

## A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE HISTORY OF EUROPEAN JAZZ

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“European Jazz has now become an enormous world of idioms and a synthesis of styles that represent an effectively strong alternative to the US jazz scene. A new appreciation of popular roots and local traditions, the cross-cultural styles and freshness of instrumental expression unique in sound (for example: the sax of Jan Garbarek, the trumpet of Arve Henriksen, the horn of Michel Godard or Gianluigi Trovesi’s clarinet) have made of European Jazz an ambient of elaboration, an open laboratory of languages and dialects of the future to be. Some dare indicate Europe as the beating heart of future Jazz or at least its most productive and stimulating setting.”  
(*Vincenzo Martorella, Jazz historian, introduction to the Italian edition of Alyn Shipton’s “A New History of Jazz”*)

### **Jazz Histories**

Jazz blossomed in Europe during the 20th century not only as entertainment, but also as a generalised form of art. Today European Jazz is an active and vivid container full of all sorts of creative, expressive and original music. A History of European Jazz though, is something that many believe doesn’t exist. We should more correctly indicate what we are searching for as: Histories of European Jazz. This because Jazz, what we identify as Jazz in its traditional aspects, though present and active since decades in many European countries, has not had a uniform development across the “Old Continent”. This is due to differences generated by a vast number of reasons, the most significant which I will try to briefly analyse.

#### 1. Historical backgrounds

Each European country has developed its own particular history and this goes for music too. Needless to speak about the “National Schools” flourished during the 19th century (German, Russian, French, Spanish, Czech, Polish, Hungarian, Scandinavian and that of Italian Opera). What I want to point out is that each of these countries has deep and different social traditions, a different historic developed inside frontiers for which these countries have fought against each other to protect. Most of all each country has a different spoken language even if the origins of European languages are basically three (latin, saxon, finnish-russian). With this ambient as a place in. Which to grow and evolve, how could Jazz possibly have only one general history in Europe? The Jazz expressed in each country has its roots dug deep into different traditions and social habits and many musicologists consider this a positive factor because it has offered Jazz the possibility of manifesting various paths of development, generating different creative approaches that have, in unique ways, blended into the transformation of an original afro-american tradition. Furthermore in Britain, France, Germany and other northern European countries jazz history has always been given correct attention whilst this doesn’t go for the Mediterranean European countries. Italy, for example, started having a Jazz “awareness”, in consideration of a possible national jazz history, around the end of the ‘70s even though one of the oldest jazz reviews (*Music Jazz*) was born in 1945.

## 2. Influences through immigration

Apart the English presence in North America, afro-american traditions have been in contact with European cultures through the phenomenon of immigration (Italian, Irish, Polish, Russian and others) which boomed in the late 19th century. Not only did each national community “take” from the afro-american culture, but each community also “gave” something of its own heritage adding to the birth of jazz in the USA.

Due to family ties and the fact that immigrants would return back home once wealthy, musical contamination and influences also returned back to each nation. For example Italian Jazz has been much characterised by the presence in Italy, after the '50s, of a number of excellent Argentinian musicians with families of Italian origin because of immigration (Leandro Gato Barbieri sax, Alberto Corvini trp, Pocho Gatti pn). Particular is also the case of Jewish musicians that migrated, not only to the US, but also to East European countries contributing to the birth of Jazz traditions in countries such as Poland, Russia, Hungary etc

## 3. Different ways of “receiving” Jazz

Great Britain holds the privilege of having, and having had, the greatest exchanges with the US and its jazz musicians. This is due to a strong historical tie between England and the US, a common language which, in the years, permitted an easier organisation of concerts and cultural exchanges, two combined World War efforts and England's positive economic situation.

Furthermore in the '60s England received a number of jazz musicians from South Africa that had already developed their own distinctive jazz aesthetic.

France caught up soon though, becoming in the '50s a paradise for American Jazz players as for quantity of concerts in which to perform, excellent pays and social esteem, to a point where many US musicians moved to France. We must also remember that France is the country that saw the success of the mythical, Belgian born, guitarist Django Reinhardt.

Notable is the case of Sweden (the land of the pianist Lars Gullin) and Denmark. Due to the high quality of life, no racism, the social esteem held for jazz musicians, good work possibilities and excellent local musicians, these two countries became safe havens for a number of American jazz musicians.

Eventually Italy and Germany too started expressing interesting artists and festivals after the disaster of World War Two. Germany due to a thriving artistic Berlin situation and the need of a cultural renaissance, Italy because of an early 20th century tradition of jazz as entertainment music, banned during the fascist period and again fashionable after World War Two due to the presence on our soil of the Big Bands of the 5th and 6th US fleet stationed in Naples and Trieste. Plus, in the '50s, Chet Baker elected Italy as his home for a long time and became an influencing celebrity.

## 4. Inclusion in special cultural production

France and Italy also have always had a strong cinema industry, thus avanguard film directors that have often offered jazz musicians the possibility of making creative film music (Miles Davis, “Ascenceur Pour l'Echafaud” by Louis Malle (1957, Fra); Chet Baker, “L'Audace Colpo dei Soliti Ignoti” by Nanni Loi (1959, Ita); Gato Barbieri, “Last Tango In Paris” by Bernardo Bertolucci (1971) and “Appunti per un'Orestiade Africana” by Pierpaolo Pasolini (1970, Ita), just to name a few.

## 5. Music education

Each European country presents a different social consideration of music which leads to a different way music is made use of in daily life and to different music education systems. In Britain, Germany and Northern European countries music is considered something which is traditionally part of the everyday life of a family. Families usually have a piano at home or have fun at making their own music during festivities or participate in a choir. In these countries music is studied at all school levels ending with University specialisation. In Mediterranean cultures, though having a strong folk music tradition, non classical (Jazz) musicians enjoy a low widespread appreciation and music making, at more intellectual levels or for artistic engagement, is something normally reserved for those who have studied, are experts or “geniuses”. Thus, in Italy for example, there is no official music teaching in Italian primary schools. Music is studied in Conservatory, ancient terminology for what is now considered, by law, a part of university studies.

Unfortunately this is the outcome of the political aim of uniting EC countries under the same laws while traditional unwritten “laws” are, in fact, still effective. Fortunately in the case of Jazz, a part from State University courses, Italy enumerates a number of excellent jazz Schools of international level approved by the Ministry of Education: Siena Jazz, Siena; Saint Louis Music College, Rome; Scuola Civica di Jazz in Milan. Plus the private Umbria Jazz Clinics held in Summer and around Christmas by Berklee School.

#### 6. Folk music traditions

Owing to the fact that improvisation is one of the basic characteristics of Jazz, we must consider how it has been easier for an idiom that holds a strong improvisational approach to develop in countries where people are more accustomed to making music improvising. This is the case of the Mediterranean countries such as Spain, Italy and Portugal, and to a certain extent France too, where the characteristics of improvisation dominant in folk music have acted as a vehicle for Jazz music. This doesn't mean that the British or Scandinavian folk heritage doesn't present a tradition of improvised music, but the energies that improvisation expresses in the cultural world of Spain (such as in Flamenco) or in Naples, Italy (vocal and dance music) go way above any other to be found. Furthermore these energies generate deeper social implications and are vehicles for strong human values. For example the work songs of the field labourers of the South of Italy, the chants of the prison convicts of Milan or the Neapolitan love songs, produce the same feeling of the American blues and they change along with the evolution of the characters involved and the language those singing embrace.

#### 7. Commercial aspects

Another aspect that generated a big difference in the historical development of Jazz in Europe, especially up to the '60s, was the commercial distribution of Jazz records throughout the continent. Record selling started widespread in the more technologically advanced and richer countries (Britain and the North European) and then extended southwards to the Mediterranean countries. Jazz record sales started rising in Italy during the economic “boom” of the '60s. Jazz then became accessible not only to the richer aristocratic families that had always had jazz records at home, but to everyone, side by side to rock 'n' roll and pop music.

Jazz then started finding space on national radio and in the '70s Italy had five national state TV and radio Big Bands that not only performed for on-the-air shows, but were also active in festivals, often with American guest musicians. These Big Bands, that offered Italian musicians the possibility of an easier living, acted as cradles for many individual musicians that created and exported their own bands and also became a focus point for jazz composers.

#### 8. Social appreciation and enhancement

Throughout the 20th century while Jazz flourished in Northern Europe gaining social appreciation and being enhanced as sophisticated entertainment by private enterprise and as art form by the State, it toiled to find an equal condition in Southern Europe. Thanks to the presence of many American musicians France started funding Jazz festivals and attributing at least 30% of concert spaces to French musicians and their original projects. This condition, though, was long to come in Italy where the debate whether Italian jazz was “true” jazz or just a bad copy of American jazz went on till the '90s and still today the majority of festival venues are offered to musicians from abroad.

## Considerations

After World War Two the development of communication media and the enhancement of global cultural ideas, along with travelling becoming easier and records more available and less expensive, became of great aid in the expansion of Jazz in Europe.

For decades the US had been a center of great attraction for musicians all around the world (For example: Rolf Ericson and Valery Ponomarev trp, Josef Zawinul, Michel Petrucciani pn, Miroslav Vitous and Jiri Mraz bs), but during the '50s and '60s exchanges between musicians intensified in what concerns quantity and quality. Furthermore in the '60s jazz education started to develop substantially in Europe stimulating a new generation of able musicians and a significant boost to Jazz was also given by the birth of great Jazz festivals.

We may state that at the end of the 20th century the US have definitively lost their centrality related to jazz. Though born as an Afro-american phenomenon, Jazz now belongs to everyone and, most of all, it is not related to a particular geography or racial group. The '60s was probably the crucial period when jazz started developing autonomous and original forms outside of the US. It was the birth of a Jazz with different characteristics, not imitation of American music, that could be played though maintaining a relationship with American Jazz culture and tradition.

## Names (a few to listen to)

Great Britain:

Keith Tippett, Mike Westbrook pn, Elton Dean, Ronnie Scott, Courtney Pine, Evan Parker, John Surman sx, Ian Carr trp, Robert Wyatt, John Stevens Drm, John McLaughlin, Derek Bailey gtr, Dave Holland bs

France:

Django Reinhardt (born Belgium) gtr, Michel Solal pn, Michel Portal sx, cl, Michel Godard tuba, Richard Galliano accordion

Belgium:

Francis Boland pn, Philippe Catherine gtr

Sweden:

Lars Gullin, Esbjorn Svenson pn, Arve Henriksen trp, Palle Danielsson bs

Norway:

Jan Garbarek, Trygve Seim sx, Jon Christensen Drm

Russia (USSR):

Leo Feign pn, Ganelin group, Igor Butman sx

Germany:

Albert Mangelsdorf trb, Manfred Schoof trp, Alex Von Shlippenbach, Johakim Khun pn, Peter Brotzmann sx

Holland:

Misha Mengelberg pn, Han Bennink dr, Willem Breuker sax, cl

Poland:

Tomasz Stanko trp, Krzysztof Komeda pn

Serbia:

Dusko Gojkovich trp

Italy:

Quartetto Cetra vocal quartet, Gorni Kramer accordion, Renato Carosone, Giorgio Gaslini, Enrico Pieranunzi, Franco D'Andrea, Stefano Bollani pn, Oscar Valdambri, Enrico Rava, Flavio Boltrino trp, Gianluca Petrella trb, Gianni Basso, Enzo Scoppa, Maurizio Giammarco, Massimo Urbani, Rosario Giuliani sx, Gianluigi Trovesi, Gabriele Mirabassi cl, Gegè Munari, Roberto Gatto dr, Giovanni Tommaso bs

**Orchestras (some)**

Clarke-Boland Big Band (Ger), Mike Westbrook Orchestra, London Jazz Composer's Orchestra (GB), Vienna Art Orchestra (Aus), Globe Unity (Ger), Italian Instabile Orchestra (Ita), Massimo Nunzi Orchestra Operaia (Ita), RAI-TV Big Bands, Rome and Milan (Ita), Willem Breuker Collectif (Hol)

**Jazz Clubs (a taste)**

England: Ronnie Scott's, London

Denmark: Jazzhus Montmartre, Copenhagen

Italy: Swing Club, Turin - Music Inn, Rome - Blue Note, Milan

France: Le Caveau de la Huchette, new Morning, Paris

**Festivals (a few)**

Holland: Den Haag

Germany: Berlin, Moers

Switzerland: Montreux

France: Juan-Les-Pins, Nice

Italy: Alassio, Umbria Jazz, Bergamo

Poland: Jazz Jamboree

**Record labels (a part from majors)**

Italy: Black Saint, Soul Note, Horo, Red Records, Dischi della Quercia, Splasc(h), Alfa Music

Germany: Moers Music, Circle, FMP, Saba (then) MPS, ENJA, ECM, Japo

Sweden: Jazz Society II ('70s)

England: Incus, Leo, Ogun, matchless, Black Lion, Emanem

Denmark: Steeplechase

Switzerland: Hat Art

Holland: ICP, BVHaast, Criss Cross, Timeless, Fontana

France: BYG, Actuel, America, Black&Blue, Label Blue, Jazz Society I ('50s)

**Attached** is a list of influential, American Jazz Musicians who lived in Europe (from *Storia del Jazz* by Stefano Zenni, Stampa Alternativa, 2012, Ita)