

JAZZ @ 100

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(Jazzinstitut Darmstadt)))

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Preface: Jazz @ 100.

An Alternative to a Story of Heroes

Jazz history usually is told like this: Louis Armstrong – Charlie Parker – Miles Davis – John Coltrane. Or like this: New Orleans – Chicago – Kansas City – New York. Or like this: Dixieland – Swing – Bebop – Cool Jazz – Hard Bop – Free Jazz – Fusion. People, places, stylistic eras... a history of great men (!), of lively urban scenes, of revolutionizing stylistic innovations.

In reality, this focus on big names, major cities, and stylistic concepts confines the discourse if it doesn't actually distort it. Apart from the big-name stylists there are those whose creativity either never resulted in popular success or simply did not last long enough or who didn't have the personality to "sell" themselves sufficiently. Jazz historiography often talks about successful or tragic heroes. An alternative reading might move other protagonists into the focus, might talk about temporary networks which enable artistic developments but are much more than mere musical relationships. An alternative reading would not necessarily question the importance of the great personalities but ask what kind of an example they set and/or what other examples there exist if history was looked upon from a different perspective. Such a reading might question the concept of artistic or commercial "success", look at the processual aspects of improvisation (as opposed to the "Werk" aesthetic which shines through in most artists' discographies) or at the involvement of artists in the cultural discourses of their direct environments (community, city, scene, politics).

Apart from the well-known centers of jazz there were cities and regions with a lively jazz scene which produced many musicians, yet which jazz historiography at most marked as potential stop-overs for touring bands, but not as breeding grounds for the music. Jazz historiography mostly talks of places like New Orleans, Chicago or New York, of Paris, London or Berlin. An alternative reading might identify other places, such as Charleston, St. Louis, Los Angeles, or Lyon, Leeds, Wuppertal, and link these to specific events, movements, or group activities. An alternative reading might also stress the fact that any fixation of cultural activity to a specific place forgets aspects of mobility which are important in a music dealing mostly with cultural encounters. Such a reading might look at communities and connections between scenes, at the focusing on a specific "place" or at the deliberate negation of geographical positioning – and it might also deal with the connections between locations and the music itself.

Finally, apart from the established styles there are innumerable interstages as hardly any musician played whatever style in its “pure” form. Not to mention the fact that most jazz narratives, even most jazz biographies, are being told with recordings in mind, thus often forgetting the performative aspects of jazz, the fact that the record released is only a snapshot-in-time of the creative process of improvisation. It seems like those lucky days when jazz history could easily be categorized with clear stylistic distinctions are over since the 1970s. And yet we often search for new descriptions to sum up more recent developments. The designation of stylistic names may be helpful for talking about music, but is it still suitable for the internet era in which genre-hopping is the rule for a whole generation? An alternative reading might deal with ideas of “genre” or “style” in general, it might ask how such categories have been canonized in the past and are being used in the present, by the music press, the industry, by fans or even by those pretending not to like jazz (Branford Marsalis: “People think if nobody sings it’s jazz.”). It might question the illusion of genre purity, ask about the general necessity for categories and speculate about a future with no need “to file under...”

In the questionable centenary of jazz – the recordings of the Original Dixieland Jass Band from 1917 are often cited as the first jazz recordings ever – the Darmstadt Jazzforum conference looked at the pitfalls of jazz historiography, which often relies on myths and legends that distort what is even more important: the multi-perspectivity of a music which is being created not only by great masters, but certainly by many individualists.

JAZZ @ 100 – THE PAPERS

The amount of perspectives which we were able to touch upon during the three-day conference in the fall of 2017 was limited, yet the very different approaches by the 15 scholars and musicians documented in this book are proof of how much more can be discovered if one digs deeper, if one questions major narratives, if one focuses on details, on neglected facts and tries to re-imagine jazz history from their specific perspective.

The first three papers look at the perception of jazz history through the eyes of some of its heroes themselves. It touches upon aspects of narrative formation and some of the sources that make or do not make it into the history books. For his series *American Jazz Heroes*, for instance, the photographer and journalist **Arne Reimer** visited older musicians at home and, while setting up his equipment, learned about their lives and realized that there is a difference between reality, self and external perception. **Nicholas Gebhardt** subjects Jelly Roll Morton’s autobiographical notes, originally recorded for an oral history project for the Library

of Congress, to a closer reading and analyzes the relationship between narrative, memory and the cultural imagination. **Katherine M. Leo** looks at the Original Dixieland Jazz Band whose recording of “Livery Stable Blues” and “Dixieland Jass Band One-Step” from 26 February 1917 is often cited as the first jazz record ever, and uses court documents for copyright lawsuits as well as a critical reading of the music’s reception to set the different narratives in perspective which the record evoked.

Six chapters use different methods to slightly shift our focus on the music and its history, but to also make us aware of how, apart from the accepted narrative as recorded in history books, the personal experiences of musicians and everybody else involved influence how the story is being told. **Klaus Friele** has been working on a computer-based analysis tool to approach solo improvisations and uses both the findings and the potential of such new methods to describe jazz history through the lens of a computer scientist. **Andrew Hurley** reads the different editions of Joachim Ernst Berendt’s influential *Jazzbuch* (The Jazz Book), focusing on the author’s changed and changing attitudes and using this example to describe different methods of narrative formation. **Tony Whyton** discusses the influence of local and often very personal memories of musicians or promoters on the discourse about jazz as a trans-national practice, using a box bequeathed to his mother-in-law by an uncle who had a little-written-about musical career as a starting point. **Mario Dunkel** reads Darcy James Argue’s *Secret Society* as a attempt to imagine an alternative kind of jazz history and thus make room for a history of jazz as a story of both realized and unrealized potentialities. The pianist and composer **Orrin Evans** talks freely about jazz as a current and relevant art form, about the different communities and circles he moves in and how they can be both helpful and restrictive, as well as about (African-)American identity of jazz in context of a more and more complex global musical network. **Krin Gabbard** looks at the film “Syncopation” from 1942 in order to ask how “new jazz studies” approaches can help to analyze racial and economic ideologies and to emphasize the importance of not only concentrating on the (mostly male) heroes of the music.

The remaining six chapters deal with major narratives in jazz and ask how they have been influenced by the music industry, but also how musicians have the power to change the historical narrative which involves them directly, and how all of such discourses influence the perception of the public. **Wolfram Knauer** looks at specific places where jazz is being performed, and asks about the effect of some of the iconic venues on the music, the musicians, the jazz scene(s) and the public perception of the music. **Oleg Pronitschew** discusses the increasing institutionalization of German jazz in the 1970s, the reasons behind it and its effect on the public image of the music. Looking at examples from Poland, **Rüdiger Ritter** examines the idea of “jazz giants” in Eastern and Central Europe and finds that

myth in jazz can be a productive element and an artistic prison at the same time. **Karen Chandler** describes the influence of Gullah and Geechie culture on the coastal region of South Carolina and argues that a representation of jazz history along clear geographical centers can distort the much more complex notion of jazz as a musical as well as social practice. **Scott DeVaux** revisits the birth of bebop, which provided the ideology for much of modern jazz, but asks us to reconsider whether the choices made by musicians in the 1940s should still govern contemporary music-making. And **Nicolas Pillai** looks at representations of Miles Davis across different media, asking in which ways the late Miles created impact beyond his music.

As with any conference, the presentations at the Darmstadt Jazzforum were only the trigger to what actually happened. What we cannot capture in this book are the discussions at breakfast, lunch or dinner, during coffee breaks or concert intermissions, in the hotel lobby, waiting for the conference venue to be opened, or for those who came from far away even on the way back to the airport. If we were just to publish a book, it would be much easier to commission essays and have the authors work from home. The idea of a conference is so much more: It brings people together with different backgrounds, approaches, and outlooks on music to share their knowledge, to present their view, but also to shift their own perspective. If the Darmstadt Jazzforum, a regular event since 1989, has contributed to the field of jazz research, it is exactly through this: a constant re-vision of what we know, a constant shift of perspectives. History is not a fact but an interpretation shaped by different experiences. Only if we are aware of the diversity of such personal views can we get close to understanding the complex system that makes us think we “understand” history.

THANKS

We are lucky to be based in a city that understands that “talking to each other” is necessary for continuing a discourse. In the early 20th century, Darmstadt became the hub for Art Nouveau with its Mathildenhöhe attracting some of the major architects and designers of the *Œuvre*. Since 1946 the city hosts the Darmstadt Summer Course for Contemporary Music where new approaches to musical discourse are still being negotiated. In the 1950s the Darmstädter Gespräche (Darmstadt Conversations) publicly discussed how a new society might look and what needs to be done to take everyone along. The city is home to the German branch of PEN International, to the German Academy for Language and Literature, to the Spring Conference on New Music and Music Education, to numerous associations involved in fine arts, literature, music, social responsibility. Since a number of years the three municipal music institutes (Jazzinstitut, Internationales Musikinstitut, Akademie für Tonkunst) continue this tradition with the Darmstädter Musikgespräche (Darmstadt Music Talks) which focus on the fact that music is no end in itself but influences spheres far beyond the musical.

That said, we are grateful to find support from a liberal, open-minded and international city that, as we learned over the last 28 years is happy to have us as well. The Darmstadt Jazzforum takes place every other year since 1989 and each time focuses on specific topics. It is a unique mix of an international conference, panels, but also concerts in major Darmstadt venues. My thanks go to my colleagues for many years, Doris Schröder and Arndt Weidler, who were responsible for much of the preparation but also took part in the critical discussions about how to frame the topic and where to go with the conference (as well as this book). Doris Schröder also curated Arne Reimer’s exhibition “My Encounters with American ‘Jazz Heroes’” which was shown at Literaturhaus, the conference venue.

We enjoyed a pre-conference JazzTalk concert by pianist **Kirk Lightsey** and his quintet, featuring Jean Toussaint, Paul Zauner, Steven Watts and David Wickens at the Jazzinstitut’s own venue. The Pianist **Julia Hülsmann** accepted our invitation to present her unique “Songs for double trio and three voices”, bringing together the singers Aline Frazão, Live Maria Roggen and Michael Schiefel, the violinist Héloïse Lefebvre, the cellist Stephan Braun, the bassist Eva Kruse and the drummer Eva Klesse in a celebrated concert at Centralstation Darmstadt. Orrin Evans agreed to a rare solo performance on the last day of the Jazzforum at Knabenschule where he managed to combine the many influences on his playing with a personal musical statement steeped in the blues and yet clearly in the present.

The 15th Darmstadt Jazzforum was supported by the Sparkassen-Kulturstiftung Hessen-Thüringen as well as by Kulturfonds Frankfurt RheinMain. Fur-

ther financial support came from the Department for Science and the Arts of the State of Hesse. As always, our colleagues at the city's culture department helped with the budget transactions of the event. Roland Stein designed the program booklet which also served as a poster. Wilfried Heckmann accompanied the conference with his camera and allowed us to use his photos in this book. Thanks, as well, to our cooperation partners, the cultural center Bessunger Knabenschule and Centralstation Darmstadt, as well as to our media partners, the magazine *Jazzthetik* and our regional public radio station, hr2 Kultur .Thanks to Andrzej Kaluza from the Deutsches Polen Institut who filled in for Rüdiger Ritter at the conference on short notice. A special thank-you goes to Peter Mischung of Wolke Publishing for his reliable work in producing this book.

The most important thank-you, though, goes to the authors of the essays which you find in this volume, all of whom not only delivered their papers but took part in the lively discussions. These discussions among scholars, musicians, journalists, and everybody who is present in the audience make the Darmstadt Jazzforum a special time of the year, a conference we are proud of and an event people gladly return to.

Wolfram Knauer (August 2018)



Conference impressions (photos: Wilfried Heckmann)