



JAZZ IN LATVIA  
**2022**

*Hey there! Welcome to the world of Latvian jazz!*

So here's the very fresh insight of the Latvian jazz scene, found in the "Jazz in Latvia 2022" compilation, produced by the Latvian Music Information Centre / SKANi with the support of the Ministry of Culture, State Culture Capital Foundation, and JAZZin.lv for the "jazzahead!" trade fair.

Our friend, music journalist Kaspars Zaviļeiskis has written a short review, or a sneak peek if you wish, into what Latvian jazz has in store this year. Dive in and read to find out more about our traditions of the genre, some special traits of our musicians, from experimenting with jazz up to Latvian mushroom-picking habits, and, of course, proceed with listening to the compilation right after to see if Kaspars was right about it all!

# *Latvian jazz on the path of searching*

*by music journalist Kaspars Zaviļeiskis*

In every country that does jazz, jazzophiles have always wanted to define exactly how expressions of the genre in their specific geographic area differ from those elsewhere. Latvia is no exception. Jazz is definitely present here, and it's quite diverse as well.

Yes, we live in the north. We aren't exactly keen on bossa nova rhythms because they require more sun. But yes, we are party animals, since we don't live on the other side of the Polar Circle. And yes, we have something to say, because talented musicians keep emerging here like mushrooms after a rain. Mushrooms and picking them, by the way, is one of the most beloved pastimes of Latvian jazzophiles and other inhabitants of our country, so one should never underestimate this comparison.

This year's quite eclectic selection of Latvian jazz demonstrates a generous harvest. It contains results of the work of approximately three generations of musicians, marking a musical territory from classical jazz to funk party to a cool Nordic palette of pastel color.

Honoring the so-called "older" generation, this year's Jazz in Latvia 2022 features the Latvian saxophonist Deniss Pashkevich, whose active stage career is considerably more than two decades long and counting. That phrase sounds a bit scary, taking into consideration that Pashkevich is not

yet 50 years old and is still a true funkier who was recently playing glitzy parties with the Time After Time band. When we realize that two decades ago was around the turn of the 21st century, we understand that the wheel of time cannot be stopped. In fact, Pashkevich began delving into experimental music long ago with his TEN KA project, but this selection highlights other international jazz collaborations he's involved in. This time, with Finnish trumpet player Mikko Gunu Karjalainen – a deep, Nordically reserved, high-quality example of jazz in Pashkevich's best tenor expressions.

The older generation in this selection is also represented by trombone player Lauris Amantovs, who offers a first-rate arrangement of one of the most beautiful Latvian folk songs (and Latvians do have more of these than mushrooms in a forest), accompanied by Rūta Dūduma-Ķirse and her clear, bright voice. Also in this composition we hear a Nordic melancholy sentiment expressed in all the light nobility of the fusion genre.

However, the main emphasis in Jazz in Latvia 2022 is on the young generation of jazz musicians, because they have grown up studying in all sorts of schools abroad and have undeniably been exploring new directions. Latvian jazz is still searching for its path, but there's no doubt that path will become clearer in the near future. The

majority of the compositions here feature a bunch of young cats who are deservedly called jazz musicians, and this gives the listener a bright outlook on the future of Latvian jazz.

Here we hear cool tones – which are natural for our latitude – and warmer party elements, along with the classic American swing and bop tradition that was distinctive of Latvian jazz for many years but is increasingly fading away. So this is our search for our own style, and the direction of this style is really pleasing. Here we meet unhurried jazz moods (guitarist Davids Bejers, Dream Teller, Pulse Trio – an ensemble of Pauls Pokratnieks), a more classic comprehension of jazz (singer Jekaterina Šarigina), funk party (keyboardist Miķelis Dzenuška and friends), bossa nova-like sounds to remind one that Latvia also has some hotter nights (trombone player Vadims Dmitrijevs), influences from classical music (the great pianist Toms Mikāls, trumpet player Kristians Kalva with his German colleague Simon Gelsdorf) and also fresh new pursuits combining spoken word with free-flowing jazz musical lines (Monta Tupčiņenko and her German fellow musicians in the band Lathyrus).

The so-called "middle" generation of Latvian jazz introduces a pleasant, eclectic mood. But also not without a funk party, along with an amazing Hammond organ sound (Atis Andersons is a young

master of the instrument in Latvia). Likewise, a party is provided by electrofusion jamming band LUPA and Very Cool People, who are ready to blow up no less than the entire Balkans. Meanwhile, FunCOOLio create a pleasant lounge mood, as usual. Singer Beāte Zviedre along with double bassist Jānis Rubiks conjure up some coolness on a jazzy theatrical note, and a bright accent is placed on top of it all by the free experimenters Endless Roar together with internationally acknowledged pianist and classical music interpreter Vestard Shimkus.

And, of course, there's the Latvian Radio Big Band as well – a fantastic formation that can play and collaborate with the best from all over the world, as has been proven many times. This time the proof is found in a musically saturated carnival together with renowned French saxophonist Pierre Bertrand.

Colorful, powerful, and willing. And still on the path of searching, which can potentially last forever. We can only wish this for the musicians and composers in this selection as well as for its listeners. Because without searching, there's no progress. And without progress, there's no jazz. But without jazz, we cannot and do not want to exist at any time, under any circumstances.

# Deniss Pashkevich



Deniss Pashkevich is a saxophonist, flutist, composer, producer, ad-libber, educator, and a prominent figure in Baltic jazz whose name is included in the European Jazz Tree. In 2017, his album *Yours Faithfully* won the “Zelta Mikrofons” Latvian Annual Music Recording Industry Award for best jazz album. In 2019, he released the album *Variations*, recorded together with Vyacheslav Ganelin and Arkady Gotesman, which received a four-star review in *Downbeat* and was included in the magazine’s 2019 list of the year’s top-rated albums; the album was also recognised as the best jazz album of the year in Latvia. Over the course of his career, Pashkevich has recorded more than 50 albums. He regularly plays with world-class musicians such as Randy Brecker, Seamus Blake, Aaron Parks, Tim Hagans, and many others and has performed at festivals worldwide. Pashkevich is an official artist-endorser for companies such as Marca Reeds, Kay Siebold Mouthpieces, TT Mouthpieces, Erica Synths, Gamechanger Audio, and Arturia. He has more than 15 years of experience teaching and, in addition to composing, performing, and pedagogy, is also the founder and visionary of Riga Room, an organisation that manages musicians and organises jazz concerts and workshops in cooperation with many organisations in Europe.

[www.denisspashkevich.com](http://www.denisspashkevich.com)  
[valters@denisspashkevich.com](mailto:valters@denisspashkevich.com)

# Lauris Amantovs



Lauris Amantovs is a trombonist and a bandleader of various ensembles. He graduated from the Rēzekne Music High School, going on to study jazz at Klaipeda University and the Conservatory of Amsterdam. Amantovs has participated in many international improvisation competitions and numerous popular-music recordings. He is also a founder and the leader of the well-known Mirage Jazz Orchestra big band, together with which he has taken part in such recordings as My Favourite Things (Mirage Jazz Orchestra feat. Gunārs Rozenbergs), Nordic Spring (Mirage Jazz Orchestra), and Šūpuļdziesma trombonam (Lauris Amantovs Jazz Quartet). In addition, Amantovs performs with most of Latvia's prominent jazz and pop music artists.

*[lauris.amantovs@inbox.lv](mailto:lauris.amantovs@inbox.lv)*

# Rūta Dūduma-Ķirse



Rūta Dūduma-Ķirse is a laureate of several international competitions. She was the winner of the Nõmme Jazz competition in 2013 and a finalist at Riga Jazz Stage in 2014. She has participated in a variety of Latvian television shows, including the Eurovision national selection in 2012 and 2013. She has performed at the Kaunas Jazz (Lithuania), Turku Jazz (Finland), Juu Jäab (Estonia), Rīgas Ritmi (Latvia), and Jazz'n Chişinău (Moldova) festivals, among others, and has collaborated with such well-known Latvian musicians and composers as Maestro Raimonds Pauls, Intars Busulis, Jolanta Gulbe, and the Latvian Radio Big Band. Dūduma-Ķirse graduated from the Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music and is currently a soloist with the vocal jazz ensemble Framest.

 [rududum](#)  
[ruta.duduma@gmail.com](mailto:ruta.duduma@gmail.com)

# Dauids Bejers



Dauids Bejers is a composer, guitarist, and music producer based in Riga, Latvia, who specialises in various different music genres. He draws his main influences from jazz, classical music, jazz fusion, and post-rock. He has studied pop and jazz guitar at the Ventspils Music College, music production and sound engineering at the Dynamic Records Music School, and jazz guitar performance at the Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music. In 2021, Bejers released his debut album, Home.

<https://soundcloud.com/davids-bejers>  
[d.bejers@gmail.com](mailto:d.bejers@gmail.com)

# Dream Teller



Much like dreams give us advice on the next steps in our lives, Dream Teller's songs are like small keys to a person's core values: compassion, love, courage, and composure. The group's goal is to inspire listeners to live truly and not be afraid of themselves. Concluding that it is difficult to find inner peace and balance in an increasingly turbulent time, Edgars Cīrulis and Kristīne Cīrule decided to create new music that reflects both of their personal paths to self-knowledge. The two musicians are fascinated by the interaction of the human subconscious and the forces of nature, so their musical material is based on these themes. Their work combines influences from various, not just musical, sources. Listeners can expect the intensity of jazz music, a vivid harmonic style, spontaneous interplay, and melodies that address the listener directly. All of the group members are active musicians in Latvia and Europe, covering several genres, allowing Dream Teller to transcend genre boundaries and discover new sounds.

*[edgars.lark@gmail.com](mailto:edgars.lark@gmail.com)*



# Pauls Pokratnieks



Pauls Pokratnieks is a drummer who specialises in jazz and other improvised music styles. He holds a master's degree in jazz drumming and has experience playing internationally with a wide variety of musicians. Pokratnieks took his first steps in the field of music at age six, when he enrolled in a music school in Riga, where he studied piano, music theory, and orchestral percussion instruments. At the age of 16, he began to play a drum set and develop an interest in jazz music. He graduated from the jazz department of the Riga Cathedral Choir School in 2009 and continued his music studies at the Royal Conservatoire in The Hague, earning a master's degree in jazz music in 2015. Pokratnieks has performed with various improvised music ensembles all over Europe, including at the AglanJazz Festival (Cyprus), Saulkrasti Jazz, Rīgas Ritmi (Latvia), Casa Del Jazz (Italy), Warsaw Summer Jazz Days (Poland), and the Reykjavik Jazz Festival (Iceland). He has always been inspired by the so-called Nordic/Scandinavian sound, and in 2016 he moved to Gothenburg, where he focuses on composing music for his band and working as a freelance musician and teacher.

*[www.paulspokratnieks.com](http://www.paulspokratnieks.com)  
[pauls.pokratnieks@gmail.com](mailto:pauls.pokratnieks@gmail.com)*

# Jekaterina Šarigina



Jekaterina Šarigina is a vocalist, composer, and educator specialising in jazz and contemporary improvised music. She has a master's degree in jazz performance from the New England Conservatory (NEC) in Boston. During her studies at NEC, she was a guest vocalist for several large ensemble projects, including Maria Schneider's residency concert, the Nat King Cole anniversary concert, and Jacob Collier's Djesse Vol. 2 concert at MIT. With her American Songbook project, Šarigina has performed at the Pori Jazz festival in Finland, the Rīgas Ritmi festival in Latvia, the Battle of Ideas festival in London, and other venues in the United Kingdom and the Baltic states. Her clear tone and expressive interpretation have earned her awards at the Jazz Voices (Lithuania, 2011) and Voicingers (Poland, 2012) vocal jazz competitions. She was also a semi-finalist in the Riga Jazz Stage 2014 vocal competition in Latvia and the UNISA International Voice Competition 2018 in South Africa. Šarigina is currently a teaching artist at the Wycombe Abbey International School in Changzhou, China. Her debut full-length album featuring original compositions is due out in Spring 2022.

*[www.jekaterinasarigina.com](http://www.jekaterinasarigina.com)  
[jekaterina.sarigina@gmail.com](mailto:jekaterina.sarigina@gmail.com)*

# Miķelis Dzenuška



Miķelis Dzenuška is a jazz vibraphonist and keyboardist based in Riga, Latvia. He has released two albums, *Pritonā* and *Brīvdiena*, and founded an eight-piece funk/fusion ensemble called *Uzvaras Bulvāris*. Dzenuška has performed at the Rīgas Ritmi festival and collaborated with Latvian Radio Big Band and the Latvian jazz label *Jersika Records*. He draws inspiration from 1970s jazz fusion greats such as Miles Davis, Chick Corea, and Weather Report as well as younger jazz/pop artists, including Bill Wurtz, Louis Cole, and Jacob Mann.

*m.dzenuska@gmail.com*

# Vadim Dmitrijev



Vadims Dmitrijevs is a Latvian jazz trombone player and songwriter currently based in Hamburg. At the young age of 23, he has already proven to be a prominent, promising soloist performing as a member of the Latvian Radio Big Band as well as making appearances with other locally known musicians and bands. Dmitrijevs is also a bandleader, giving many small performances with various jazz projects of his own. His debut album, Chapter I, has received praise from local music critics as well as audiences. The album features a younger generation of Latvian jazz musicians and consists of eight stylistically different musical pieces, each dedicated to a specific emotional memory of its author. Dmitrijevs moved to Hamburg in October 2021 to pursue his master's degree in jazz music. During his first semester of studies, he has already performed with such artists as Tino Derado, Rudi Mahall, John Schroeder, and Matthias Schubert.

[www.vadimsmusic.com](http://www.vadimsmusic.com)  
[vadim@vadimsmusic.com](mailto:vadim@vadimsmusic.com)

# Toms Mikāls



Toms Mikāls is a composer, songwriter, jazz pianist, and improviser. He graduated from the Prince Claus Conservatoire in the Netherlands, has participated in a number of international projects and many album recordings, and is a keen teacher and educator. His very own debut mini-album, titled Teikas, was released in 2021 and features piano improvisations about things, places, and people.

 [toms.mikals](https://www.facebook.com/toms.mikals)  
[toms.mikals@gmail.com](mailto:toms.mikals@gmail.com)

# Kristians Kalva



Kristians Kalva is one of the most promising young jazz trumpet players in Latvia. He is currently studying at the Royal Conservatoire in The Hague under Rik Mol and Martijn de Laat, who are two of Europe's best-known trumpet players. He has also studied at the Malta College of Music and has won recognition at various international competitions. He regularly collaborates with prominent Latvian orchestras – the Latvian Radio Big Band, the Latvian National Symphony Orchestra, the Sinfonietta Riga chamber orchestra, the Latvian National Opera and Ballet Orchestra – and has performed in international projects in Belgium, Switzerland, Finland, Germany, the United States, Spain, etc.

*[kristians.kalva@outlook.com](mailto:kristians.kalva@outlook.com)*



# Monta Tupčijenko



Monta Tupčijenko is a composer, singer, pianist, and vocal coach. She was born in Latvia, where she also began her musical career. Her studies took her to Tallinn (Estonia), Rotterdam (Netherlands), Trondheim (Norway), and Essen (Germany), where she is currently studying jazz arrangement and composition at the Folkwang University of the Arts. Tupčijenko has written for various different ensembles and genres, from contemporary music for solo piano to big band, choral, and orchestral arrangements. With her chamber jazz quartet Lathyrus, she released a debut album, titled *On the Brink of Light*, in 2021.

 [monta.tupcijenko.music](https://www.facebook.com/monta.tupcijenko.music)  
[www.lathyrusmusic.com](http://www.lathyrusmusic.com)  
[monta.tupcijenko@gmail.com](mailto:monta.tupcijenko@gmail.com)

# Atis Andersons



Atis Andersons is a pianist and composer who began his jazz music studies at Riga Cathedral Choir School and earned a bachelor's degree at the London College of Music (University of West London) thanks to a Mona Blackman scholarship (2014). After his studies in London, he returned to Riga to earn a master's degree from the Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music. He has also studied with Rob van Bavel at the Conservatorium van Amsterdam and with Bob Wijnen. Andersons currently writes and arranges music for his own projects in trio and quartet settings, where he plays both piano and organ.

*<https://soundcloud.com/atis-anderson>  
[atis.andersons@gmail.com](mailto:atis.andersons@gmail.com)*



# LUPA



The contemporary jazz band Lupa was founded in 2016 by four prominent Latvian representatives of jazz and contemporary music: Dāvis Jurka (alto saxophone, flute, effects), Ritvars Garoza (keyboard), Valters Sprūdžs (bass guitar), and Andris Buiķis (drums, Tempest analogue drum machine). The collective's debut LP, *Sequences and Consequences*, was nominated for the "Zelta Mikrofons" Annual Latvian Music Recording Industry Award for jazz music and the Austras Balva award in 2019. The band continued its success in 2021 by releasing a new recording, titled *Koki / Sketches of Trees*.

[www.grupalupa.com](http://www.grupalupa.com)  
[grupa.lupa@gmail.com](mailto:grupa.lupa@gmail.com)

# Very Cool People



Very Cool People is a massive injection of funk and soul combined with jazz, surf, and klezmer. The band has been putting jazz and funk back on the dance floor since 2007. Hailing from Riga, Latvia, the band has lit up clubs and festivals from Estonia to Romania, and from Spain to South Korea. Always open to new experiments, Very Cool People have collaborated with plenty of guest artists from a bunch of countries. Even if they are a live band more than anything else, they have eight studio albums under their belt, are well-received critically, and have also been nominated for awards.

[www.verycoolpeople.org](http://www.verycoolpeople.org)  
[booking@verycoolpeople.org](mailto:booking@verycoolpeople.org)

# FunCOOLio




FunCOOLio is a band from Riga, Latvia, that performs original instrumental compositions in the Baltic Fusion style. The creative association includes guitarist George Panfilov, drummer Jurij Osipovich, bassist Denis Gradalev, saxophonist Fred Hormain, and organ player Vladimir Tuzov. FunCOOLio has been performing live with this line-up for more than a decade. In November 2021, the group released its second studio album, titled Vol. 2, under the FunCOOLio Records label.

 [Funcoolio](#)  
[fnkcoolio@gmail.com](mailto:fnkcoolio@gmail.com)

# Beāte Zviedre



Beāte Zviedre is a very versatile singer who can perform jazz and pop songs as well as classical music. She is also known as the voice of Anna in the Latvian version of the animated film Frozen. Last year, Zviedre was nominated for the prestigious Latvian Grand Music Award in the young artist of the year category. In 2019, her voice was heard all around Europe, in 27 countries, on the Euroradio Christmas Music Day broadcast produced by the European Broadcasting Union. She recently released her debut album, titled Kad es nomizojos. Zviedre also sings soprano in the a cappella group Framest, with which she has performed in many countries worldwide, including Asia, Europe, and Russia.

 [beatezviedremusic](https://www.facebook.com/beatezviedremusic)  
[zviedrebeate@gmail.com](mailto:zviedrebeate@gmail.com)

# Jānis Rubiks



Jānis Rubiks is a Latvian bassist, composer, and arranger based in Riga, Latvia. Over the years, he has become an actively sought musician on the Baltic music scene. Playing both the double and electric bass, he has worked in a variety of genres ranging from jazz and improvised music to classical, popular, and singer-songwriter. Music written by Rubiks has been performed by the Latvian National Symphony Orchestra, the Latvian Radio Big Band, the Liepāja Big Band, singer Beāte Zviedre, the Chamber Jazz Collective, Equanimity Trio, and others.

[www.janisrubiks.com](http://www.janisrubiks.com)  
[janisrubiks@gmail.com](mailto:janisrubiks@gmail.com)



# Arvydas Kazlauskas



Arvydas Kazlauskas is one of the leading saxophone players in Latvia. Trained as a classical musician, he does not limit himself to only “serious”/classical music and is known for his creative curiosity. Kazlauskas is always up for unexpected musical adventures, resulting in collaborations with musicians from other genres and explorations of yet-unknown musical territories. In 2019, he and his ensemble Endless Roar released an album titled Rush Hush (Jersika Records), and a new recording with the same group is on its way.

<http://arvydaskazlauskas.com>  
[arvydas.kazlauskas@gmail.com](mailto:arvydas.kazlauskas@gmail.com)

# Latvian Radio Big Band



The Latvian Radio Big Band, founded in 1966, is one of the most renowned jazz music ensembles in the Baltics. Over the course of many years, it has brought together outstanding jazz musicians and has proven itself with high-quality recordings. Since its revival in 2012, the big band has performed with such artists as James Morrison, Lars Danielsson, Jiggs Whigham, Nils Landgren, Richard Bona, and many others. In addition to performing at numerous live jazz events throughout the years, the Latvian Radio Big Band is a frequent guest at recording studios and enjoys working on new compositions by local composers and collaborating with international jazz heavyweights such as Randy Brecker, Mats Holmquist, Pierre Bertrand, and others.

[www.radiobigband.lv](http://www.radiobigband.lv)  
[info@radiobigband.lv](mailto:info@radiobigband.lv)



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