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European Echoes:
Jazz Experimentalism in Germany,
1950–1975

wolke

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Cover photo: Free Jazz Meeting Baden-Baden. *Left to right*: Albert Mangelsdorff, Paul Rutherford (partially obscured), Michel Pilz, Joachim Kühn, Manfred Schoof (partially obscured), Trevor Watts, Peter Brötzmann, Tomasz Stańko. *Front, seated*: Don Cherry, 1970.

Backcover photo: *Left to right*: Peter Brötzmann, unidentified person, Alexander von Schlippenbach, Derek Bailey, Evan Parker, Buschi Niebergall, West Berlin, 1970s.

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“You can be in unison without being in unison.”

Ornette Coleman

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Introduction

In 1977, the influential German jazz critic, impresario, and record producer Joachim-Ernst Berendt published an essay “German Jazz and the Emancipation (1961–1973)” in which he argued that “the imitative [...] era” of German and European jazz ended in the early 1960s.¹ Berendt asserted that while during the imitative era, European and German jazz closely adhered to the musical styles and ideas of US jazz artists, by the mid-1960s European jazz musicians began to come into their own, bringing about what he referred to as “a new European jazz.”² He designated this departure and the ensuing individuation process as “die Emanzipation” (the Emancipation).³ At the same time, Berendt, who was careful to avoid any triumphalist underpinnings of “the Emancipation,” suggested a dialectical but conflicting notion of this phenomenon. In doing so, he emphasized that “the process of emancipation itself was [...] provoked by American musicians,” such as black experimentalists Charles Mingus, Cecil Taylor, Ornette Coleman, and John Coltrane.⁴ He also asserted that the new European jazz remained dependent on US jazz. Perhaps concerned about the uses of what George E. Lewis has referred to as the workings of “strategic essentialism” in terms of “an emerging pan-European political nationalism” that has informed the Emancipation discourse since the 1970s, Berendt was cautious.⁵ He therefore admonished “that it is dangerous

1 “Die imitatorische [...] Ära.” Joachim-Ernst Berendt, *Ein Fenster aus Jazz: Essays, Portraits, Reflexionen* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, [1977] 1980), 215. All translations, unless noted otherwise, are my own.

2 “Ein neuer europäischer Jazz.” Ibid.

3 Berendt’s view was anticipated by Scottish trumpeter and writer Ian Carr, who as early as 1973 in a similar vein had viewed a series of late 1960s recordings by English composer and pianist Mike Westbrook as “responsible for the emancipation of British jazz from American slavery.” Ian Carr, *Music Outside: Contemporary Jazz in Britain* (London: Latimer New Dimensions, 1973) 21.

4 “Der Emanzipationsprozeß selbst wurde [...] durch amerikanische Musiker ausgelöst.” Berendt, *Ein Fenster aus Jazz*, 215.

5 George E. Lewis, “Gittin’ To Know Y’All: Improvised Music, Interculturalism, and the Racial Imagination,” *Critical Studies in Improvisation* 1, no. 1 (2004) (accessed December 2, 2019); available from <http://www.criticalimprov.com/article/view/6/14>. Here Lewis borrows from Stuart Hall, who utilized the notion of strategic essentialism in a 1992 essay. See Stuart Hall, “What is this ‘Black’ in Black Popular Culture?,” in *Black Popular Culture: A Project by Michelle Wallace*, ed. Gina Dent (Seattle: Bay Press, 1992), 21–33. Hall himself borrowed the concept from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who had ad-

to use the term emancipation of German or European jazz as an undifferentiated buzzword.⁶

Since Berendt's influential essay, the notion of "the Emancipation" has defined many historical narratives of post-1950s European jazz and improvised music. According to narratives advanced by various music scholars, such as Ekkehard Jost, Wolfgang Burde, and Mike Heffley, beginning around 1965 European musicians emancipated themselves from perceived US cultural hegemonic influences. Most of these narratives, which are usually framed in terms of a Europe-US binary opposition, contend that by severing ties to their African American spiritual fathers – represented by "free jazz" practitioners such as Ornette Coleman, Cecil Taylor, John Coltrane, and Albert Ayler – European improvisers eventually came into their own by asserting a pan-European cultural difference and aesthetic self-reliance. For instance, in a 1978 essay, Burde argued that European jazz's difference rested on its traditionless nature. As he asserted, it was precisely "this lack of tradition" that "affords European jazz the very chance – which it has now taken advantage of for the first time in its history – to gain its independence."⁷ In his foundational study *Europas Jazz 1960–80*, Jost read the mid-1960s rise of the European jazz experimentalism movement as nothing less than a "revocation of the dependency on the American father figures."⁸ Heffley, acknowledging the African American influence on the Europeans, identified the trope of ambivalence on the part of European improvisers, framing the interrelation between "the Europeans and their African-American models and peers" in terms of "a general love-hate dynamic."⁹

The above historical narratives have been challenged by the interventionist work of George E. Lewis, who has addressed the salient issue of the transnational and intercultural impact of black musical knowledge on pan-European cultural ensembles. As Lewis has maintained: "To the extent that the pioneers of the European movement drew heavily upon the methods, materials, and histories of American jazz, acknowledging progenitors such as Coleman, Ayler, Taylor, and

vanced it in a 1988 essay. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313.

6 "Daß es gefährlich ist, das Wort von der Emanzipation des deutschen und des europäischen Jazz als undifferenziertes Schlagwort zu verwenden." Berendt, *Ein Fenster aus Jazz*, 218.

7 Wolfgang Burde, "A Discussion of European Free Jazz," translator unknown (accessed December 2, 2019); available from http://www.fmp-label.de/freemusicproduction/labelsspecialitions/forexample_burde_en.html.

8 "Aufkündigung des Abhängigkeitsverhältnisses gegenüber den amerikanischen Vaterfiguren." Ekkehard Jost, *Europas Jazz 1960–80* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1987), 12.

9 Mike Heffley, *Northern Sun, Southern Moon: Europe's Reinvention of Jazz* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 133.

Coltrane, the work of the new Europeans constituted part of a second generation within a gradually globalized notion of jazz.”¹⁰

Expanding upon Lewis’ ideas, this book is a historical and interpretive study of the movement of jazz experimentalism in West and East Germany between the years 1950 and 1975. I complicate the narratives advanced by Jost, Burde, and Heffley by arguing that engagement with black musical methods, concepts, and practices remained significant for the emergence of the German jazz experimentalism movement. In a seemingly paradoxical fashion, this engagement with black musical knowledge enabled the formation of more self-reliant musical concepts and practices. Rather than viewing the German jazz experimentalism movement in terms of dissociation from its African American spiritual fathers, I present this movement as having decisively contributed to the decentering of still prevalent jazz historiographies in which the centrality of the US is usually presupposed. Going beyond both US-centric and Eurocentric perspectives, this study contributes to scholarship that accounts for jazz’s global dimension and the transfer of ideas beyond nationally conceived spaces.

Furthermore, this study contributes to the unfinished project of desegregating historiographies of music that music scholar Leo Treitler called for in a 1996 *Black Music Research Journal* article.¹¹ In this article Treitler argued for the necessity to overcome the divisions of historiographic paradigms of what he has denoted as the “Western European classical tradition” and “black-music history.”¹² Utilizing Treitler’s trenchant demand as a point of departure, in this book I challenge the still prevalent segregation of jazz historiographies with which jazz studies on both sides of the Atlantic seem to be by and large intellectually comfortable.

As Heffley has compellingly argued with respect to Germany’s significance for post-1950s European jazz, “German musicians were responsible for the first pan-European coalition of jazz scenes, in the *Emanzipation*’s first most groundbreaking and internationally important recordings.”¹³ Furthermore, for Heffley, “Germany’s history as the Cold War-torn country models in microcosm the broader West vs. East geopolitics of the European jazz scenes that reshaped the sociopolitical implications of ‘free’ there.”¹⁴ While highly significant as a critically important site for the rise of “free jazz” in Europe, Germany also became an important extension of the networks of black experimentalism. I illuminate how Germany, a place usually not associated with the black diaspora, became a site where musicians and critics have thought deeply about and engaged with black cultural production. A central concern of this study is the question of how knowl-

10 Lewis, “Gittin’ To Know Y’All”.

11 See Leo Treitler, “Toward a Desegregated Music Historiography,” *Black Music Research Journal* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 3–10.

12 Ibid., 3.

13 Heffley, *Northern Sun, Southern Moon*, 14.

14 Ibid.

edge of black music has been represented in different and changing socio-cultural configurations in post-war Germany. My claim is that the various local transpositions and adaptations of black musical methods, concepts, and practices by jazz experimentalists in both Germanys became prime sites for contestations over definitions of cultural, national, and racial identities. Jazz has acted as a destabilizing factor in terms of convenient binaries, such as Euro/Afro, own/foreign, or high/low, deemed essential to the formation of individual and collective identities.

“European Echoes: Jazz Experimentalism in Germany, 1950–1975” elucidates the German jazz experimentalism movement by focusing on the lives and work of four of its most significant proponents: saxophonist Peter Brötzmann, trumpeter Manfred Schoof, pianist Alexander von Schlippenbach, and saxophonist Ernst-Ludwig Petrowsky. In the words of Lewis, “the work of these and many other musicians would soon result in the emergence of a panoply of approaches that, taken together, constitute one of the critically important developments within a composite notion of late 20th-century musical experimentalism.”¹⁵

Utilizing the above artists’ life stories and oeuvres as case studies, I situate the production, circulation, and reception of their music in the wider socio-cultural contexts of the two respective post-WW II German political systems. I also devote ample space to the issue of the critical reception of jazz and black diasporic music in post-war Germany. Of crucial concern in this study, therefore, are the intellectual and aesthetic challenges musicians and critics in both German states faced in coming to terms with the meanings of the new sounds associated with Charles Mingus, Ornette Coleman, Cecil Taylor, John Coltrane, Eric Dolphy, Joe Harriott, and Don Cherry, which were denoted alternatively as the “new thing,” “free jazz,” “avant-garde jazz,” “free form,” and “total music.”

Moreover, I discuss the emergence of an infrastructure for the production, distribution, and reception of the new music. By means of magazines, first attempts at self-organization, state-funded radio networks, self-produced recordings and above all the foundation of the critically important musicians’ cooperative and record label Free Music Production (FMP), at the end of the 1960s a network of European jazz experimentalism had coalesced.

An essential methodological tool for this volume is a series of oral history interviews that I conducted with Brötzmann, Schoof, Schlippenbach, Petrowsky, multi-instrumentalist Gunter Hampel, saxophonist Gerd Dudek, Jost Gebers, who has been the head of FMP, clarinetist Rolf Kühn, pianist Joachim Kühn, pianist Ulrich Gumpert, pianist Irène Schweizer, drummer Günter Baby Sommer, and trumpeter Heinz Becker. I carried out most of the archival research at the Jazzinstitut Darmstadt, the Staatsbibliothek Unter den Linden in Berlin, the Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers University, the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, and the Bernd-Alois-Zimmermann-Archiv housed at the

15 Lewis, “Gittin’ To Know Y’all”.

Akademie der Künste in Berlin. I also consulted the privately held FMP archive as well as the personal archives of my interviewees. This research allowed me to obtain previously unexamined sources, including playbills and business contracts. Combining the archival research and the oral histories enabled me to uncover a hidden history of deep interactions between German and African American jazz experimentalists. In doing so, I reconstruct the emergence of jazz experimentalism in Germany in a more nuanced fashion.

My elucidation of the movement of German jazz experimentalism is organized into three chapters, which offer case studies of important German improvisers in the late twentieth century. In the first chapter, I illuminate the creative tension between the realms of music and politics, which decisively shaped the production and reception of Peter Brötzmann's music during the latter half of the 1960s. In doing so, I also explore the intersection between the rise of the European jazz experimentalism movement and the protest movement associated with the New Left. Situating Brötzmann within a field of transnational and intercultural influences, I examine his pursuit of a normatively charged notion of music as a medium of social critique.

The second chapter is concerned with improvisers and composers Manfred Schoof's and Alexander von Schlippenbach's significance for the emergence of a European jazz experimentalism movement. Presenting them as musical thinkers, I reconstruct the bearings of both men's academic training on the development of their respective concepts and practices. I illuminate the complex ways in which Schoof's and Schlippenbach's studies with new music composer Bernd Alois Zimmermann and their engagement with the music of Ornette Coleman and Don Cherry impacted the development of their musical and sonic identities as European improvisers. Their deployment of a usable European past notwithstanding, Schoof's and Schlippenbach's work evince strong references to black experimental musical concepts, methods, and practices. Furthermore, I discuss both men's collaborations with multi-instrumentalist Gunter Hampel and saxophonist Gerd Dudek, whose significant contributions to jazz experimentalism have received scant attention due to his status as "sideman." By looking at the experiences of Swiss pianist and drummer Irène Schweizer, one of the only two female instrumentalists associated with the rise of the European jazz experimentalism movement, I also elucidate the dynamics of gender and sexuality at this crucial moment in modern European music history.

The third chapter looks at Ernst-Ludwig Petrowsky and his significance for the emergence of an East German jazz experimentalism movement. Focusing on the conditions of production in a state socialist system, I explore the difficulties Petrowsky and other jazz experimentalists such as Joachim Kühn and Ulrich Gumpert faced under the ideological constraints imposed by GDR cultural policy makers during the height of the Cold War. Going beyond the convenient oppression and decadence narrative commonly associated with jazz in the GDR,

I reconstruct the ways in which internal supporters and detractors, responding to cultural pressures from the West, engaged in actual debates about the music, thereby complicating the notion of authoritarian shutdown. At a last point, I elucidate the establishment of the critically important Free Music Production and its founder Jost Gebers' role in bringing together improvisers across the Berlin Wall and documenting the rise of the East German jazz experimentalism scene.

Throughout this study I worked with sources in multiple languages. By means of an interlanguage dialogue, I bring to light heretofore untranslated German critical work to an Anglophone readership, thereby making the discourse surrounding jazz experimentalism available beyond the German context. I illuminate the political and cultural environment in which the jazz experimentalism movement took root in both the capitalist Federal Republic of Germany and the state socialist German Democratic Republic. By looking at both the West German capitalist and the East German socialist scenes and situating them within the larger context of the Cold War, I explore how musicians were operating within and across these respective political systems. I place music as a significant actor in these socio-cultural scenes and discuss how music turned into political debates. In doing so, this study contributes to the fields of German studies, political science, and Cold War studies.

I devote ample space to the issue of pedagogy in both post-war German societies. I focus on the ways in which musical knowledge was produced, disseminated, and received both in formal, institutionalized and more informal, even autodidactic settings in both Germanys. This study also provides the first in-depth Anglophone discussion of the life and work of Schoof, one of German jazz experimentalism's crucial figures. Finally, I elucidate Zimmermann's significance both as a pedagogue and musical thinker for the emergence of Schoof's and Schlippenbach's own concepts, which is usually only rendered as a footnote.¹⁶

16 For an exception, see Kai Lothwesen, *Klang – Struktur – Konzept: Die Bedeutung der Neuen Musik für Free Jazz und Improvisationsmusik* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2009).