest album
 40 integrated soul from the 50s and 60s. Their songs hit the Top 5 on the *Billboard* Hot 100 Chart in
 2018, weaving glittering records like their mentor Mariah did.

~510 words

Looking into Grammar

The passive voice is used to emphasise the recipient of an action of which the performer is either omitted or indicated with 'by'. Note that intransitive verbs are not used in the passive form.

- ✗ A nurse was become by her after graduation.
- ✓ She became a nurse after graduation.

🔍 Circle TWO examples of verbs used in the passive voice in paragraph 3.

Part A Multiple Choice Questions

Answer the following questions based on the information provided in the magazine article. Choose the best answer by blackening the appropriate circle.

1. Where did R&B originate?

- A. big cities in Africa
- B. rural areas in Africa
- C. big cities in America
- D. rural areas in America

1 The word 'originate' means 'begin' or 'come from'.

2. In line 20, the word 'liberated' can best be replaced by '_____'.

- A. popular
- B. conventional
- C. free
- D. up-to-date

3. What was the earliest form of R&B like?

- A. full of energy
- B. emotional
- C. cheerful and light
- D. soft and gloomy

4. Which of the following is NOT true about R&B?

- A. It has undergone variations over time.
- B. Contemporary R&B integrates several music genres.
- C. It can be played without the piano or the saxophone.
- D. It is a kind of dreary and miserable music with pessimistic lyrics.



5. Read line 11. The word 'This' refers to the fact that Afro-Americans _____.

- A. stayed in rural areas together
- B. joined one another to play sad music
- C. gathered because they were homesick
- D. moved to big cities in the United States

6. 'R&B' later became 'a blanket term' for _____.

- A. ways to keep singers warm
- B. different styles of vocals of singers
- C. various genres of music
- D. famous artists

7. The last paragraph is about _____.

- A. the music industry today
- B. R&B music today
- C. the R&B singers with the most hits
- D. how vintage R&B becomes popular again

7 Find the topic sentence of the paragraph to help identify its main idea.



Please scan the QR code on P.6 to access the checklist for evaluating your own reading progress.

Part B Pre-HKDSE Questions

Answer the following questions based on the information provided in the magazine article. For question 1, answer in a complete sentence.

1. Think of a word that can replace the word 'genesis' in the article's title.
-



2. Look at the following pronouns and answer what/who they refer to in the magazine article.

Pronoun	Line	Reference
Its	line 20	(i)
it	line 33	(ii)
His	line 39	(iii)

2 Pay attention to what the possessive adjectives (e.g. his, its) refer to.

3. Determine whether each of the following statements is a fact, an opinion, or undecided because not enough information is given.

Statement	Fact	Opinion	Not Given
(i) Contemporary R&B incorporates vintage and modern elements.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(ii) Blues is very old-fashioned.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
(iii) Rihanna has never won any Grammy Awards.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



4. What are the important decades for R&B and their representative features and singers? Complete the summary below. Some of the details have been completed to help you.

Decade	Features	Singers
(i) 19____s-	combined (ii) _____ and blues; sung by strong vocals	Louis Jordan, Ruth Brown
(iii) 19____s-	a blend of (iv) _____, soul, funk and gospel music	Michael Jackson, (v) _____
2000s-	(vi) _____ vocals and vibrant beats	(vii) _____, Beyoncé, Rihanna

5. Complete the summary below by filling in ONE word in each blank.

5 Change the parts of speech or the forms if necessary.

R&B (i) _____ in the United States. At first created by (ii) _____ bands, it is now popular all over the world. Some pop singers have even become the (iii) _____ of contemporary R&B, whose music reflects the (iv) _____ of it, as R&B integrates music of different styles.

Part C Vocabulary Bank

Label the photos below with the names (and their less formal alternative names in brackets) of the musical instruments from the word box.

drum kit (drums)

trumpet

pianoforte (piano)

clarinet

trombone

double bass (bass)

bass guitar (electric bass)



1.



2.



3.



4.

strings

percussion

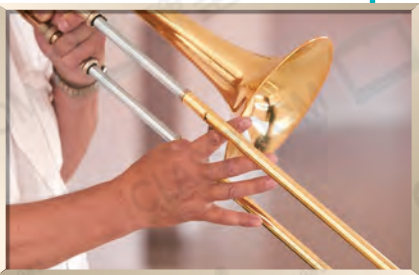
Common musical instruments for playing R&B or Jazz

woodwind

Let's Discuss!



1. Who is your favourite singer? Why do you like him/her?
2. Do you play any musical instruments?



5.




6.




7.

Part D Cloze Passage

Complete the website below with the appropriate words introduced on the previous page.

 <http://www.music.com/jazz.html>

MUSIC.com 

1. [Musical notations](#)
2. [Periods of music history](#)
3. [Musical instruments predominant in each music genre](#)
 - i. [Classical music](#)
 - ii. [Jazz](#) 



Music lovers who are unfamiliar with Jazz may think that, being so different from other music genres, it may require instruments to be designed especially for its artistic purposes. Quite the contrary: Jazz musicians mostly just use stringed, woodwind and percussion instruments that are often used in Classical music. For example, the commonest musical instrument, the (1) _____, is used in Jazz as it is in Classical music both to accompany (play the supporting lines) and to lead (play the melodic lines).

Of the instruments used in Jazz for accompaniment, the (2) _____ should be familiar to Rock lovers for its capacity to give strong rhythms to the music. And you may picture the (3) _____ as a bigger cello with a lower pitch that is, however, played with hands instead of a bow. Lastly, from the name of the (4) _____, you can tell that it is basically an electric guitar with a pitch similar to a bass.

The saxophone is the only Jazz instrument from the woodwind family that is unconnected to Classical music in the popular imagination. It is a golden instrument that produces mellow sounds. Its name interestingly but misleadingly suggests sexiness, and associates its players with being romantic. It is designed to be played vertically (with the instrument pointing downwards), so don't confuse it with the trumpet or the trombone. All three are roughly of the same colour, but only two of them are played horizontally (with the instrument pointing outwards), and are less elaborate in design. The (5) _____ is the one smaller and higher in pitch, whereas the (6) _____ is larger and lower in pitch. None of them is comparable to the (7) _____, being silvery and slim and able to produce a sound that is a curious mix of calmness and sweetness.