

FRANCESCO MARTINELLI (ED.) (2018). *THE HISTORY OF EUROPEAN JAZZ. THE MUSIC, MUSICIANS AND AUDIENCE IN CONTEXT.*

A Review by Lawrence Davies

The History of European Jazz is, according to editor Francesco Martinelli, »a ›stitching together‹ of stories in a jazz quilt covering the whole of Europe« (5). The metaphor is apt: with forty chapters involving forty-seven contributors over 742 pages, *The History of European Jazz* presents an elaborately woven tapestry of the names, sounds, places, and dates of the continent's jazz history. Surveying the genre from its arrival on European shores to the present day, the book attests to both the ubiquity and the multiplicity of jazz appreciation and performance outside of the country of its birth.

As well as being a paean to the glorious polyphony of jazz history, *The History of European Jazz* will serve as a solid reference work. The book's ordered, nation-by-nation layout will ensure that it becomes an indispensable resource for anyone writing about jazz in Europe. Its thirty-four national chapters are grouped into eight regions, which make up the book's principal parts: Western Europe, Scandinavia, Central Europe, Eastern Europe, South-west Europe, The Baltic States, South-east Europe, and »Europe/Asia« (which encompasses Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Armenia). Each chapter closes with a bibliography containing primary and secondary literature (both in English and the relevant vernacular), as well as a list of recommended listening; these resources will prove useful for scholars and students alike. Most contributors have provided regular thematic subheadings throughout their chapters; these will guide readers looking for information on specific time periods or subtopics.

The History of European Jazz follows the more or less global turn of recent jazz scholarship that consciously rejects the portrayal of jazz as uniquely American music. The last twenty-five years or so have seen a proliferation of academic texts on the circulation, reception, and appropriation of jazz in a

number of European countries, in both historical and contemporary contexts. That the academy has now broadly recognised jazz as music with international dimensions does not negate the need for this book, however. What James Lincoln Collier famously termed »Jazz: The American Theme Song«¹ is not confined to popular documentaries or the writings of journalists and neo-classical polemicists: it continues to permeate university curricula, edited collections, conferences, and dissertation projects. Many a researcher will be familiar with the sinking feeling that comes from picking a new and intriguing jazz text off the library shelf, only to find that its author is either blithely unaware that the sounds, ideas, or people that they are writing about ever left the North American continent or, worse still, is fully aware of the fact yet has chosen to ignore it.

The comprehensiveness of *The History of European Jazz* is perhaps its biggest draw, widening the scope considerably from earlier models of European jazz history provided in the edited collection *Eurojazzland*² or Ekkehard Jost's *Jazzgeschichten aus Europa*.³ The book adds valuable detail to the well-trodden paths of continental jazz history, such as the British »traditional jazz« revival, the foundation of jazz festivals in Nice, Juan-les-Pins, or Montreux (to name only a few), or the numerous jazz scenes that emerged behind the Iron Curtain. But generous attention is also given to the many stories that have been previously neglected. Several chapters are, according to Martinnelli, »the first published monographic work on the general history of jazz« in these respective countries (7). Being confronted with the history of jazz in Latvia, Iceland, Turkey, or Azerbaijan alongside the more familiar France, Britain, or Norway will encourage all readers to look beyond the borders that they are most familiar with.

The chapters that make up the bulk of the book provide engaging accounts of their respective countries' national jazz scenes. Particular focus is given not just to key performers, but also to the venues, record companies, festivals, competitions, and jazz promotion and appreciation organisations that have shaped jazz culture across Europe. Reading more than one or two chapters, it swiftly becomes apparent that there are many intriguing patterns – but also striking variations and exceptions – in the continental jazz history.

1 James Lincoln Collier (1993). *Jazz: The American Theme Song*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

2 Luca Cerchiari, Laurent Cugny, and Franz Kerschbaumer (eds.) (2012). *Eurojazzland: Jazz and European Sources, Dynamics, and Contexts*. Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press.

3 Ekkehard Jost (2012). *Jazzgeschichten aus Europa*. Hofheim: Wolke.

This fact was amusingly demonstrated at the *Rhythm Changes VI: Jazz Journeys*⁴ conference at the University for Music and Performing Arts Graz in April 2019: one Q&A session became a gleeful chorus of »well, the same thing happened in...« as members of the audience related the parallels and coincidences that they had noticed between their respective countries' jazz histories and the content of the paper that they had just heard presented, until one lone delegate interjected: »but this *did not* happen in Belgium!« *The History of European Jazz* therefore illustrates one of the most crucial elements involved in thinking about jazz history on a continental scale: what we might assume to be unique to a nation's jazz history is often not so, yet there are still occasions when the situation in a given country turns out to be the exact opposite of its neighbours' and allies'.

While limitations of space prevent me from providing anything like a comprehensive survey of the book's chapters, I hope that the following examples will illustrate how this dialogue between the complementary and the contrasting plays out across the work as a whole. The importance of gramophone recordings for the spread of jazz is well known, but the extent to which multinational record companies exploited Europe's changing geopolitical landscape is shown here in detail. Occupation of Balkan states by Western European powers after the First World War provided a steady flow of recorded jazz to listeners far from the stages of global cities like Paris, London, or Berlin. Readers will also be intrigued by the extent of the African American presence across Europe, even early on. Saxophonist Sidney Bechet's long-standing association with France is well known, but his tours of Azerbaijan and Greece in 1927 are substantially less so. Several chapters attest to the pioneering journeys of long-forgotten African American expatriates. The story of Frederick Bruce Thomas, a Mississippi-born businessman and impresario who extended his turn-of-the-century northward migration out of the Deep South into a global sojourn that led him first to London, then Moscow, and eventually to Istanbul, is one such example.

Jazz's complex relationship with the State, particularly under Europe's various dictatorships and behind the Iron Curtain, emerges in a number of chapters. State-sponsored radio and TV orchestras, as well as dedicated cultural ministries provided many opportunities for musicians to learn, perform, and tour, but placed their members under constant surveillance and control.

4 The annual *Rhythm Changes* jazz studies conference originates from the HERA-funded project of the same name, which examined »the inherited traditions and practices of European jazz in five countries, developing new insights into cultural exchanges and dynamics between different countries, groups and related media.« For more information see <http://www.rhythmchanges.net>.

A number of contributors offer moving tributes to musicians who fell foul of the regimes under which they lived, and whose untimely deaths robbed the continent of jazz talent. Martin Pfeleiderer's chapter on jazz in Germany, likewise, provides a succinct and highly readable account of jazz under National Socialism that highlights the extent to which postwar German jazz activity responded to this legacy. Yet, even amongst the most forcibly homogenised and conservative of cultural environments, we find striking loopholes. Despite steadfast moral and political opposition to jazz in Portugal due to the Salazar dictatorship's »all for the nation« (462) ethos and the condemnation of jazz by the Catholic Church, the country's officially neutral position during the Second World War brought Europe's exiled elites – and swing music – to Lisbon, while the foundation of British military bases on the Azores Islands precipitated the formation of the »No. 1 Rhythm Club Azores« (ibid.), eleven years after its namesake had formed in London.

Even when contributors turn their attentions to the present day and the recent past, there are remarkable variations in the state of jazz culture, despite Europe's ever-growing connectivity in the new millennium. Although a number of Western and Northern European countries have experienced shrinking audiences and economic prospects for jazz during the last years of the twentieth century, those countries for whom these years brought the end of Communist rule, economic and social liberalisation, and membership of the European Union are now enjoying a golden age of jazz performance and patronage. Musicians are able to study and perform across the continent, while the importing of recordings and musical equipment becomes more and more commonplace.

We also learn much about the extent to which the development of jazz in the United States has depended on Europe. Okeh, the first record company to market »race« records featuring African American blues, jazz, and vaudeville performers was the brainchild of German émigré Otto Heinemann, and was consequently part of an intercontinental network of record distribution that soon valued Europe as just as important a market for Black music as the US. Many chapters highlight the number of iconic American performers, promoters, or record producers who were immigrants to the United States or who were the immediate descendants of immigrants. These include the Ertegun brothers (from Turkey), the founders of Blue Note records Alfred Lion and Francis Wolff (from Germany), or the celebrated drummer Paul Motian (of Armenian descent), to name only a few. American educational institutions, particularly Berklee, have proved an irrepressible draw for aspiring musicians from a number of countries. Although this latter fact ostensibly affirms

America's dominance as the centre of jazz innovation, it also shows how important an international student base has been to the development of formal jazz education. Scholars who are otherwise content to ignore the international dimensions of jazz history would do well to remember that, at any given time over the last century, a small but not insignificant minority of active participants in the jazz scenes of New York, Chicago, Boston, or Los Angeles were foreigners who would duly return to their countries of origin.

Notwithstanding the many fascinating stories held within *The History of European Jazz*, there is something of a contradiction between the book's underlying rationale and its structure. International jazz studies is often legitimised by gestures to jazz's inescapable transnationalism. Martinelli's introduction itself highlights the need to understand jazz as a culture with global roots: skewering classic quotes from Ken Burns's 2001 documentary film *Jazz*, Martinelli draws on writings by Thomas Fiehrer⁵ and Nicholas Gebhardt⁶ to remind us that the forces of capitalism, slavery, consumerism, and individualism that gave birth to jazz are *global* rather than local phenomena, and that broad studies of African American culture that explore Harlem – yet ignore Haiti – are only telling part of the story. Yet the contributors to *The History of European Jazz* steadfastly obey the national borders of the early twenty-first century continent, focusing on their respective countries with little acknowledgement to the fact that jazz's circulation and reception was typically driven by economic, political, and cultural forces that were transnational in scope. Famous musicians tour multiple chapters, but the reader has no way of telling whether or not these multiple appearances are part of the same itinerary. Martinelli acknowledges the inevitable overlaps that have occurred throughout the book, particularly those resulting from the shifting and fragmentation of national borders (5); I get a sense, however, that Martinelli wants the reader to treat such overlaps and repetitions as inconveniences to be tolerated and excused, when really they are evidence of something not only intrinsic to jazz's development but also to how we should write its history. »Jazz exists in our collective imagination as both a national and postnational music«, writes E. Taylor Atkins, »but it is studied almost exclusively in the former incarnation.«⁷ *The History of European Jazz* is no exception to this.

5 Thomas Fiehrer (1991). »From Quadrille to Stomp: The Creole Origins of Jazz.« In: *Popular Music* 10 (1), pp. 21-38.

6 Nicholas Gebhardt (2012). »When Jazz Was Foreign: Rethinking Jazz History.« In: *Jazzforschung* 44, pp. 185-197.

7 E. Taylor Atkins (2003). »Toward a Global History of Jazz.« In: *Jazz Planet*. Ed. by E. Taylor Atkins. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, pp. xi-xxvii (here xiii).

The final part of the book, entitled »Themes« (642-718), proffers a more transnational perspective. Here, Martinelli tells us, the reader will find »short treatments of some pan-European subjects« (6) to tie together the broader themes that have emerged in earlier chapters. George McKay's chapter on »Festivals« (707-718) provides a nuanced, thematically guided reading of how European jazz festivals have become valuable sites of belonging in an increasingly globalised world. Gabriele Coen's chapter on »Jews and Jewish Music« (667-677), too, provides a fascinating survey of Jewish musicians' involvement in European jazz that connects the mobility of the Jewish diaspora to the spread of jazz across the continent. Other chapters in this section, however, do not quite attain the transnational dimensions that their subjects merit. Rather than using »gypsy jazz« as a window onto diaspora identity or the politics of intercultural musicking, Michael Dregni's chapter on »Django Reinhardt and *Jazz Manouche*« (653-666) is a Franco-centric biographical treatment of the famous guitarist and his subsequent acolytes. Selwyn Harris's chapter on »Film« (688-706) provides valuable detail on the interactions between jazz musicians and filmmakers, but his brisk tour of each nation's domestic film industry and their principal jazz-related outputs offers little more than brief expansions of what has already been said in the national chapters, and belies one of the most important elements of jazz's presence on screen: that, despite the heavily localised, quotidian, even mundane plots and settings of much jazz-related European cinema, the very presence of jazz in these works connects both their protagonists and their audiences to something much bigger and more fundamental than is immediately apparent from the everyday dramas being portrayed.

The unevenness that is evident between the book's final chapters raises a broader question: is *The History of European Jazz* an encyclopedic reference book, or a very large edited collection? Despite the dependable chapter-by-chapter, nation-by-nation layout, contributing authors appear to have been given a large degree of freedom to decide the scope of their chapters and their approaches to the subject. This freedom has bred quite a number of inconsistencies, something that is at odds with the comprehensiveness and standardisation that one might expect from a work of this size and structure. Although several chapters are meticulously footnoted, most are not at all, which makes it difficult to relate the recommended primary and secondary literature to the content of the text itself, or to distinguish contemporaneous responses to events from those of the author. Similarly vexing is the allocation of more than one chapter to certain countries, but not others: Great Britain, Sweden, Portugal, and Slovenia are afforded two chapters each, while several nations that are often regarded as key jazz centres, such as

France, Norway, or The Netherlands, do not. Periodisation between the »double-chapter« countries is inconsistent, too. Portuguese jazz history divides sensibly at 1974 with the fall of the *Estado Novo* regime, but no reason is given for dividing the chapters on Sweden at 1970 or for the decade-plus overlap between the two chapters on Great Britain. Again, this question of identity: is *The History of European Jazz* a reference work that imposes uniformity onto its subject matter, or a collection of individuated, national variations on jazz themes?

A number of chapters are also hindered by their authors' questionable approaches to historiography. The »who«, »what«, »where«, and »when« are depicted in vivid, sometimes overbearing detail: more than one chapter morphs into an incessant catalogue of who was »on the scene« in any given year. There is a need for this base-level documentation, of course, particularly in the case of countries whose jazz histories have previously escaped scholarly attention, or when covering aspects of European jazz's pre-history that other contributors might be tempted to hurry through. Elsewhere this quasi-positivist approach crowds out the equally important task of connecting musicians' identities, activities, and choices to the broader political and social factors that they were experiencing, or to contemporaneous developments in technology, media, or cultural policy. There are few attempts to delve into how jazz is positioned culturally: while some contributors highlight the early permeability between jazz and contemporary dance music (to the extent that distinguishing between these labels becomes increasingly meaningless), the genre is soon ensconced in the smoky cellar bar, arts centre, or classroom settings that epitomise its »art« status. That jazz performance has continued to exercise a prominent – albeit contested – influence on the formation of local popular music scenes, and has sold well in numerous fusion, crossover, or »smooth« manifestations since the 1970s onwards, goes largely unremarked upon.⁸ More galling still is the way that some authors forego historical context entirely for stock narrative tropes. Xavier Prévost tells us that »everyone felt that jazz music was about to change« (22) following the release of Ornette Coleman's *Free Jazz*. As influential as this album undoubtedly was, phrases like this substitute understandings of the impact of Coleman's work that could be drawn from contemporaneous sources with a well-

8 For a discussion of these elements of European jazz history, as well as their marginalisation in jazz studies, see: Simon Frith (2007). »Is Jazz Popular Music?« In: *Jazz Research Journal* 1 (1), pp. 7-23; and Catherine Tackley (2019). »Jazz Meets Pop in the United Kingdom.« In: *The Routledge Companion to Jazz Studies*. Ed. by Nicholas Gebhardt, Nichole Rustin-Paschal, Tony Whyton. New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 97-104.

worn tale of artistic stagnation and heroic innovation. *The History of European Jazz* may have managed to eschew American-centrism by virtue of its subject matter, but many of the clichés of the »jazz tradition« are still firmly in evidence.⁹ It will come as no surprise to readers, too, that women are almost entirely absent from many chapters. Martinelli acknowledges this, but many of contributors do not.

Despite these issues, it is important not to underestimate the book's usefulness as a starting point for research, or as a teaching tool; anyone looking for concise, readable overviews of »jazz in...« will most likely find what they need. The myriad performers, albums, and venues detailed across the book – not to mention the many surprising parallels and exceptions to existing European jazz narratives – will surely prompt future research. Moreover, the value of a *continental* jazz history is undeniable. These are, Martinelli emphasises, »stories that needed to be told« (1), and it is only to his and his many co-authors' credit that they have done so. *The History of European Jazz* shows how jazz has bound the continent together at some of its darkest moments, yet has also continuously challenged restrictive definitions of what it means to be European. At a time of resurgent far-right politics, the delusions of Brexit, and the growing climate emergency, these inspiring stories offer a guide not just for jazz studies, but for the European project as a whole.

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9 For a critique of the »jazz tradition« concept, see: Scott DeVeaux (1998). »Constructing the Jazz Tradition.« In: *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*. Ed. by Robert G. O'Meally. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, pp. 483-512.