MUSIC FROM OUT THERE, IN HERE:

25 YEARS OF THE LONDON JAZZ FESTIVAL

Emma Webster and George McKay
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FOREWORD:
25 YEARS ON…

JOHN CUMMING,
DIRECTOR, LONDON
JAZZ FESTIVAL

Jazz occupies a special place in London. Over the decades, jazz in this city has connected with new cultures and new communities, making music that has become an essential part of London’s cultural fabric. During the festival’s ten days, you find it in venues large and small, in cinemas and art galleries, on the airwaves and online – and playing to all ages, from Jazz for Toddlers sessions to a dedicated audience for whom jazz has been the soundtrack of their lives. The meticulous work that follows in this history charts the festival journey across decades, and probes the bigger picture that surrounds it. It’s not just about the music, extraordinary and inspiring as that can be. It’s about the way that what might be seen as a niche area of creative work can reflect and respond to external change – and, we hope, make a difference.

Not just within a city, but as part of worldwide reach that transcends barriers of race and ethnicity, and, at its best, celebrates a global mix of gender, class and generation. For those of us involved in the festival, and even though we are committed to our aims and aspirations, both short and longer term, it’s all too easy to lose sight of the wood among the trees. This new history of the festival not only reminds us of the highs and lows, evolution and the rationale, but also moments of revelation, frustration, and intense pleasure. I’m not sure that those of us involved in the day-to-day, year-to-year business of getting the show on the road ever really get to the bottom of how it all works. Emma and George have found their way through piles of randomly stored paperwork, sounds, strongly-held opinion, and often only half-remembered anecdote, to illuminate this process.

Perhaps more important, they have helped to remind us of our core values – some of which stretch back to the pre-history of the London Jazz Festival. Their approach has been painstaking, sympathetic, and sometimes provocative. Most important, they have immersed themselves in our world while managing to make their own judgements. The outcome is I think an immensely valuable piece of work that informs our practice as a producer of live music, and at the same time marks the essential role of academic research in evaluating the impact of the cultural sector in a wider context. Looking back at the materials that Emma and George unearthed in their festival archaeology… well, 25 years ago, social media hadn’t been invented, the internet was a nascent force, and we still lived in a world where the old school was only just beginning to be re-invigorated by a fast-changing new world of communication technology – let alone fast-shifting social, economic and cultural change.

Yet the music retains its fundamental spirit – a spirit that fires the urge of the individual artist to create, and to communicate with an audience that continues to value the simple and profound live experience of a band on a stage. And while this experience still lies at the heart and soul of our festival, the new world allows us to spread the message ever more widely through means that might allow a performance in London to be experienced simultaneously in the further reaches of the planet. The next 25 years will be an equally fascinating journey. Festivals are a mammoth team effort, and I’d like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has ever been part of making it all happen, and then making it happen again, and again – the funders, donors and sponsors, our ever-expanding audience, and of course the thousands of musicians who have provided countless hours of pleasure and stimulation, some of them just starting on their creative path, others no longer with us.

And I thank a Serious team that includes directors and staff, freelancers and volunteers, and the authors of this history. As the hashtag – something that we never dreamt of a quarter of a century ago – for the 25th festival proclaims: We are Jazz…
INTRODUCTION

THE OPENING NIGHT

On Friday 14th May 1993, the Union Chapel in Islington hosted the opening night party of a brand new festival. Supported by the ‘spine-chillingly powerful’ British singer Carol Grimes and thunderous twenty-piece percussion-based London Afro Bloc, the party was headlined by New Orleans’ Rebirth Brass Band, who, with their combination of roots jazz, funk, hip hop and reggae, as The Guardian’s jazz critic John Fordham recalls, ‘were the perfect harbingers of the idiomatically freewheeling and inclusive London Jazz Festival yet to come.’

Grimes’ folk-jazz group with its guitars, percussion and the ‘graceful lyricism’ of Annie Whitehead’s trombone, along with Afro Bloc’s more carnivalesque sound, made for a contrasting yet complementary accompaniment to the exuberant Americans, whose sousaphone-led brass bass, rough slide trombones and kicking rock solid snare drums played a euphoric version of Herbie Hancock’s 1970s Head Hunters as well as some ‘luxurious reggae’. As Fordham said at the time: ‘It’s showbiz all right, but as a party-band it’s a hoot, literally.’

By putting on a young American band who looked to the music’s roots, its ‘vigorous present’, and to the future of jazz, alongside young British talents from London itself, so this first gig epitomised the new London Jazz Festival’s mission statement:

May 1993 heralds the start of something new and exciting for the London jazz scene. After too many years without a jazz festival of the scale provided by other European cities, London will at last reflect the important cultural contributions made by its own committed and creative musicians, in 10 days of eclectic jazz-related activity from around the world.... Involving more international jazz stars and top venues than ever before, it is seen as a prototype of a festival that will spread right across London in years to come.

THE GUARDIAN

“The London festival still puts an emphasis on the adventure of being human and also becoming more human, and jazz, to me that word means ‘I dare you to go beyond – like in Star Trek! – places where no-one goes’. And I see that in director John Cumming’s attitude... when he talks and he gets really excited about something, it’s like his life, he wants to keep that rich adventure, you know... The London Jazz Festival’s a great festival.”

WAYNE SHORTER, SAXOPHONIST 2016

The aim was to create a London Jazz Festival that both reflected and contributed to London’s status as a world city, as well as functioning as a kind of cultural melting pot, if that’s not too utopian. At its very best the jazz festival sounds London’s effervescent creative presence as a musical city which has been at the centre of jazz in Britain for over a hundred years and which today is still a major centre for the European jazz movement that’s developed since the 1960s, as well as being an extraordinary site of transatlantic and Commonwealth musical exchanges and dialogues.

Sending a bold message to London that its new jazz festival had arrived, the 1993 event was heralded by 20-metre-high images of jazz musicians projected on to the side of St Pancras railway station, described by The Guardian as beginning with ‘a confident shout that has reverberated through the decades since.’ Up to that point, Glasgow had been leading the way as the only British city ‘with the nerve to stage a truly representative mixture of big time jazz concerts, club event, commissioned pieces, and work-in-progress.’ It was time for London to join the party.

This book, published to coincide with the 25th anniversary of what is now a major fixture in national and international jazz calendars, examines how the event fits into the history of jazz in Britain and into the fabric of London, showing how the festival’s history is part of the history of London itself. It is a visual and cultural history of what Time Out has called ‘one of the biggest cultural events of the year’ and The Times names ‘one of the world’s great music festivals.’
That is over half a century of festivalising in and around the city with the modern music of jazz. A century ago, two remarkable ensembles from the United States sprung on London city in one glorious year, shaking its musicians, dancers, fans, new music critics and instant jazz historians all at once in a febrile curiosity. The year was 1919, and a first British tour by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band (ODJB), a group of white jazz musicians, was followed by live performances by the African-American Southern Syncopated Orchestra (SSO). Of course it is likely that jazz arrived in Britain before 1919.

The history is a turbulent and compelling one, featuring wonderful new music and sounds, sex scandals, royalty, the pleasure of dancing and the preaching of disapproval, narcotics, underground clubs, racial harmony, racism, war, the destruction and rebuilding of London, festivals, jazz riots, too many early deaths, parades and political demonstrations, media from early radio to online streaming, and more. It is also a rapidly evolving history: London in the 1920s was already becoming a jazz city, one marked by what David Gilbert has described in The London Journal as ‘the syncopation of different social and cultural beats, by improvisation and experimentation on traditional themes, and by the cosmopolitan fusion of influences from abroad.’
Although perhaps not quite on the level of the Anti-Jazz Movement in the Irish Republic in the 1930s, during these decades there was still great resistance to jazz from the establishment, indeed, of anything that ‘smacked of American culture’ finding its way into the British way of life. To protect British values from this ‘transatlantic octopus’, jazz broadcasting on the recently constituted BBC was controlled through careful selection of ‘house’ bands and a deliberately diluted jazz, before Lord Reith finally outright banned ‘hot music’ entirely in 1935. Around the same time the Musicians’ Union (MU) had secured agreement from the Ministry of Labour that it would be consulted over all applications for permits by foreign musicians, the MU’s argument being that one of its duties was to protect British musicians by preventing foreign labour from replacing them. By the end of the 1940s, American musicians in particular found it difficult to perform in Britain, and vice versa.

Jazz was transmitted not only via live music early on. From records and tapes to CDs, downloads and streaming, the development of recording technology has had a significant impact on its development, and that of popular music more broadly. The disembodiment of the voice also meant that in the early days of jazz records, white people could listen to black music without subjecting themselves to the performance, while the isolationism of the early 1950s helped to create an exceptionally strong pool of British jazz musicians by protecting them and allowing them to develop at their own pace.

From the first international jazz festival in Nice in 1948 to Beaulieu, Hampshire in 1956 to Montreux in 1967, the jazz festival has long featured as a significant European contribution to the music, drawing on as well as influencing American festivals like Newport, originally established in 1954. Described as a ‘sample’ of jazz by George McKay, the 1950s in Britain were bookended by the Festival of Britain in 1951 – for jazz London’s Southbank Centre was built, of course – and the prototype for the Notting Hill Carnival in January 1959, a Caribbean ‘layre’ in St Pancras, organised by Trinidadian communist and journalist, Claudia Jones.

Even prior to this, there are tantalising glimpses of a London-based jazz festival culture in the early postwar years of the late 1940s. For example, a very early jazz festival in Britain was the ‘Festival of Jazz’ which took place at London’s Winter Garden Theatre, Drury Lane, on 24 April 1949 in conjunction with the London Jazz Club. Performers included Freddy Randall and his Band, The Yorkshire Jazz Band, Mick Gill and his Imperial Jazz Band, Humphrey Lyttelton and his Band, and George Webb. It is not being unkind to point out that this bill compared poorly alongside the Paris festival just a couple of weeks after – apart from Bird, Miles Davis also played there that year, for instance. It is vital to acknowledge that the 1950s were also an important year for jazz festivals across the Atlantic, with George Wein’s inaugural Newport Jazz and Folk Festival [Miles debuted in 1955] and the first Monterey Jazz Festival held in 1958. Touring to London, Birmingham, Newcastle, Bradford and Sheffield, the first Newport Jazz Festival European Tour arrived in Britain in 1959, with miles, Dave Brubeck, Dizzy Gillespie, Buck Clayton, and Jimmy Rushing.

These package tours, themselves based on a model developed by American record promoter Norman Granz, were to become an important model for American jazz musicians to perform in Britain. While jazz clubs provided fairly regular opportunities to play, however, as Eric Hobsbawm writes in 1959, from the musician’s point of view, festivals such as Newport, Nice, Cannes and San Remo were at that time ‘spiritually rather than financially satisfactory, like the occasional recitals in the temples of official music [like the Festival Hall].’

They are a sort of cultural recognition of jazz, but too infrequent to count much.’

In November 1955 at the Royal Festival Hall, the National Jazz Federation organised its second British Festival of Jazz, in the form of a multiple bill pair of concerts in the afternoon and evening. The brochure’s introduction explained to festival-goers that ‘during the past year we have tried to maintain a high standard of entertainment, interspersing the regular appearances of exponents of both Traditional and Modern Schools at the Recital Room, with large concerts both at the Festival Hall and in the provinces. We have also tried to give a hearing to the new groups and fresh voices in British jazz, and to welcome visiting jazz personalities to our shows.’ The festival’s afternoon concert featured modern and the evening’s traditional jazz, with a US closing headliner in Big Bill Broonzy.
Arguably the most significant event in terms of the history of jazz festivals in Britain was the Beaulieu Jazz Festival on the Beaulieu estate and stately home in Hampshire, first organised by the aristocratic Lord Montagu in 1956 and ending in 1961, the final two years marred by violent clashes between trad and modern jazz fans. The 1957 festival’s slogan linked space and sound: it was to be ‘A combination of blue blood and the blues.’

Soon teenage festival-goers were camping under the stars, living free in the woods, smoking marijuana and drinking cider and having sex, against a backdrop of wild music and weird dress. They were called ‘ravers’. (Singer Rod Stewart often tells the story that his first transatlantic solo hit ‘Maggie May’ from 1971 was ‘more or less a true story, about the first woman I had sex with, at the 1961 Beaulieu Jazz Festival.’)

In scenes that would be more familiar in a few years between mods and rockers, there were jazz riots in the festival’s final two years. The BBC, trying new live outside broadcasts from the jazz festival in 1960, had to cut the show short because of crowd trouble. The banjo from Acker Bilk’s band was irreparably damaged – surely there was no more telling symbol of trad vs. modern jazz antagonism than a smashed-up banjo. The ‘BEATNIK vs. modern jazz antagonism than a smashed-up banjo. The Beatnik’ beat-up of the 1960 festival, as it was headlined in one newspaper, was reported in the Commonwealth and world press as an extraordinary mix of English aristocratic eccentricity and American jazz madness. Indeed, jazz festivals would quickly become so commonly associated with crowd trouble that it was in fact the absence of trouble at the Earlswood Jazz Festival in July 1961 that made an ironic front page headline in Melody Maker: ‘Wot, no Riots?’

The magazine went on: Two hundred police and a pack of tracker dogs controlled Britain’s biggest jazz festival last weekend. Fifteen thousand people went to Earlswood (Birmingham) where sixteen trad bands played non-stop for 14 hours. BUT THERE WAS NO RIOT. THERE WAS NO ROWDINESS. THE CRITICS OF JAZZ FANS WERE CONFOUNDED.

According to Simon Frith et al, the Beaulieu Festival was also an important symbolic event for British jazz, the images of large crowds of jazz fans in the music as well as the national press and later on television and newsreels creating a sense of a ‘jazz community’ for the first time. As well as being musically and socially significant, early gatherings such as Beaulieu and the Trinidadian Carnival were also politically so, developing alongside more overtly political events such as the annual Aldermaston Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament marches or in reaction to the worsening racial tension in England.

BEAULIEU JAZZ FESTIVAL

THE NATIONAL JAZZ FESTIVAL

Taking on the jazz festival baton from Beaulieu was the National Jazz Festival, first held on the outskirts of London at the Richmond Athletic Ground in 1961, promoted by the National Jazz Federation’s Harold Pendleton. Pendleton had been involved in the later Beaulieu Festivals and, in the same summer that Beaulieu was suffering from crowd trouble for the second year running, the first festival at Richmond featured a mix of jazz styles, including the Johnny Dankworth Quartet (and Orchestral), Ken Colyer’s Jazzmen, and the more contemporary Joe Harriott Quintet. Pendleton remembered them being ‘very polite affairs. You see, you went home in the evening, it was just like going to a concert without a roof on it really.’

By 1963, a June edition of Crescendo magazine was writing of the summer ‘festival season’ that ‘the jazz festivals are upon us. There are half a dozen major events this Summer, besides a number of smaller affairs and the usual roistering boatloads that ply our wider and less peaceful estuaries.’ This last was a reference to events such as George Webb’s annual Floating Festival of Jazz, which started in London in 1957, on a boat with jazz bands and fans on a Sunday afternoon down the Thames from Tower Pier to Margate and back. The Thames was Mississippi. There was also a Northern Floating Jazz Festival, on a boat trip from Liverpool to the Isle of Man which, yes, happily featured on the bill the Merseysissipi Jazz Band.

In his Jazz News column in July 1962, Ian McLean provided a witty description of the booming jazz festival scene across the country:

Festivals come in all sorts of shapes and sizes. There is the Mammoth one which lasts for about a week. This is suspiciously tied up with the city’s Art and Culture Week and is patronised (in every sense) by civic dignitaries and has just about everything except the massed bands of Ken Colyer, Mike Cotton, Terry Lightfoot and Acker Bilk marching and counter marching up and down the High Street during the rush hour.

On a smaller scale there is the Festival which lasts about a day or so depending on the availability of large tracts of land on which anything from a fairground to a zoo, or even a circus, can be erected as extra.
Even little villages have Jazz Festivals. Leader of the local youth club engages a couple of groups – style notwithstanding – hires a cheap (in every sense) band from a leading London agency to top the bill in the Scout hut and, all of a sudden, Midsomer-In-The-Cart has a Jazz Festival. The local rag is impressed, the binge gets loads of publicity and a thunderstorm and the whole stupid thing is a total flop.

Then you can have the mixture as before... adding water. This is called the Floating Festival and the extra #bandleaders do it as well – and a

CHAPTER 1

Reflecting changing popular tastes, and as happened with other major jazz festivals like Montreux and Newport, the National Jazz Festival would begin to expand its original jazz remit to include rock and blues; the Rolling Stones were included on the bill for the first time in 1963. In 1964 it was renamed the National Jazz and Blues Festival, and by the mid-1960s, jazz groups had become outnumbered by blues and R&B bands. By 1971, the National Jazz Festival had moved to Reading, again not far from London, and changed its name to Reading Rock Festival, before changing to Reading Rock in 1976, with National Jazz, Blues and Rock Festival, as part of a European tour sponsored jointly by Pan-American Airways and the US Travel Service as a means of promoting US tourism. By the final Expo in 1970, a classified ad in The Guardian boasted that the event was the biggest jazz festival in the world.

While jazz was starting to disappear from its own national festival, other jazz festival-style events were taking place in the UK, and, as jazz became more accepted (and funded) by the establishment, so too the crowd trouble which had previously plagued jazz festivals began to dissipate. The Daily Mail International Jazz Festival in June 1963, for example, was sponsored by a newspaper that had regularly been histrionically critical about the antics of the jazz ‘ravers’ at Beaulieu Festivals a few years previously.

Another jazz-based festival of note was what The Guardian describes as the first London Jazz Festival: Jazz Expo ’67, which took place indoors in the Royal Festival Hall. Really an eight-part concert series, the Expo was associated with George Wein’s Newport Jazz Festival and was part of a European tour sponsored jointly by Pan-American Airways and the US Travel Service as a means of promoting US tourism. By the final Expo in 1970, a classified ad in The Guardian boasted that the event was now ‘The biggest jazz festival in the world.’

The British and UK-based jazz musicians and improvisers of the late 1960s and 1970s – the likes of Mike Westbrook, Stan Tracey, Evan Parker, Chris McGregor, Mike Gibbs, Joe Harriott, Derek Bailey – were developing new jazz idioms which, as jazz writer Roger Cotterrell has put it, ‘helped to build a collective self-confidence that made European jazz eventually no longer reliant on American developments’, with a distinctive flavour and clear identity of its own.

Indeed, the 1960s was to become the ‘golden decade of creativity in British jazz’ in the words of writer and broadcaster Alyn Shipton in A New History of Jazz. Such confidence was aided in part by the gradual development of jazz infrastructure in London, including the Jazz Centre Society (1968), the London Musicians’ Co-operative (1970), the Musicians’ Action Group (1972), the House of Commons Jazz Society (1973), now the All-Party Parliamentary Jazz Appreciation Group and the London Musicians’ Collective (1974), as well as clubs like Ronnie Scott’s, the Bull’s Head, Barnes (both 1959), the 606 Club (1969), and the PizzaExpress club in Soho (1969), all of which would go on to become London Jazz Festival venues.

In 1968, Graham Collier had become the first jazz composer to receive an Arts Council bursary for his piece, Workpoints. Yet, despite all this activity and organisation, the 1970s in Britain saw an overall decline in jazz participation and, as Stuart Nicholson puts it, ‘areas of jazz had been marginalised by rock and pop to the extent that it was no exaggeration to say that jazz was at one of its lowest ebbs ever’. As a result, the 1970s now is remembered in London music festival terms predominantly as the era of free rock concerts in public parks, alongside the street-based urban event of black London, the Notting Hill Carnival, but it was in fact also an important period in London Jazz Festival history, as the seeds of the Camden Jazz Week were sown in 1974 and the first Brockwell Festival began the following year, organised by John Cumming.
SOHO AS BAROMETER FOR JAZZ AND FOR LONDON

Soho in central London is a useful barometer for some of the bigger musical, economic and social changes in London in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. By the mid-nineteenth century, Soho was a hub for immigrants (including Karl Marx) and instrument makers, and had already gained a reputation as a centre of gastronomy, of the sex industry, and of musical and theatrical entertainment.

The area was perfectly suited for the jazz and dance band boom of the 1920s and the 1930s saw a host of legal and semi-legal venues, including the site of Britain’s first Rhythm Club, the Dog O’Nails. Soho was also the base of the London Orchestral Association and then the Musicians’ Union on Archer Street, which became an unofficial social gathering and hiring place for musicians until the 1960s. Nearby Denmark Street was the place for music shops and music publishers.

The 1940s and 1950s saw a number of relatively short-lived jazz clubs and Soho became the centre of the skiffle and folk revival movements in the 1950s, while the 1955 Soho Film of the year saw the first outing by John Fair would see the first outing by the Musicians’ Union on Archer Street – the Traverse was a hotbed of radical theatre and brought about what Pete Clark calls the ‘slow death of Soho’, an area now being shaped into ‘something resembling a homogenised shopping mall, while ultra-prime real estate’.

London is fast becoming ‘a ghost-town where absentee investors park their wealth. Author and journalist Michael Goldfarb has speculated that ‘the delicate social ecology that made London’s transformation into a great world city over the last two decades is past the tipping point.’

Articles in The Guardian in 2017 ask whether London is no longer the place to be, citing research which seems to suggest a net loss in migration in every age group apart from people in their twenties due to London’s ‘bloated’ property prices. Interestingly, and perhaps remarkably given the dismal nature of some of the above analyses, for the London Jazz Festival at least, central London still appears to be a prime location for jazz gigs – this is where people expect jazz to be heard. From just one venue in the first jazz club on the 1920s – the Traverse was a hub of experimental theatre and brought him into contact with avant-garde theatre groups like New York’s La MaMa Etc and with early plays by Paul Foster, Sam Shepard and Lanford Wilson – artists for whom music was an intrinsic part of their work – as well as a production of Alfred Jarry’s Ubu Enchained, with music by The Soft Machine and visuals by artist Mark Boyle, he who had started the trend for psychedelic liquid light shows. Cumming had been involved with the Traverse prior to this, even running jazz gigs while still at school in the Theatre Bar. Cumming then moved to London, where, demonstrating his adaptability, he spent six months in the West End doing Victorian music hall as the Players’ Theatre’s resident electrician, and earning extra funds by moonlighting for other theatres like the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Royal Opera House. Ronnie Scott’s taking a lot of Cumming’s income, as did Dobell’s Record Shop, and he spent much of his free time hanging out in one or the other, getting to know the musicians and the jazz scene, and seeing musicians like Charles Mingus, Sonny Rollins and Hank Mobley.

John Cumming is at the heart of the London Jazz Festival, and has been since it began. Named by the Independent in 2003 as one of the top 20 most influential groovers and shakers in the music industry, and awarded an OBE for services to jazz in 2014, Cumming was described by British saxophonist Andy Sheppard in 2016 as ‘a force majeure in the world of jazz’. Yet his early work was in theatre rather than music specifically.

Born in 1948 in Edinburgh, Cumming took a life-changing gap year rather than heading straight to university after school and went to work for Edinburgh’s Traverse Theatre Company. In those days – the 1960s – the Traverse was a hub of experimental theatre and brought him into contact with avant-garde theatre groups like New York’s La MaMa Etc and with early plays by Paul Foster, Sam Shepard and Lanford Wilson – artists for whom music was an intrinsic part of their work – as well as a production of Alfred Jarry’s Ubu Enchained, with music by The Soft Machine and visuals by artist Mark Boyle, he who had started the trend for psychedelic liquid light shows. Cumming had been involved with the Traverse prior to this, even running jazz gigs while still at school in the Theatre Bar.

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Cumming later returned to university in Edinburgh and became involved with both the student jazz society and the dramatic society, and was also offered the opportunity by the University of Edinburgh to develop an old bar into a Fringe venue during the Edinburgh Festival, as well as spending summers working back in London. His artistic directorship of the dramatic society led to an entire academic year in which he ‘really didn’t do any work at all because he was also running The Pool Lunch Hour Theatre Club, a theatre for new writing in Edinburgh he had opened in January 1971. As well as running jazz and folk sessions, the Pool began to receive Scottish Arts Council funding, working with dramatists and directors like Chris Parr, David Hare, David Edgar, Howard Brenton, and playwrights like Stewart Conn, Robert Nye and Hector MacMillan. Cumming was by now Cumming returned south in 1973 to work as the theatre director of the new South Hill Park Arts Centre in the converted South Hill Park mansion in Bracknell, Berkshire. From October to March he ran a small repertory theatre at the centre, but in the summer, the whole venue was turned on its head and went from, as he put it to us, ‘doing lots of things in small spaces to doing a few things in big open-air and tented spaces.’ With their gardens, lawns, trees and two lakes, the grounds thus became the location for large-scale music events featuring an eclectic mix of genres and styles, anything from BBC Radio 1 DJ Emperor Rosko and Miki & Griff’s country and western evening, to comedian Rosko and Miki & Griff’s country and western evening, to comedian

**BRACKNELL JAZZ FESTIVAL, 1975-87**

Inspired both by the classic film of Newport Jazz Festival, 1960’s Jazz On A Summer’s Day, and by his teenage experiences at the National Jazz Federation’s festivals at nearby Richmond and Windsor, Cumming started the Bracknell Jazz Festival in 1975, with festival-goers invited to camp in the mansion’s extensive grounds. In a neat historical loop, the National Jazz Federation’s Harold Pendleton and his wife Margaret started coming to Cumming’s Bracknell Festival, whereupon Harold told him that, ‘This is a bit like our old festival.’ To this Cumming replied, ‘That’s why it’s here; because I used to come to those!’ Thus festival (and film of festival) leads to festival, a trajectory of the carnival. It was not only the camping aspect of Bracknell and its greenfield proximity to London that had been inspired by the Pendletons’ festivals, however, but the programming too: what had struck Cumming at Richmond and Windsor in the 1960s was the focus on British artists and the relative lack of American artists on stage. While in the very early days of Bracknell, British trad jazz did feature – musicians like Alex Welsh, George Chisholm, and Humphrey Lyttleton – the Bracknell bill would later develop into a statement of international modern jazz: a weekend festival which featured some Americans, quite a lot of Europeans and other international musicians, and also included a large number of British artists. As the festival developed, Cumming began to think of Bracknell as a space for looking at where the music was going, ‘where we were being led.’ Focusing on British composers, he also started to commission new work, an approach drawing on his experience in theatre. Commissions included Stan Tracey’s Bracknell Connection in 1976 and the all-star performance of Graham Collier’s Hoarded Dreams in 1983.

Early in the festival’s history, Cumming started to get to know the work of the increasingly influential German label ECM [Editions of Contemporary Music], which was looking to build up the live opportunities for its musicians. And so he first booked guitarist Ralph Towner to play in 1976, thus beginning a long association with both Towner and ECM’s Thomas Stiwerd, later of Austrian agency Sautades Tourneen, which represented artists like the Art Ensemble of Chicago and Carla Bley. Although Cumming left South Hill Park in 1977, he continued to run the Bracknell Jazz Festival on a freelance basis, alongside other music and theatre projects, which included putting on the first British performance of Norwegian guitarist Terje Rypdal at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in 1979. Following the discovery of oil in 1969, Norway had heavily invested in its people and its arts, including jazz, and the apparently national or regional sound of what would become known and marketed as the ‘Nordic tone’ was starting to spread.

"In Britain jazz festivals come in three types: a series of indoor concerts, a temporary stage set up for a few days in the middle of some enormous field or stadium – and Bracknell." 

DAVE GELLY, THE OBSERVER, 1984

Rypdal was on ECM along with fellow Norwegian, saxophonist Jan Garbarek, both of whom espoused the label’s concept of minimalist and Eurocentric jazz. Garbarek himself created music described by jazz writer Stuart Nicholson in Jazz: The Modern Resurgence as projecting the “‘stark imagery of nature near the Northern Lights’ with an ordered calm in the often frantic world of jazz.” By now, Cumming was working freelance and tour-managing artists like American pianist Carla Bley – an artist whose work he has presented many times over the years, at the London Jazz Festival and more extensively – and Charlie Haden, who enabled him to travel around Europe and learn about the ways jazz was developing in different countries at that time. The contacts he developed in the late 1970s and early 1980s are people Cumming is still in touch with today, and he cites the generosity of exchange of information about what was going on musically as playing a key role in the development of his festivals.
making a considered statement that jazz music was now pan-cultural, not only (African-)American, in 1981. Cumming programmed American flautist and composer James Newton’s wind quintet – featuring ‘heritage’ musicians like Red Callender, who had taught bass to Charles Mingus – with Chico Freeman’s band, and in the middle put free British saxophonist Evan Parker, thus connecting the new music of the black avant-garde to Mingus via Callender, while also bringing in the new sounds of Europe.

Dave Gelly pointed to the important developmental role of the Bracknell festival in The Observer in 1984, remarking that it provides the best possible chance for hearing just how far British jazz has come since the days when our musicians were judged by the accuracy with which they copied American originals. As with other jazz festivals in Europe, the festival was becoming a key site for the complex negotiation in jazz between African-American origin and national – in this instance, British – musical expression. Over the years, Bracknell would feature a host of other transatlantic names and styles including Alexx Koner, Jack Bruce, Ornette Coleman, Stanley Clarke, Allan Holdsworth, Barbara Thompson, David Murray, Michael Brecker, Mike Westbrook and a young Pat Metheny, as well as introducing European musicians hitherto unheard live in the UK – Jan Garbarek a prime example. By the 1980s, then, the jazz madness of Beaujolais had become redundant for what The Observer described as Bracknell Jazz Festival’s ‘slightly folksy garden party’ atmosphere, at which festival-goers were ‘not the kind to cause a riot’, as the music ‘simply doesn’t attract gangs of break-in yobboes’ any longer.

The new festival’s programming continued to be mostly classical music and opera, but lunchtime jazz at the Cochrane Theatre and poetry and jazz at Holborn Library Hall were also incorporated into the programme that year. By 1971, the festival had been divided into three sections: the main music festival in spring, a series of neighbourhood festivals throughout the summer, and an autumn themed festival. A couple of years later, the festival hit a low point due to decreased funding and a feeling that its focus on high arts had what a Community Arts Working Party report described as ‘little relevance for a large proportion of the population’. With the support of councillors and local musicians, the expansion of the festival into jazz was developed by Camden’s Arts Officer at the time, Christopher Gordon, along with Charles Alexander from the then-active Jazz Centre Society, who had known John Cumming in Edinburgh in the mid-1960s.

While jazz was still not a major part of the music festival proper, in 1974 it had been chosen as the theme for the autumn festival, which included, among others, Mike Westbrook’s Citadeli/Room 315 for the opening gig, a revival of Stan Tracey’s Under Milk Wood, and a sell-out concert by the South African Chris McGregor’s big band, Brotherhood of Breath. The latter meant that the organisers had an instant and substantial ticket sale to the South African secret police, who all turned up at the concert looking exactly like South African secret policemen, with regulation thick Boer moustaches, heavy beige trench coats, and heavy brogue shoes. As Christopher Gordon recalls, because nobody else in the audience looked remotely like that, it was really funny that they were quite obviously sinister and yet clearly incompetent at the same time.

Secret policeman’s ball aside, the success of autumn’s Jazz Week and the Jazz Band Ball saw them become a permanent fixture of the main Camden Festival from 1975 onwards. Described as a ‘spectacular feast’ by Lawrence, Jazz Week featured leading jazz musicians, filmmakers, poetry, a series of free events, and marching bands, the latter causing the street drinkers outside Camden Town tube station to rise to their feet and dance as they heard the band. Jazz Week was presented in collaboration with the Jazz Centre Society, as one of its key annual activities in its ultimately doomed campaign to establish a national centre for jazz in London. Unlike Bracknell’s open-air tented affair, Camden was a series of concerts in existing urban venues, like the Shaw Theatre, the Camden Centre and the Roundhouse, the model that would be adopted in due course by the London Jazz Festival. Among the many jazz musicians who performed were Art Blakey, Chet Baker, Trevor Watts, Courtney Pine, John Surman’s Brass Project, the World Saxophone Quartet, Abdullah Ibrahim (Dollar Brand), and the first performance in Britain by the Art Ensemble of Chicago in March 1979.

Cumming worked for the Jazz Centre Society for a year as a concert programmer, and was brought in to produce the Camden Jazz Week in 1978, which he then ran on a freelance basis. At the same time he worked on festivals in places like Bradford and Sheffield, and tour-managed for the Contemporary Music Network (CMN) – the Arts Council of Great Britain’s high level, highly subsidised touring circuit for contemporary music – including the first Gil Evans UK tour in 1978. Interestingly as a side note to this story of jazz festival development in the capital city, the CMN’s brief from the Arts Council explicitly aimed to avoid the over-concentration of this type of work in London, and to spread the opportunity for it to be heard.

Cumming and partner John Elison would go on to establish Serious Productions as a tour production company in 1986, and run it together for the first decade. This was the company which subsequently evolved into Serious, producer of the London Jazz Festival.
As well as having the contract to run Bracknell and Camden, one of the ways in which the company developed in its early days was by taking on much of the production work for the DMN, which enabled Serious to work on large-scale international work, such as George Russell’s Living Time Orchestra, which then fed back into their festivals and other activity over the years.

In addition to producing concerts for external clients, Serious Productions also took on a couple of management clients including one of the ‘golden generation’ of artists who developed in the UK during the 1960s, John Surman, and Andy Sheppard – who Cumming had first come across at Bracknell in the band Sphere – and who had returned to England from Paris in the mid-1980s, having moved there initially to England from Paris in the mid-

**THE NEW JAZZ OF THE 1980S**

The year after Cumming’s initial involvement with the Camden Jazz Week, a significant and high-profile American-led jazz festival started in July 1979 at the Alexandra Palace in London, the Capital Radio Jazz Festival at the Ally Pally, organised by Newport Jazz Festival’s George Wein. However, the night before the second Capital Radio Jazz Festival was due to take place in 1980, the Alexandra Palace burned to the ground (taking with it the two Bösendorfer pianos Cumming had hired for Bracknell a few weeks later). In his autobiography *Myself Among Others*, Wein recalled that: ‘The fire had spread so fast that, had it happened the following night, many of our audience of five thousand might have perished. We were lucky, but it was the end of the Ally Pally festival. For a few years we tried to keep it alive...’

We achieved varying degrees of success, but never captured the spirit or momentum of what we had at Ally Pally.

Changing its name to the JVC Capital Radio Jazz Parade London in 1984, this festival was tied into the other JVC jazz festivals in both the United States and across Europe, and also linked to the Nice Jazz Festival and The Netherlands’ North Sea Jazz. As Cumming remembers it, ‘Wein’s festival was mostly parachuted in with Americans, with the occasional appearance of Ronnie Scott or John Dankworth in London.

On the whole, then, the beginning of the 1980s offered relatively few work opportunities for British jazz musicians in Britain as audiences got older, money was scarce, and festivals were few and far between. As saxophonist Alan Skidmore said in 1981 in a familiar lament: ‘There’s no scene for me in England as a professional jazz musician...now I just work in Europe.’

In a major shift of creativity and activity, though, to its own surprise perhaps, in the early to mid-1980s British jazz began to experience a boom which led Richard Williams to write that ‘the new generation of British musicians is responsible for the healthiest complexion the London scene has worn since the end of the sixties. The Wire, an influential new jazz and improvised music magazine founded in 1982, was also energetically making and championing the new jazz zeitgeist.

Partly, the new interest in jazz in the 1980s was because jazz collectives dubbed the New Jazz had suddenly become popular and synonymous with style, with a number of young British artists playing challenging but accessible jazz getting major record label deals. There was even major chart success for some: the new smooth jazz band Sade, featuring South African singer Sade, had hit singles and albums on both sides of the Atlantic, and won Brit Awards and Grammys alike.

Though this was the popular end of jazz, it was a clear sign that things were changing. There was smooth jazz, but there was also new black jazz, white big bands – even if it sometimes felt that the senior musicians from the 1940s and 1970s, important innovators and stylists, were being left behind in the suddenly fashionable landscape.

**LOOSE TUBES**

One example of the New Jazz of course was the Loose Tubes collective, established in London in 1984 as a 21-piece co-operative ensemble by several musicians who had formerly been members of a workshop led by Graham Collier in 1983. As Jazz Centre Society director (1973-82) Charles Alexander recalls: ‘Loose Tubes were the signal that the younger generation of musicians were taking responsibility for finding their own careers and creating their own situation.’

The predominantly white band’s influences were eclectic – rock, varied ethnic sources, and all styles of jazz, with Djangos Bates particularly inspired by the music and musicians of South Africa; his 1985 composition *Sjàd Afrika*, for instance, featured South African sounds such as tin whistles, fanfares, flutes, and the kwela groove. It is worth noting here that Djangos Bates was the keyboard player with Hugh Masekela at the afore-mentioned anti-apartheid gig at Alexandra Palace in 1983.

‘Loose Tubes achieved a relatively high level of success in Britain as a result of concert performances in London and national tours, aided by widespread television and radio coverage, and became the first jazz orchestra to play a late night Prom in autumn 1987. Loose Tubes played at both Camden and at Bracknell festivals, but disbanded in 1990 following a week-long residency at Ronnie Scott’s. Many of its members went on to have successful careers, with ex-members like Bates, Tim Whitehead, Iain Ballamy and Eddie Parker all performing in other guises) at the London Jazz Festival over the years, and a triumphal reunion concert to mark the band’s 30th anniversary of formation at Cheltenham Jazz Festival in 2014. As John Cumming puts it, the black-white binary in the new British jazz in 1980s London was exacerbated by the press into an ‘artificially created sort of standoff’ between the young, predominantly white Loose Tubes and the young, predominantly black Jazz Warriors.’
A second remarkable big band sprung up in London during the 1980s jazz boom, of course. Jazz Warriors formed in 1985 as an offshoot of TAJA (The Abibis Jazz Ants), a collective started the previous year by Courtney Pine as a non-commercial space for black musicians to play together.

Jazz Warriors became the first black British big band since those of the 1940s and 1950s and, as such, its members were seen by many, including Val Wilmer, as the ‘leaders of the country’s new jazz sensibility.’ Other members of Jazz Warriors included Jason Yarde, Claude Deppa, Mark Mondesir, and Gail Thompson, and although the personnel changed over the years, the group continued until 1992, having also played at both Brixton and Camden.

For Hilary Moore, in her book Inside British Jazz, the band’s significance went beyond the jazz development with further element of music education and jazz development with further generations in the subsequent Tomorrow’s Warriors charity.

The media framing around race might have been unhelpful in that it encouraged a level of division in the new scene, but arguably at least jazz as being written about with enthusiasm and played with a new gusto. Jazz Warriors carved out a space for young black musicians and, according to Gary Crosby, played a significant role in ‘multiculturalising’ British jazz because it encouraged interaction between black and white musicians and re-introduced a new generation of black musicians to jazz.

Crosby has maintained a crucial role between black and white musicians because it encouraged interaction between black and white musicians. In doing so, Pine helped to bring black music and black musicians to very few British performers,’ Pine said.

Courtney Pine performing with Art Blakey’s Jazz Messengers at Camden Jazz Week, 1986.

It was Courtney Pine who became the star of the 1980s British jazz scene, however. Highlighting the international recognition of his talent, and, according to The Guardian, ‘a recognition accorded to very few British performers’, Pine was invited to tour with Art Blakey’s Jazz Messengers in 1986. This followed performances at Camden that year that also included other members of the Jazz Warriors and three of the dance groups that populated the UK jazz scene at the time (filmed by Dick Fontaine for Central TV).

Pine had to return home, however, because his first son had just been born and his debut album, Journey to the Urge Within, had just been released. This 1986 recording enjoyed ‘unparalleled media hype’ for a British jazz recording, and by the end of the 1980s he had appeared at several international jazz festivals.

Speaking to Sue Lawley on BBC Radio 4’s Desert Island Discs in 2001, Pine further explained the reasons behind his decision to leave the Jazz Messengers tour:

Courtney Pine: Yeah. And it’s also the fact that we have a superstar jazz gig. So for me, I thought, well, there’s nobody doing that here so maybe I could maybe pick up that gig.

Sue Lawley: You saw a gap in the market?

Courtney Pine: (laughs) Yes, I sure did! And I went for it!

In doing so, Pine helped to bring black music and black musicians into the mainstream. ‘Without Courtney,’ says Crosby, ‘we wouldn’t have broken out.’ Such a view was confirmed by Tomorrow’s Warriors graduate saxophonist Denys Baptiste in 1999.

Courtney brought jazz to younger people through the music he introduced: hip hop, drum ‘n’ bass, and earlier on with reggae. He changed jazz from being a music for people in their forties, fifties and sixties into music for a younger crowd. That is vital for the development of jazz, and that’s what makes him such an important guy.

Having got to know John Cumming via the Camden Jazz Week and the Community Music organisation, and in recognition of his roots with the Jazz Warriors, Courtney Pine first played the London Jazz Festival with Gary Crosby’s Tomorrow’s Warriors and iconic Jamaican singer/ musicologist Marjorie Whylie in 1996. Pine progressed to playing the Hammersmith Apollo in 1999, and headlined in 2000 at the Royal Festival Hall.

The connection with Andy Sheppard is worth mentioning here – Sheppard’s band of the late 80s included Orphy Robinson and Mamadi Kamara of the Jazz Warriors, and the following band included the Warriors’ Claude Deppa. Sheppard has also worked extensively at the London Jazz Festival, with the likes of Nana Vasconcelos and Carla Bley, highlighting the enduring connections between musicians and the festival. In London, as elsewhere, musicians make festivals, and festivals make musicians.

WORLD MUSIC

In June 1987, a meeting was held in London between record labels confronted with what was called a ‘marketing dilemma’ of how best to present and sell a diverse range of music, variously labelled ‘international’, ‘ethnic’, ‘traditional’, or ‘roots’. This issue was particularly pressing following the controversial success of Paul Simon’s Graceland album the previous year, with its apartheid-era cultural boycott-busting use of South African musicians.

Via a show of hands, ‘world music’ won the vote and so a new product genre was born and named. The same year promoter David Jones started the Crossing the Border Festival of World Music in Camden. The first festival featured Ali Farka Touré’s only London performance at the time and a host of other names from the folk and now ‘world music’ fields, including Kathryn Tickell, Rory McLeod, and Lovemore Mapanza & The Zulu Band. It was around this time that Jones started to cross paths with John Cumming.
DAVID JONES

While John Cumming and John Ellison came from the jazz world, Jones was from more of a rock and new music background, although he too had been working with Mike Westbrook – Jones’ passion is for improvisation in its myriad forms. Born in 1957, the first concert he put on was Supertramp at his school in Croydon in 1973 as a teenager, and he became manager of cult figure Ivor Cutler in 1976, working with him until his death in 2006.

Before getting into music promotion, Jones worked in both theatre and television. After working at the Battersea Arts Centre – ‘cleaning toilets in the morning and tearing tickets in the evening’ – he moved on to be the administrator of a touring theatre company, which meant a steep learning curve on how to master touring, budgets and management.

Jones was pulled back into music after being asked to direct what became the Bloomsbury Festival at the Bloomsbury Theatre between 1984 and 1987, for which he programmed outﬁeld rock music, soul, contemporary classical, jazz, and a good deal of improvisation.

The first Bloomsbury Festival was opened and closed by the Michael Nyman Band, Nyman being an artist first promoted by Jones in 1978 at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) to an audience of 60, and later to 2,500 at the Southbank in 1993. Jones had initially been wary of a career in music as in the early days, he ‘couldn’t ﬁgure out how you could actually earn a living in music.’ However, musicians he had promoted at the Bloomsbury Festival asked him for more gigs, ‘and I was going, “I’m not a concert promoter; that’s not what I do!” And then I looked around two or three years later and I was a concert promoter.’

Soon he was running the production company Speakout. Jones was never keen on the term ‘promoter’, however, as it seemed like something ‘blokes in camel hair coats should be called’ and so, with Cumming, together they settled on the idea of a ‘producer’, ‘because it has more of a sense of bringing creativity and creating something special in music.

We can see the development of the creative role of the festival producer at Camden Jazz Week. Describing Cumming in the Evening Standard in 1990 as ‘the Jonathan Miller of this year’s Camden Jazz Festival’, the media were starting to notice the creative input of the producer as a significant force in the success of an event and also the shift away from simply ‘promoting’ a musician to, instead, ‘producing’ an event.

The Standard’s jazz critic Jack Massarik explained to readers how the jazz festival was beginning to be actively curated.

The novelty of simply ﬁlling jazz festivals with big-name artists and their regular working groups seems to be wearing off. Instead we now ﬁnd the ‘festival concept’ in which the producer/director aims to be as creative as the performers out front… It was [Cumming’s] idea to present John Surman and Jack DeJohnette with the Balanescu string quartet and, after some painful moments, the experiment was successful.

FESTIVALS IN THE CITY

The 1980s and early 1990s saw a marked increase in the number of annual jazz festivals in the UK overall, from ten in 1980 to around forty in 1992, including Ealing, Brecon, Birmingham and the Glasgow International Jazz Festival, as the popularity of festivals as tools for local authorities to enhance local identity and for ‘destination marketing’ as well as cultural regeneration gained momentum throughout this period.

In a globalised world, putting on international festivals can be a means of claiming equal status of local culture by interweaving it with those of other countries, jazz, as an inherently ﬂexible and syncretic music, is particularly suited to this. Indeed, UNESCO’s International Jazz Day (30 April) recognises or certainly claims that the cross-cultural, democratic nature of jazz lends itself to a ‘diplomatic role of unifying people in all corners of the globe.’ Some academic research on festival audiences (such as that by Steve Oakes at Cheltenham) has found that jazz enthusiasts are often well-educated, middle class and upper earners, and hence useful for attracting sponsorship.

Urban theorist Richard Florida has argued that, for more than a century, the mark of a cultured city – in the United States at least – was to have a major art museum plus an ‘SOB.’ the high-art triumvirate of a symphony orchestra, an opera company and a ballet company. To that, one could nowadays add the jazz festival. By the early 1990s, however, even with its ﬂuid portfolio of local festivals in different parts of the city and environs – Bricknell, Camden, Soho, JVC, Jazz Lunacy, Ealing, Outside In (a kind of Bricknell mark 2, 1988–1993), and others – London did not yet have the high-level jazz programming enjoyed by other capital cities in Europe at this time, a topic which was to nag away at John Cumming. When bumping into him at gigs across Europe, for freelance jazz promoter and later festival co-ordinator Debbie Dickinson, Cumming’s big question was always ‘There are these jazz festivals all over the world, how come London doesn’t have a jazz festival?’
CHAPTER 2

MOVING FORWARD

By the late 1980s, it was becoming apparent that London, with its historical ties to music and culture, had what the Arts Council’s Review of Jazz in England would describe as a ‘major gap’ in the city’s jazz concert provision as the bubble of interest around Courtney Pine, the Jazz Warriors, and Loose Tubes was starting to deflate. Economically, it was getting tight again with only the odd festival in the city through the year. To remedy this, between 1989 and 1991, live music in London was stimulated by funding from the Greater London Arts Association’s Major Concert Promotion scheme.

Both Cumming at Serious and Jones at Speakout had successfully applied to the new fund but decided that rather than competing, they should instead work together and make better use of the money by co-promoting. A relatively small subsidised annual subsidy enabled Serious and Speakout to start to bring over both jazz and contemporary music. Importantly it also enabled Serious and Speakout to start to bring over major American jazz musicians, and also gave them the confidence – financially and psychologically – to do so.

Taking a risk, they put on Sonny Rollins for the first time in 1989 – and later Keith Jarrett. Rollins’ fee alone used up all the funding for the year, but they still made a profit. Highlighting their relative naivety, David Jones laughingly recalls asking Sonny Rollins for a medical certificate so that they could get insurance for the show.

I just sent a note to his wife saying, ‘Please could you ask Sonny to get a medical certificate so that we can go and get insurance’ and I was told very firmly that Sonny Rollins has never given out a medical insurance and never would.

As noted by the Arts Council, what Serious and Speakout had tapped into and begun further to develop was a substantial local and national audience for quality innovative contemporary music which did not fall into the traditional marketing categories of subsidised classical or ‘commercial rock’.

Serious and Speakout understood that the audience for jazz artists such as Keith Jarrett or Jan Garbarek had as much in common with that of Steve Reich or Michael Nyman as it did for mainstream jazz musicians such as Wynton Marsalis or Sonny Rollins, the implication being then that these artists could be included in a concert series based around a jazz theme, and that jazz musicians could form part of a wider programme.

Notwithstanding the economic and ideological shifts in terrain and cultural policy that were such a feature of the 1980s and 1990s, such programming might also have greater leverage to access public funding as and when it was available. There is a curious and interesting dynamic here: on the one hand the need for innovation in programming, making ambitious music newly available on a regular basis, while on the other, negotiating the funding landscape and its potentially negative impact on adventurous programming.

In 1992, as a result of the recession, the Arts Council had begun a period of belt-tightening. Jazz, even the Cinderella of the musical arts, as Ian Carr had told us in his 1973 book Music Outside, would find itself the poor relation once more, in comparison with the public funding required to maintain orchestras and opera houses. In fact, though, the domination of public funding for classical music would have some unexpected benefits.

It led to jazz being grouped together with improvised music and ‘world music’ and, while it meant less money for these art forms, an unforeseen consequence was that the musical dialogue which had always been there historically between jazz and other ‘outsider’ art forms became structurally closer as well. In the hustling spirit of jazz perversity, then, was born the following year the inaugural London Jazz Festival.

As Cumming said in 2013, ‘Camden epitomised a changing jazz universe, reflecting the new energy emerging from the UK and European scene alongside the African-American tradition of the music.’ For our story, too, festivals such as Bracknell and Camden were setting the scene for a more ambitious city-wide event still. By 1993, then, the global city of London was ready, even impatient, for its own major international jazz festival, based on the central tenets of musical pluralism, a celebration of multiculturalism, and an emphasis on learning and developing audiences in an effort to ensure the future of jazz. For Cumming, as for the others involved in the London Jazz Festival’s pre-history, it would have to be a case of ‘the city leading the festival as well as the festival leading the city.’
1993: THE FIRST LONDON JAZZ FESTIVAL

1993 was the year that Britain resurfaced from recession, the year that the city’s 50-year post-war population decline was starting to reverse, and the year of the first London Jazz Festival proper.

As we have seen, the impetus for a London jazz festival had been building for a number of years, but the precise origins of the London Jazz Festival can be surprisingly difficult to locate. London Jazz Festival director David Jones remembers that Serious Speakout were approached to put on a festival in the north London boroughs of Camden, Hackney and Islington, and John Cumming recalls having many conversations with the Music Officer for the new London Arts Board at the time, Andrew McKenzie, about establishing a new festival which would eventually build into a city-wide event. Cumming had thought to call the new event the North London Jazz Festival, but Jones said, “No, the hell with it! Let’s call it the London Jazz Festival!” (This was also a practical move as another North London Jazz Festival (aka Just Jazz) ran from 1989 to 1992.) In such a moment of attitude and boldness something special is made, even — especially perhaps — if a long-term plan isn’t there from the start. The city pushed them along, dared them to do it, demanded it of them even. As Jones told us on looking back at the early festival and how it has grown, it just took off from that moment: ‘It hasn’t been something where we’ve said, “Let’s make a 25-year plan and let’s be in this place by now.”’

The previous chapter showed how the London Jazz Festival inherited a kind of mix of Serious and Speakout’s other festivals – Bracknell, Camden, Outside In, Crossing The Border – which were going through changes and which were distilled into one.
CHAPTER 3
This distillation resulted in a potent combination which steered the new festival’s musical direction and also meant that the borough of Hackney retained an interest (because pragmatics matter, financially and organisationally). McKenzie had made it clear that he did not want the festival to become city-wide overnight, and by bringing on the boroughs of Hackney and Islington to join Camden, allowed it to build out slowly.

Cumming recalls that one of the conditions of the funding from the London Arts Board – later to merge with the other regional arts boards to eventually become Arts Council England – was that as well as the festival becoming a focal point for bringing high-level international jazz into the city, it would also draw in the grassroots of the scene in order to eventually become Arts Council funding from the boroughs of Hackney and Islington, the festival to become city-wide. The grassroots social engagement element of the festival’s funding showed in that in 1993 it was also supported by Hackney Drugs Prevention Team, among others.

The inaugural performance of The Jools Holland Bigger Band Revue was another feature of the 1993 festival, a smart piece of programming since Holland was already a television celebrity by this time and his inclusion in the festival helped everyone.

There was a further snag, however, in that the police needed to see Cumming’s ID, which he did not have. He tried to persuade the police that he was the director of the London Jazz Festival, and in doing so, let slip about the £5,000 in the back of the car. This got the police very excited, leading to a phone call to Cumming’s partner in the early hours. She managed to persuade the police that Cumming was not a master (or even a minor) criminal and that he really was the director of the festival, after which he was finally released.

Another prominent American guitarist remains part of the London Jazz Festival lore for very different reasons. At this point, said guitarist and his band appeared to have fallen out, so rather than travelling and his band travelled in the back of the car. This got the police that he was the director of the London Jazz Festival, and in doing so, let slip about the £5,000 in the back of the car. This got the police very excited, leading to a phone call to Cumming’s partner in the early hours. She managed to persuade the police that Cumming was not a master (or even a minor) criminal and that he really was the director of the festival, after which he was finally released.

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Another memorable performance was by John Etheridge, around which time Sawhney was back again, performing as part of the Jools Voice opening gala at the Barbican, alongside relative newcomers like John Lawton and veteran star Elaine Delmar.

Another significant British musician in the first London Jazz Festival was John Surman, whose brass Project at the Lilian Bayliss Theatre, conducted by John Warren, was reviewed in the Financial Times as ‘a uniquely English and folksy form of big band jazz’, with Warren’s Ellingtonian new compositions, rounded off with an extraordinary arrangement based on the music of his headlining the Queen Elizabeth Hall.

Exemplifying Serious’ eclectic approach, in 2004 he performed with the Britten Sinfonia at the Royal Festival Hall, mixing up classical, jazz and world music in a programme of music ranging from the Bollywood sounds of A.R. Rahman through to Steve Reich’s rhythmic minimalism, as well as new orchestral arrangements of some of Sawhney’s best known music and the world premiere of a new work commissioned by the Britten Sinfonia. In 1995, Sawhney was back again, performing as part of the Jazz Voice opening gala at the Barbican, alongside relative newcomers like John Lawton and veteran star Elaine Delmar.

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A LONDON FESTIVAL

Since it is situated in a global and multicultural city, from the start the festival has tried to reflect London’s international nature and include its different musical cultures within it, as well as offer opportunities for those sounds to speak to and mix with each other.

In Cumming’s view this is because: the festival is about London as much as it is about jazz. It’s about how this fantastic evolution of music in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has had a worldwide impact and has an impact on a major city like London.

However, in a city with a population approaching ten million, the question quickly becomes: how to make a major impact with what is seen as a minority genre of music? The answer the festival has come up with is via a series of evolving partnerships, developed and enhanced through Serious’ year-round work across a range of musics with jazz, the spirit and practice of improvisation, at its heart.

We can see this effort at partnership from its earliest days; the 1993 list of partners, for example, includes Assembly & Community Music, Jazz Rumours, Jazz Umbrella, partnerships, Secret Spaces, and Somethin’ Else. While the 1994 list includes Blow The Fuse, London Musicians’ Collective, Weekend Arts Partnership, Secret Spaces, and ppArtnerships, Secret Spaces, and Jazz Rumours, Jazz Umbrella, Direct & Community Music.

For the festival, we wanted to use all that and distil it into the venues that we work with, large and small, with the other promoters in London, with the communities in London that were working with music education and community education... So in a sense, the mission statement was that the festival is about London, but London is also about the festival.

Ronnie Scott’s, the Jazz Café and the Vortex were just some of the clubs gathered under the 1993 umbrella. Serious’ Speakout’s office was in Soho at that time and shared a fire escape with Ronnie’s, meaning that it inevitably became a musicians’ hang during the day. Both Cumming and Jones remember that the new festival had to be put together early in the day before they were taken over by the socialising demands of the local musicians.

To the north east of Soho’s jazz hub, The Vortex was then at its original location in Stoke Newington, its line-up in the 1993 London Jazz Festival including a Blow The Fuse collective night, Annie Whitehead, and the Vortex Superband featuring Dick Heckstall-Smith. Linking right back to the Flamingo Club and the National Jazz Festival and joining the dots between jazz, reggae, ska, and Latin jazz, Gary Crosby’s Jazz Jamaica played at the Bloomsbury Theatre, and featured Rico Rodriguez, Michael ‘Bammi’ Rose, Eddie ‘Tan Tan’ Thornton, ‘Rico’ Rodriguez, Michael ‘Bammi’ Rose, Eddie ‘Tan Tan’ Thornton, and Crosby’s uncle, Ernest Ranglin – who had been resident guitarist for a while in the house band at Ronnie Scott’s in the mid-1960s – all supported by saxophone star Andy Hamilton, from Jamaica via Birmingham. Coming from a very different end of the jazz spectrum, Brazilian fusionist Tania Maria was supported by DJs from the Latin and African Brixton club, Mambo Inn, making a rare appearance north of the river.

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DANCE MUSIC IN THE 1990S

The late 1980s and early 1990s were a vibrant time for club-based dance music in London, a new subcultural scene shot through with the entrepreneurialism of the times. During the 1980s, a resurgence of pirate radio stations – from tower blocks rather than from the offshore ships of the 1960s – gained large audiences. There was pressure to grant more broadcast licences, and so in July 1989, the Independent Broadcasting Authority announced that the Greater London FM licence would go to London Jazz Radio, later Jazz FM, which along with dance music station KISS FM caused a “marketing revolution” for London’s clubs, labels and magazines.

By 1991, Jazz FM’s Somethin’ Else show with Jez Nelson and Chris Phillips was on every night from 10pm to 2 or 3am, a show aimed at young, fashionable club-going jazz fans, including records, interviews and live broadcasts from London’s jazz venues. Along with DJs Gilles Peterson and Patrick Forge’s acid jazz nights, the show became one of the ways in which jazz made its way back to the dancefloor and brought jazz to a younger audience.

Camden was the epicentre of the new acid jazz scene, with clubs like Dingwalls and the Electric Ballroom playing a central role, as did Soho’s Wag Club and Hoxton’s Blue Note (fka Bass Clef). Cumming recalls taking American pianist Cecil Taylor to successive Monday nights at the Wag Club to watch the kids dancing – and to dance themselves – to Art Blakey records, Taylor enunciating that ‘There’s nothing in New York like this!’

At the same time, black British music in London had evolved into a thriving jungle and ‘n bass scene from the lovers’ rock, reggae, and sound systems of the 1970s and the soul music of the 1980s.

As writer Lloyd Bradley explains, the success of bands like Soul II Soul expressed black Britishness in a way that contributed hugely to culture as a whole and meant that during the 1990s, the audience for a much broader spectrum of British black acts was ready and waiting. A number of Asian bands and musicians such as Apache Indian also started to attract national attention by 1992, and by mid-1995, a number of Asian clubs had emerged in London, including Mohabbat and Outcaste.
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The London Jazz Festival cleaved to dance music from the start, a legacy from the festival’s roots in progressive Camden, the Arts and Leisure Department of which viewed the night-time economy as pivotal in terms of the borough’s cultural provision. As well as two Friday night Drum ‘n’ Bass Club events at the HQ Club, that first festival in 1993 also featured events promoted by Jazz Nelson’s Somethin’ Else production/promotions company; the London Jazz Bop at the Forum with Peterson and Nelson DJ-ing; and the first Shape of Things to Come night also at the Forum. The latter featured, among others, pianist Julian Joseph and South African-born pianist/saxophonist Bheki Mseleku, and was a co-production with British dance music magazine Straight No Chaser.

Dubbed ‘Way Out East’, the festival’s 1996 opening night party a few years later headed downstream to the K-R Warehouses at the Royal Victoria Docks for a show across three warehouse spaces, featuring Groove Collective from New York, Nils Petter Molvaer from Norway, ‘intelligent drum ‘n’ bass’ producer LJT Bukem – a classically trained pianist who had once been in a jazz-funk band – Ninja Tune’s Coldcut played at the Shepherd’s Bush Empire on the opening night of the 1999 Festival, featuring the multi-talented, multi-deck turntablist DJ Kid Koala and Cabbage Boy. Even superclub Fabric was brought into the programme that year with an event called The Fusion Principle: It’s Time, a club night which celebrated contemporary jazz fusion.

Fast forward to 2015 and the influence of dubstep, hip hop and drum ‘n’ bass could be heard in the music of Robert Glasper, Moon Hooch’s saxophone-led dubstep and acoustic techno, and Manchester trio GoGo Penguin, the latter’s yearning melodies and resonant seventh chords filtered through what The Daily Telegraph describes as the ‘soothing dance energy’ of the bassist’s and drummer’s skittering drum ‘n’ bass rhythms. In 2016, one of the giants of the electronic scene, St Germain, featured in the festival, bringing his mix of deep house, African sounds and jazz to the Royal Festival Hall.

By the end of the decade, the festival’s inclusion of dance music showed no sign of abating. Ninja Tune’s Coldcut played at the Shepherd’s Bush Empire on the opening night of the 1999 Festival, featuring the multi-talented, multi-deck turntablist DJ Kid Koala and Cabbage Boy. Even superclub Fabric was brought into the programme that year with an event called The Fusion Principle: It’s Time, a club night which celebrated contemporary jazz fusion.

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The London Jazz Festival was as much about London as it was about jazz, and in its choice of location, also highlighted the increasing importance of East London as a cultural destination.

Jazz on film – still and moving – has formed a part of the festival since the early days, forming another strand by which jazz has been mediated and re-presented to generations old and new. The first festival in 1993 used 20-metre high images of jazz musicians like Gary Crosby and Steve Williamson projected on to St Pancras Station to announce its arrival; while the following year there was an exhibition called Shooting Stills at The Bloomsbury Theatre, a collection of work from photographers such as Gered Mankowitz, designed to reinvent the jazz image.

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Fast forward and jazz photography and film are now an established part of the festival’s programme. The work of one of jazz in Britain’s most celebrated photographers, David Redfern, was featured in a new exhibition at the Southbank in 2013, alongside the work of emerging photographer, Ede Hawkins. In 2015, 25 years of the dynamic black and white jazz photography of David Sinclair was celebrated in an exhibition at the Royal Albert Hall, stretching all the way round the curved inner walls of the iconic venue.

Moving pictures have also featured since the early days. To acknowledge a more significant achievements here within film and jazz festivals in London, there is great interest to be had in watching the feature-length documentary film of the first Soho Jazz Festival from 1986: Ten Days that Shook Soho. Produced for Channel 4 at a time when television was very interested in jazz, it contains some great footage of live performances – from old and new generations alike – but also a sense of Soho street life is on view in which jazz and the sax industry are firmly intertwined, and some of the backstage scenes of negotiation and organisation are priceless.

In 1974, for example, the London Musicians’ Collective presented a ‘latter day Beat journey’ with film, video, test and guitar from Lee Ranaldo of Sonic Youth and New York film-maker Leah Singer. In 2011, the programme included the European première of Louis Armstrong and the birth of jazz, with a score composed by Wynton Marsalis.

More recently, a raft of new films about jazz – whether documentary or feature – have found their place at the festival. In 2012, what became for The Guardian one of most uplifting and transcendent shows of that year’s festival was Bill Frisell: The Great Flood, in which the guitarist provided a live soundtrack to Bill Morrison’s documentary about the catastrophic 1927 floods than engulfed the Mississippi Delta.

To a soundtrack which took a sonic journey from blues to bluegrass, from ragtime to Americana, gospel to R&B, the film showed that even ‘amidst the biblical horror, what shines through is mankind’s resilience.’ Other new films have included Dick Fontaine’s portrait of Sonny Rollins, Beyond the Notes, screened in 2012 (Fontaine also made the film about Art Blakey at the Camden Jazz Festival), and the UK premiere of the feature film about jazz drumming and teaching, Whiplash, in 2014.

1986 film about Soho Jazz Festival

NOT JUST A MUSIC FESTIVAL

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The spoken word has also formed a part of the London Jazz Festival since its inception, from the pre-show talk series – entitled Hear Me Talkin’ To Ya, after the classic 1955 oral history of US jazz book – to the more lyrical conjoining of jazz and poetry. The 1993 Festival, for example, included Groove, the popular and long-running jamming session at the (then) WKD Café in Camden Town, hosted by Steve Swindells, and featuring poetry and prose with jazz rhythms performed by The Hipsters.

In 2002, veteran Norwegian pianist Ketil Bjornstad was at the Purcell Room playing what The Guardian described as ‘deliciously minimalist settings’ of John Donne poems, featuring Arild Drecer on vocals and Punkt Festival’s Jan Bang featuring Aneli Drecker on vocals. The setting’s of John Donne poems, described as ‘deliciously minimalist form.’

One of the running themes of the festival programme over its 25 years has been to tell the rich history of jazz in different ways, from Troopers in Town’s History of Jazz at the Hackney Empire in 1994 through to WordTheatre’s Redux at the St James Theatre in 2016. The latter show was led by pianist James Pearson, and illuminated the story of jazz through the words and songs of musicians including Jelly Roll Morton, Billie Holiday, Louis Armstrong and Nina Simone.

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One such was John Surman, described as ‘probably the only British jazz musician whose surname alone is capable of conjuring up the gravitas associated with the great surnames of the past, like Rollins or Coltrane.’ Other British highlights included Grand Union, Mike and Kate Westbrook, and a rare performance by Giant Steps – Diane McLaughlin’s 17-piece orchestra – featuring trombonist Annie Whitehead, guitarist Deirdre Cartwright and singer Ian Shaw.

The 1995 festival was also the first year that the Swiss watchmaker Oris was on board as a sponsor, the following year taking on title sponsorship until 1998. This marked the point at which the festival reached parity between public funding and commercial sponsorship. The Oris partnership impacted beyond the festival, however, as it also opened the notion of corporate sponsorship to others in the field. For Gary Crosby, for example, Oris’ sponsorship made him realise that there were more proactive line in finding the women on the jazz scene.

In its early days, despite few or three decades of second-wave feminism, jazz discourse could still reflect an overwhelmingly male perspective. While anti-theoretical to the festival’s own viewpoint, Richard Liston’s preview in the Weekly Journal of a 1995 all-women festival concert encapsulates the problem. Take three attractive women pianists, put them on a stage and the phwoar factor is guaranteed to rise a few notches. This clearly is a sexist observation but one which Nikki Yeoh, Jessica Lauren and Errollyn Wallen are resigned to and aware of, although all would rather it is their music that gets the adrenaline flowing.

The issue of the gender imbalance in jazz is a longstanding one, and, in all fairness, not one a solitary jazz festival can address satisfactorily. As George McKay suggests in Circular Breathing: ‘The history of jazz in Britain is one of men supporting men, talking to and listening to each other’s music and exchanging instrumental secrets with each other, seeking structure or escape from the gravitational pull of men listening to each other’s music and sharing special male sociocultural spaces, rather it is their music that gets the adrenaline flowing.

The scene you bear some responsibility for shaping the culture and its future, not least when there has been criticism for not including enough women in its line-up. Indeed, an article by Masskraabel on the ImprovisingBigMusic website in 2013 talked of the ‘London (Men’s) Jazz Festival.’ This prompted Serious to analyse their programming and take a more proactive line in finding the next generation of talented female musicians, artists like Laura Jurd, Trish Clowes and Yazz Ahmed. The commitment continues to expand, with 2016 and 2017 of emerging names alongside important and established influential singers, Norma Winstone, along with important and established musicians from abroad (Geri Allen, Trish Clowes and Yazz Ahmed). The Festival, a celebration of the work of one of the UK’s most influential singers, Norma Winstone, alongside important and established musicians from abroad (Geri Allen, Trish Clowes and Yazz Ahmed).

The situation becomes self-fulfilling: as McKay notes, one of the factors that are a million times better than the others in putting themselves in that [situation]. The thing about jazz is you develop your craft by going to jams and being out of your comfort zone and sitting in and playing a tune you don’t really know with musicians that are a million times better than you. And it’s generally a horrific experience [laughs]… I don’t think there are many teenage girls that are comfortable in putting themselves in that situation. The scene you bear some responsibility for shaping the culture and its future, not least when there has been criticism for not including enough women in its line-up. Indeed, an article by Masskraabel on the ImprovisingBigMusic website in 2013 talked of the ‘London (Men’s) Jazz Festival.’ This prompted Serious to analyse their programming and take a more proactive line in finding the next generation of talented female musicians, artists like Laura Jurd, Trish Clowes and Yazz Ahmed. The commitment continues to expand, with 2016 and 2017 of emerging names alongside important and established influential singers, Norma Winstone, along with important and established musicians from abroad (Geri Allen, Trish Clowes and Yazz Ahmed). The Festival, a celebration of the work of one of the UK’s most influential singers, Norma Winstone, alongside important and established musicians from abroad (Geri Allen, Trish Clowes and Yazz Ahmed). The situation becomes self-fulfilling: as McKay notes, one of the factors that are a million times better than the others in putting themselves in that [situation]. The thing about jazz is you develop your craft by going to jams and being out of your comfort zone and sitting in and playing a tune you don’t really know with musicians that are a million times better than you. And it’s generally a horrific experience [laughs]… I don’t think there are many teenage girls that are comfortable in putting themselves in that situation. The scene you bear some responsibility for shaping the culture and its future, not least when there has been criticism for not including enough women in its line-up. Indeed, an article by Masskraabel on the ImprovisingBigMusic website in 2013 talked of the ‘London (Men’s) Jazz Festival.’ This prompted Serious to analyse their programming and take a more proactive line in finding the next generation of talented female musicians, artists like Laura Jurd, Trish Clowes and Yazz Ahmed. The commitment continues to expand, with 2016 and 2017 of emerging names alongside important and established influential singers, Norma Winstone, along with important and established musicians from abroad (Geri Allen, Trish Clowes and Yazz Ahmed). The Festival, a celebration of the work of one of the UK’s most influential singers, Norma Winstone, alongside important and established musicians from abroad (Geri Allen, Trish Clowes and Yazz Ahmed).

The jazz scene in the UK tends to exclude women. For women audiences, the sexual discrimination is mostly unintended – their needs are not considered. For women performers the discrimination is perhaps more deliberate. The London Jazz Festival and Serious have had a female director since Claire Whitaker joined in 1996, have appointed a number of senior female staff members over the organisation’s history, and have aimed to pursue a positive path in gender balance in programming for many years. Even so, the festival has been criticised for not including enough women in its line-up. Indeed, an article by Masskraabel on the ImprovisingBigMusic website in 2013 talked of the ‘London (Men’s) Jazz Festival.’ This prompted Serious to analyse their programming and take a more proactive line in finding the next generation of talented female musicians, artists like Laura Jurd, Trish Clowes and Yazz Ahmed. The commitment continues to expand, with 2016 and 2017 of emerging names alongside important and established influential singers, Norma Winstone, along with important and established musicians from abroad (Geri Allen, Trish Clowes and Yazz Ahmed). The Festival, a celebration of the work of one of the UK’s most influential singers, Norma Winstone, alongside important and established musicians from abroad (Geri Allen, Trish Clowes and Yazz Ahmed).
“The jazz festival is dead: long live the ‘jazz’ festival.”

THE TIMES, 1996

CHAPTER 3


The early 1990s saw the death of some of the great American jazz greats: Art Blakey in 1990, Miles Davis in 1991, and Dizzy Gillespie in 1993, and as the scarcity of the big name American headliners increased, so too, Glasgow Jazz Festival director Jill Rodger told us with a smile, did their fees. Attempting to fill their shoes stepped in the likes of Wynton Marsalis, with his own neo-traditionalist perspective on jazz history. For a critic like Stuart Nicholson, in his book Is Jazz Dead? (Or Has it Moved to a New Address?), the jazz mainstream in the United States between 1990 and 2005 saw the main area of jazz activity become both conservative and innovative.

Whitaker then went on to become development director at the Southbank Centre in 1990 before becoming director of africa95 in 1992. She started working in South Africa two weeks after Mandela’s election where she helped to set up an organisation called Business Arts South Africa (BASA), based on the UK’s Arts & Business model, whose patrons included Nelson Mandela and Her Majesty the Queen. It was via africa95’s opening concert, however, produced by Serious, that Claire started working directly with David Jones. Once africa95 had finished, Jones and Cumming invited her to join Serious. Whitaker became a new director in January 1994, working to enhance the company’s development and fund-raising strategies, and leading and developing a successful and consistently expanding learning and development programme, as well as special projects such as Women of Africa 1997, State of Play, and BT River of Music for the Cultural Olympiad 2012. Claire was awarded an OBE for Services to Jazz in the Queen’s 2015 Birthday Honours List and a Gold Badge Award for a unique contribution to music by the British Academy of Song Writers, Composers and Authors; and has been named as one of London Mayor Saqiq Khan’s Cultural Ambassadors.

The American dominance of jazz was seemingly on the wane as young European musicians developed confidence in their own jazz idioms, although as Nicholson suggests, there will always be a market in Europe for jazz’s top headliners – a Herbie Hancock, a Wayne Shorter, a Pat Metheny, an chick Corea, a Keith Jarrett and so on – but subsequent generations of jazz musicians, especially young musicians establishing their reputations, are finding less job opportunities in Europe as European musicians move into the space once occupied by American musicians.

For musician Alex Webb, speaking in a 2010 interview about the 21st-century jazz festival: ‘It’s sad in a way that there aren’t any Mileses [Davis] left – Sonny Rollins is perhaps the last one – but I mean on the other hand there’s a hell of a lot of other interesting things happening in areas of jazz… where it relates to other music.’ To help promote Britain and British jazz around the world, for a long time the London Jazz Festival had a relationship with the British Council as a platform for getting British music beyond Britain. In 1994, for example, a brochure, produced by the Council, promoted the Jazz From Britain strand which highlighted the strength of the British scene by featuring generations of musicians like Stan Tracey, John Surman, Tim Garland, Tomorrow’s Warriors with Courtney Pine, and Deirdre Cartwright.

Conversely, as a platform for introducing the extraordinary quality of European jazz to a British audience, the early London Jazz Festivals also featured national themes. Also in 1994, the Jazz From Norway mini festival (and accompanying Norwegian sampler CD) put a spotlight on musicians like Terje Rypdal and Arild Andersen, who have created a special kind of language for European jazz. And Django Reinhardt? He was a genius.”

For more information see: Serious, Time Out, ‘Jazz From Norway’.

For full details contact 0117 405 5974
Cross-Cultural Fusions

Thirty years after Time magazine’s ‘Swinging Sixties’ headline, Newsweek in 1996 labelled London as The Coolest City in the World, much of the excitement coming from the city’s mix of European and world cultures and its mix of the old and the new. As Jerry White explains in London in the Twentieth Century, 1990s London was booming ‘because young people had money in their pockets and purses’ given an extra flip by the election in 1997 of a New Labour government more inclined towards spending (albeit via public-private partnerships) than its Conservative predecessors.

Feasibly, such economic optimism contributed to the success and ambition of the now Oris London Jazz Festival, which by 1997 had grown to become ‘one of Europe’s leading new music events’, according to The Guardian, with the ‘most wide-ranging’ programming of any UK jazz festival.

Every year the word ‘jazz’ comes up for renegotiation somewhere, but 1996 in Britain put it under particular scrutiny with November’s Oris London Jazz Festival, which put Youssou N’Dour, Marisa Monte, John Harle and Elvis Costello under the banner alongside more orthodox candidates like Sonny Rollins, John Scofield, Mike Westbrook and Michael Brecker.

As the Evening Standard put it, ‘Not everyone shares the Serious taste, but it’s always progressive and rarely misses a contemporary beat’, an obvious example being what The Times dubbed the ‘laudably adventurous’ move to programme Asian Dub Foundation – who love Sun Ra – and Nitin Sawhney at the Royal Festival Hall for the festival’s opening night in 1997. According to The Times, the event showed off the rich seam of talent running ‘from Brick Lane to Bradford via Bengal and Baluchistan’ and was hosted by Outcaste Records, the label at the forefront of the British Asian music scene. It was not just the range of venues and events, then, that was attracting attention – by now, around 130-odd gigs – but also its reflection of what John Fordham termed in 1997 the ‘cultural energies aglow’ in London: from India, the Caribbean, Africa, and Europe.

By now, The Times felt able to write of the London Jazz Festival that it had ‘begun to put its own stamp on the listening habits of the contemporary audience’ to the extent that its programming decisions were being heralded as the future of jazz festivals in a world in which old stylistic distinctions were disappearing: ‘One type of jazz festival is dying; another is being born.’ Some, however, were less fond of the London Jazz Festival’s increasingly diverse programming of world music and fusion.

Another Times critic, for example, warned that: ‘The obvious danger is that the subtleties and complexities of the jazz improviser could be squeezed out by more populist and instantly commercial forms – just as they were in the heyday of fusion mark one. You do not have to be a cynic to feel that some of the enthusiasm for world music arises from the quest for an exotic, package-tour version of the lowest common denominator.

As these contrasting views from The Times indicate, jazz festival producers are often criticised either for being too populist or not populist enough, too focused on the new or not sufficiently innovative. In the UK, however, festival promoters can be pulled in apparently contradictory strategic directions. As academic Steve Oakes explains, on the one hand they need to impress sceptical arts funding bodies by convincing them of the artistic value and credibility of the music, whilst at the same time are also under pressure from the very same funding bodies to increase accessibility by putting on music which appeals to a wider, more populist audience. Jazz festival producers, then, walk a fine line between programming innovative music with niche appeal, and putting on big names who will guarantee ticket sales and packed halls. Ears on stalks or bums on seats.

For DJ Jez Nelson, many of the great jazz festivals have become pop festivals but they retain the word ‘jazz’ because ‘it’s got a bit of sexiness to it.’ For him, the London Jazz Festival is a ‘bloody good jazz festival [and] they’ve done that without including pop music, in the main.’

According to David Jones, the reason the festival has been able to do this is the tripartite model of box office, state funding, and commercial sponsorship developed by Serious, meaning that the three pillars support each other without the need to over-rely on one income stream.
AND NOW... TOO MANY JAZZ FESTIVALS?

When it came to jazz festivals in the capital city, by 1997, extraordinarily, Londoners had almost too much choice. For much of the year, there seemed to be one every few weeks, while July alone saw, like a trio of London buses, three coming along one after the other. With the Soho Jazz Festival, Jazz On The Streets, the JVC Jazz Festival, and the Ors London Jazz Festival as regular events, an article in Jazz UK magazine entitled ‘Will the real London Jazz Festival stand up?’ went so far as to suggest that jazz fans in the capital would be ‘bemused’ by the number of jazz festivals on offer. Perhaps, Jazz UK continued, the various events should instead pool their resources to form a ‘mega-bash’ the size of the Netherlands’ North Sea Jazz Festival?

However, Serious had their particular vision, aligning themselves with the programming of Bath Festival, the newly-launched Cheltenham Jazz Festival, and some European festivals with their ‘eclectic left-field programming and outreach schemes’, rather than the more ‘bar-and-brasserie atmosphere of Soho’ and the ‘cavalcade of star names’ of July’s JVC event, as Jazz UK characterised each. JVC bore the brunt of criticism, being described in The Times as ‘a conveyor belt of ageing soloists going through the motions as they waited for the next flight to Nice or New York’. JVC finally ended in 1997, thus marking the end of a run of imported American jazz festivals in London and leaving a space in the jazz calendar which the London Jazz Festival would later fill.

Interestingly, in 2011 a new festival was started by US promoters Live Nation, originally under the name of the London Jazz and Blues Festival, now called Bluesfest.

1999: BUT IS IT JAZZ?

Although 1999’s London Jazz Festival hosted star north American headliners including Branford Marsalis, Diana Krall, and Dianne Reeves, The Times still complained that, ‘at the London Jazz Festival, now in its seventh year, the stars are smaller and the straight jazz harder to find.’

Indeed, in the late 1990s the festival producers found it difficult to programme enough major jazz artists to fill the bigger venues available, but, rather than go down the route of booking pop acts, they looked instead to other musics. In an article in The Independent the following year, Cumming acknowledged that that year’s festival was light on the bigger American stars, but sought to present this as a positive development: ‘It’s a chance for people to see how the international jazz scene fits in the context of a major European city festival. It reflects the way things are in London and how the musicians are taking the music in exciting new directions.’

His views on London would be echoed by Denys Baptiste, who a few years later described the American jazz scene as having ‘got into this quagmire of tradition whereas London – England – is so cosmopolitan now [with] so much more fusing of musical ideas than there is in America. They have this fortress of the history of jazz but it rarely moves on from there... But for the music itself, there’s more happening here.’ The point here is not to establish new jazz nationalisms, but to show how the festival was negotiating its own sense of place – London – and managing its relation with a changing jazz landscape, and then to think about what that would mean for programming.

In 1999, however, complaints about a watered-down programme were louder than ever. Indeed, ‘thoughtful sceptics’, led by Richard Cook, the editor of Jazz Review, even took to BBC Radio 4’s Today programme to ask how a jazz festival could give prominence to the likes of reggae poet Linton Kwesi Johnson ‘without falling foul of the Trade Descriptions Act.’

Yet the introduction to the 1999 festival programme sought to address the question head-on, and justify its definitional and programming openness:

The festival makes no definition of what is jazz – it would be out of date as soon as it was made. Rather it draws together all the strands that connect jazz to the broad spectrum of contemporary music. It seems this didn’t convince all: the following year The Times was still asking questions like ‘Jazz? What jazz?’, and the festival was receiving ‘more than its fair share of critical flak’ for its broad approach, leading The Independent to fight its corner:

The unashamedly catholic policy of Serious, the promoters, simply reflects the state of jazz itself. With limited possibilities for vertical progression since modernism reached the virtual cul-de-sac of free improvisation in the late 1960s, contemporary jazz – in parallel with most other arts – has responded by expanding horizontally, reaching out to related forms such as pop, classical, and world music, as well as reappraising its own, already widely disparate, traditions... To therefore insist upon some idealist notion of jazz purity smacks of musical eugenics, or aesthetic cleansing.

The debate as to who sets genre boundaries is an old one. For writer and critic Simon Frith, one of the on-going debates in jazz is whether to define it canonically – by its history, its great names, its stylistic conventions – or by its processes, as music defined by improvisation and experimentation. The London Jazz Festival aims to cleave to both definitions, but as Frith says in Performing Rites, genres are constantly changing anyway and jazz in particular is characterised by a restless fluidity and curiosity because of its improvisatory and hybrid nature.

Director David Jones has relished the challenge: I think what the London Jazz Festival has done is to feed out to the world at large a confidence that jazz is an important music and it has a place for engaging with any other music it chooses to work with. So I think we’ve managed to push over a lot of boundaries and other people have gone, ‘Well, if they can do it, so can we’. I don’t think there’s any festival left who would go, ‘You can’t do that – we’re a jazz festival!’

To provide an urgent and entertaining overview of the diversity of programming.
However, diversity is not just about ethnicity, but also about class (and disability and sexuality and other identity markers). Indeed, as McKay’s Circular Breathing reminds us, the media’s Jazz Warriors/Loose Tubes binarism in the 1980s jazz boom was as much about each group’s class status as it was about their ethnicity.

Non-white, rather than the typical 20% or fewer indicated in its annual online survey. But as Gary Crosby says, on the context of race and ethnicity, ‘We should all do more on diversity and audience development and London Jazz Festival’s programming, both commercial and educational, has done so much for us all.’ Even so, as Crosby observed of jazz generally in 2016, more could be done for both BAME (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic) and non-BAME audiences and musicians, ‘because everybody’s struggling at the moment.’

Through new audience schemes, education work and free stages, Serious continue their effort to match the line-up on the stage and in the stalls to that of the multicultural identity of London. To truly reflect London’s demography both on and off the stage, 40% of the jazz festival’s audiences should be non-white, rather than the typical 20% or fewer indicated in its annual online survey. But as Gary Crosby says, on the context of race and ethnicity, ‘We should all do more on diversity and audience development and London Jazz Festival’s programming, both commercial and educational, has done so much for us all.’ Even so, as Crosby observed of jazz generally in 2016, more could be done for both BAME (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic) and non-BAME audiences and musicians, ‘because everybody’s struggling at the moment.’

Performing at a memorable sell-out gig at the Royal Festival Hall as part of the scheme in 2001 were the rebranded, relaunched Jazz Jamaica All Stars, featuring Gary Crosby, Juliet Roberts, Orphy Robinson, Andy Sheppard, Ashley Slater, Annie Whitehead and Alex Wilson, and supported by Dennis Rollins’ Badbone & Co.

That concept formed the heart of both Serious’ and the festival’s award-winning new audience development programme, which started in 1999 in partnership with energy supplier London Electricity to provide subsidised tickets and free transport to young people from deprived communities.

For John Cumming, such schemes give access to people who would otherwise never set foot inside a place like the Royal Festival Hall, and means that those audiences ‘quite often create that edge of enthusiasm that elevates a good concert to a great one.’

Apart from the festival, Serious’ commitment is evident elsewhere. From 2004, and for some years following, the company organised the annual Celebration of Life Concert which celebrates the lives of young people who have died as a result of violent crime and features predominantly black British artists.

One of the aims of the concerts is to build a better relationship between black communities and the Metropolitan Police, but they function also to remind all Londoners that public music venues are intended for everyone: the concerts have seen the highly unusual occurrence of 98% non-white audience in the Royal Festival Hall.

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Furthermore, as Linda Wilks’ recent work on audiences for black British jazz shows, a high proportion of black attendees come from the higher socio-economic classes, and her conclusion is that while audiences for black British jazz show complex diversity along the dimensions of age and ethnicity – jazz audiences are not necessarily just old and white – they are not so diverse along class and educational dimensions: her work finds that white and black jazz audiences are well-heeled and well-educated. Wilks’ research – some of which was undertaken at London Jazz Festival venues – suggests that black British jazz musicians may attract a slightly higher proportion of black or Asian audience members than white British jazz musicians, and that younger performers attract younger audiences, as do more relaxed, open venues. The London Jazz Festival, through its new audience development programmes and the inclusion of music outside narrow terms has in recent years deliberately shifted towards a wider variety of venues and clubs as a means of developing a younger, more diverse audience. Former associate director of production Amy Pearce says of the London Jazz Festival audience that those who prefer standing venues – XOYO, Scala, Village Underground, KOKO – to seated clubs are definitely the younger end of the jazz audience, those who want to dance rather than just sit and listen. One of the effects of the crossover popularity of artists like Jamie Cullum, Robert Glasper, and Snarky Puppy in recent years is that they help to break down further rigid genre definitions.

For Pearce, the question is whether audiences at such gigs would even describe themselves as a ‘jazz audience’.

How many people at a Robert Glasper gig think that they’re at a jazz gig when he’s doing his experimental stuff and how many of them are just at a Robert Glasper gig?... Standing in a pop gig you wouldn’t necessarily say, ‘I am at a pop gig,’ you would say, ‘I’m an Ellie Goulding gig or I’m at a Taylor Swift gig...’ It’s why conversations about ‘what is jazz?’ for me, just lead you down a dead end because, does it really matter or should it just be that the music is doing something interesting and related to an art form that has a history called jazz?

**2000: THE NEW MILLENNIUM**

As well as bringing new audiences directly into the festival, another important tool in the festival’s audience development toolkit has been via outreach and education programmes. In the London Jazz Festival of 2000, for example, headliner Courtney Pine led a series of workshops with young people from Hackney, Lambeth, and Southwark under its auspices, supported by the PRS Foundation.

Just one out of dozens of letters that the saxophonist received afterwards, the following highlights how Pine was bringing the sounds of jazz to an impressionable, enthusiastic audience:

Dear Courtney, Thanks so much for coming to our school. It was amazing to see you live. You really inspired me. I’m the one who played jazz flute, and thanks to you, next week I’m getting my first sax lesson.

By this time, as John Lewis put it in a feature about Pine’s musical development in Time Out magazine, the ‘propulsive hard bop beats’ of the 1960s had been replaced with ‘fat drum ‘n’ bass loops’. By going into schools, Pine was expounding on his theory of British jazz that related to British musical movement and related directly to the young people’s own musical experiences. (The significance of his early reggae playing should be remembered here, too. As even more so with Gary Crosby, British reggae was a Black Atlantic sound for some players who would then move into jazz.)

As Pine put it, thinking back to an early moment when he had turned down an invitation to play as a member of the Jazz Messengers in the United States:

I’m proud of drum ‘n’ bass as a British innovation, from our UK black experience... it’s something that could only have come out of a British perspective.... I could have gone to America with Art Blakey and been a millionaire. But I’m glad I stayed – I couldn’t do this music anywhere else in the world.

It is therefore fitting that, in the first year of the new millennium, Pine headlined a festival which had embraced and celebrated London’s black musicians from the beginning, and which by 2000, was now billing itself as ‘London’s biggest music festival’ – quite a bold claim when the competition includes something like the long-established eight-week Proms classical music festival in the city.

Highlighting the still strong links between the live and recording industries, Courtney Pine’s first proper headline (then Racing Green) London Jazz Festival gig in 2000 marked the release of his new CD, Back In The Day, released on Blue Thumb, an imprint of Universal Jazz. (To accompany the brochure that year, Universal Jazz produced a sampler CD featuring some of its jazz artists, including Pine, Christian McBride, and Bugge Wesseltoft.)

The gig was a storming sell-out described by Jack Massarik in the Evening Standard as a ‘megablast’ a two-hour show at screaming pitch from start to finish... which left fans reeling out of the hall, their hands sore from applauding, their voices hoarse from whooping and their ears ringing from aural assault.'
CHAPTER 4

THE BBC YEARS: 2001-2012

2001: BBC RADIO 3

2001 was the year in which, as Claire Whitaker puts it, the London Jazz Festival ‘changed from a London festival to a national festival’ as the result of a new partnership with BBC Radio 3, which helped to further promote the festival outside of London. Radio 3’s remit is primarily classical music, but with some jazz, and of course it is a national broadcaster, not only for London.

Our profile had been going up, the reach of the festival and the profile of the festival, the strength of the British scene and all sorts of things came together, but that Radio 3 moment when they came in as partners gave a lens to look at that through and see how far we’d come.

The station had broadcast from the festival since 1993, becoming the official radio station in 1995, but in 2001, Radio 3 became the principal creative (and financial) media partner, which meant more broadcasts and a greater online presence. Roger Wright had been appointed Controller of Radio 3 in 1998 and had been looking for a way for the station to form a more concrete relationship with the festival to mirror and develop the station’s burgeoning jazz and world music content.
Jez Nelson’s independent media production company, Somethin’ Else, which had been assiduously recording and broadcasting from the festival for the BBC for years, had also been trying to find a way to link the strands together. The result was that BBC Radio 3 came on board as a partner for the 2001 Festival, which for Whitaker, ‘felt like we’d grown up and been given our key to the door.’

For classical music critic Norman Lebrecht, writing in The Daily Telegraph, the Radio 3 partnership was a sign of a ‘highbrow station slipping off its blue stockings and jumping into bed with a funky jazz fest that turns out to have had minor surgical alteration and gone transcultural.’ Indeed, for Lebrecht, ‘the quiet serious intensity of the whole proceedings...akin to classical music.’

Dan Tepfer’s improvisations around J.S. Bach’s Goldberg Variations of the whole proceeding... akin to classical music. For Whitaker, ‘felt like we’d grown up and been given our key to the door.’

The London Jazz Festival has ‘a little gem of civilisation’ with a ‘pin-perfect acoustic’ according to The Daily Telegraph, was home to Brad Mehldau, playing solo for two nights, ‘the quiet serious intensity of the whole proceedings...akin to classical music.’

For classical music critic Norman Lebrecht, writing in The Daily Telegraph, the Radio 3 partnership was a sign of a ‘highbrow station slipping off its blue stockings and jumping into bed with a funky jazz fest that turns out to have had minor surgical alteration and gone transcultural.’ Indeed, in its treatment of jazz over the years, the BBC shows how jazz has often tended to get caught between highbrow and lowbrow, entertainment and culture, youth and older audiences.

From the gramophone recitals of the 1920s, through the St Regis Hotel relays of 1938-1939 – then the only way to hear live American musicians during the Musicians’ Union ‘ban’ – to the wartime Radio Rhythm Club (1940-1947), and to the long-running Jazz Club programme (1947-1974) as both a radio and TV programme, and listened to in the early 1960s by a young John Cumming), jazz has shuttled between BBC Radios 1, 2 and 3.

But jazz has never really found a secure and substantial home within the BBC’s family of radio stations and the Underrepresentation of jazz on the BBC and in the British media is an on-going issue. (A 2009 report by Jazz Services, the then national agency for jazz in Britain, concluded starkly if unsurprisingly for many in the jazz community that the BBC was ‘not, in the eyes of many engaged in the British jazz economy, supporting British jazz to the extent it could, and many feel should.’)

Thus the choice of venue can affect the ‘feel’ of a gig and indeed, the use of certain venues may also carry deeper layers of meaning. In 2010, veteran French pianist Martial Solal also played at the Wigmore Hall at the age of 82. Cumming attended the rehearsal, and, as he put it, ‘wallowed’ in the sounds of one of the world’s great pianists in one of the world’s great rooms for music. As Cumming says, Solal loved it, and this story also highlights how matching the right artist to the right venue is also satisfying for the festival producers. It also means that the London Jazz Festival has been putting on music at very heart of the arts establishment in London, reminding us perhaps of the late musician and radio broadcaster Humphrey Lyttelton’s only slightly tongue-in-cheek observation that ‘it is considered an extra feather in the cap of jazz if it can be presented in a hall normally reserved exclusively for serious music.’

NEW VENUES, NEW FRONTIERS

The partnership with the London Jazz Festival in 2001 and the broadening of BBC Radio 3’s musical vocabulary also points to a broader postmodernist trend within the arts, in which the previously deeply scored lines between genres and art worlds have become more blurred. Illustrating this trend, London’s temple of classical music, the Wigmore Hall, was used for the first time in the jazz festival in 2004, as was the cathedral of the art world, the Royal Academy of Arts.

The Wigmore Hall, a ‘little gem of civilisation’ with a ‘pin-perfect acoustic’ according to The Daily Telegraph, was home to Brad Mehldau, playing solo for two nights, ‘the quiet serious intensity of the whole proceedings...akin to classical music.’

**FREE FESTIVAL**

2001 was also the first year of the PizzaExpress-sponsored FreeStage, a temporary stage built on the floor of the Royal Festival Hall’s Clavie Ballroom, with another added in the Queen Elizabeth Hall foyer in 2004. Fully equipped with light and sound, the stage represented a further flowering of the festival’s more inclusive, boundary-less events – not always an easy thing to achieve in dark, cold mid-November. The music is not locked away behind the doors of a concert hall and the free stages allow people to sample new musicians and new sounds in a more relaxed atmosphere. Furthermore, it gives musicians the opportunity to play in front of a thousand people rather than the usual couple of hundred (or fewer), and so they have to learn how to make an impression.

The London Jazz Festival has included free events from the start, including free performances in unusual locations around Euston and King’s Cross in the very first year. From 1995, free events in the Royal Festival Hall Foyer included Radio 3 broadcasts, interviews and live performances from festival artists such as John Surman and Carol Kidd. By 2000, the festival was able to put on much more free music, thanks to support from (one year only) title sponsors Racing Green, independent label Provocateur Records, and Arts & Business’ New Partners scheme. That year, artists included a mixture of new talent and established acts, including Gary Crosby’s Nu Troop II and Andy Sheppard in Jazz and Beats with DJs Rita Ray and Max Reinhardt.
CHAPTER 4
Free event in Royal Festival Hall foyer, 2013

While for some people, an event like the annual Jazz Voice gala is the London Jazz Festival, for others the free events are the main draw. As one audience member, playing up to British regional stereotypes, told us: ‘I’m a northerner and so I'm going to all the free gigs!’ However, for others, the evening events are ‘just concerts’ and it is the free stage that feels more like a festival.

While money is an issue, then, for some free festival attenders, the more relaxed open setting, plus the opportunity to discover new music, give the free events more of a ‘traditional’ festival vibe and a more convivial atmosphere. One of the most important findings in a large-scale study into outdoor arts by The Audience Agency is that they go ‘with a bang’ was the arrival of Norwegian newcomers unleashing some of the most exciting, focused, yet uninhibited and spontaneous music in years’, including a six-hour Adventures in Sound gig featuring the improvised thrash metal electronicica of the Scotch Trio from Finland and Norway alongside Matthew Bourne, the Matthew Shipp Trio, and Evan Parker. This gig, cooked up in collaboration with Somethin’ Else, remains one of director David Jones’ favourite London Jazz Festival memories, an unrehearsed, unshaped musical collaboration which started at 4pm and finished at 10pm. As he recalls:

The audience really got into the drama of it; they could see musicians visibly responding to what was going on around them. It was almost like being able to take an audience into the inner workings of the idea.

By now, Norway’s vibrant music scene had ‘started to make a splash across London’, leading The Guardian to dub it the year of the ‘Norwegian Invasion’.

THE 'NORWEGIAN INVASION'

For The Guardian, what made 2002’s festival go ‘with a bang’ was the arrival of Norwegian newcomers unleashing some of the most exciting, focused, yet uninhibited and spontaneous music in years, including a six-hour Adventures in Sound gig featuring the improvised thrash metal electronicica of the Scotch Trio from Finland and Norway alongside Matthew Bourne, the Matthew Shipp Trio, and Evan Parker. This gig, cooked up in collaboration with Somethin’ Else, remains one of director David Jones’ favourite London Jazz Festival memories, an unrehearsed, unshaped musical collaboration which started at 4pm and finished at 10pm. As he recalls:

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MUSIC FROM OUT THERE, IN HERE

Writing in 2002, music industry publication Music Week claimed that the jazz calendar had thrived in comparison with the genre’s record sales, and, by 2003, it now seemed that live music and music festivals were one of the saviours of the popular music industry more broadly. As a genre, though, jazz itself remained ‘barely a blip on the global music industry’s graph’ with small venues threatened or closed, and record labels opting to repackage classic albums rather than release contemporary material.

It is these kinds of industry shifts and crises that make the story of the survival – indeed, thriving – of festival in general so striking, and jazz festivals perhaps even more so.

Even so, the Independent on Sunday was less than impressed with the London Jazz Festival programme’s increasing expansion into world music:

In future can we just render unto jazz what belongs to jazz, and let world music devotees bang their drums elsewhere? Jazz is underfunded and underappreciated, and the way to attract new recruits is not by getting people along under false pretences – not that ‘don’t worry, it’s really a jazz festival’ is much of a rallying cry.
(Ironically, the festival in recent years has apparently received complaints that there now is not enough world music in the programme.) However, the embracing of music from around the world has meant that over the years the festival has been able to include the West African kora sound of Seckou Keita, the tabla-infused Indo-jazz fusion of (Remember) Shakti, the flamenco of Paco de Lucía, and the melancholic Portuguese fado of Mariza. (Illustrating the way in which the festival can help to break an artist onto the scene, Mariza’s first UK show was in the intimate and sold out the Barbican in 2006, and as well as hitting the wider public has been via the live late-night broadcast of the festival’s opening party on Jazz on 3.

In a multicultural city, pentatonic melodies from China and microtonal Arab ballads constitute our daily aural environment. World music is, among other things, an expression of massive social transformation. More than any other sound, it is the music of tomorrow.

The festival’s offering may not have been ‘pure’ jazz, but it was indeed the sound of London. Summing up its eclectic programme, the slogan for the 2003 festival was ‘Music from out there, in here’, particularly apt because it encapsulates the inclusive pan-cultural vision of the festival, one which imports music from all over the world into London, but, read another way, also reflects the way in which the festival also provides a platform for the music being made in London itself. The 2003 festival in particular featured a host of significant mostly newer British jazz artists. Courtney Pine, Gilles Peterson, Jamie Cullum, and Soweto Kinch.

One of the ways by which the festival has introduced new performers to the wider public has been via the live late-night broadcast of the festival’s opening party on Jazz on 3, which grew directly out of the BBC Radio 3 partnership and which began in 2003. Continuing the BBC’s tradition of broadcasting live jazz, Jazz on 3 started to broadcast a special festival opening night event live on air from Soho’s PizzaExpress, featuring new acts alongside jazz stars, which was presented by Jez Nelson up to and including 2015.

In 2008, the show moved to Ronnie Scott’s, and as Nelson recalls, ‘We’ve had incredible legends who’ve played there’, including saxophonist Archie Shepp, vibes player Bob Hutcherson, pianist Tord Gustavsen, trumpeter Terence Blanchard, singer Sheila Jordan, and The Bad Plus. To have London Jazz Festival live from Ronnie Scott’s broadcast on BBC Radio 3 is indeed quite special.

Tickets are balloted and attendees are often industry players, including promoters, critics, and other jazz musicians. Nelson again: ‘GoGo Penguin, who are now becoming really big – they certainly cite that as being a very important gig. The band’s manager, Kerstan Mackness, concurs, explaining that it was GoGo Penguin’s first time playing in London, and as well as hitting the core jazz audience via the radio broadcast, it felt like the whole jazz industry was in the room, including most of the significant critics, agents and promoters: the gig was ‘a marker; it put them on the map.’

For Bex Burch, band leader of Vula Viel, who played the gig in 2015: ‘That gig for us was really great... Lots of people were there, industry, lots of people were reviewers... And we’re in talks with a couple of people who were there about festivals in the future... so possible other gigs may come out of it as well.

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‘It’s a real privilege to be playing here, man: the biggest jazz festival, the capital city. It’s massive for me; it’s probably one of the biggest gigs that I’ve done to date.’

SOWETO KINCH, SAXOPHONIST

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In an age of mass travel, the songs of far countries enter our holiday ears and our unconscious.

For the Evening Standard, then, the London Jazz Festival’s ‘taking over’ by world music was something to be celebrated rather than shunned.

In an age of mass travel, the songs of far countries enter our holiday ears and our unconscious. In a multicultural city, pentatonic melodies from China and microtonal Arab ballads constitute our daily aural environment. World music is, among other things, an expression of massive social transformation. More than any other sound, it is the music of tomorrow.

The festival’s offering may not have been ‘pure’ jazz, but it was indeed the sound of London. Summing up its eclectic programme, the slogan for the 2003 festival was ‘Music from out there, in here’, particularly apt because it encapsulates the inclusive pan-cultural vision of the festival, one which imports music from all over the world into London, but, read another way, also reflects the way in which the festival also provides a platform for the music being made in London itself. The 2003 festival in particular featured a host of significant mostly newer British jazz artists. Courtney Pine, Gilles Peterson, Jamie Cullum, and Soweto Kinch.

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Opening Night Live

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Festivals Developing New Artists, Being Developed by New Artists

2003 was the first year that pianist Jamie Cullum headlined the festival’s closing concert at the Royal Festival Hall, just six months after signing a million-pound record deal with Universal, the kind of contract unheard of by many British jazz artists.

By the end of the year, Cullum’s new album Twentysomething had become the fastest selling jazz album in UK chart history, outstripping Courtney Pine’s previous record of 100,000 sales by a factor of three. He was, as the BBC put it, ‘jazzing up the music scene.’ His very first appearance at the festival had only been the previous year, his trio performing as part of the Southbank’s free lunchtime series.

A year later he was back – headlining the main venue, promoting an album just released. Supported by American jazz label, Verve Records (owned by Universal), for 2004’s festival Cullum would return to his roots to play at the PizzaExpress club and the 606 Club, the latter the venue where he had signed his record deal in the first place.

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Not everyone in the jazz community was so keen on Cullum’s music, however. For Phil Johnson in The Independent, the problem with Jamie Cullum (and even Courtney Pine) was not that they were ‘insufficiently jazzy’ (although, of course, they are). ‘It’s simply that they’re not imaginative enough. (Perhaps they were too popular, too, which is sometimes viewed as a problem in the jazz world.)’ Nevertheless, as Cumming said in 2004 of the Jamie Cullum effect, he’s certainly doing no harm bringing attention to the scene, and it is reflective of a much broader and bigger success story. We’re beginning to see more acceptance and support from third parties – from the Arts Council and the BBC, for example – and general levels of audiences are up. The Independent even went so far as to suggest that the golden age of British jazz was not in the past but was actually happening right there and then, marked by the ‘steady stream of uncommodity-good albums’ on independent labels such as Dune, Provocateur, and Caber Music, and by British artists such as Tomorrow’s Warriors, Matthew Bourne, Jason Yarde, and Soweto Kinch.

At 25, Soweto Kinch was described by the Evening Standard in 2003 as already having a full band: ‘imagination, big sound, impressive as already having a full hand. His debut album, Conversations with the Unseen combined straight-ahead jazz with hip hop, and in 2003 won him a Mercury Music Prize nomination and the MOBO Award for Best Jazz Act.

His performance at the London Jazz Festival in 2003 led the Independent on Sunday to suggest that Kinch, who opened for the American star David Sanborn, ‘left the million- selling alto saxophonist looking as if he needed to take a few lessons’. Following on from the success of Jamie Cullum’s special concert for 5,000 young people at the Royal Albert Hall in 2005, the last Sunday of the festival became ‘family day’ and in 2006 featured Kinch and trumpeter Abram Wilson playing a special afternoon concert as well as their later evening show.

As noted in the press, Kinch was not the only young black artist making waves in the new millennium, however. Although Courtney Pine headlined the festival again in 2003, the higher profile of London’s emerging black talent could be seen via performances by drummer Mark Mondesir, tenor saxophonist Denys Baptiste, trumpeter Byron Wallen, Tomorrow’s Warriors’ funky collective Jade Fox, and Priscilla Ometan’s J Noir at Dingwalls.

FESTIVAL RESIDENCIES

From the Original Dixieland Jazz Band in 1919 residency at the Hammersonic Park through Ronnie Scott at Club Eleven and beyond, jazz residencies have been a vital means of developing the genre in the UK. In 2003, the festival’s DJ in residence was Gilles Peterson, described in the London Jazz Festival brochure as being at the heart of British jazz with an incalculable influence on shaping tastes, and so help festival-goers connect to the dance floor.

Combining interest in records and live performance, Peterson curated the first Future Sounds of Jazz event, featuring Matthew Herbert’s Big Band, Bembe Seque and Two Banks of Four, the same year as the release of Peterson’s Universal compilation, Impressed, featuring rare cuts of 1960s and 1970s British jazz.

In the 2003 festival brochure, Peterson was keen to point out that some of those greats were performing at the festival that year, including Michael Garrick at the Vortex, Mike Westbrook at PizzaExpress and an evening dedicated to the work of Joe Harriott at the Purcell Room. The latter featured British jazz stars such as Soweto Kinch, Byron Wallen, and Gary Crosby, a fitting way to commemorate Harriott’s rich contribution to British jazz music. Peterson’s Future Sounds of Jazz would later go on to close the 2005 festival, this time introducing a notable multiple bill of pianist Robert Glasper, Heritage Orchestra and special guest Dwight Trible at the Barbican. At this time, Glasper was a relative unknown and his inclusion by Peterson as a ‘tip for the future’ highlights the DJ’s influence both on musicians’ careers and on the programming for future London Jazz Festivals.

(A journalist who had been particularly critical about the festival’s all-embracing programming policy was taken out for lunch that year by Claire Whitaker and David Jones to try and patch things up. It was the journalist’s opportunity to be rude about the festival to the directors’ faces and tell them exactly how, in his opinion, he would run a better festival. ‘The problem with you people is that you don’t know about jazz’, he ranted. ‘There’s this amazing pianist you should hear, absolutely amazing! His name is Robert Glasper.’

Jones recalls taking particular pleasure in telling the journalist that Glasper was in fact already playing at the Barbican that very year. A few years later, Jones recalls another lunch with the same journalist, in which, to deliberately wind him up, Jones said, ‘The problem with jazz is that there are just too many solos’. Shocked into silence and rapidly turning an apoplectic shade of purple, the journalist was mollified just in time by Jones: ‘just kidding’.)

Gilles Peterson presents
Future Sounds of Jazz
as part of the London Jazz Festival 2005

Gilles Peterson as DJ and resident curator is one facet, but the festival has also encouraged residencies from the music’s instrumental movers and shakers (indeed, this harks back to Camelot jazz days, when Ornette Coleman and Art Blakey both played in multiple settings). Following the success of 2008’s Scene Norway series, the festival programme in 2009 included a special London Jazz Festival four-night residency at Kings Place, featuring maverick Italian piano maestro Stefano Bollani, opening with the trio that featured on his latest ECM release, Stone in the Water, and finishing with his sextet, Visionari.

Following Bollani in 2009 and The Bad Plus as musicians in residence in 2010, the 2011 series, rather than focusing on a particular artist or band, instead threw a spotlight on artists emerging as key figures on the global jazz stage and became a meeting place for artists from the USA and Europe whose music stretches and probes the boundaries of jazz. These included Swiss pianist/composer Nik Bartsch, Glasper, Norwegian trio PEMPO and Scottish saxophonist and composer Tommy Smith’s quartet, Karma. 2016’s Kings Place residency was Bugge Wesseltoft, marking 20 years since he fused Nordic electronics with club culture in his album, New Conception of Jazz.
In 2014, a new type of residency was introduced at the festival, the Professor in Residence, which in its first iteration was George McKay from the University of East Anglia, succeeded the next year by Professor Tony Whyton from Birmingham City University and Birmingham Conservatoire. (Emma Webster was the researcher-in-residence for the 2016 festival.) Recognising the quirky innovativeness of the role, the Jazz Man blog called this new residency ‘a unique and brilliant appointment.’ It shows the festival’s intellectual curiosity, its willingness to engage with the jazz community at its widest, and its boldness of programming.

The residencies are also a reflection of the New Jazz Studies, a mushrooming of interest in jazz music and culture from academic researchers, who want to engage the public in their research, whether that is on festivals themselves (such as this book, by Webster and Whyton), or musicians from John Coltrane [Whyton] to Winifred Atwell (McKay).

The choice of the resident represents the festival-as-tastemaker as a whole, in Brilliant’s case, representing the ‘far-sighted, boundary-shattering nature of the London Jazz Festival itself, as the event’s own brochure somewhat immodestly described it. The other meaning of resident in terms of being abiding, present, inherent, and established is also significant here, as it shows the London Jazz Festival’s confidence that it will endure, that it is now resident in its home city.

2004-2007: THE FESTIVAL GROWS

In 2004, the festival’s geographical reach across London grew further, as this time expanding to the artsdepot gallery and performance space on north Finchley, and The Wapping Galley and performance space on east London. In 2005, the festival moved to the re-opened Roundhouse, the latter including Cadogan Hall, KOKO, and the gallery and performance space on the iconic Tower Bridge. This became the long-running Jazz in the House, which has since been supported by both BBC Radio 3 and now EFG International. The event brings together jazz musicians, industry practitioners and sponsors with jazz-appreciating MPs and Lords to talk about the on-going state of the jazz scene, and features live music on the Terrace Pavilion of the House of Commons, overlooking the Thames.

In Whitaker’s view, ‘we had a greater attendance of MPs and politicians than anything else and yet it was jazz, it wasn’t a string quartet. I think that sort of thing doesn’t just give us confidence as an organisation, it gives the scene confidence that it gets that kind of recognition.’ A direct impact of the event was that the APPJAG Awards attracted support from the music licensing organisation Phonographic Performance Limited (PPA), because, according to Whitaker, ‘they saw how accepted jazz was as a tool to lobby politicians.

The real joy of the London Jazz Festival is the sheer extravagance of it. Every day at around noon the action begins at venues all over London, and runs continuously in a frenzy of music-making until the wee small hours. Any jazz-lover must be tempted to treat it as the musical equivalent of a ten-day pub-crawl, staggering bleary-eyed from one gig to the next.”

IVAN HEWETT, DAILY TELEGRAPH

THE POLITICS OF FESTIVALS

In 2007, the festival received support from, among others, the Hungarian Cultural Centre, the Norwegian Embassy and the French Music Bureau. Indeed, the list of international embassies and cultural organisations with which the festival has worked since its inception is notable.

In the years since, it has broadened its fundraising portfolio to include organisations ranging from Pro Helvetia (the Swiss Arts Council) to the Polish Cultural Institute, from the Canadian High Commission to Dutch Performing Arts, and from the Brazilian government to the German Foreign Office. As Amy Pearce explains, ‘London is politically an important place but musically still seen to be an important place and therefore it’s been prioritised by artists, by record companies, by the embassies who often support that work, which has made a huge difference to being able to present it.’

Indeed, a marker of the confident position the festival inhabits in London is seen in its relation with the political establishment, most specifically the All-Party Parliamentary Jazz Appreciation Group (APPJAG), which hosts an annual private reception at the House of Commons, overlooking the Thames.

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JAZZ HONOURS

It is interesting to note jazz’s gradual acceptance by or into the establishment via the Honours List, with the following receiving OBEs and other honours over the years: John Dankworth (CBE 1974; knighted 2008), Cleo Laine (1979; Dame 1997), Stan Tracey (1986; CBE 2007), Chris Barber (1991), Courtney Pine (2000; CBE 2009), Acker Bilk (2001), Jools Holland (2003), Andy Hamilton (MBE 2008), Gary Crosby (2009), Claire Martin (2011), the festival’s Jazz Voice musical director Guy Barker (MBE 2015) and Serious’ own John Cumming and Claire Whitaker in 2014 and 2015 respectively for services to jazz.

Recognising the cultural importance of such honours, Michael Connarty MP argued for more musicians to join the ‘pantheon of jazz’. ‘If we could recognise some of the work of individuals, we could put jazz on a respectable footing. (Someone or many people reading this will be asking themselves, ‘Yes, but does jazz want such a thing?’) As Ian Lamont has written, jazz is another means for musicians and the honours system, legitimisation works both ways, however, as awards gives consent to the political system that created them, and may also function to nullify criticality.

To this end, it is worth acknowledging those in the jazz and related music world who have rejected honours, such as Humphrey Lyttelton and George Melly. More recently, early festival London Jazz Festival regular Nilin Sawhney released an OBE in 2007, explaining later that, ‘I wouldn’t like anything with the word “emperor” after my name. Jazz is, after all, a music founded in slavery and after my name.’ Jazz is, after all, explaining later that, ‘I wouldn’t like that, Myrna Hague. As well as being a Passage of Music event, this gig celebrated ten years of Dune Music, the company and label set up by Jazz Warrior Gary Crosby and Janine Irons, initially set up ‘to find a way to give young black jazz artists the opportunity of getting the same breaks as their white counterparts’.

Looking forward to 2015, Terence Blanchard’s E-Collective played music inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement at the Barbican, while the next night rapper Ice-T was reading, over a score, from the Harlem Renaissance poet Langston Hughes’ late work Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz, a show which went on to win the 2016 Jazz FM award for Live Experience of the Year. The brochure itself that year could read like a manifesto or a history lecture as much as a concert guide. It included an article entitled ‘Black Identity: With a continuing international dialogue around race relations, the African-American origins of jazz become ever more pertinent. [Blanchard] performs music from his powerful new record Breathless (a reference to the last words of Eric Garner, who died in NYPD custody in 2014). It’s also important to probe deeper into history... Hughes’ masterpiece... is rooted in the spirit of the civil rights movement of its time.’

EUROPEAN EXPANSION AND THE EUROPE JAZZ NETWORK

Broader political currents in Europe also impact on the festival, as well as fed its evolution and land its funds. The expansion of the EU in 2004 led to the new membership of a group of accession countries from central and eastern Europe, including Poland, Bulgaria, and the post-Soviet Baltic states. London’s demography continued to evolve: as the 2011 Census showed, between 2001 and 2011 more than three million of the 8.2m Londoners hailed from outside the UK, a million more so than in 2001.

Of these recent arrivals, nearly 40% came from the EU’s new member states. It is worth noting too that in 2016, when the UK voted to leave the EU, the people of London, the capital city, voted to remain. New migrants and their musical traditions from home began to be heard more widely, and what has been called the ‘outernational spirit of jazz sounded anew. It’s fair to say the sounding of the spirit of an art event like the festival was considerably aided by new funding opportunities also.

For Serious the expansion of the EU opened up further opportunities for importing jazz from and exporting it to an even wider range of countries. In 2009, for example, a year in which the festival included nearly 300 events, the London Jazz Festival was part of POLSKAI YEAR, a joint initiative by the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a means of presenting Polish culture to the UK audience. The festival was awarded a substantial grant to present a programme of work with Polish artists, which included veteran trumpeter Tomasz Stanko (including national tour dates, pianist Leszek Możdżer, and the Fresh From Europe gig at the Vortex featuring musicians from France, Estonia, Sardinia, as well as Poland. European jazz has been a feature of London’s jazz festivals for decades, however, bolstered behind the scenes by organisations such as the Europe Jazz Network (EJN). With Serious as one of the founder members, EJN was set up in 1987 to connect promoters across Europe in order to share ideas about musicians and live promotion and to collaborate in organising tours and concerts.

(EJN was set up to take advantage of the new opportunities for electronic communication in the late 1980s but the phone lines from the then-Serious office in Soho were so over-subscribed in the early days that connecting was frequently only possible in the early hours of the morning, by which time communication skills might well have been past their best.) As Cumming recalls, Serious took an early decision to invest in ourselves by taking ourselves into Europe and going to jazz network conferences and going to see work in different places and meeting up, making connections with foreign colleagues.’

Projects over the years have included the Europe Jazz Odyssey, from which the Adventures in Sound gig sprung, and Take Five Europe, a development scheme which brought together young composers from across Europe in 2012 and 2013. A special season called Jazz in the New Europe took place in 2012 with the support of a one-year grant from the Culture Programme of the European Union.

One highlight was the pairing of two big bands on the same small stage at the Purcell Room, Manchester’s Beats & Pieces with Norway’s Ensemble Denada, as reviewed in ‘The Quietus’.

When [Beats & Pieces’ Ben] Cottrell and [Ensemble Denada’s] Helge Sunde swap places to conduct each other’s ensemble with new compositions written by the composers, it’s clear that this is one project making the most of its European cultural funding.
2008-2011: PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE

FESTIVAL ON THE MOVE

2008 saw the festival expand again with the launch of Festival on the Move, a new strand of programming intended to ‘take jazz to more of the city than ever before’, as the brochure puts it, supported in its first year by the fitting combination of Chiltern Railways and the Mayor of London’s office. Indeed, ‘boosting the London Jazz Festival so that it reaches more boroughs’ was one of the claims made for Boris Johnson’s ‘200 achievements as Mayor of London’ in 2010 on the Conservative Home website, alongside ‘brought back Christmas’, and ‘appeared in EastEnders.’

The scheme allowed the festival to hold events in outer London boroughs for the first time, from Stratford in the east to Richmond in the southwest. In this way, the London Jazz Festival reflects the ebb and flow of the city’s oscillating remit. What is interesting is that it highlights how the festival is not a monolithic creature at the centre of a web, sending out satellites to draw people in, but rather, like the many festivals of Edinburgh, operates horizontally and vertically through space and time, intersecting with other happenings taking place at the same time.

As Lewis Daniel, bass singer in the acapella group, Vine, who played the Festival on the Move in 2013, says, ‘I think the idea of the festival on the Move is a really strong one because it brings jazz and different music into different areas of London which you wouldn’t expect to see it. We did the artsdepot the other day and I wouldn’t expect to see jazz there. I think it’s good to get the awareness of jazz and this music around.’

Festival on the Move has echoes of the original free performances at the first London Jazz Festival, but with a broader geographical remit. What is interesting is that it illustrates the close ties to the recording industry and the festival’s deference to the jazz canon, the Jazz Voice tributes.

Based on the success of the Ella tribute, Jazz Voice began the following year, with a specially created London Jazz Festival Orchestra conducted and arranged by British trumpeter and composer Guy Barker. Over the years, the event has featured songs from Irving Berlin, George Gershwin, Louis Jordan, Paul McCartney, Stevie Wonder and Prince amongst many more obviously jazz composers – all of them somehow linked, explicitly or more obscurely, to the decades preceding the year of each festival, while showcasing singers from Jamie Cullum, Dee Dee Bridgewater, Gregory Porter, Carleen Anderson, Norma Winstone to even Boy George and Lady Leshurr. Jazz Voice is a glittering event which reaches out to a more mainstream and misty-eyed audience who prefer the sound of strings and the massed brass of Barker’s big band to some of the festival’s more esoteric contemporary jazz and world music.

JAZZ VOICE

Unlike the dark velvet intimacy of the festival’s opening night party in Soho, the annual Jazz Voice gala, which began in 2008, is a glitzy, sparkling affair in one of London’s biggest concert halls. Jazz Voice grew out of the We All Love Ella event at the Royal Festival Hall in 2007. The show was a tribute to Ella Fitzgerald featuring UK R&B and soul singers Jamelia and Terri Walker, as well as Melody Gardot, and jazz virtuosos Liz Wright, Claire Martin, Lea DeLaria and Ian Shaw, who ‘The Guardian described as spontaneously turning ‘what could have been a cheesily respectful tribute show into a party.

Illustrating the close ties to the recording industry and the festival’s deference to the jazz canon, the event celebrated what would have been the 90th birthday of ‘the first lady of jazz’, as well as being timed to coincide with the release of a tribute album on Universal featuring a host of contemporary stars.

We All Love Ella, 2007

I wish they wouldn’t have so much great music at the same time sometimes because some of the nights you can’t get to everything but it’s great that they have this festival and all the venues are killing, really really killing.”

ROBERT GLASPER

Shingai Shoniwa performing at Jazz Voice at the London Jazz Festival 2011

2010 festival supporters including then Mayor of London, Boris Johnson

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THE RECORDING INDUSTRY IN THE 2000S

Jazz Voice and We All Love Ella have their roots further back in Serious' history, with an event first held in September 2001 called The Song's The Thing. Claire Whitaker developed and raised sponsorship for the event - i.e., an event first held in September 2001 called The Song's The Thing. Claire Whitaker developed and raised sponsorship for the event, a celebration of the art and craft of song-writing featuring singers like Badly Drawn Boy and Eddi Reader.

The illegal file-sharing site Napster [est. 1999] had been closed down in July 2001 but its rapid success meant that the recording industry was starting to realise that the digitisation of music files on CDs had opened up a Pandora's box when combined with the internet's immense power to share files. The launch of iTunes and the iPod in 2001 meant that people started to buy single tracks rather than whole albums and the fortunes of the album-based recording industry took a downwards turn. As well as support from the then-Performing Right Society (PRS, the UK society which administers the performing rights of the musical works of composers, songwriters and music publishers), and BMI (the American performing right society), The Song's The Thing was also supported by British Music Rights. PRS' Respect the Value of Music campaign aimed to raise awareness of the value of music and of the 'detrimental impact' that the distribution of unlicensed music via the internet would have on the long-term prospects of the music creators and the recording industry.

The Song's The Thing, then, which returned in 2002, was a means of reminding the public of the value of songwriters at a time when the money and power in the music industries were beginning to shift away from the record labels and (slowly) towards live music and festivals. Indeed, in 2008, research by PRS for Music showed that revenue from live music overtook that of recorded music for the first time. Although this might appear to be a beneficial situation for live music and festival producers like Serious, in fact their bigger picture does - and of course should - include an effort to enhance and renew the repertoire, and the festival continues to work with labels like Blue Note and Universal, as well as PRS for Music.

SCENE NORWAY

Following the success of the 'Norwegian Invasion' a few years earlier, Serious cements their already strong ties with Norway and the Royal Norwegian Embassy by producing a centenary concert named Norwegian Voices in December 2005, a celebration of Norwegian music and 100 years of Norwegian independence. This sampler concert paved the way for a broader mini-festival three years later, Scene Norway, which formed a major part of the London Jazz Festival’s programme in 2008.

Curated by Fiona Talkington of BBC Radio 3’s Late Junction, the Norwegian-focused mini-festival took place in the newly opened Kings Place in King’s Cross and featured music, talks and film, alongside a weekend of family-focused events. As Talkington explains:

The original Scene Norway arose because [CEO and King Place developer] Peter Millican asked if I would curate a Norwegian Festival at Kings Place when it opened [with] Serious as the producers. It was a ten-day festival for which I arranged film and literature events as well as the music. The music included a commission with the London Sinfonietta and Iain Ballamy and Arve Henriksen.

There were children’s films for which some eminent musicians had written the music, and there was a packed children’s afternoon where Terje Isungset and Karl Seglem brought a magical atmosphere with the percussion and goat horns. I'd wanted to include a folk version of The Little Prince which I’d seen in Farde with live music, and we got poet Ian McMillan in to narrate and a group of dancers who taught the children how to do the Halling dance.

Scene Norway also included the UK premiere of Terje Isungset’s Ice Music, a piece in which the percussionist played on instruments sculpted entirely from ice. For the audience, this was no doubt a unique and evocative experience, incorporating recorded sounds of Norwegian glaciers and moving ice. For the production team, however, the piece was somewhat of a challenge in London’s more temperate November climes, as they had to find means both of transporting and storing the beautiful but delicate instruments – albeit bulky, at least pianos don’t tend to melt when they’re being moved.

2008 was also the year in which Norway's Punkt Festival came under the London Jazz Festival umbrella, a festival centred around the concept of live remix in back-to-back concerts with a transient audience, which in Norway programmes artists like Brian Eno and Laurie Anderson to create a hub for creativity which goes beyond purely jazz.

As Talkington says, the element of risk, danger and excitement makes it special for audiences and musicians.

I had been so struck by Punkt’s flexibility and the potential for collaborations with musicians and artists in cities around the world, that it seemed obvious to me to bring it to London and have another focus within the Scene Norway festival... I think for Peter and for Kings Place it was a memorable event in the building which had been opened just a few weeks previously, and a great honour that it was opened by the Crown Prince of Norway.

Scene Norway part 2 took place as part of the 2013 London Jazz Festival, again curated by Fiona Talkington, with a residency from Norwegian trumpeter Nils Petter Molvaer at Kings Place. In this way, Norway and its jazz continue to have a special role in the festival, which, like London itself, is a cultural melting pot and, as Eric Hobsbawm puts it, acts as ‘a bridge between the USA and the rest of Europe’.

It is perhaps worth adding that the festival hosted the final performances of the ground-breaking collaboration between Jan Garbarek and the Hilliard Ensemble – having produced an earlier concert at the Royal Albert Hall, the festival took them to the other end of the scale, with two intimate concerts in the evocative setting of Temple Church.
CHAPTER 4

abstract artworks

2010 brochure

front cover

This

was part of a

series of four commissioned

abstract artworks

(2009-2012)

CELEBRATING THE LEGACY

In June 2008, pianist Ebjorn Svensson of Swedish trio EST
died suddenly, aged 44. After EST’s PizzaExpress residency in
1999, which, according to one commentator, ‘began something of
a love affair between the group, the club and the city’, the group’s first
major London concert had been at the Queen Elizabeth Hall as part
of the 2001 London Jazz Festival, supported by British pianist
Matthew Bourne.

In 2003, the band opened the festival at the Royal Festival Hall, and in 2006, played the Barbican, performing on a bill with British band Polar Bear, a double bill which, according to The Guardian, ‘reflected world-music, classical forms and avant-rock at least as
much as jazz.’ To commemorate his life and music, the London Jazz Festival put on a memorial concert to Svensson at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in November 2008.

Videos of the band, as well as tributes by Jamie Cullum and Pat Metheny, were accompanied by Jez Nelson in conversation with the band’s manager and label manager, and the trio’s two surviving members also came on stage, both still stunned at the loss of their friend and collaborator. Five years later, the life and untimely death of London-based New Orleans jazz trumpeter and composer Abram Wilson was also commemorated in a special tribute show.

Festivals, then, can act as secular sites of public commemoration for musicians who have died and for whom we still grieve. For Ezra Collective drummer Femi Koleoso, his most poignant memory of the London Jazz Festival is of his band’s dedication of their 2014 Festival set to 19-year-old alto saxophonist David Turay, one of the original members of the band who had passed away earlier in the year: ‘That magical experience of being able to dedicate a show to one of my best friends and to be able to play in my home city in a jazz festival was a special kind of thing. I got the opportunity to speak on behalf of the band, just saying what he meant to us.’

Memorialising their friend at the festival highlights both its significance within the jazz world, but also as part of the fabric of the city to its feet... [T]he ailing star’s appearance was doubtful until moments before he was wheeled onstage, and he was clearly summoning up fleeting reserves to play at all... Dankworth’s soft, clarinet-like sax sound told a unique story, from falling in love with American jazz in the 1940s, through a lifetime of making it his own, and finally playing a farewell to the music, and the audience he and Laine had helped build.

Dankworth died a little over two months later, on 5 February, 2010.
CHAPTER 4

The 2012 London Jazz Festival was, according to The Guardian, a ‘memorable’ festival that brought musical thrills to packed halls, foyers and free stages at the Southbank and Barbican. It also saw the first performance at the festival of the now globe-trotting Brooklyn-based fusion band, Snarky Puppy, alongside a clutch of major jazz stars – Herbie Hancock, Melody Gardot, Jan Garbarek, Brad Mehldau, Esperanza Spalding, Sonny Rollins and Jack DeJohnette, as well as a major focus on ‘Jazz in the New Europe’.

A memorable behind-the-scenes story from the same year concerns Paco de Lucia, for whom 2012 was a memorable year for Serious for other reasons, however. Back as far as 2004, the brochure for the London Jazz Festival contained an advert encouraging festival-goers to ‘Back the Bid’ for the London 2012 Olympics. As well as sport, the event also included a national ‘Cultural Olympiad’ across the United Kingdom, which ran from June to September 2012.

As part of this, Serious produced the BT River of Music, a two-day festival taking place across London in July on six continent-themed stages along the Thames, including the Tower of London and the Old Royal Naval College, Greenwich, and featured musicians from the 205 nations taking part in the Olympics, including Hugh Masekela and Angélique Kidjo, Wynton Marsalis, the Scissor Sisters, the Kronos Quartet, and Arun Ghosh.

As Bristol Music Trust CEO Louise Mitchell and academic Dimitrinka Stoyanova Russell put it: ‘Festivals are highly pressured environments: they often run on adrenaline. Those working in them have high emotional involvement and often have to go beyond the call of duty.’ Such an ambitious festival project unsurprisingly added additional pressure on the organisation – yet a few months later, what David Jones remembers being ‘a really prime festival’ jazzed the city again.

The London Olympics and the Cultural Olympiad notwithstanding, the economic crisis which began in 2008 led to a policy of austerity. Cuts to both Arts Council England and local authorities saw state funded arts organisations increasingly encouraged to look for private sponsorship to boost their existing subsidies. (In fact there has been success here: annual business investment in the arts grew from £57m in 1991 to over £150m in 2000 to over £660m by 2012.) According to writer and public policy consultant, Adrian Harvey, London boroughs saw the largest cuts in arts and culture spending in England: by nearly a fifth between 2010 and 2015, while in 2015, it was decided that funding for Jazz Services – the national agency for jazz – would be completely, the decision causing considerable debate within the British jazz community.

Austerity also affected the BBC, and Radio 3’s partnership with the London Jazz Festival ended amicably in 2012, the size of the festival as meaning that Radio 3 still feature it within their schedules. When the Radio 3 partnership ended, however, the London Jazz Festival needed to find another partner in order to maintain the high level of the programming, and so 2013 was the year in which the Swiss private bank EFG International signed up as title sponsor for the next three years, thus securing the festival’s medium-term future.

Another new chapter began for the festival’s 21st year with the title sponsorship of Swiss private bank EFG International, which had been sponsoring the EFG Excellence Series since 2008. Over the years, this has featured world class performances from some of jazz’s leading lights, including Sonny Rollins in 2012, Keith Jarrett in 2015, Dee Dee Bridgewater in 2017, and the annual Jazz Voice gala.

For Serious, partnerships with the corporate sector are a valued and vital way of allowing the festival to continue to programme at the highest level. Recognising the merits of balancing public funding with commercial activity from a very early stage, Serious has a long history of association with corporate partnerships, dating back to 1995 and Oris. In Claire Whitaker’s view, by actively embracing and welcoming a collaboration of funders, from EFG to the Arts Council, Serious can continue to grow the excellence, scope and breadth of our work.

Our vision is to increase the accessibility of jazz of the highest level, and, simply put, without such investment, we would struggle to achieve this. By partnering with a mix of funders we can achieve our aims and so much more.
COMMISSIONING NEW WORK

Although the 21 Commissions project in 2013 and the 25 one-page scores commissioned for Club Inégales in 2017 were major events in the festival’s history, commissioning new work has been part of its role since the early years, illustrating that, while festivals are necessarily reactive to current trends, they can also be proactive.

In 1994, for example, Serious Speakout successfully applied for funding from the Arts Council for a commission by John Harle, whose mix of medieval texts and contemporary music, Terror and Magnificence, appeared at the 1996 London Jazz Festival with a line-up which included Elis Costello, Sarah Leonard and Andy Sheppard. As one reviewer asked, ‘Is it jazz? Is it classical?… Theoretically, this was a fusion of jazz and the classical tradition, not Third-Stream, but Slip-Stream.’

Another early example of an artist commissioned by the festival was Graham Collier, who wrote and became The Third Colour for his Jazz Ensemble in 1997. In 1999 the festival co-commissioned a concert with Nottinghamshire County Council focused on Robert Wyatt, in which his songs were reworked by musicians such as trombonist Annie Whitehead and singer Julie Tippetts while Wyatt watched from the Festival Hall’s Royal Box. The audience would be able to go onto the stage and sample the food. In France, ‘c’est pas un problème, but in England, health and safety regulations would not allow it, meaning that the increasingly hungry audience could smell the delicious food but not eat it.’

Specially commissioned world premieres of new pieces used to be one of the means by which festivals could add a dash of sparkle to their programme, whilst also helping to develop the genre and providing composers with paid work.
“I love it here. I love playing the London Jazz Festival. It’s one of my favourite festivals in the world so to get a chance to come back is always great... I like the fact that every time I’m here it’s a different venue... You go from the Royal Albert Hall to Rich Mix. It’s cool, you know?”

CHRISTIAN SCOTT, TRUMPET PLAYER
2014: JAZZ EDUCATION

A long way away from some of the grumblings in the festival’s early years about its lack of big name headliners, The Guardian enthused that the 2014 EFG London Jazz Festival launched ‘with the kind of all-star firepower show that has become the norm.’ The Friday night alone saw performances by the UK’s ‘folk-steeped maestro’ John Surman, singers Kurt Elling and Dee Dee Bridgewater, the ‘coolly sophisticated’ sax-playing Branford Marsalis, and Jan Garbarek with the Hilliard Ensemble. The latter performed together for the final time before the retirement of the early music vocal quartet, their remarkable combined sound tingling spines in the extraordinary acoustic of the tiny Temple Church behind Fleet Street in two sell-out farewell shows as part of the EFG Excellence Series.

Reflecting both the background of its directors and London jazz’s special relationship with the country, the 2014 festival celebrated twenty years of democracy in South Africa in a partnership between the Department of Arts & Culture, South Africa and the British Council, featuring major concerts from established stars such as Abdullah Ibrahim and also introducing new talents such as Bokani Dyer. As Cumming explains, the programme looked back at the history of jazz in South Africa and how musicians had emigrated to Europe and found a home in London in the 1960s and 1970s, becoming an influential presence within both the British and European jazz scenes, hugely enlivening what were already dynamic periods of experimentation and innovation.

Around Ibrahim and Dyer, Serious also brought younger musicians from South Africa together with young British players capable of responding to that heritage. Cumming remembers that programme being ‘interesting because we were then able to construct a programme that explains that background but also explains what was going on in the new South Africa.’

The Abdullah Ibrahim concert also formed part of the EFG Excellence Series but another of the uses to which corporate money is put is the festival’s learning and participation programme, which by 2014 included Jazz for Toddlers, singing instrumental and workshop programmes for young musicians.

Two particular highlights were Serious Sing’s pop-up community choir premiere of a piece by John Surman as part of the Surman at Seventy residency, and the performance of Bird on a Wing by 207 seven- and eight-year-olds from Islington, a project devised with pianist Alexander Hawkins and Australian recorder virtuoso Genevieve Lacey. (Her performance with Surman of his new commission at Kings Place was a revelation for most of the audience, for whom jazz recorder was a new experience.)

The festival’s artists and audiences have benefited from its Camden and Bricknell origins in many ways, not least because of the legacy of their education and community programmes, and the wider links between jazz and the world of community music.

The first London Jazz Festival in 1993, for example, contained a number of workshops and initiatives, including music played and made in special schools, community centres, prisons, hospitals, and care homes. Public-facing workshops included TechnoJazz and three free jazz workshops at the Weekend Arts College, including an improvisation session with Nitin Sawhney and Pritim Singh, an all-day workshop with Carol Grimes and Brenda Rattray, and a percussion and horn workshop with Byron Wallen and Richard Ajayle. The presence in the festival of such community, learning and development activity would be further enhanced with the arrival of Claire Whitaker at Serious in 1996; for Whitaker, community is core work.

Educational routes into jazz are many and varied, from the formal education of colleges and conservatories, to more informal routes like private lessons and development schemes like Tomorrow’s Warriors. Post-study, however, musicians can find themselves in a landscape with very little traditional music industry support and it is in response to this that Serious developed the Take Five initiative.

Take Five is a professional development programme for UK-based creative jazz musicians under the age of 35, set up in 2004/5.

In 2009 a version – Artine – was launched for musicians living and working in Scotland supported by the Scottish Arts Council, now Creative Scotland, and from 2011, Take Five Europe expanded across Europe, illustrating the appetite for professional development beyond Britain alone.

Since its inception, Take Five has contributed to the development of over 150 musicians, many of whom have gone on to have high-profile success. Alumni include Grammy award-winning conductor, arranger and composer Jules Buckley, Mercury nominees Eska Mujingwa, Sebastian Rochford, Shabaka Hutchings, and Gwilym Silcock, and also the CEO of Edition Records, Dave Stapleton (the label also has a number of Take Five alumni in its stable).

As Martel Dilerenshaw, associate director of talent development (now under the nicely-titled banner of Seriously Talented) explained to us, the programmes provide time out and access to the industry so that the musicians can be better informed and can focus on their career; they include music-making but also concentrate on artists’ overall professional development. Participation in a Seriously Talented programme can also mean that the artists get the opportunity to play across Serious’ many platforms, including the London Jazz Festival. The Take Five Takes Over showcases, for example, included performances on the Queen Elizabeth Hall FreeStage from 2010, and in 2015, Take Five musicians took over the Royal Festival Hall’s Clore Ballroom free stage to celebrate ten years of Serious’ talent development schemes.

In doing so, this takes the behind-the-scenes development work on to the stage and up front as a Serious and a London Jazz Festival activity. (While Take Five focuses on jazz, another Serious scheme, Move On Up, is for creative artists working in African and Caribbean music who live in England, including alumni Adriano Adevale, Zara McFarlane, Ayanna Witter-Johnson, and Mim Suleiman.)

Illustrating how the festival can provide work for those musicians already within its milieu, Arun Ghosh ran the Jazz for Toddlers gig in the 2015 Festival, leading babies and toddlers and their parents and carers in an hour of music, stories and movement. To the accompaniment of taiko drums, Ghosh’s clarinet took the children from a highly-excited romp around the room into a sleepy lullaby, before recalibrating them ready to go back out into the city.

One of the most ambitious and complex educational events in 2016 was guitarist Chris Sharkey’s Make it/Break it, a mass participation commission for over one hundred musicians and vocalists of all abilities and all kinds of instruments to make music and play together in a piece that was workshopped in the morning and performed in the evening.

As well as these more structured artist and audience development schemes and educational activities, Serious also distribute complimentary tickets to young musicians from, for example, the Tomorrow’s Warriors project, and young musicians also get the chance to attend masterclasses.

One such was part of a celebration of 75 years of the Blue Note label in 2014, which featured stellar names from the label’s roster including pianists Jason Moran and Robert Glasper. Furthermore, besides developing young musicians, Serious run their own internship and training and mentoring scheme, Young & Serious, and The Write Stuff scheme for developing young jazz and music critics and photographers, in association with the magazine Jazzwise.
presented and celebrates London's direct spheres of knowledge and so well as genres outside their own access to younger and more diverse networks, as well as enabling other promoters' knowledge importantly, is able to capitalise dance clubs of 1930s London. dancefloor, stretching back to the concert hall to the club to the heritage as a music which connects fresh and continues jazz's long years has been a shrewd move as it partners with club promoters and venues over the years has been a shrewd move as it has kept the festival's programming fresh and continues jazz's long heritage as a music which connects the concert hall to the club to the dancefloor, stretching back to the dance clubs of 1930s London. It means that the festival shares out the economic risk but, just as importantly, is able to capitalise on other promoters' knowledge and networks, as well as enabling access to younger and more diverse audiences. In this way, the festival can include leading edge music as well as genres outside their own direct spheres of knowledge and so presents and celebrates London's jazz (and music) scene more broadly. At the same time, though, the changing face of London's boroughs has an impact on the jazz scene. For instance, as regeneration and gentrification have spread, so too property prices in London have been increasing well above inflation for many years, accompanied by an increase in luxury accommodation and a decrease in the availability of affordable housing. For Steve Rubie of Chelsea's 60's Club, the high cost of living in Chelsea has had a direct impact on the club: 'Chelsea was a great place to be in 1988; for the jazz thing it's not so great any more; it's a struggle.' His customers used to live nearby but fewer can afford to anymore and so have to travel, which, with drinks and food costs also, becomes an expensive proposition on, say, a weekday night. Rubie sees the London Jazz Festival acting as a powerful 'shop window' for the 60's Club, which has brought new customers to the venue over the years. 

### UNDER THE JAZZ UMBRELLA

The London Jazz Festival is often described as an umbrella festival in that it gathers together a huge number of events into one (physical) programme. It could also be called an 'amplifier' in that it amplifies London's existing jazz scene, or even what writer Jonathan Wynn in his typology of festivals might call a 'core' festival, as it uses a variety of locations in and around London whilst also having major spectacles - both free and ticketed – at its core(s) at the Southbank and Barbican. Way back in 2003, The Independent suggested that perhaps the festival should model itself on the Netherlands' North Sea Jazz Festival, which was then sited in a large congress centre in The Hague, containing a number of different sized venues, noting that 'it would be bad for clubs, but more people would get to hear more jazz. That has to be what it's all about.'

Amy Pearce explains, however, that, while Serious have in fact discussed moving the festival (back) to the summer and have talked about having it in one location such as the Southbank Centre, they have always returned to its now well-established formula: That's a conscious choice because we live in London and it is a big, sprawling city and we want the festival to reflect the city…. The commitment to the scene is a big part of why we stay as we are because although you could do a Ronnie Scott's stage and you could do a Vortex stage, it's not the same as being at the Vortex or being at Ronnie Scott's and that's how it is. The festival, therefore, uses a wholly different model to the North Sea Jazz Festival as it encompasses venues across the capital. Indeed, by 2015, the London Jazz Festival had spread even further into Greater London, with a set of music events called The Streets extending the sounds of festival east to Redbridge in Essex and west to Kingston-upon-Thames, funded from the Mayor of London's High Street Fund for accessible culture, and taking music into cafes, libraries, civic halls, and the high street itself. David Jones uses the metaphor of an onion to explain how the London Jazz Festival works: there is an inner ring of activity created by Serious, followed by a further ring of activity they are responsible for stimulating – a South African artist flown to London, for example, who then also gets club gigs elsewhere – and then there’s an outer layer of what he terms ‘confident creators’, who could be clubs, promoters, or musicians themselves, for instance. Not everyone is entirely convinced about this approach, however – or of the umbrella festival model in general – as it can mean that musicians and venues feel under pressure to pull out all the stops for the festival to put on a more special – and expensive – programme. The 'confident creators' may be musicians rather than promoters who, as Debbie Dickinson sees it, may end up hiring venues themselves in order to be included under the festival’s umbrella, with no support from record labels, and may end up out of pocket. According to Claire Whitaker, London today has the equivalent of a music festival happening every week. As the British festival market boomed in the first decade of the new millennium, competition from other festivals and other leisure activities has meant that events like the London Jazz Festival have expanded and diversified into talks, films, and other ‘fringe’ activities in what is a very crowded marketplace. There is therefore some pressure for the festival’s overall programme to be more than the sum of its parts, and more special than what London can provide in its year-round activity. Looked at in one way, umbrella festivals essentially operate a free market model in which events compete against each other to try and attract an audience, pitting headline events at the centre against those on the fringes.
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“...To have a jazz festival is special to me anyway, and to have a jazz festival in London – one of the major cities in the world – is even more special because I live here, I grew up here, and I love this place. I look at the jazz festival like a magnifying glass. The organisers bring in all the big guns, all the people they really want – whether it’s Herbie Hancock or Chick Corea, John McLaughlin – and the spotlight’s put on them and the magnifying glass is put on them. But it’s all the other stuff that gets encapsulated into the jazz festival that really bolsters the event and makes it look amazing.”

JULIAN JOSEPH, PIANIST

PROGRAMMING CREATIVITY

Where does one begin to programme a festival which includes dozens of venues and thousands of artists? Former associate director of production Amy Pearce tells us that Serious start with two grids: one that focuses on the concert hall programme, one that focuses on the club programme. The bigger names tend to be booked first, because their timelines in terms of planning tend to work further ahead, sometimes as much as 18 months.

There is a series of international jazz festivals taking place each autumn, of which the London Jazz Festival forms a key part. November is a series of international jazz festivals taking place each autumn, of which the London Jazz Festival forms a key part. November

While the festival is at the heart of everything they do on the jazz side, Serious also have many other activities which spin out from it, including the Barbican Jazz Series as well as music consultancy and programming work with other British festivals, and a year-round national touring programme. And so there are conversations right through the year between the Serious team, and with artists and agencies, and with other venues and promoters via networks like EJN and the LPO.

For Pearce, ‘the idea’s always that the programme is like a statement. What is jazz in London in November 2016? And therefore you’re trying to look at celebrating the big names, spotting the emerging talent, presenting the new collaborations and you’re looking for where the gaps are.’ And as new artists inevitably reach a tipping point of success, festivals then need to include them in the programme, rather than the other way round.

The music industries rely on tastemakers such as festivals and record labels finding the next big thing. New artists cause buzz within the industries, and it can be surprising, even in the digital age, how long these artists take to come into the public eye.

Pearce again:

You suddenly find that there’s an artist who’s been booked for Love Supreme [jazz festival], who’s been booked for London Jazz Festival, who Gilles Peterson or Jamie Cullum are talking about and there’s a real sense of the industry buzzing about it. How long it takes for that buzz to translate to an audience is probably two, three years.

One example of this slow-burning buzz effect was Robert Glasper, who was tipped off to Serious by Gilles Peterson in 2005 but still took four or five years to sell out the Royal Festival Hall and the Roundhouse.

Sometimes the new stars are still students, shining through in Serious learning and participation work, which opens up the organisation to the music colleges and allows Serious to see who is creating the exciting new music. Highlighting the broader changes afoot in terms of tastemaking and gatekeepers, it used to be that the press drove all sorts of activity: journalists and the press would drive everything in the 1990s and early 2000s, but by the 2010s, the critics’ dominance had waned in the face of falling sales and the increased significance of social media and citizen journalism.

At the same time, there has been an explosion in music available online in the 21st century, and trusted tastemakers such as DJs and festival producers have therefore become increasingly important for helping to steer listeners towards new music.

Broadcasting is still crucial, however, and by 2015, the London Jazz Festival had partnered with BBC Music, BBC Radio Scotland, and BBC Radios 1, 2, 3 and 6. Music, which meant that, alongside a dedicated temporary ‘pop up radio station’ – a collaboration with the commercial station, Jazz FM – the event could be ‘cross-trailed’ across radio and website platforms, leading on double bills in order to introduce one festival-goer to remark that ‘it just did feel like it was everywhere this year!'

CREATIVE CURATION

As well as commissioning, another tool in the festival producer’s toolkit is creative curation of an evening’s programme, by pairing musicians on double bills in order to introduce both artists to new audiences, as well as to hopefully set off some kind of musical or critical dialogue.

Often but not always this is done by putting together a more well-known act with an up-and-coming act as support.

In 2015, the senior African-American trumpeter Terence Blanchard’s powerful electric band was paired with the young (boy-ish, even) local one-man-band YouTube star Jacob Collier, the idea being that both acts were exploring technology from a new perspective. The gig introduced Blanchard’s music to Collier’s younger audience and vice versa, the aim being to challenge and stimulate both.

The Robert Glasper Experiment performing at the EFG London Jazz Festival at KOKO in 2016.
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WAYNE SHORTER, SAXOPHONIST

The projector above the stage in the first half of the show was filled with multiple and ever-changing layers of computer-enhanced psychedelic images of Collier’s face, linked to the instrument(s) he was playing at the time. The second half, however, showed a single still image, the cover artwork for Blanchard’s new album, Breathless, a reference to the last words of Eric Garner (‘I can’t breathe!’).

The album cover features the image of a white peace dove on a black power fist, a visual reference to the continuing civil rights movement in the US, and Blanchard’s stark angry sound was intended to present and reflect on the Black Lives Matter movement. While the technological approaches to the music may have linked the two acts, arguably the shift during the interval from Collier’s fresh-faced pop vocals to Blanchard’s brooding presence across the stage was one awkward step too far.

Such adventures in ‘cultural dating’ – bringing together disparate artists and audiences and even genres – had also been in evidence the previous year, when Scottish folk electronica band Lau were programmed on the same bill together with three European artists from jazz and DJ backgrounds. Henrik Schwarz, Bugge Wesseltoft and Dan Berglund, the bassist with EST. As John Cumming explains, the process behind the idea was collaborative, not ‘top down’.

Serious had had a long relationship with most of these musicians and from a list of artists devised by Lau with whom they were interested in working. Serious threw back the names of Wesseltoft and Schwarz to Lau, and then threw Lau to Schwarz. As Cumming continues, where festival collaborations come from is ‘more to do with creating a dialogue with musicians’ than a ‘diktat from Serious’. The result in this instance was ‘a collaboration between two areas of music which don’t necessarily seem to work but actually did’. The bands joined each other for an encore, ‘sort of in Dr’, as Lau shouted out to the jazz musicians as they stood listening and smiling in the wings. Cumming again: ‘Is it jazz? I don’t care. Is it improvisation? Yes it is.’

Another example of creative curation in 2015 paired GoGo Penguin in the first half of the concert with the hotly-tipped Kamasi Washington in the second half. The pairing probably worked out better for the latter than the former in terms of media attention, although for GoGo Penguin gave them the opportunity to do something very creative and brokered a new partnership between the band and the choreographer Lynne Page, who had been commissioned to devise a new dance piece to the accompaniment of the Manchester band’s music.

The gig was memorable for another reason, however. The terrorist attacks in Paris the previous night (Friday 13th November) meant that Washington’s Sunday night show in Paris was cancelled and so the band had a spare night in London. Could the London Jazz Festival producers set up a brand new show with 24 hours’ notice before the end of Washington’s set? A frantic couple of hours ensued, not helped by the fact that the Barbican’s backstage and production area is an underground concrete bunker, meaning multiple trips up and down in the lift by the festival’s production team and Washington’s crew to get mobile phone signal.

Eventually, the Scala in Kings Cross confirmed, so long as the festival could guarantee a minimum bar spend. No problem, thought the production team. After a storming first half, set, the London crowd were hungry for more, and Washington’s announcement from the Barbican stage about the new gig meant that it sold out easily. There was only one fly in the ointment: the guaranteed bar spend. At the Scala, Washington played an entirely different set, straight through with no interval, meaning that nobody left the room to go to the bar.

SERIOUS MOVEMENT

From ‘swinging’ in the 1960s to ‘cool’ in the 1990s, by 2016, Forbes had rebranded London as the ‘most influential city in the world’, underlining its status as a global financial capital. In the same year, official government population projections predicted that by 2042, London’s population will have grown to nearly ten million, with particular growth in the East End, that international immigration into London will increase by 10%, and that the fastest-growing section of the population will be the over 65s. However, these forecasts were made before Britain narrowly voted to leave the European Union in June 2016 in a ‘Brexit’ which appeared to surprise even those who campaigned for it. The referendum result exposed deep geographical and demographic divides, a resurfacing of racial tension, political and economic uncertainty at home and further uncertainty about Britain’s place in the world.

What could all this mean for an outward-looking, international cultural form like jazz, and its celebratory festival in the nation’s capital and global city? By 2016, performers representing around 30 countries took part in the festival, including at least Angola, Azerbaijan, Brazil, Canada, Cuba, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Guinea-Bissau, Iran, Italy, Korea, Mauritius, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Russia, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, the United States (compare this to 2002’s programme which featured performers from only 14 countries). For the London Jazz Festival, then, as Martel Ollerenshaw explains: ‘We move people from around the world, so if there’s any impediment or curtailing of the free movement of people, that will have an impact.

Other issues include possible extra workload and costs for visas, possible restrictions on Serious’ ability to access European funding, and potential impacts from a destabilised economy with existing and future sponsors.

Overall, of course, the people of the city of London voted strongly to remain in the EU, with only five outlying boroughs voting to leave. (Indeed, at the traditionally patriotic Last Night of the Proms at the Royal Albert Hall in both 2016 and 2017, it was notable that the flags being waved by the BBC Proms classical music festival-goers were not only Union Jacks, but included a number of EU flags also.)

The anti-apartheid exile South African pianist Chris McGregor once said that the big band Brotherhood of Breath benefitted from being in London, ‘a London that has become the crossroads of the Caribbean, India and Jamaica’, and a city to which, if McGregor were speaking today, could have been added Europe, Africa and South America as well. Surely the music of jazz can only and always speak not internationally.
“The London scene is so vibrant. You can’t do without it... For a fresh take on jazz, London is way ahead of New York.”

ANDRÉ MÉNARD, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, MONTREAL JAZZ FESTIVAL

THE LONDON JAZZ SCENE

Some [other] things never seem to change. Writing in 1973, Ian Carr had described Britain as a ‘one-city country’ so far as the arts were concerned, whereby musicians ‘deeply committed to jazz’ usually tried to get to London, while speaking in 2016, pianist Sarah Tandy told us that ‘if you are serious about it, there is no other place to be other than London.

The 606 Club’s Steve Rubie [who of course as a London jazz club owner since the 1970s has both a wide and informed perspective and perhaps also something of a vested interest] concurs, claiming that outside of New York, London has the greatest strength and depth of any city in the world in terms of world-class musicians.

For him, there can never be a surfeit of outstanding musicians in one city: ‘It is a question of the London jazz musicians today have a remarkable level of entrepreneurialism and facilitation – they are always doing things, organising things; getting it together, using social media to advance their careers and their bands.’

While hustling for gigs, creating their own opportunities, and self- and collective organisation are longstanding hallmarks of the jazz career – seen today in Britain in groups like the Loop Collective, Way Out West and the F-IREE Collective – according to Jez Nelson there might be less today of musicians sitting around asking, ‘Why don’t I get any gigs?’ Instead, these guys – and girls very much – make stuff happen.

They’re industry savvy, they’re kind of ‘start up’; they’ve got a punk ethos, for want of a better phrase. They make stuff happen. They’re not just musicians, they’re promoters, and they help each other out.

Tandy again: ‘I guess technically on paper you’re all fighting for the same gig, but then having said that, what you get out of having so many great musicians here is greater than the obstacles it presents to you.’

Charles Alexander has noticed that, as well as the excellent quality of the musicianship, London’s jazz musicians today have a remarkable level of entrepreneurialism and facilitation – they are always ‘doing things, organising things, getting it together, using social media to advance their careers and their bands.’

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THE LONDON JAZZ FESTIVAL IN 2016 AND 2017

By 2016 the London Jazz Festival was London’s biggest pan-city music festival and Britain’s largest jazz festival, featuring more than 2,000 artists and over 350 gigs in over 50 venues to an aggregate audience of over 100,000 people. Special events included the second performances of new work from Wayne Shorter and Jason Moran, as part of a continuing association with the Jazztopad Festival in Wroclaw, Poland, and a 75th birthday celebration for revered vocalist Norma Winstone (including a commissioned piece from Vince Mendoza).

Return visits by keyboardists as diverse as Robert Glasper, Brad Mehldau, Geri Allen (in what, sadly proved to be her final London concert), Carla Bley (with a reformed version of Charlie Haden’s Liberation Music Orchestra and Todd Gustavsen, were another feature, alongside a residency from Bugge Wesseltoft celebrating 20 years of his New Conception of Jazz message.

The new generations included a double bill of Dhafir Youssef and Ambrose Akinmusire selling out the Barbican, a BBC Concert Orchestra programme featuring new commissions from Laura Jurd and Daniel Herskedal; and Miguel Atwood-Ferguson’s instrumental re-working of the music of J Dilla.

An especially strong club programme included the UK debut of the New York band featuring Donny McCaslin that played a key role in David Bowie’s final recording, Blackstar, trumpeter Christian Scott and the Bad Plus, whilst UK artists of all generations invigorated the festival throughout the city, and in sometimes unusual places – from Evan Parker at the Royal Academy of Arts, to Chris Sharkey’s mass participation piece Make It/Break It.

Surprisingly perhaps, it has not been part of the Serious strategy consciousely to grow the festival. Rather, because they always want to reflect what is happening in London – a city the population of which is increasing in size and cultural diversity – this has inevitably led to the festival growing too.

As Amy Pearce told us, ‘I think now the desire is probably to stop it getting too big because it becomes too much, it just becomes impenetrable... I spend my life saying “no” to artists and venues’, she continued. Another telling comment from the Serious team is from Ope Igbinyemi, who expressed his amazement at how the jazz festival just seemed to grow and grow and grow: ‘and now I don’t know whether we’re in control of it or it’s in control of us!’

In its 25th year, 2017, the festival continued to explore an active commissioning programme, with new music from Terence Blanchard (with the BBC Concert Orchestra), Jazz Ahmed and Dave Mancini/Phronesis/Engines Orchestra (a joint commission with some of the other leading UK jazz festivals, Cheltenham and Manchester Jazz Festivals), the commissioning of a series of 25 one-page scores specially created for a festival collaboration with Club Inégales, and Blacktop’s response to New York artist Jean-Michel Basquiat’s jazz imagery, alongside the Barbican’s major retrospective of Basquiat’s work.

Keith Tippett and Matthew Bourne created a new piano duo; Robert Glasper brought a new project in celebration of the 25th year, reflecting his long association with – and enthusiasm for – the festival. The legacy of jazz was drawn on to inspire new ideas – events evoking the spirits of Thelonious Monk, John and Alice Coltrane and Miles Davis sat alongside a study day led by Professor Catherine Tackley around the impact of jazz in Britain in the 1920s and 1930s. Artists from the festival toured into the regions – guitarist Pat Metheny and the great French bassist Henri Texier – and a Serious collaboration with Hull Jazz Festival, as part of Hull’s year as UK City of Culture in 2017, included Chris Montague’s participation project History of the Coolest Instrument in the World (the electric guitar, in case you were wondering), and a new piece from an emerging Hull musician, Revenu.

New venues for the 2017 festival included London’s newest theatre, the Bridge – only opened a few weeks before the festival – and the Electric Ballroom. Artists from Scandinavia filled a day of performances at the Royal Festival Hall, as part on the year’s programme Nordic Matters, whilst artists from Turkey, Estonia, France and Switzerland also had a significant presence.

Christian Scott at a masterclass in 2010.
CONCLUSION

The London Jazz Festival launched in 1993 with the twin aims of celebrating London as a jazz city and bringing high-level international jazz into the capital. The introduction to the 2002 brochure, left, marking its 10th year, returned to that original mission statement, in a justifiably proud moment of self-celebration.

For, yes, sometimes you are allowed to blow your own trumpet. Through presenting a pan-cultural programme that has looked to the past, present and future of jazz, a programme that through the combination of artists and venues is distinctly and uniquely of London, there is no doubt that the London Jazz Festival has impacted on the city, economically, culturally and socially, and the city has, of course, impacted on the festival.

Of course, an outdoor camping festival such as Glastonbury is more immersive for its participants than the London Jazz Festival because you are in the festival, a constituent part of its temporary infrastructure and community. It surrounds you in a very literal sense in the form of a large security fence. Once you are on site, you are inside and there is a very clear sense of who is in and who is out. This differs from an urban, multi-venue event like the London Jazz Festival, where the sense of a jazz community only becomes obvious at the events themselves. Instead, part of the experience of being at the London Jazz Festival is being in London.

From the spectacular view of the Houses of Parliament, Big Ben and the London Eye at night from the fifth floor of the Southbank Centre, to the sudden (sub)cultural shift of walking from the shiny, glassy high skyscrapers of Liverpool Street to the graffiti-ed exposed brick of hipster Shoreditch, London as a festival setting is a different kind of immersive experience. The city itself becomes the festival site, or rather, the city hosts the festival, which switches on and off depending on time and location.

From the beginning, experimental work, commissions, workshops and educational events all played a part in setting the agenda for a festival that would develop over the next ten years to have an impact across the whole city. It was to be a jazz festival that didn’t just have jazz in it but looked at jazz’s antecedents and connections with Caribbean, Latin, African, Indian and European music. Jazz was to be a touchstone, with musical ideas moving between, or colliding with, other genres. What has set the festival apart has been its constant attempts to mix the familiar with new, tradition with experiment, one culture with another.

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The London Jazz Festival 2015

CONCLUSION

Front cover of 2016
London Jazz Festival
brochure incorporating
elements of London life

Travelling from the Barbican to the Southbank on the bus takes you past St Paul’s Cathedral, the Old Bailey and Somerset House, crossing the Thames to Waterloo, as the Eye and Parliament appear. While the London Jazz Festival does not have the city-wide impact of, say, the London Olympics in 2012, the city does impact on the festival; both positively and negatively. It does so positively from all the benefits of being in a global city – the sights, the food, the shopping, the urban buzz – and not so positively because London is vast and getting around takes a long (sometimes bringing) time.

One festival-goer told us that when thinking about festivals, or talking about them with friends: Greenfield events like Glastonbury Festival do tend to come to mind. But, I’m, like, no, actually, I think [the London Jazz Festival’s] kind of better than that, in a way, in the sense that you can go to so many different things, go to different venues, different zones. I mean, last year we saw Snarky Puppy at the Roundhouse [with 3,300 people], which is massive. And then we went to see a tiny quintet in Camden in a tiny little jazz club. So you get such a vast majority of things. And you don’t have to camp. And that’s always a plus.

Whether it’s to travelling to Chelsea, then, to see The Impossible Gentlemen or Peter King’s Saxophone Summit at the 606 Club in the west or encouraging the next generation of jazz fans at Jazz for Toddlers in Barnet’s artsdepot, as New Minnows, but every so often you see a look in someone’s eye and you realise that to them, you’re the monster that blocks out the sun, you know, that their feeling is, ‘Well, however much I might enjoy the monster that blocks out the sun, you know, that their feeling is, whatever...it goes into the hands of the few, what journalist Dan Spicer described as a bit of a jazz mafia thing going on’, in which ‘if you’re not part of that circle then you don’t get the gigs. You just have to look at the London Jazz Festival to see what I’m talking about. Certain people get to play it over and over again.’

Jazz Festival has enabled the club to take more economic risks, in their case to charge £20 tickets, double what they usually charge, in order to bring in bigger names: ‘It opened up the possibility of us being able to do that, without being such a risk, as we thought it might have been.’ For musicians, particularly those within the Serious camp, as well as getting paid for gigs, the educational activities and new commissions also offer other lines of potential work.

Festivals are inherently expensive propositions, however, and there is the argument that events like the London Jazz Festival suck in much of the available state funding and corporate sponsorship which could be used to fund more regular grassroots projects. The argument ought to be that this is a symptom of the lack of jazz funding overall, but such a point can be lost in the attitudinal swirl of creativity, entrepreneurial hustling and marginalisation that can be life of a British jazz musician or worker, something Serious and the London Jazz Festival themselves recognise.

David Jones explains: We tend to regard ourselves still as minnows, but every so often you see a look in someone’s eye and you realise that to them, you’re the monster that blocks out the sun, you know, that their feeling is, ‘Well, however much I might enjoy having a drink with David or John or somebody else, ultimately if Serious wasn’t there, I could get a share of what they’ve got.’
In our research and discussions around the scene, more than one citizen of the jazz republic has called Serious director John Cumming ‘King John’, with usually at most a half-smile, in recognition of his perceived power in making careers. Malia or monarchy? – again, you decide. (By the way, Spicer has had a terrifically creative response, of which any jazz festival organiser would only approve: he established the Alternative Jazz Festival, in Brighton, taking inspiration from long running avant-garde jazz festivals such as New York’s Vision Festival and Germany’s Moers Festival.)

For Charles Alexander, there can be too much repetition in the London Jazz Festival programme, with the Jazz Voice concert on the same night each year, and Sonny Rollins seemingly ‘always there’ (The Serious response to Rollins’ appearances three years running? ‘But it’s Sonny Rollins!’)

Yet Alexander then qualifies this: ‘But then I look at the rest of the events and I think, “Wow, this is really interesting!”

For Rube, however, the major achievement of the London Jazz Festival has been to stop jazz being a dirty word, because the festival gets into the general media and breaks down people’s preconceptions about being intimidated by jazz. ‘It gives the sense that this is a London-wide thing,’ he says, ‘and loads of people are going to it and it’s the sort of thing you should check out.’

However, some argue that the marketing of an umbrella or ‘core’ festival is inherently imbalanced. As Debbie Dickinson suggests, the idea is that everybody’s profile benefits, but the media and audience attention will tend to be focused on the headline acts: ‘So if you’re a lovely artist playing in the Bull’s Head or whatever are you really benefitting from that marketing?’ As she acknowledges, however, the London Jazz Festival publicity operation is a ‘phenomenal machine’, particularly for an organisation that doesn’t own its own venue or ticketing agency, and, as John Etheridge puts it, ‘It does help [your] profile, because you get in the brochure and that brochure gets everywhere.’

For emerging artists, performing in the London Jazz Festival offers a concrete means of signalling their status and experience to other venues and festival bookers. In saxophonist Camilla George’s view, it adds to the creative and reputational portfolio of the artist, who is able to say: ‘I’ve done the London Jazz Festival with my own project’, yes, I think it is a big thing.

Performing in the festival also puts musicians on Serious’ radar, which can have positive impacts both for musicians as well as for Serious which, as a live music promoter, is regularly scouting for new talent to work with, develop and produce. It can also be a means for young musicians in particular to become part of the worldwide ‘jazz family’, as Andy Sheppard put it to us, in order to survive and grow. The London Jazz Festival is, then, as a hub for national and international festival promoters, agents, and other industry people, can provide a platform, both on and off stage, for musicians to network and to display their musical wares.

Furthermore, festivals act as catalysts for musicians to travel between cities and countries. If a band is not yet well known enough to sell many tickets abroad, a festival can give the opportunity both to get abroad in the first place and to be introduced to a new audience via the festival’s promotional channels. Through ‘cultural dating’ and new commissions, the London Jazz Festival has also acted as a catalyst for new compositions, new collaborations, and new pairings, helping to broaden and develop the jazz genre.

As John Etheridge says of his 1994 gig with Andy Summers and Nilit Sawhney: ‘Twenty years ago when it started, that was probably quite radical... People might go, ‘Ooh, that’s not jazz’, but of course, now the definition has become so broad. Well, there is no definition – it’s just what anybody wants to call jazz, you know. So [Serious are] able to put on all sorts of areas of music that they represent, which can loosely be called jazz, whatever that is. So it’s the London Music Festival and it’s jazz orientated.

For artists and audiences alike, the opportunity to see and hear some of the world’s most accomplished musicians is a learning activity in itself and one which can lead to further exploration. Tommy Remon, guitarist with Tomorrow’s Warriors, says that ‘it gets more exciting living in London during the London Jazz Festival. All of a sudden you get all of these cats from the States coming in, all these amazing gigs going on.’ For drummer Femi Koleoso: ‘You see some of the best music you hear all year in that period of time. Like, the jam session at Ronnie’s can be really special during the jazz festival. There’s something quite special about seeing Christian Scott play a jazz standard that you’re working on; it’s really quite inspiring to get them in that context. The audience enjoys the opportunity to see and hear the classics, but also the new music that the festival can offer, as one festival-goer told us: ‘In the early years of the festival, you could hear these greats who you’d heard on record but you’d never seen live. People you’ve grown up with, and that you’ve listened to, who have influenced (you). And also to listen to new stuff. Then you’d see new developments, see where new musicians are taking their work, and you just learn all the time.’

As this account has shown, however, the London Jazz Festival is more than just about jazz, or even simply about music. Because of their cyclical nature, jazz festivals can become a pivot around which the rest of the year is planned. One attendee said that the festival was ‘like an extended family’ of musicians and fans, and so jazz festivals are sites for renewing old acquaintances and making new ones.

For Snarky Puppy’s bassist and founder Michael League: ‘Every time we come into town we end up looking at the calendar and seeing a bunch of our friends from all over the world playing at different venues. That’s the beautiful thing about festivals: it becomes like a hang for musicians that don’t get to see each other all the time. Yeah, [London Jazz Festival’s] programming’s amazing, the venues are amazing. Serious is wonderful, you know; they’re kind of like our UK family, so it’s great, man, we love it.

And as bassist Marcus Miller put it: ‘I love coming to play the Jazz Festival! because they invite really cool people. So when you’re hanging out in the lobby before the show, you run into Robert Glasper, Lionel Loueke, I saw all sorts of guys. And we were joking and we were saying, ‘Man, I never see you in America! I see you in England, at the Jazz Festival!’

Festivals can also be opportunities for being with like-minded listeners but not always, as with the Cassandra Wilson Royal Festival Hall gig in 2015 for which the singer’s late arrival on stage exposed divisions in the audience between those sympathetic to the singer and those less so.

For Miller, the London audience is a ‘very cool audience, very knowledgeable about music, and very passionate. And the knowledge and the passion together is very powerful. It makes for a great audience, you know what I mean? You feel like they’re part of the music. ‘Indeed, as the research of Shana Walton and Helen Regis shows, jazz festivals have even been sites for transformative – even spiritual – experiences for their participants.

The words of one final London Jazz Festival-goer capture the significance of the upbeat festival spirit: ‘It’s good that people can get together and it’s positive and there ain’t much at the moment that’s positive! I can remember being here, not long after 9/11. And just feeling somehow that we have to have these positive things, we really need them, I think they’re crucial.\n
"CONCLUSION"
For Eltonshile, at this moment especially, London needed jazz as an inherently ‘outernational’ cultural expression and world-view. I love jazz because it’s inclusive and democratic, and a profoundly expressive art form that reaches across audiences, and across the barriers of class, race and language. And now as never before, we must be committed to ensuring we find ways to communicate and understand each other... Music goes beyond words, and jazz, which is the least prescriptive and the most flexible of forms, takes music to new horizons, to a space for dialogue between the musicians who ultimately create the new sounds of European jazz. In doing so, they have both reflected and on-going curation of the festival, Seri eros have provided a platform for British jazz and have played a significant creative and practical role in the development of jazz in Europe and beyond, providing funding and space for dialogue between the musicians who ultimately create the new sounds of European jazz. In this way, we come from. Jazz is for everyone... I think Serious for their role as ambassadors for UK jazz, reflecting the diversity of our scene here in their programming, and communicating this to international producers, many of whom visit the festival. Thanks to Serious and other organisations, the United Kingdom is a strong international voice in jazz. It’s a voice with which we talk to the world and invite the world into conversation. It’s a voice with which we talk to the world and invite the world into conversation. It’s a voice with which we talk to the world and invite the world into conversation. It’s a voice with which we talk to the world and invite the world into conversation. It’s a voice with which we talk to the world and invite the world into conversation. It’s a voice with which we talk to the world and invite the world into conversation. It’s a voice with which we talk to the world and invite the world into conversation.
In Music From Out There, In Here: 25 Years Of The London Jazz Festival, Emma Webster and George McKay have pieced together a fascinating jigsaw puzzle of archival material, interviews, and stories from musicians, festival staff and fans alike. Including many evocative images, the book weaves together the story of the festival with the history of its home city, London, touching on broader social topics such as gender, race, politics, and the search for the meaning of jazz. They also trace the forgotten history of London as a vibrant city of jazz festivals going back as far as the 1940s. As festival founding director John Cumming says:

The meticulous work that follows in this history charts the festival journey across decades, and probes the bigger picture that surrounds it. It’s not just about the music, extraordinary and inspiring as that can be. It’s about the way that what might be seen as a niche area of creative work can reflect and respond to external change – and, we hope, make a difference. Not just within a city, but as part of worldwide reach that transcends barriers of race and ethnicity, and, at its best, celebrates a global mix of gender, class and generation... The outcome is I think an immensely valuable piece of work that informs our practice as a producer of live music, and at the same time marks the essential role of academic research in evaluating the impact of the cultural sector in a wider context.

Music From Out There, In Here will be of interest to jazz and music fans, to historians and lovers of London, to festival-goers and festival workers, cultural funders and sponsors, to musicians, and to anyone curious as to how a city like London or a music like jazz continually reinvents itself while building a cultural tradition.

Emma Webster completed her PhD entitled Promoting Live Music: A Behind-the-Scenes Ethnography in 2011. She has since held AHRC-funded post-doctoral positions at the Universities of East Anglia and Edinburgh. She is co-author with Simon Frith, Martin Cloonan and Matt Brennan of The History of Live Music in Britain, vol. 1 (2013) and a founder and director of research group Live Music Exchange.