

*Take the A Train*, Ella Fitzgerald with the Duke Ellington Orchestra  
*Take the A Train*, Duke Ellington and Oscar  
*Take Five*, Dave Brubeck Quartet

Time in Jazz - Middle School level, grades 6-8

**Objectives:**

1. The student will learn about where the A Train went in New York City through the lyrics Ella Fitzgerald sings.
2. The student will hear Ella Fitzgerald scat sing a solo and identify what instrument she was imitating.
3. The student will listen for a series of great trumpet solos that were inspired by Ella's scat singing.
4. The student will identify what meter both versions of *Take the A Train* are in.
5. The student will identify what meter *Take Five* is in.

**Optional Objectives:**

1. The student will explore the websites below to learn more about Ella Fitzgerald.
2. The student will explore the websites listed below to learn more about Duke Ellington.
3. The student will explore the websites listed below to learn more about Dave Brubeck.

**Time:** One or two class periods.

**Material Required for Objectives:**

Computer access to Internet recordings and speakers for playback to class (or individual headphones for students to listen on their own).

**Procedure:**

**Activity 1** - "*Take the A Train*, composed by Billy Strayhorn, is a famous theme song for the Duke Ellington orchestra. In this version jazz singer Ella Fitzgerald sings about the A Train. What city is the A Train in? Listen to her sing and see if you can figure it out." Teachers: Stop after Fitzgerald finishes singing all the verses. And ask, "What city is the A Train in? (New York/Harlem) What kind of a train does that make it? (subway) People came from all over to come to Harlem to hear Duke Ellington perform. This song tells newcomers to New York how to find Harlem. Sugar Hill is a neighborhood in Harlem where all the wealthy African Americans lived."

**Activity 2** - "This time we will listen to the recording again and hear Ella Fitzgerald scat sing an improvised solo. She often would imitate horns when she scat sang. What horn do you think she might be imitating in this solo?" Pause recording after her scat solo finishes. Ask students to identify the instrument she might be imitating and why they think so.

**Activity 3** - After Ella's solos, you will hear a series of great trumpet solos. There are six trumpet players who each will play a short solo beginning with Clark Terry, Shorty Baker, Willie Cook, Cat Anderson, Dizzy Gillespie and Ray Nance. See if you can hear when the solos change to a new trumpet player. Hold up a thumb in front of your chest when you hear the trumpet players change. Count 1,2,3,4 four times to hear them change. This is called "trading fours" because they are each playing four measures apiece and then trading off to the next player. Listen to Ella come back in and scat sing some more after all the trumpets play together what is called a "shout chorus" which here definitely sounds like a group of trumpets shouting. Listen to how Ella changes around the melody and makes it original; this is improvising, too.

**Activity 4** - "Listen to another version of *Take the A Train* played by the Duke Ellington Orchestra with Oscar Peterson guest soloing on piano. Duke begins with a solo with his bass player and drummer. Try to figure out if he is playing in the meter of 3 or 4. Count 1,2,3,1,2,3 over and over to see if it fits and 1,2,3,4, over and over to see if it fits for four. No sooner will you figure it out and all of the sudden it changes again. See if you can decide what meters *A Train* goes into." Replay beginning sections as often as students need, they should be able to hear when 3 fits and when 4 fits.

**Activity 5** - "Occasionally a jazz musician would venture into more rare meters like 5/4. The Dave Brubeck Quartet was well known for several popular recordings that featured unusual meters. *Take Five* was his most popular recording. Listen and try to feel the meter of 5. Count 1,2,3,4,5 over and over and you will begin to feel the groove settle in with 5. Some people even think of it as 1,2,3, 1,2; either way, 5/4 isn't played very often in any kind of music but makes a cool jazz groove in this recording."

### **Optional Activities:**

**Activity 6** - Explore the websites below to learn more about Ella Fitzgerald, Duke Ellington, and Dave Brubeck.

### **Extensions:**

Show *Ella Fitzgerald: Something to Live For*. DVD/VHS, 86 mins. Winstar Home Entertainment, 1999.

Show *On the Road With Duke Ellington*. DVD/VHS, 58 mins. A & E Home Video, 1967/2002.

Show *Jazz Casual: Dave Brubeck*. DVD/VHS, 30 mins. WEA Corp., 1967/2000.

### **Indicators of Success:**

Students will identify Ella Fitzgerald's imitation of trumpet sound in her scat solos. Students will hear trumpet solos changing on *Take the A Train* and know it is called "trading fours."

Students will identify jazz that is in the three different meters.

### **Learn more about Ella Fitzgerald:**

[http://smithsonianjazz.org/class/jc\\_start.asp](http://smithsonianjazz.org/class/jc_start.asp)

<http://www.redsugar.com/ella.html>

[http://www.pbs.org/jazz/biography/artist\\_id\\_fitzgerald\\_ella.htm](http://www.pbs.org/jazz/biography/artist_id_fitzgerald_ella.htm)

[http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/fitzgerald\\_e.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/fitzgerald_e.html)  
[http://www.smithsonianjazz.org/class/fitzgerald/ef\\_match.asp](http://www.smithsonianjazz.org/class/fitzgerald/ef_match.asp)

**Learn more about Duke Ellington:**

[http://smithsonianjazz.org/class/jc\\_start.asp](http://smithsonianjazz.org/class/jc_start.asp)  
<http://www.dellington.org/>  
<http://www.americaslibrary.gov/cgi-bin/page.cgi/aa/music/ellington>  
<http://www.pbs.org/ellingtonsdc/dukeEllington.htm>  
[http://www.pbs.org/jazz/biography/artist\\_id\\_ellington\\_duke.htm](http://www.pbs.org/jazz/biography/artist_id_ellington_duke.htm)  
<http://americanhistory.si.edu/events/elling/>

**Learn more about Dave Brubeck:**

<http://americanhistory.si.edu/events/elling/>  
<http://www.pbs.org/brubeck/>  
[http://www.pbs.org/jazz/biography/artist\\_id\\_brubeck\\_dave.htm](http://www.pbs.org/jazz/biography/artist_id_brubeck_dave.htm)

**Lyrics to *Take the A Train*:**

[http://www.aldielyrics.com/lyrics/chaka\\_khan/take\\_the\\_a-train.html](http://www.aldielyrics.com/lyrics/chaka_khan/take_the_a-train.html)