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## Jazz for beginners

*Learn to really dig it*

Louis Armstrong famously said that if you had to ask what jazz was, you'd never know. Brighton singer and BBC 3 broadcaster Claire Martin is a little more helpful.

**Jazz is supposed to be the sound of surprise.** To me it means improvised music that's sometimes challenging but is never boring. It's music that sounds different every night.

**Having said that, there are rules.** Not in free jazz, which is completely improvised, but in trad jazz and more mainstream jazz there are a set length of bars, set harmonies and melodies. If I've sung a song once and want to go through it again, I have to try and create a melody that's as interesting as Gershwin's that sticks to the harmonic structure and begins and ends in the right place.

**Even with scat singing, it isn't about gritting your teeth and hitting any note.** Ella Fitzgerald knew exactly what she was going to do next. The trick is in making it look totally spontaneous.

**Jazz expects a little more of you as a listener. You have to meet the musicians halfway.** You won't be able to hum the chorus in three minutes like in pop. But you shouldn't need to work too hard. You should be listening for a tone, a melody, an emotion that touches you in some way. You don't need to worry about how it was created to appreciate it.

**As a teenager I loved pop but when I started my career at the age of 19, jazz was the only thing I wanted to sing because I knew I'd never get bored of**



it. I still put on the greats after some wine and aspire to be half as good as they are. Your work is never finished in this job and that's what makes it interesting.

**It's hard to define exactly what it is that makes a musician great** but in jazz it has a lot to do with emotion. You have to be willing

to lay yourself bare; to be vulnerable. Billie Holiday had the story, the poise, the phrasing but most of all she had emotion and you hear it every time.

**I admire Miles Davis because of the way he kept reinventing himself.** When rock 'n' roll arrived in the '60s it was the end for a lot of jazz musicians but he kept trying out new things.

**If you're totally new to jazz,** I'd recommend listening to Miles Davis' *Milestones*. If you put that on and it doesn't appeal to you in any way...there's probably no hope.

**There isn't really any special lingo to learn.** I suppose if you want to blend in, you might say something like, 'Yeah man, his solo was killin'. If you really want to go for it you could try: "He was playing really deep, he was really diggin' in. That solo was burrrrin'!" *As told to Nione Meakin*

**Claire Martin will perform at the first South Coast Jazz Festival, which takes place at the Ropetackle Arts Centre, Shoreham, from January 23 - 25.**

**She will be giving a talk on Jazz for Absolute Beginners, at 3pm on Saturday January 24.**

[ropetacklecentre.co.uk/events/south-coast-jazz-festival-2015](http://ropetacklecentre.co.uk/events/south-coast-jazz-festival-2015)