

***“Kinship doesn’t come from skin color. It’s in your soul and your mind.”***

*- Dave Brubeck*

**R**ooted in the African American experience, jazz is one of America’s greatest contributions to the world. With a unique synthesis of African and European musical and cultural traditions, jazz celebrates the improviser’s spirit, while holding in creative tension the voice of the individual performer and the power of the collective creative process. When composer, pianist, and activist Dave Brubeck came on the music scene in the 1940s, Bebop was the rage and New York City was the epicenter of the jazz world. A new sound in jazz was developing in the midst of tumultuous social change, both domestic and global. In spite of victory abroad, America struggled to address intensified cries for freedom and civil rights at home. Such social upheaval caused many artists throughout the world to re-examine their role and place in society. It was into this world that the outspoken and adventurous Dave Brubeck emerged.

**H**e was a part of the “Cool School”, a music many associated with the West Coast, although Brubeck himself lived in the New York City area. It was a music of eclectic influences incorporating classical forms, extended harmonies, and an emphasis on counterpoint. Brubeck is perhaps best known for his interest and use of mixed meters and unusual time signatures. The Brubeck Quartet recordings of Paul Desmond’s *Take Five* (in 5/4 time) and Brubeck’s own *Blue Rondo a la Turk* have become a part of jazz canon. Many listeners regarded the music of the cool as more accessible and easy on the ear. Brubeck went on to become one of the most successful and popular international jazz artists of all time.

**F**or over sixty years, Dave Brubeck has sought to bring people together from different races and backgrounds just as his music has reflected the coming together of European classical traditions with American improvised forms. Such confluences are always dynamic and unpredictable. It is perhaps in this context that we understand him best. Brubeck has always been honest, direct, and uncompromising on issues of creative freedom and social justice. His refusal to not use his African American bassist, Eugene Wright, during a 1960 tour of the South placed him in direct opposition to the status quo of segregation. Although courageous is not a term often associated with jazz legends, here it seems appropriate that we consider Dave Brubeck in context – *in his own sweet way*.

*- Dr. Dwight Andrews,  
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