

The Role of Jazz in Austria: Aspects of the Current Jazz Scene

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In Austria, a country deeply steeped in musical history and famous for its classical composers like Mozart, jazz had no problem gaining importance. Since the end of World War II jazz has begun to play a significant role within the music culture, and especially in the two biggest cities Vienna and Graz jazz scenes evolved rather quickly. Once jazz in Europe was academically institutionalized for the first time at the “Akademie für Musik und darstellende Kunst Graz” (now “University of Music and Performing Arts Graz”, abbreviated “KUG”) in 1965, the status of jazz in Austrian musical life was assured.

In order to get an overview of today’s situation of jazz in Austria, various aspects of the current jazz scene are examined: situation of jazz musicians, education, venues and festivals as well as media presence. In addition to collated comprehensive data, expert interviews will help to gain extensive insights in the jazz culture. The main aim of this paper is to present the role of jazz and its current importance within the music culture in Austria.

INTRODUCTION

Since the end of Second World War jazz has begun to play a significant role within the music culture in Austria. In a country like Austria which is deeply steeped in musical history and famous for classical composers like Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Anton Bruckner, Joseph Haydn, Johann Strauß and Arnold Schönberg, jazz had no problem gaining importance. Especially in the two biggest cities Graz and Vienna jazz scenes evolved quickly with internationally successful musicians like Hans Koller (1921–2003, saxophone), Fatty George (1927–1982, clarinet, saxophone) and Joe Zawinul (1932–2007, piano, keyboards). When jazz was academically institutionalized at the Music Academy in Graz, now “University of Music and Performing Arts of Graz” for the first time in Europe in 1965, the status of jazz in Austrian musical life was assured.

In order to get an overview of today’s situation of jazz in Austria, the following aspects of the current jazz scene are examined: general situation of jazz musicians, professional jazz education at universities and conservatories, organizers of jazz events including jazz festivals and media presence of jazz (print media, radio, TV). The basic information and national data for the study was provided by the national music information center Austria, (MICA, <http://www.musicaustria.at>). In addition to this data, expert interviews help to gain extensive insights in the jazz culture. This overview is part of the transnational research project Rhythm Changes: Jazz Cultures and European Identities, an interdisciplinary cooperative project which examines the current role of jazz and its significance within the cultures of the partner countries Austria, Denmark, Great Britain, the Netherlands and Norway (<http://www.rhythmchanges.net>). The complete and detailed country report about the current Austrian jazz scene will be published in *Anklaenge 2011: Wiener Jahrbuch für Musikwissenschaft* (Vienna: Mille Tre).

SITUATION OF JAZZ MUSICIANS

There is a broad consensus that currently a huge number of highly skilled jazz musicians exists in Austria. The experts’ perception shows a considerable increase since the 1980s. One reason is the good infrastructure for jazz education at Austria’s universities and conservatories: Most jazz musicians obtain a degree in jazz. Due to the well established studying possibilities many foreign students also study in Austria, which again enlivens the jazz scene. According to the interviewees, exceptional strengths of Austrian jazz musicians include creativity as well as multifaceted and innovative work.

Nevertheless, Austrian jazz musicians have a rather difficult economical situation, since very few can make a living strictly as a freelance musician. Their fields of activities are giving concerts, commissioned compositions, working in jazz orchestras/big bands and working in jazz-related fields (such as pop music, musical productions, TV productions, studio musician). Most frequently, jazz musicians additionally teach at music schools and conservatories. This is seen partially as a positive supplement and enrichment of their work, partly it is seen as a hindrance to their artistic work.

Concerning the gender topic, it is clear that there are by far more male jazz musicians than female and that the profession “jazz musician” in Austria is still a male-dominated field; however, this is not a problem specific to Austria. According to the current list of jazz musicians from MICA, 84% of musicians are male and just 16% are female. Moreover, female jazz musicians are mostly vocalists. The comparison of “younger” jazz musicians (under 35) shows that women seem to be catching up, since there are comparatively more young female musicians than male ones. Observations of jazz audiences also confirm that women are interested in jazz.

Above all, more jazz agencies are needed: The few existing agencies, such as LPS (Live Performance Service, <http://www.lps.at>) and Saudades Tours (<http://www.saudades.at>) mainly

deal with international musicians. Hence, the jazz musicians manage their organizational responsibilities themselves, such as contacting organizers, planning concerts and tours as well as writing funding applications. Being a jazz musician means combining artistic and organizational skills. Therefore, management courses are already part of many curricula at universities and conservatories. Generally, the internet is of great importance for jazz musicians and seen as a practical tool with many possibilities to promote their music. Almost every jazz musician has a website and uses online tools like “facebook”, “twitter” and “myspace” for their music, as well as “youtube” and “vimeo” for their videos.

HIGHER JAZZ EDUCATION

The jazz experts agree that there are sufficient institutions providing a professional jazz education in Austria, and that the quality of the education generally is high. A jazz study is important for the later career of the jazz musician and provides, besides the artistic education, early performance possibilities, contacts and networking both inside and outside the university. Within the jazz training it is distinguished between an artistic study, the so called “Konzertfach” with a final diploma, and an artistic-pedagogical study called “Instrumental- und Gesangspädagogik” (IGP) with an additional teaching certificate, which allows the graduate to teach at any educational institution in Austria. Besides these studying possibilities, jazz can be chosen as an additional main focus within classical music studies. The jazz institutes at the music universities in Graz, Vienna and Linz are named as the most important institutions for higher jazz education.

The Jazz Institute at the “University of Music and Performing Arts of Graz” (KUG) was founded in Graz in 1965 and is the oldest jazz institute in Europe. Furthermore, KUG also has an Institute for Jazz Research since 1971. Jazz can be studied with the main instruments vocals, guitar, piano, bass, trombone, saxophone, drums and trumpet (<http://www.kug.ac.at>). The Jazz Institute at the “Konservatorium Wien Private University” (KWP) in Vienna was founded just a few years later in 1968 and provides jazz studies with the same main instruments (<http://www.konservatorium-wien.ac.at>). The Institute of “Jazz and Improvised Music” (JIM) at the “Anton Bruckner Private University” in Linz was founded in 1989. In addition to the main instruments offered in Graz and Vienna, at the JIM one can also study the instruments electric bass, percussion, violin, viola, violoncello, flute and tuba (<http://www.bruckneruni.at>). Of all conservatories offering similar jazz studies, the “Kärntner Landeskonservatorium” (KONSE) is the most renowned. The final degrees are equal to university degrees (<http://www.konse.at>).

The aforementioned universities with professional jazz education provide student information on their homepages. To conduct a comparative analysis, the data of the fall term 2010/11 concerning all bachelor and master studies (BA and MA) in jazz is used. The overall analysis shows that 80% of the students are male and only 20% female, very similar to the general situation of Austrian jazz musicians. A further result shows that in sum the percentage of Austrian students is 64%, compared to 36% of students from abroad. At the KUG the percentage of foreign students is higher – 58% – than the percentage of domestic students. At the other two universities, Austrians are in the majority (KWP: 73%, JIM: 78%). The analyses of the bachelor and master Studies show that at all universities female students often finish only the bachelor studies and do not begin the master’s degree program. At the KUG a total of 91% of master’s students are male and in Vienna they all are. At JIM the vast majority of master’s students (90%) are also male. On the basis of these numbers it becomes clear why few female jazz musicians exist in Austria.

ORGANIZERS FOR JAZZ

According to the interviewed jazz experts, in Austria the current number of organizers for jazz events is sufficient. There are enough possibilities for jazz musicians to play at venues like clubs, festivals, concert halls and restaurants. Unfortunately, the financial situation of the organizers generally has become worse. Especially younger jazz musicians earn most of their money by playing at commercial events (like private parties, art exhibits, etc.).

In general, jazz festivals have more financial resources, which is why fees are better at festivals. Furthermore, public interest is quite high: There is much information about festivals published in the media and usually a huge audience. Nevertheless, playing at smaller clubs or at university events is also regarded as very important. Due to the wide acceptance of jazz within the so-called “high culture” in Austria, jazz concerts also take place at classical concert houses like for example the “Stefaniensaal” in Graz and in Vienna at the “Musikverein”, the “Wiener Staatsoper” and the “Wiener Konzerthaus”, where regular jazz series take place (e.g., “Jazz im Konzerthaus” and “The Art of Jazz Piano”, <http://konzerthaus.at>). Nevertheless, it is criticized that the “big stars” of the international jazz scene but almost no local musicians play at these venues. Jazz concerts at these famous concert houses, however, do increase the reputation of jazz in general.

According to MICA’s current list of active jazz organizers in Austria, only 19% work within the field “jazz” only. For the others, jazz music is part of their work, combined with other music styles like pop, rock, contemporary art music, electronic music, world music, hip hop and classical music. All interviewed jazz experts identified the jazz club “Porgy & Bess” in Vienna (founded in 1993) as the most important jazz organizer in Austria and a very professional organizer of jazz concerts. The data of the year 2010 shows in sum exactly 365 events. Fewer concerts were organized during the summer months July, August and September, the time when many jazz festivals take place.

Jazz festivals are very important events in the Austrian music scene, mainly because of the already mentioned public interest. However, they are sometimes criticized for not allowing more national musicians to play at the big and popular festivals, such as the “Jazz Fest Wien” with around 60,000 visitors. According to the list of jazz festivals in 2010 provided by MICA, in sum 39 festivals (of a total of 143 music festivals) contain jazz music, partly combined with other music styles. The analysis of the nationality of musicians/ensembles playing at Austrian jazz festivals shows that 45% of the musicians are Austrian, 29% live in the European Union and 26% come from outside the EU, mainly from the USA.

JAZZ IN MEDIA

Media can make a great contribution for the development of a country’s music and jazz scene: Print media (newspapers and journals), radio and television provide the possibility of making information available. In Austria, media-related support of jazz and jazz musicians is considered low and not appropriate to the relevance of jazz. However, the general importance of these media has decreased due to the increasing importance of the internet.

In newspaper articles concerning jazz a rather poor quality is observed. “Der Standard”, “Die Presse” and the “Kleine Zeitung” are named as daily newspapers with significant jazz reporting. Generally, all jazz articles concern event listings, radio programs, upcoming festivals and similar information, with almost no reviews. Currently no jazz magazine exists in Austria. The very informative Jazzzeit was discontinued in 2009. However, jazz is partly covered in the magazines Concerto, a journal of jazz, blues, world music and pop (six times a year, <http://www.concerto.at>), Freistil, a magazine about music and surrounding areas (six times a year, <http://freistil.klingt.org>) and SKUG, a music journal (four times a year, <http://www.skug.at>). Although no jazz magazine exists in Austria, the following three publication series published by the Institute for Jazz Research at KUG together with the Inter-

national Society for Jazz Research in Graz (<http://www.jazzresearch.org>) are important scientific publications and known internationally: *Jazzforschung / Jazz Research* has been published since 1969, with 42 volumes to date. Also since 1969 *Beiträge zur Jazzforschung / Studies in Jazz Research* have been published irregularly; 14 volumes exist so far. Moreover, the *Jazz Research News* has been published since 2000 with 38 issues printed to date.

Due to the lack of jazz presence in national broadcasting, the Austrian public broadcaster ORF (“Österreichischer Rundfunk”) is consistently criticized for not meeting its responsibility to report on the Austrian jazz scene in both radio and TV. Currently, there are no jazz productions since the orchestra of the ORF was dissolved in the 1980s. The regular jazz series in radio have been cut down and only appear on the ORF’s cultural and flagship station “Ö1” (<http://oe1.orf.at>). The regular jazz series are the “Jazztime”, the “Ö1 Jazznacht”, “On Stage” and “Spielräume”. At the Styrian regional program of “Ö2”, the Styrian ORF program, a jazz series called “Jazz at its best” is broadcast. The most popular Austrian radio station, “Ö3”, does not broadcast jazz series. In addition to the public broadcaster ORF, regular jazz series are made by single “Freie Radios Österreich”, independent radio stations, which are non-profit organizations broadcasting via online streams. Examples are “Freirad” (<http://www.freirad.at>), “Radio Helsinki” (<http://helsinki.at>), “Freequenns” (<http://www.freequenns.at>) and “Orange 94.0” (<http://www.o94.at>).

Jazz plays no role at all in television; it is simply not present in ORF programming. A very few single reports occasionally appear on the news program “Zeit im Bild” (ZIB) or “Kulturmontag” as well as some event information at “A.Viso” (<http://www.orf.at>). However, the program “3sat”, a mainly German television transmitter in cooperation with Swiss broadcasting and the ORF, does program jazz in the form of concerts, portraits of jazz musicians and documentaries (<http://www.3sat.de>).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

An important positive aspect of the current Austrian jazz scene is the huge number of young and active jazz musicians, who not only work as performing artists but also teach and play in jazz orchestras and collectives. Generally, more jazz agencies are needed since the musicians have to do most of the organizational work themselves. The education possibilities for jazz at universities and conservatories are considered very good. Jazz students and graduates form an important part of the jazz scene; however, there still are very few women in jazz. Currently, there are enough organizers and venues such as clubs and festivals where jazz musicians get the chance to perform. Moreover, jazz concerts at famous classical concert houses such as the “Wiener Konzerthaus” or the “Wiener Staatsoper” are possible. National jazz musicians would appreciate more chances to play at the popular venues and festivals like the “Jazz Fest Wien”. Jazz is present in the national media, but according to the experts far too little. More qualitative articles in newspapers and magazines, more regular radio jazz series as well as a general higher media presence in TV are also seen as necessary.

Altogether, one can draw a positive picture of the current jazz scene in Austria. There is a vital jazz scene which, in spite of the flaws discussed, is widely accepted and plays an important role within the national music scene.

Rhythm Changes is financially supported by the HERA Joint Research Programme (www.heranet.info) which is co-funded by AHRC, AKA, DASTI, ETF, FNR, FWF, HAZU, IRCHSS, MHEST, NWO, RANNIS, RCN, VR and The European Community FP7 2007-2013, under the Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities programme.