



WHAT IS THIS MUSIC?

Adrian Lăcătuș, Lucian Ban, Maria Ghiurțu (editors)

Chamber Jazz

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Transilvania University Press

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Transilvania University Press is accredited
by the National Research Council in Higher Education(2020)

National Library of Romania CIP Description:

Chamber Jazz: what is this music?

eds.: Adrian Lăcătuş, Lucian Ban, Maria Ghiurţu - Braşov: Transilvania University Press, 2024
ISBN 978-606-19-1724-2

- I. Lăcătuş, Adrian (ed.)
- II. Ban, Lucian (ed.)
- III. Ghiurţu, Maria (ed.)

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**Transilvania
University
Press**

The Music of Conversation

Jazz is the music of freedom, a tribute to personal creativity, but also a way of paying close attention to the other and a creative response to their difference. It's the music of conversation – a carefully rehearsed, sustained, fine-tuned conversation, and yet one that always manages to surprise.

The rather intimate concept that defines our Chamber Jazz series, rooted in the physical closeness to the audience and the warm space that is the Multicultural Centre of Transilvania University of Brașov, provides an optimal setting for said conversation to unfold, minimizing the intrusion of external elements.

There is no clearly defined stage, and electronic or amplified instruments only rarely make an appearance. As a result, the audience can experience the physical and material aspects of musical production as directly and personally as possible.

Nevertheless, this music is not always straightforward – the program of our series testifies to a sometimes tense state of balance between constant innovation and experiment, avant-garde, and musical traditions (classical, folkloric, jazz and pop), between inquisitiveness and risk-taking, on the one hand, and pleasure and contemplation, on the other. It is a program centered on the aesthetics and practice of improvisation, one of the main topics of discussion in this book, on which pianist and composer Lucian Ban, the artistic director of the series, has written an essay that is also featured.

Improvisation is equally fascinating in terms of the aesthetics of perception and the extraordinary experience of the listener. The connection to this new music being created before us out of the dialogue between musicians cannot be anticipated; it is both immediate and exhaustive.

There are concerts which audiences can adapt to more easily, perhaps because the performance is more seductive, and other concerts that create a sense of unrest, of ambivalent projection and introspection in the listener.

In any case, any such musical improvisation calls for a response, a reaction or chain of reactions. Since this type of improvisation is far more than a play on emotional spontaneity, but rather has its own artistic, cultural and historical identity, from the start we felt the need to examine our public's reactions by having a conversation, an on-the-spot interrogation of the music that had just been consumed. These discussions are themselves a form of improvisation and follow more or less the same principles as their musical counterpart. The questions stem from paying close attention to the musicians

and their performative stage presence right then and there. But they also come from a long history of interpreting music, contemporary art, literature and even politics, which the host and the university's public revisit with each new concert experience. There is an imponderable and mysterious air to every jazz concert, and the discussion itself builds on this feeling while also attempting to find meaning in it, translate it into words and break it down into familiar parts.

Usually, these questions seek to uncover the source of creativity, the relationship between musicians and their own lived experience, society at large, their education, as well as the art of others. Yet there is something special about musical creativity, and probably performative creativity in general: it transcends the romantic notion of an overwhelming ego and has the ability to incite dialogue, to compel the audience to listen, absorb and then react to the presence, gestures, message, and music of others. The aim of these discussions is to describe this phenomenon.

What I have also noticed on a few occasions is that the dialogues are not always unidirectional, vertical and repetitive, limited to a question and answer format between host and musicians. They branch out instead, sometimes surprisingly, horizontally, into a conversation between performers who, after days, weeks, even years of communicating through music and establishing authentic artistic rapports, come to discover new and unexpected aspects about one another. Left unchallenged, some underlying ideas are never expressed, perhaps not even consciously acknowledged. The most interesting challenges frequently come from outside the circle, as it were, from profane interrogation.



Born out of the desire – so decidedly legitimate in an academic setting – to whet the appetite of the audience, comprised of a significant number of students each time, for the creativity, mindset and experience of contemporary music, these dialogues have often surpassed our expectations. Carried out in an atmosphere saturated with music, they become the final piece of the concerts – the musicians’ dialogue among themselves and with their listeners, translated into words, almost assuming the form of an epure, an exercise in emotional decompression.



George Dumitriu, Mattia Magatelli
Proverbs, November 2017

Photo: Maria Nițu

Ramon Prats, Ernesto Aurignac. Marco Mezquida
M•A•P, March 2019

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Design & layout: Mugur Mihai

Translated by: Andrei Petrea, Maria Ghiurțu, Anca Papana,
Cristina Baci, Rareș Călugăr



Chamber Jazz: What is this music? Is it improvisation? Is it chamber music? Is it jazz?

For the past eight years the intimate hall of the Multicultural Center in the historic Rectorate building of Transilvania University in Brasov hosted the Chamber Jazz concert series curated by Romanian-American pianist Lucian Ban. Musicians from Romania, Europe and the United States such as Abraham Burton, Evan Parker, Sarah Murcia, Mircea Tiberian, Albrecht Maurer, Alex Harding, Marta Hristea, John Surman, Mat Maneri, George Dumitriu, NEA Jazz Master Amina Claudine Myers and many others performed in different ensembles and combinations, followed by post-concert talks moderated by Adrian Lăcătuș. These concerts and the revealing dialogues, featured in the present book, offer a close and fascinating view of what jazz practice means in the 21st century.

Chamber Jazz @Transilvania University is an initiative of the Multicultural Center that aims to investigate and celebrate the artistic expression and ideas from different cultures that make up the world we live in through projects in visual arts, literature, contemporary music, film, theatre, dance and philosophy.



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