

European Jazz @ UCLA is a valuable opportunity for American audiences to get acquainted with variations of European Jazz from Austria, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Poland, and Switzerland, which illustrate the many ways in which jazz continues to reinvent itself. To put things in context, we present an article by the composer, musician and musicologist Marek Zebrowski.

Jazz in the United States and Europe

By Marek Zebrowski

Generally acknowledged as a quintessentially American genre, jazz actually is an amalgam of various musical styles as well as a treasure trove of continental crosscurrents and influences. It is also a medium that continues to evolve, adapt, and reinvent itself all across the globe. Long associated with the southern United States, the roots of jazz can actually be traced back to West African rhythms and to music brought to the shores of the New World together with the slave trade.

Already at the cusp of the 20th century, New Orleans jazz and ragtime showed influences of American popular music, church hymns, and European classical music that crossed the Atlantic and found its way into all kinds of public spaces in America. From very early on, jazz reinterpreted and reinvigorated these musical traditions and—through syncopated rhythms, blue-note scales, improvisatory techniques, and specific choices of instruments—turned them into a singular and clearly identifiable genre.

Almost instantly, popular minstrel and salon music (a rage of the late Victorian era) found its classical counterpart in Louis Moreau Gottschalk, a New Orleans native virtuoso pianist and composer, who studied in Paris and became a favorite of Frederic Chopin and Franz Liszt. Gottschalk's appropriation of Afro-Caribbean music in his compositions began a process of the cross-pollination between popular music and classical music, and vice versa. Afro-Creole pianist Jelly Roll Morton not only popularized the turn-of-the-century New Orleans jazz, but also incorporated Spanish and Cuban elements like the habanera into the jazz tradition. The widely-acclaimed king of ragtime, Scott Joplin, was a classically-trained pianist and his infectiously likeable piano rags inspired early modernist compositions by Claude Debussy and Igor Stravinsky.

The 1920s were the "Jazz Age" on both sides of the Atlantic and after World War I American jazz began to migrate to Europe. Berlin and Paris were seized by jazz fever and its exoticism proved extremely popular with local audiences. Such artists as Josephine Baker (who settled permanently in Europe in the 1930s) and bands (like the legendary Sam Wooding's Chocolate Kiddies and Paul Whiteman's Band) successfully introduced jazz to European audiences. Ernest Krenek's jazz opera *Johnny spielt auf* was smash hit in the late 1920s; Kurt Weill's *Threepenny Opera* and *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* were also strongly influenced by American jazz from that era. George Gershwin's *An American in Paris* is another example of blending the European symphonic tradition with American jazz. Maurice Ravel's compositions from the early 1930s, especially his two piano concertos, reflect his fascination with the jazz rhythms and harmonies.

The years of the Third Reich were a strong setback for jazz, not only in Germany but also across Europe, which was soon engulfed in a longstanding and bloody conflict. Criticized by the Nazis for being "degenerate" and "inferior" together with most of contemporary art and music, jazz became popular in Europe again only after World War II. Brought back with touring ensembles for the Allied soldiers stationed throughout Europe's former battlefields, jazz once again made successful inroads with many local musicians. Names heretofore famous across America—Louis Armstrong, Count Basie, Cab Calloway, John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie, Benny Goodman, Earl Hines, Thelonious Monk, Charlie Parker, Fats Waller, and Teddy Wilson—became European celebrities from the 1950s onwards.

Just as European classical music embraced the avant-garde atonal, improvised and experimental language during the post-World War II era, the American cool jazz (Chet Baker, Dave

Brubeck, Bill Evans, the Modern Jazz Quartet) and free jazz (Charles Mingus) echoed the same improvisatory aspects, free atonality and world music influences of European concert music from the 1950s and the 1960s. During the mid-century decades, American musicians once again travelled to Europe for extended visits that led to further development of the European jazz medium, with its increasingly idiomatic language. Europe's first native jazz musician and virtuoso guitarist, Django Reinhardt, mixed Gypsy and Eastern European folk tunes with American swing and French dance hall traditions already in the late 1930s. By the 1950s and the 1960s, avant-garde trends in classical music were echoed by European free jazz and quickly evolved towards its own language and style with such greats as Peter Brötzmann, Andrea Centazzo, Günter Christmann, Jan Garbarek, Stéphane Grappelli, Gunter Hampel, Misha Mengelberg, Manfred Schoof, Irene Schweitzer, Alexander von Schlippenbach, and Enrico Rava, among others.

The drawing of the iron curtain across the center of Europe for almost half a century after World War II did not stop jazz from crossing many well-guarded borders. In fact, the history of jazz in Eastern Europe is a separate and fascinating chapter in the overall history of jazz. In spite of tight political controls, cultural prohibitions, and limitations on individual expression in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and the former Soviet Union, jazz was a wildly popular genre practiced openly and very successfully by such artists as Mihaly Drech, Vyacheslav Ganelin, Krzysztof Komeda, Adam Makowicz, Zbigniew Seifert, Tomasz Stańko, Jiri Stivin, György Szabados, Joe Sachse, Vladimir Tarasov, and others.

After 1989, European integration—and with it the integration of jazz across the continent—continued the development and prosperity of the genre. The cultural and political thaw of the 1990s inspired scores of European jazz musicians, especially when *Down Beat Magazine* put Swedish band The Esbjörn Svensson Trio on its cover in May 2006. This was perhaps an overdue acknowledgement of the enduring vitality of European jazz, as practiced in Scandinavia and in the rest of Europe, and a tacit recognition that the Old World continues to effectively reinvent a genre which long ago had ceased to be the sole property of the American musical tradition.