

San Francisco Scene

Read the excerpt below as you listen to the recording. Then, read it again, highlighting specific words or sentences that stand out to you. Just as you did with the musical samples, keep track of the tempo and structure of this piece. How does it sound? Also - keep track of punctuation. Does the piece seem to follow the rules when it comes to sentence structure? You will be asked to refer to these sections in the questions that follow.

Now it's jazz, the place is roaring, all beautiful girls in there, one mad brunette at the bar drunk with her boys. One strange chick I remember from somewhere, wearing a simple skirt with pockets, her hands in there, short haircut, slouched, talking to everybody. Up and down the stairs they come. The bartenders are the regular band of Jack, and the heavenly drummer who looks up in the sky with blue eyes, with a beard, is wailing beer-caps of bottles and jamming on the cash register and everything is going to the beat. It's the beat generation, it's beat, it's the beat to keep, it's the beat of the heart, it's being beat and down in the world and like oldtime lowdown and like in ancient civilizations the slave boatmen rowing galleys to a beat and servants spinning pottery to a beat.

The faces! There's no face to compare with Jack Minger's who's up on the bandstand now with a colored trumpeter who outblows him wild and Dizzy but Jack's face overlooking all the heads and smoke. He has a face that looks like everybody you've ever known and seen on the street in your generation; a sweet face. Hard to describe, sad eyes, cruel lips, expectant gleam, swaying to the beat, tall, majestic – waiting in front of the drugstore. A face like Hunke's in New York (Hunke whom you'll see on Times Square, somnolent and alert, sadsweet, dark, beat, just out of jail, martyred, tortured by sidewalks, starved for sex and companionship, open to anything, ready to introduce new worlds with a shrug). The colored big tenor with the big tone would like to be blowing Sunny Stitts clear out of Kansas City roadhouses, clear, heavy, somewhat dull and unmusical ideas which nevertheless never leave the music, always there, far out, the harmony too complicated for the motley bums (of music-understanding) in there.

The drummer is a sensational 12-year-old Negro boy who's not allowed to drink but can play, tremendous, a little lithe childlike Miles Davis kid, like early Fats Navarro fans you used to see in Espan Harlem, hep, small – he thunders at the drums with a beat which is described to me by a near-standing connoisseur with beret as a "fabulous beat". On piano is Blondey Bill, good enough to drive any group. Jack Minger blows out and over his head with these angels from Fillmore, I dig him – now it's terrific. I just stand in the outside hall against the wall, no beer necessary, with collections of in-and-out listeners, with Verne, and now here returns Bob Berman (who is a colored kid from West Indies who barged into my party six months earlier high with Dean and the gang and I had a Chet Baker record on and we hoofed at each other in the room, tremendous, the perfect grace of his dancing, casual, like Joe Louis casually hoofing). He comes now in dancing like that, glad. Everybody looks everywhere, it's a jazz-joint and beat generation madtrick, you see someone, "Hi," then you look away elsewhere, for something someone else, it's all insane, then you look back, you look away, around, everything is coming in from everywhere in the sound of the jazz. "Hi", "Hey". Bang, the little drummer takes a solo, reaching his young hands all over traps and kettles and cymbals and foot-peddle BOOM in a fantastic crash of sound – 12 years old – but what will happen?"

- Jack Kerouac, "San Francisco Scene"

Reading & Processing Questions

1. What kind of scene is being described here? What feelings seem to come out? What are some of the sights, sounds, and actions?
2. List 4 to 5 words that popped out to you as you read and listened.
3. What kind of feeling did these words give you? What effect did they have on the sentences where they were found?
4. Can you find any places where the writing seemed surprising?
5. How would you characterize the style of this piece? Are the sentences very structured, or are they more loosely constructed? Provide one specific sentence as an example.
6. Consider your answers thus far, then think: With which song does this piece of writing match best? How might the song have helped to influence the style of the writing? Explain by using at least one specific example from the music and from the text.
7. Using the notes you took on the reading as well as the song selections, respond in a well-developed paragraph: How does this piece of writing seem to capture the mood, feeling, and structure of the music that inspired it?