

JOHN EDWARD HASSE

## Jazz Journeys



Photo by CRISTIAN WUNDERLICH, 2015

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "John Edward Hasse". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the left.

### **John Edward Hasse**

Curator at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History and founder of the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra.

**W**HAT ARE the elements of a journey? A starting point, a movement over time, and a destination. At the outset, the destination may be unknown; if known, it may alter. A journey entails some sort of change—at least a shift of location. And most journeyers find themselves experiencing internal change, whether small or transformative.

Metaphorically speaking, jazz has made two interweaving journeys: one across space and another across time, both of which have transformed the music. This essay provides a few thoughts on these journeys, touching on its dissemination across the United States and around the world, including to Romania; its progression through one style after another; its movement from a lowly, even scandalous entertainment to a widely respected art form; and its progressively larger influence on art and culture. And on a personal note, this article traces another jazz journey, that of an American boy from a very humble background growing up in a small prairie town, to a public career pursuing jazz at the world's largest museum complex, a journey that took him many places, including Romania, and changed him.

## The Geographical Journey of Jazz

**W**HERE DOES jazz come from? It is rooted in earlier styles of African-American music, especially ragtime, which modeled form in jazz, and blues, which shaped melody in jazz and gave the music soul. Some elements of jazz can be traced back to Europe, some back to Africa; but the synthesis is entirely American.

The earliest jazz was not written down, but passed on aurally, a kind of folk music. The city of New Orleans gave rise to the first jazz musicians. This great seaport, near the mouth of the Mississippi River, became a paella of Afro-American, Anglo-American, French, German, Italian, Mexican, Caribbean, and even Native-American musical influences, and the first center of jazz. African Americans such as Buddy Bolden, Creoles of color such as Ferdinand LaMenthe (who took the stage name “Jelly Roll” Morton), and Italian-Americans such as Nick LaRocca played a role in the early development of jazz. In fact, Americans of many ethnic backgrounds have contributed to jazz, though most of the foremost innovators—those who transformed the aesthetic—have been black.

In Chicago and many other US cities, each ethnic group—black, Irish, Greek, etc.—typically lived in its own neighborhood. In New Orleans, by contrast, families from different ethnic backgrounds often lived cheek-by-jowl. Since there was no air conditioning, windows were open and music of all kinds was in the air, audible for anyone to listen to and imitate. This access provided countless opportunities for musical interchange, a process central to the birth and growth of jazz.

New Orleans was fabled for its dancing: jazz began as a small-combo music, typically used for dances, sometimes for parades. In the late 1910s, the first jazz recordings were issued and the music generated national interest. A growing diaspora of Crescent City players spread the sound, and it caught the fancy of many young people at a time when, across the nation, public dancing was becoming a craze and nightlife was increasing as a part of urban culture.

New Orleans wasn't the only source of the music in the 1910s. During the middle and late teens, early jazz was emerging in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Kansas City, New York, and Washington, DC. There and elsewhere, musicians were experimenting. They were trying out looser rhythms, exploring syncopation, bending notes, embellishing melodies, varying familiar songs, devising their own “breaks,” and creating their own tunes.

In the 1920s, jazz became a popular phenomenon. As Americans took to ballrooms in greater and greater numbers, jazz and dance bands grew in size to heighten musical interest and to produce more volume to fill the larger and larger dance halls. Jazz music reached its all-time peak of popularity in the late

1930s and early 1940s, when 3,000 “name” swing bands played jazz music for dancing in the United States.

By the end of World War II, a new, modern style of jazz called “bebop”—more melodically angular and rhythmically asymmetrical—burst forth in the United States. Bebop and even newer styles of jazz after the War were intended less for dancing than for listening, as jazz moved from the dance hall to the night club, concert hall, and festival stage. The 1950s saw cool, hard bop, and modal jazz, while the 1960s experienced free jazz, jazz-rock, and various other kinds of fusions. In the United States, Latin jazz became prominent. While younger musicians often took up a new style, many of the older players continued in the style that they grew up with. That pattern continues to the present time. What this means is that, over the decades, the jazz listener has had the choice of an increasing number of styles of the music. Today, if one is diligent, in major American cities one can hear most of the major styles of jazz—from traditional to contemporary.

While jazz is a quintessentially American music, early on, it began to spread abroad. Even before jazz came on the scene, ragtime and syncopated dance music were making their way to Europe and even South Africa through touring minstrel and vaudeville performers and published sheet music.<sup>1</sup> In 1918, Lt. James Reese Europe’s “Hellfighters” US army band created a sensation when it performed proto-jazz in Paris. The appreciation of jazz quickly became an international phenomenon. In 1919, the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, from New Orleans, spent the year touring England. That same year, New Orleans-born clarinetist and soprano saxophonist Sidney Bechet went to Europe, whereupon the Swiss conductor Ernst Ansermet proclaimed him “an extraordinary clarinet virtuoso” and “an artist of genius.”<sup>2</sup> After the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I, Constantinople drew jazz musicians from Europe and the United States; some Western musicians traveled between Constantinople to Cairo to perform.

In Paris, jazz was embraced immediately as a manifestation of modernism, pointing to a difference in the early reception of jazz in Europe and the United States. As Jed Rasula observed, “The greatest difference between the European and American responses to jazz . . . [was] that the avant-garde was a pervasive phenomenon across Europe when jazz appeared, whereas it had played almost no role in the United States.”<sup>3</sup>

Phonograph recordings and touring American musicians did more than anything to spread jazz across oceans.<sup>4</sup> Listeners in Europe first encountered Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong via records, which built up great anticipation among jazz aficionados for their first visits to Great Britain and the continent. As interest in the music and its associated dance steps spread, in the 1930s, American jazz musicians ventured as far afield as Shanghai, Bombay, and Dja-



JOHN EDWARD HASSE (photo by CRISTIAN WUNDERLICH, 2015)

karta.<sup>5</sup> After World War II, the United States' Voice of America short-wave broadcasts carried jazz throughout the world.<sup>6</sup> The growing influence of American jazz—in fact, much of America's vernacular music—around the world went hand-in-hand with growing American economic might—and the international reach of the American music and record industry. By the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, American popular music, for better or worse, had become the dominant force in music of the world, a position it maintains in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In finding an audience abroad, jazz inspired musicians in those countries to learn to play the music. In 1918, the first jazz band in Australia became a sensation in Sydney.<sup>7</sup>

Jazz performance took root in many countries, especially in Canada, Europe, and Japan. France produced the great Gypsy jazz guitarist Django Reinhardt and the swinging jazz violinist Stéphane Grappelli, who together offered the first real alternative to an American sound in jazz. Today jazz sustains a variety of national flavors, and there are school jazz bands in many nations. Jazz festivals are now held in many parts of the world, ranging from tiny Ascona, Switzerland to Tokyo, Japan, and Mumbai, India. The venerable American jazz magazine *Down Beat* counts subscribers in 114 countries.

The history of jazz in Romania has been well-documented, most recently by Virgil Mihaiu in his book *Jazz Connections in Romania*. In the 1910s, he recounts, Romanian dance bands performed and recorded a number of American ragtime instrumentals. In 1926, reedman Emil Berindei established a band he

called The Hot Chops, and when Radio Romania was inaugurated in 1928, the ensemble became the first to broadcast jazz in that country.<sup>8</sup> As Romania was largely agrarian, jazz was limited mostly to cities. In the 1930s, though derivative of American jazz, such bands as the Jazzul Telefoanelor big band, Radio Big Band, and James Kok Orchestra, introduced more Romanians to jazz through performances, recordings, and radio. “Although during the cold war years,” wrote Milhau, “jazz was excommunicated as a vicious ideological device of the imperialists, it managed more or less to survive in the underground.”<sup>9</sup> Then, after the fall of dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu in 1989, jazz was free to compete with other forms of music and entertainment in Romania. The music continues to weave a complex history in this easternmost Latin country.

As jazz journeyed through time and around the earth, it changed. Just as the mother tongue of the island of England—English—went all around the world, taking root in different countries to produce markedly different pronunciations and even vocabularies, so jazz traveled from the United States around the planet and took on varying accents and sounds. I am reminded of trumpeter Clark Terry’s description of learning jazz: “Imitate. Assimilate. Innovate.”<sup>10</sup> In some nations, innovation has come from combining elements of American jazz with local musical influences. For instance, jazz in Cuba, Brazil, and South Africa came to sound much different than jazz in the United States—but each style is still jazz. This phenomenon has been described as “glocalization”—from the combination of “global” and “local”—wherein musicians incorporate their own national musical culture into the language of jazz.<sup>11</sup>

Jazz now belongs to the world—something I have experienced first-hand in Cuba, Kenya, Ethiopia, Mauritius, Sweden, Romania, and elsewhere. I’ll never forget being in the center of South Africa, when a busload of township students came to hear me lecture on Louis Armstrong. These 14-year-old boys, who had ridden a bus for two hours to attend, lived in shacks, with no electricity or running water: they were as poor as they could be. But when I began playing a recording of Louis Armstrong singing *Hello Dolly*, they smiled and started singing along. They knew the words, they knew the melody. In Alexandria, Egypt, I was giving a lecture on Louis Armstrong and noticed an elderly Muslim woman, with black-clad headscarf, smiling broadly. It turned out that she knew no English, but was moved by Louis Armstrong’s ebullience and brilliance. All over Africa today, Louis Armstrong is the most popular American jazz musician—someone who can bring joy to people’s hearts, even when they don’t speak English. I am struck by these examples of how jazz can conquer time, space, language, and culture. I’ve seen it many times.

Jazz is such a globalized idiom that today one could bring together a Turkish trumpeter, a Thai trombonist, a Chinese clarinetist, a Senegalese saxophonist, a

Polish pianist, a Brazilian bassist, a Guinean guitarist, and a Dominican drummer, and though they might not share any spoken language, they might well instantly communicate in the international language of jazz.

## Jazz's Stylistic and Cultural Journey

**J**AZZ DIDN'T progress slowly. In the course of its first century, it recapitulated the centuries-long evolution of European classical music from a localized dance accompaniment to an international art with an avant-garde edge. Separated by only twenty actual years, Louis Armstrong's *West End Blues* of 1928 and Charlie Parker's *Parker's Mood* of 1948 nonetheless seem light years apart. This contrast bespeaks the extraordinary rate of change in jazz, matching the velocity of transformation in other sectors of twentieth-century life.

As jazz evolved, the shapes it took made it a musical analog to historic events and trends. Nightclub jazz and dance-hall swing of the 1920s and thirties, for example, rose on a wave of postwar American optimism, a surging youth culture, and shifting social currents. The music's multiethnic flavors—heard, for instance, in the Afro-Cuban beat of Dizzy Gillespie's *Manteca*, the calypso of Sonny Rollins' *St. Thomas*, and the bossa nova of Stan Getz's *The Girl from Ipanema*—emerged with both the growth of US immigration and the increasing interconnectedness of world cultures due to advances in communications and transportation technology. Progressive bebop of the 1940s articulated the new assertiveness of African Americans in the United States, and the even more progressive “free” jazz of the sixties echoed the anti-repressive call of the civil-rights and counterculture movements. Post-sixties jazz synthesizers and electronics signaled alliance with the digital information revolution, while the kaleidoscopic sonic arrays of some late-century jazz reflected the increasingly fractured and data-bombarded state of late-century consciousness. Where there was a change in the status of human existence, there was a jazz movement to match it.

Jazz not only mirrored social and cultural change but also brought it on. Long before American society was racially integrated, jazz musicians were recording in multi-hued bands and becoming celebrities across the color line. Jazz led the way towards racial integration in the United States, even before baseball and the American armed forces were integrated.

Jazz did all those things because, at its core, it's about honest, instantaneous, high-level communication and expression. The jazz musician improvises, and the immediacy of that approach to invention ensures that the message comes from the heart. At the same time, the depth and scope of the jazz language—on a par with the most complex “classical” music—make that communication as

deep and articulate as musical expression can be. The reflection of life in all its complexity has one of its truest images in jazz.

It wouldn't be that way if not for the freedom jazz affords and encourages. "If jazz means anything," wrote Duke Ellington, "it is freedom of expression." For early New Orleans players, jazz could also mean freedom from anonymity, poverty, and powerlessness. For 1920s "Jazz Age" adherents, it could mean freedom from old, tired social mores. For people in Nazi-occupied Europe, it could mean independence from regimentation. For citizens of communist nations, jazz could powerfully symbolize freedom and individualism. And for countless Americans, jazz could eloquently protest racial injustice and express a mighty yearning for freedom and respect.

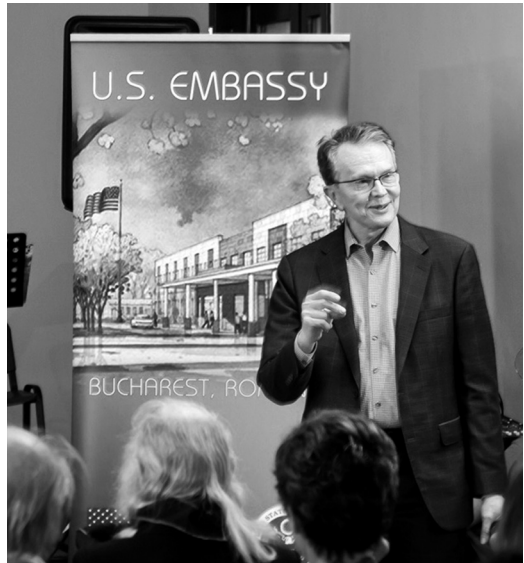
Jazz is as much about the personal as it is about the collective. Through inflections and stylings the jazz musician puts his or her own distinctive stamp on the material, making something personal out of something shared. Like democracy at its best, a jazz band maintains an optimum balance between the individual and the group and upholds the value of both.

In a century—the 20<sup>th</sup>—rife with the predictable, the dehumanizing, and the dispiriting, jazz affirmed the fresh, the human, the hopeful. It came to represent humankind at its best: striving for beauty, personal achievement, and perfection, and communicating a message that brings pleasure to the world.

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## From Marginal to Mainstream

**I**N THE early part of the twentieth century, the new ragtime music attracted legions of young Americans. Some oldsters, however, charged that ragtime was pernicious, undermined traditional morals, and was ruining the musicianship of young people. This opposition to ragtime morphed into an antipathy to jazz. However much youngsters liked the new jazz sound, many oldsters resisted it on musical or moralistic grounds. "Does Jazz Put the Sin in Syncopation?" asked a 1921 article in *Ladies Home Journal*, answering its own



JOHN EDWARD HASSE  
(photo by CRISTIAN WUNDERLICH, 2015)



ȘTEFAN VANNAI & GAIO BIG BAND, International Jazz Day 2015 (photo by CRISTIAN WUNDERLICH)

question with an emphatic affirmative.<sup>12</sup> Jazz and blues were often denounced as “the devil’s music” and regarded as disreputable by many middle-class whites and blacks alike.

Part of the reason jazz was controversial from the beginning was that the occupation of jazz musician challenged notions of middle-class respectability and normative behavior. Late hours, uncertain employment, and an often-itinerant work life—not to mention jazz’s early associations with New Orleans sporting houses, scandalous dancing, drinking, and nightlife—led some parents to ask, “Would you want your daughter to marry a jazz musician?” For most of its history, the jazz musician has been seen as an outsider.<sup>13</sup> Jazz musicians often actively cultivated the image of outsider, as it was their artistic prerogative to stand apart from, or outside, the main culture.

In the United States, the stereotyping of the jazz musician as outsider would ultimately be challenged, if not shattered, by the rise of Wynton Marsalis, in the 1990s and the 2000s, as an immaculately attired, eloquent, powerful cultural figure who was equally at home teaching in an inner-city school, hosting his own show on PBS television, lobbying on Capitol Hill, or performing at the White House.

Jazz has struggled to earn respect and recognition in its native land. On the one hand, major institutions—notably the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York City and, in Washington, DC, the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and the Smithsonian Institution—have established impor-



tant and influential jazz programs.<sup>14</sup> The federal government, through its National Endowment for the Arts, annually honors four musicians, naming them “Jazz Masters.”<sup>15</sup> Jazz scholarship is booming.

On the other hand, in the United States, jazz has all but disappeared from the major television networks and the number of public radio stations playing jazz is shrinking. While teaching of jazz in American colleges and universities became common starting in the 1960s, even in 2015, the majority of US institutions of higher learning do not teach jazz history or performance. Jazz continues to be a stepchild in the academic halls of the land that gave birth to the music.

Even while jazz was treated as second-class by parts of the American elite, it accrued deep influence in culture and society—a sharply ironic duality. While many gatekeepers of culture and academe undervalued jazz, many members of the public embraced the music.

Although jazz has absorbed influences from other kinds of music, even more so, *it* has influenced other musics—ranging from popular singing, rhythm & blues, and country music, to rock and Western classical music. Jazz moved many African American musical practices right into the musical mainstream, thereby transforming American music and spurring the creation of new styles, including r&b, rock and roll, and soul. Beyond music, jazz has inspired creation in other fields, by dancers, choreographers, novelists, poets, painters, classical composers, and filmmakers. It has influenced and enriched the American English language.<sup>16</sup>

## A Personal Jazz Journey

**I**N THE Midwestern state of South Dakota—one of the flattest and least populated states in America—I was brought up in a small town of 5,000 people, in a family of German and Scandinavian origin. Our town was homogeneous—there were no minorities; on Sunday, people went to either the Catholic church or one of the Protestant churches; and everyone knew who the town’s three Jewish families were. Because the University of South Dakota was located there, I had periodic opportunities to hear first-class concerts performed by university and visiting artists. We didn’t have much money—but there was enough to pay for weekly piano lessons. I listened a lot to radio, and at night, I’d fall asleep aside a white, vacuum-tube AM radio nestled next to my head, listening to distant stations: Chicago, Minneapolis, Little Rock, Dallas, Denver, sometimes even New York. When I was 10, my father bought me a ticket to a “Jazz Unlimited” concert at the University, a fundraiser for the musical fraternity Pi Mu Alpha Sinfonia. The first half was performed by a Dixieland combo; the second half by a student big band, playing charts of Count Basie, Neil Hefti, and

others. Jazz seized my imagination. Here was something new: musicians spinning spontaneous melody lines at the speed of thought, to a propulsive, swinging beat. Soon, I'd start picking out tunes on the piano, playing by ear or note, and trying a bit of variation and embellishment. I was on my way to improvising jazz. In high school, I formed a jazz trio to play bars, nightclubs, and dances. At the same time, I joined a rock and roll band, playing stand-up Farfisa organ.

As a freshman at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota, I seized the opportunity to take my first course in jazz history. A visiting professor, John S. "Jack" Lucas, opened up a window for me—Baby Dodds, Louis Armstrong, Coleman Hawkins, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis. I became intrigued. When during my sophomore year, I studied in New York City for four months, I managed to sign up for lessons with two prominent jazz pianists—Jaki Byard and Roland Hanna—and I listened to and met as many jazz musicians as I could—Bill Evans, Billy Taylor, Dave Liebman, Jimmy Garrison, and others.

When Roland Hanna told me that to attain his level of excellence, he practiced eight hours a day, I realized that as much as jazz and other music spoke to my soul, I didn't have the discipline to practice all day long. But I did love playing the piano, especially when I could play what I chose—at the time, Scott Joplin rags and jazz pieces.

After I graduated from college in 1971, I worked on a presidential political campaign. When the election was over, I realized that I was destined to work in music and I enrolled in a Ph.D. program in ethnomusicology at Indiana University, which I chose because that was where David Baker—one of the world's leading jazz educators—taught.<sup>17</sup> I took nearly every jazz course I could, including a seminar on Miles Davis and John Coltrane.

In both college and graduate school, I encountered an air of disdain from some faculty and students pursuing classical music. When told I was researching my doctoral dissertation on ragtime, one fellow graduate student—a woman studying to be an opera singer—replied incredulously, "Ragtime!?" Then with outright derision, she asked, "What's to study about *ragtime*?" I shall never forget that contemptuousness.

In 1976, I started presenting lecture-concerts of ragtime music, combining commentary, slides of colorful sheet music covers projected on a big screen, and my playing. Back then, this multi-media approach was new to audiences, and I enjoyed success. I loved educating *and* entertaining them. I set my sights on becoming a college professor teaching the history of jazz and American music, but as I completed my Ph.D. degree, I found there was a dearth of teaching positions. So I enrolled in a summer-long, intensive business training at the Wharton School, one of the nation's top business schools. I then landed a position at Procter & Gamble, at its corporate headquarters in Cincinnati, Ohio, and was assigned to the Head & Shoulder brand group—marketing dandruff shampoo! I

learned much about marketing consumer products, writing highly concise business memos, packaging and graphic design, but ultimately selling shampoo did not speak to my soul, and I left the company. For a while, I played jazz piano in a piano bar, then secured a grant to conduct music research.

I was elated when, in 1984, I took a position of Curator of American Music at the National Museum of American History of the Smithsonian Institution, in Washington, DC.<sup>18</sup> Established in 1846 by a request from the son of an English nobleman named James Smithson, the Smithsonian is the world's largest museum and research complex, with nineteen museums and galleries, the national zoo, and a number of research centers. The Smithsonian has 138 million objects, works of art, and specimens. Each year, the Smithsonian draws about 30 million visitors to its museums and 100 million visitors to its websites.<sup>19</sup>

Soon I realized that I had found my calling. My duties are broad and the job is demanding; it means wearing about twelve different “hats”—collector, preservationist, exhibit curator, scholar, public speaker, advocate, spokesperson, public servant, coalition builder, cultural ambassador, friend-raiser and fund-raiser. Because I am the only such curator at the Smithsonian, I feel a great sense of responsibility. I am grateful beyond words for the opportunity to do this work—it's the dream of a lifetime.

People often ask me, “What does a music curator do?” I tell them that my position at the Smithsonian includes five areas of responsibility.

The first and core responsibility: building the national collections of musical instruments, scores, parts, sheet music, documents, recordings, films, awards, and other memorabilia. Upon arriving, I was given *carte blanche* to collect and research as I wished. Convinced that the most innovative, accomplished, and consequential music invented in the United States is jazz, I determined to focus much—though not all—of my energies on that musical genre. What should I collect first? I decided to invite one of jazz's foremost living innovators—Dizzy Gillespie—to donate one of his trumpets. From there, the museum's history of jazz collection grew and grew.

In 1988, we acquired the Duke Ellington Collection from his son, Mercer Ellington. Included are about one hundred thousand pages of unpublished music that Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn composed for the Duke Ellington Orchestra, another hundred thousand pages of documents, several thousand photographs, and five hundred artifacts.<sup>20</sup> Since that acquisition, we have acquired several dozen other Ellington-related collections, making the Smithsonian unquestionably the world's leading repository of Ellingtonia, drawing researchers and musicians from many countries. We've acquired musical scores and/or band “parts” of Jimmie Lunceford, Benny Carter, Thelonious Monk, Gil Evans, Ralph Burns, Bill Holman, Bill Russo, Chico O'Farrill, Paquito d'Rivera and others; a collection of 300 jazz films; a trove of 12,000 jazz photographs; musical in-

struments and memorabilia from Ella Fitzgerald, Lionel Hampton, Benny Goodman, Gene Krupa, Artie Shaw, Ray McKinley, Buddy Rich, Doc Cheatham, Ray Brown, John Coltrane, Herbie Hancock, Tito Puente, Mongo Santamaria, Chuck Mangione, Randy Weston, Ron Carter, Esperanza Spalding, and others.<sup>21</sup>

A second responsibility: conducting research and writing articles and books. I have done extensive research on Duke Ellington, resulting in a book, a book chapter, magazine and journal articles, and a CD boxed set. I have written about ragtime, the Apollo Theater, the history of jazz, and such figures as songwriter Hoagy Carmichael and record producer Ahmet Ertegun.<sup>22</sup>

Third: developing museum exhibitions. As professors teach in classrooms, curators teach through museum exhibitions. Mine have included half a dozen on Ellington, several on jazz photography, and exhibits on Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald, Ray Charles, and the history of the piano.

Another way that a music curator can teach is by producing historically informed performances. After we acquired the vast Duke Ellington Collection in 1988, I wanted to bring alive Ellington's music—to make the archives sing. For this purpose, I conceived and founded a seventeen-member big band, the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra, and oversaw it for almost a decade.<sup>23</sup> In addition to a regular series of concerts at the Smithsonian, the orchestra has performed at the White House, the Monterey Jazz Festival, across the United States and Canada, as well as in Europe and Africa.

Fourth: undertaking public service, lecturing, lending advice. This broad area of responsibility ranges from answering public inquiries to representing the Museum at international conferences. I have led several initiatives: I founded and directed Jazz Appreciation Month (JAM), which is now celebrated every April in all fifty US states and 40 other countries, including Romania.<sup>24</sup> It has been a thrill to go lecture in such far-apart cities as Nairobi, Cape Town, Riga, and Cluj-Napoca and see our Jazz Appreciation Month posters on display there.

I also serve as chair of a Smithsonian-wide initiative called Smithsonian Music. With the recognition that if all the Smithsonian's material, programmatic, and human resources were combined, the Smithsonian would be the world's largest museum of music, staff from across the Institution are working to make its resources more available to the public in the United States and around the world. One of the most gratifying aspects of this work has been lecturing on American music in fifteen other countries, mostly at the request of US embassies. I love doing my tiny part to bridge cultural differences, enhance understanding, build friendship, and inform people about the history of American music.

To my great surprise, in April 2015, G. Dima Academy of Music in Cluj-Napoca named me Doctor Honoris Causa. It was a complete surprise. After the jolt wore off, I felt humbled and honored. And then when I learned of others who have received this honor—violinist Yehudi Menuhin and composers Iannis



JOHN EDWARD HASSE &amp; VIRGIL MIHAIU (photo by NICU CHERCIU, 2015)

Xenakis, Krzysztof Penderecki, and György Ligeti—my sense of gratitude rose even higher. Besides my gratitude to the Academy, I am thankful to the noted Academy faculty member, Virgil Mihaiu. I hold Professor Mihaiu in great esteem and consider him Romania's leading jazz scholar, critic, broadcaster, impresario, and advocate. He was the first Romanian correspondent for the world's leading jazz magazine, *Down Beat*, which has been published continuously since 1934. He has authored 15 books, including works on jazz in Romania, in Portugal, and in Europe.<sup>25</sup> He regularly serves as a master of ceremonies for jazz concerts and festivals not only in Romania but in other nations. These activities are in addition to his teaching honors and his work as a poet and diplomat. A man of the world, Virgil speaks an awe-inspiring 12 languages, in addition to the language of music. He is respected wherever he goes. When I meet some of his former students, I could instantly see the admiration they hold for him—it's on their faces. I am also indebted to the impressive young impresario Tudor Vesa of Cluj-Napoca, for persuading the United States Embassy in Bucharest to take me to Romania. With indefatigable energy and self-sacrificing generosity, Tudor is leading Romanian celebrations of Jazz Appreciation Month and International Jazz Day. Fifth and finally: helping to raise funds. The United States Congress provides the Smithsonian with roughly only two-thirds of what it needs to do its work. This means that the museums are constantly raising money from founda-

tions, corporations, and individuals. One of my jobs is to assist our fundraising department in generating private funding to support our work.

## How Has Jazz Affected My Journey Through Life?

**J**AZZ IS a music born of diversity, rising up from the bouillabaisse culture of New Orleans. Recognizing its deep roots in the African American experience, in college I chose to major in Black Studies, so I could understand jazz and African American music in their social, cultural, and historical contexts. In graduate school, I conducted fieldwork in African American churches and produced a documentary video about black gospel music.<sup>26</sup> Jazz led me to make many friendships across the color lines. Building upon my father's instinctive empathy for people struggling with adversity, jazz helped me to become more empathetic not just to jazz as an "underdog" music in the United States—scuffling for respect and audience—but for the people and culture that produced that music.

My fascination for jazz led me to pursue a doctoral degree in ethnomusicology, which taught me a great deal about the musics of Africans and African Americans, the richness of working with living informants (fieldwork), the inherent musicality of human beings, and the contrast between the universal and the unique among the world's musical cultures.<sup>27</sup> If it had not been for jazz, I probably would have pursued a different academic and career path, perhaps in politics, cinema, or education. I am thankful beyond words for the path I have made.

As a jazz pianist, I learned that there is no one correct way to perform a piece; each time you interpret it, you can vary the melody, rhythm, and harmony. In my life, this realization has come to mean there is always another way to do something. And if you get stopped in your tracks, find another way: go around the obstacle, under it, over it, or create an entirely new path.

Realizing that virtually every jazz musician—even the most brilliant—makes mistakes during performances has prompted me to become more tolerant of mistakes, at least well-intentioned mistakes. As each of us extemporize and improvise our way through our daily lives, we are all bound to make mistakes. A more generous and forgiving attitude towards failings could, I have come to believe, benefit all of us.

As a teenager, I was, like most of my peers, caught up in the most popular rock and roll music—which is what we listened to on radio. Without examining it, my peers largely liked certain songs *because* they were popular. Once I began studying jazz in college, my attitude changed radically. Despite its relative lack of exposure in the national media, jazz, I comprehended, was one of the most significant art forms in the United States. And within jazz, I realized there were radio hits—Eddie Harris's *Listen Here*, Ramsey Lewis's *The In Crowd*, Herbie Mann's *Comin' Home, Baby*—that made me want to get up and dance, but did

not represent the music at its most accomplished and enduring. In other words, I learned that typically to find what is of deep value and enduring worth, one must look beyond what is popular today. Most of pop culture at any given moment tends to be ephemeral and not destined to be valued highly in, say, 500 years.

Perhaps it's my German heritage, perhaps it's the part of me that's an educator, but I naturally like things to be ordered and clear. Categories are one time-honored way of achieving that. But, I learned as I studied Duke Ellington, he was of an opposite mind. He hated categories of all types. When Ellington wanted to lavish the highest possible praise on a musician, he'd say that person was "beyond category." For him, it was more than saying, in the familiar English-language term, "beyond compare"—i.e., nonpareil. Ellington was declaring that a person's brilliance and uniqueness made him or her transcend any categorization, and for Ellington, that was extremely desirable. When I am tempted to place a mental boundary around something, sometimes I stop and think of Ellington, and try to adjust to a more elastic viewpoint. I find it both a challenging and refreshing exercise for the mind.

Jazz has provided me with continuing inspiration. Besides the motivations discussed above, it has encouraged me to go ahead and experiment, to imagine something where there was nothing: silence, a blank piece of paper, etc. Jazz has inspired me to create and invent—words on a book page, a newly improvised melody at the piano, or an entity that didn't exist before—a month to celebrate jazz every year (Jazz Appreciation Month), or a national jazz band (the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra).

## Conclusion

JAZZ HAS traveled to every corner of the earth, in the process advancing in its recognition and understanding. I have traveled to some of those places. Like many voyagers, I have been changed by my travels and have, at the same time, left some little footprints. During my personal jazz journey, I've striven to contribute my small part to heightening esteem for and understanding of jazz. In exchange, jazz has bettered me as a professional and as a person. □

## Notes

1. Charles Hamm, *Putting Popular Music in Its Place* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 183. See also David Coplan, *In Township Tonight! South Africa's Black City Music and Theatre* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 70.

2. Kevin Whitehead, "Jazz Worldwide," in John Edward Hasse and Tad Lathrop, *Discover Jazz* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, 2012), 288–89.
3. Jed Rasula, "Jazz and American Modernism," in *The Cambridge Companion to American Modernism*, ed. Walter Kalaidjian (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 157. See also Alfred Appel, Jr., *Jazz Modernism: From Ellington and Armstrong to Matisse and Joyce* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002).
4. See Bill Moody, *The Jazz Exiles: American Musicians Abroad* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1993); E. Taylor Atkins, ed., *Jazz Planet* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003); Luca Cerchiari, Laurent Cugny, and Franz Kerschbaumer, eds., *Eurojazzland: Jazz and European Sources, Dynamics, and Contexts* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2012).
5. Whitehead, 295, 303.
6. See Terence Ripmaster, *Willis Conover: Broadcasting Jazz to the World* (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, 2007); Lisa E. Davenport, *Jazz Diplomacy: Promoting America in the Cold War Era* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009); and Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).
7. Whitehead, 288.
8. Virgil Mihaiu, *Jazz Connections in Romania* (Bucharest: Institutul Cultural Român, 2007), 46–47.
9. *Ibid.*, 53.
10. Clark Terry with Gwen Terry, *Clark: The Autobiography of Clark Terry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 148.
11. See Stuart Nicholson, *Is Jazz Dead? (Or Has It Moved to a Different Address?)* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 172. See also Nicholson's *Jazz in a Global Age* (Boston: University Press of New England, 2014).
12. See Neil Leonard, *Jazz and the White Americans: The Acceptance of a New Art Form* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962) and Neil Leonard, "The Reaction to Ragtime," in *Ragtime: Its History, Composers, and Music*, ed. John Edward Hasse (New York: Schirmer Books, 1985), 102–113.
13. John Edward Hasse, "The Jazz Musician as Outsider," in *Discover Jazz* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2012), 145.
14. See [www.jazz.org](http://www.jazz.org), [www.kennedy-center.org](http://www.kennedy-center.org), and [www.smithsonianjazz.org](http://www.smithsonianjazz.org).
15. *NEA Jazz Masters 2015* (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 2015).
16. Krin Gabbard, ed., *Representing Jazz* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995). The influence of jazz on other art forms is discussed in a series of short essays in Hasse and Lathrop, *passim*.
17. See Monika Herzig, ed., *David Baker: A Legacy in Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011).
18. W. Royal Stokes, "Tracing the Music," *The Washington Post*, 27 August, 1985, C7; David Reffkin, "The Ragtime Machine: Interview with John Edward Hasse," *The Mississippi Rag*, March 1990: 1–2; and Sascha Feinstein, "Living Archives: An Interview with John Edward Hasse," *Brilliant Corners: A Journal of Jazz & Literature* (Summer 2011): 68–89.
19. See [www.si.edu](http://www.si.edu).



20. John Edward Hasse, "Duke Ellington: The Smithsonian Will Preserve and Perpetuate Duke Ellington's Legacy," *Jazz Educators Journal* 22, 1 (January 1990): 24–27.
21. John Edward Hasse, "All That Jazz," in James Conaway, *The Smithsonian: 150 Years of Adventure, Discovery, and Wonder* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 336–37.
22. Selected publications of mine include: John Edward Hasse, ed., *Jazz: The First Century* (New York: William Morrow/Harper Collins Publisher, 2000); id., *Beyond Category: The Life and Genius of Duke Ellington* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993); id., "The Scions of Swing: How the Turkish Ambassador's Sons Jazzed Washington and the Nation," in Skip Moskey, Caroline Mesrobian Hickman, and John Edward Hasse, *The Turkish Ambassador's Residence and the Cultural History of Washington, D.C.* (Istanbul: Istanbul Kültür University, 2013), 94–130; id., "A New Reason for Living?: Duke Ellington in France," in Cerchiaro et al., 189–213; Hasse, "David Baker and the Smithsonian," in Herzog, 230–87; Hasse, "Impresario Frank Schiffman," "Heyday of the Big Band," and "Great Jazz and Pop Singers," in *Ain't Nothing Like the Real Thing: How the Apollo Theater Shaped American Entertainment*, eds. Richard Carlin and Kinshasha Holman Conwill (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2010), 81–103; *Jazz: The Smithsonian Anthology* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, 2011), six audio CDs with 200-page book (co-producer and co-author); and id., *The Classic Hoagy Carmichael* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1988), three phonodiscs and 64-page book (producer and author).
23. Peter Watrous, "The Smithsonian's Jazz Orchestra Makes Its Debut in Washington," *The New York Times*, 20 May 1991.
24. John Edward Hasse, "Launching Jazz Appreciation Month," *Jazz Education Journal*, March 2002, 40–42 and 44–45. See also [www.smithsonianjazz.org](http://www.smithsonianjazz.org).
25. See also Virgil Mihaiu, *Jazz Connections in Portugal* (Cluj: Alfa Press, 2001).
26. John Edward Hasse, *Gospel in Gary* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Folklore Institute, 1980), videotape, 23 mins.
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## Abstract

### Jazz Journeys

The paper offers a synthetic presentation of the "journeys" of jazz across the world, from the beginnings of the genre in New Orleans until today, when jazz belongs to the whole world. Attention is also given to the stylistic changes experienced by jazz in the course of time, under the influence of various historic events and trends, such as the civil-rights and counterculture movements, and to the manner in which this music could itself operate as an agent of social change. The second part of the paper presents biographic information, outlining the personal jazz journey of the author.

## Keywords

jazz, history of music, jazz styles, National Museum of American History