

Jazz Series #4, Chicago Blues, 1983

Paul Keene (b. 1920)
pencil on paper
H. 22 x W. 29.5 inches
Collection of the Bucks County Intermediate
Unit #22



Biography

Paul Keene was born in Philadelphia. He went to his first art class when he was nine years old. He knew that he wanted to be an artist. He joined the army after high school. When he was finished the army, he went to art school in Philadelphia. Mr. Keene traveled to different countries, and met many other artists. Seeing art in other countries gave him new ideas for his art. His paintings are in many museums. Mr. Keene also made sculptures. One important sculpture that he made is the Martin Luther King Freedom Memorial at the 59th Street Baptist Church in Philadelphia.

This work of art doesn't look like a painting. How was it made?

This work of art is a drawing. Paul Keene made it using pencils and an eraser, on a large sheet of manila colored paper. If you look very carefully, you can see sketchy lines, and in contrast other lines that appear more permanent. There are some plain white areas, and some areas where you can see shadows. In some parts of the drawing, the lines are thick and thin. There are other lines that are dark and light. The lines Paul Keene uses for the musicians are very different from the lines he uses to create the background. Where do you see detail in this artwork? How do Paul Keene's lines tell us about the personalities of each of the musicians? Does this drawing look complete? Why or why not?

All artists create pencil drawings. Some artists, like Edgar Degas, are famous for their paintings as well as their drawings. Vincent Van Gogh is also famous for his drawings and paintings. Think about the styles of all three artists and their subject matter. How are the drawings of Degas and Van Gogh similar to those of Paul Keene? How are they different?

Did Paul Keene ever use color in his work?

Paul Keene created hundreds of works of art in his lifetime. Even though you are now looking at one of his pencil drawings, he is more famous for the use of bright colors and bold designs in his paintings. He usually works with acrylic paints on paper. His window scenes and landscape studies show color and light in new ways.

Keene was part of a group of Philadelphia painters who helped to tell the stories of African Americans through artwork. They combined ancient African traditions with a modern point of a view. Keene was interested in creating artwork that tells



the viewer about the hustle and bustle of city life. In many of his works, he portrays jazz musicians. His *Street Quartet*, seen at www.michenermuseum.org, is a bright painting about musicians as well.

Why are the men all crowded together?

Do you play a musical instrument or sing in a church or school choir? What is it like when you are performing? Are you all spread out, with plenty of space around you? Or, are you crammed together tightly on a stage or on risers, sharing sheet music and music stands? Life in jazz clubs where musicians perform is not much different from the way you perform at church or at school. The stages (if there are any) are small and cluttered. The rooms are also typically small and dim, with tables and chairs crowded around one another in an effort to fit as many people as possible into the club to enjoy the performances. The rooms may also be smoky, with quiet chatting and the clink of glasses heard in the background. In jazz clubs, often drinks and snacks or small meals are also served. When Paul Keene sketched these musicians, he was creating the feel of the small jazz clubs by overlapping the figures and their instruments in an exaggerated way.

What instruments are they playing?

The instruments in this drawing include a guitar, a double bass, a trumpet and a saxophone. These are all instruments you might hear while listening to several styles of music, but they are all popular jazz instruments. Learn more about the instruments in the activity below entitled “What Instruments Do You See?”

What does the music they are playing sound like?

To give you an idea of what jazz music sounds like, students from Palisades High School in Kintnersville, Pennsylvania, created some original digital jazz and blues music for you to hear. It was an exciting project, and you can hear the results on our website.

Learn More

After listening to some jazz music on your own, use Garage Band software or a similar electronic music program to try to create some jazz music of your own.

“Tune up” your pencil drawing skills with the fun drawing activities outlined in the activity sheet below.

Paul Keene liked to go to jazz clubs and listen to musicians play. What do you like to do in your spare time? Could you draw a scene of that activity? Try “Drawing Crowds,” below.

Related Images

To see Paul Keene’s Martin Luther King Freedom Memorial at the 59th Street Baptist Church in Philadelphia, go to www.fpaa.org.



Look at some of Vincent Van Gogh's drawings at the website of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, www.metmuseum.org.

Look at some of Degas' drawings at the website of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, www.metmuseum.org.

You can see *Street Quartet* and other color works by Paul Keene at www.michenermuseum.org.

Related Links

Watch and listen to Charlie Byrd play his famous *Jitterbug Waltz* at video.google.com.

Listen to Pat Metheny's jazz guitar music on his website. www.patmetheny.com.

Listen to Lee Ritenour's jazz guitar music on his website. leeritenour.com.

Watch jazz bassist Charles Mingus play his double bass on his website. www.mingusmingusmingus.com.

Listen to a trumpet on the Dallas Symphony Orchestra's website for kids at www.dsokids.com.

Listen to a saxophone on the Dallas Symphony Orchestra's website for kids. www.dsokids.com.

Louis Armstrong (1901-1971) is probably the most famous trumpet player of all time. Listen to some of his music at www.louisarmstronghouse.org.

