



LATVIAN JAZZ REAL BOOK / 2017

LATVIAN  
JAZZ REAL BOOK 2017



It looks like this won't be a real Latvian Jazz Real Book after all. No notes at all, just words.... My fault!

However....

In some fancy way it definitely will be a Real Book, and that is what we had in mind when giving a title to this, well, Latvian Jazz Real Book.

We intended to document and present here the most significant themes of the current Latvian jazz scene. Or the most original ones. Or the most dynamic ones. Or the most invigorating ones. Or....

Well, we hope that you will find many more inspiring adjectives to characterise our artists and their music when you hear them. And that you will benefit from these Latvian jazz stories – either by joining our musicians on stage, or by spreading the news about them, or maybe by enriching some Latvian jazz festival with your own music, or by inviting us to join yours.

In any case, we hope that these (almost) Latvian Jazz Real Book themes will be developed in an inspiringly jazzy manner!

Ināra Jakubone



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The LMIC provides information on Latvian composers and their works and on the Latvian music scene in general.

The Centre facilitates contacts between foreign and Latvian performing artists, composers, researchers and the media. The LMIC takes care of Latvia's representation at music exhibitions and fairs and publishes informative materials.

In 2014 the LMIC started the creation of the national label SKANI, with the aim to produce high-quality recordings of Latvian classical music and make them available to listeners and audiences worldwide.

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Editor: Ināra Jakubone  
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 Photos: promotional photos, archive photos  
 Published by Latvian Music Information Centre, 2017

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# LATVIAN RADIO BIG BAND – PROVIDING A BREATH OF FRESH AIR

KASPARS ZAVIĻEISKIS

**KĀRLIS VANAGS – A SEEMINGLY INTROVERTED THINKER WITH AN UNEXPECTEDLY BROAD RANGE OF EXPRESSION IN VARIOUS STYLES OF JAZZ MUSIC. HE IS THE MUSICAL DIRECTOR OF THE RECENTLY REBORN LATVIAN RADIO BIG BAND AND IS ALSO AN ARRANGER, COMPOSER AND SAXOPHONE PLAYER FOR THE BAND.**



**Please give us a short description of what the Latvian Radio Big Band is right now.**

I'd like to say that we're moving forward with great strides. On all fronts. We're now considered full-blooded, professional musicians on the Latvian cultural scene. Meaning, the big band is now 100% financed by the state, just like Latvia's symphonic orchestras and professional choirs. The big dream has been fulfilled! And our musicians themselves are a source of joy, too. We're developing all the time, the orchestra is sounding better and better. We're able to spend more time developing programmes, offering listeners more variety. For example, recently at the Saxophonia festival we were very excited to play two concerts together with New York-based saxophonist Seamus Blake, who is currently one of the best saxophone players in the world. The repertoire was 100% his original music that had been prepared specially for us. That makes a big difference, whether a programme has already been played before and we're just repeating it, or whether we've generated it together with the artist. The satisfaction is much greater.

**You are the musical director of the band. So it's primarily your job to seek out projects for collaboration, create programmes together with guest artists and, in addition, arrange and compose works for the band.**

I work closely with our artistic director, Māris Briežkalns. We plan the programmes, find guest artists, generate ideas. My job is to make everything happen on the music end of things. I arrange, compose and work with the big band musicians.

**Can you brag a little and tell us what have been some of the band's highlights over the past few years?**

Every project has contributed something important. We've made several recordings, and we're very pleased about that. We've prepared programmes that have covered a great variety of genres. For example, last year we recorded some arrangements of opera music together with a string section and the legendary Latvian popular music composer Raimonds Pauls on piano. That was a challenging project, because the boundary between the classical interpretation and jazz was very fragile. All of us – myself and the musicians, too – had to really immerse ourselves in the classical sound and find the transition to jazz. We had wonderful arrangements, created by the British musician and arranger Callum Au. He took world-famous opera arias and channelled them through the sound of Count Basie and Duke Ellington.

I also want to mention our own original music project, Latvian Jazz Suite. It's our own individual view on what's important to us, how we feel music. Our newest album was made together with the Swedish big band specialist Mats Holmquist. In a way,

the album is a search for new directions – minimalism in a big band sound. It's daring to create something new. The soloists on the album are the American trumpeter Randy Brecker and the American saxophonist Dick Oatts. Playing together on an album with greats of the jazz world like these two men is a very big accomplishment for a band like ours.

Of course, we've also played a great variety of concerts. We celebrated Raimonds Pauls' 80th birthday with a series of concerts, in which I had the honour of creating arrangements for a very diverse group. We also played together with several soloists from abroad for our band's 50th anniversary. We met again with the American vocalists Allan Harris and China Moses as well as the Swedish trumpeter Lasse Lindgren, whose energy and life story contributed greatly to our band's sound. I could go on and on.

**Here I should add that the Latvian Radio Big Band hasn't quite existed for 50 years without interruption. It ceased to exist in 1996 due to the economic crisis. And only in 2007 you established the City Jazz Big Band, which later turned into the professional group playing today.**

Yes, the gap was long. I'm quite young myself – I'm 33 years old – and I did not play in the earlier Latvian Radio Big Band. So, the big band of the earlier years is something of a mystery to those of us playing today. But there's a huge library of music and also recordings that have been preserved from those days.

When I began the City Jazz Big Band, I never dreamed it could develop into something like the band we have today. Because back then it seemed that big band traditions in Latvia had pretty much died out. But, together with some likeminded people, we began to cultivate those traditions again, we began thinking about how to find the right methods to entice musicians who had come from a completely academic environment. Very many people have passed through this project over the past ten years, and the learning curve has been immense, the changes have been radical. A new generation of professional jazz musicians has emerged.

**What's the source of this phenomenon? Because this isn't quite New Orleans we're living in, is it?**

It's difficult to give a definite answer. I've thought about it a lot. I believe that swift progress is possible when something new and exciting is being created. If certain traditions are long-lived, you can sometimes notice a situation in which only the past is truly glorious and today the idea of the group is really only maintained because of the orchestra's name and legend. What drives us, however, is the fact that the people who are taking part in this project are for the most part young. They've still got that feeling of maximalism and the desire to achieve more and

more. They haven't fallen into a routine in which the big band is just another job. It's interesting how useful modern technologies have become. Musicians can fulfil tasks and exchange ideas on WhatsApp. That means that they can work alone, each in their own room, but at the same time they're working collectively, sending audio and video to each other. That helps them to constantly develop and improve.

### **How much experimentation can a state-financed big band allow?**

We're not bound to a specific framework. We have a certain number of concerts that we have to do, we take part in national events, but we don't have any limits in terms of style and content. We can offer new ideas to listeners. Of course, we need to see to it that we have listeners in the first place. We can't play in such an avantgarde way that in the end we ourselves don't even understand the music. But new ideas are always exciting both for us and for the listeners.

In this context, it's also good to know that playing in the big band is a respected thing among musicians. Everyone recognises that it's a huge investment, an immense amount of work. It's one thing to prepare a programme and organise a concert for a quartet. But it's quite another thing to do the same for an 18-piece band. It's important to bring cohesion to the group. Seamus Blake complimented us by saying that he could feel that everyone in our group thinks in a very similar way, and quickly, too – the group can react deftly to any necessary changes in a programme.

### **What sections comprise your team right now?**

We have four instrument sections. There's the rhythm section, led by drummer Artis Orubs. Actually, he's the conductor of the whole band, because he directs both the dynamics and the tempos. Also in the rhythm group is guitarist Rihards Goba, bassist Edvins Ozols and pianist Viktors Ritovs, who also arranges and composes pieces for the band.

Then there's a five-piece saxophone section – Dāvis Jurka plays the lead and directs the phrasing and musical things, and Gints Pabērzs is responsible for various technical stuff. Our saxophonists also play other instruments, which is a very important aspect of the group. Not all big bands have that range of instrumentation, which Callum Au also commented on. He was very happy that we were able to make use of several woodwinds, such as clarinets and flutes.

We also have two brass sections: four trombonists and five trumpeters. Laura Rozenberga leads the trombone section, and guest musicians have been happy to see a young woman in that position. At the top of the pyramid is the trumpet section, which isn't that easy to put together in Latvia. But I think we've





managed to put together a good team. I'm especially pleased with our lead trumpet, Andris Augstkalns, who is young but has accepted a difficult role and taken on great responsibility. It's also physically a difficult job to have precise command of the upper register, with good articulation and intonation.

**You did not mention that you yourself are in fact one of the leading saxophonists in the band. Sometimes in concerts you also take on the role of conductor.**

I develop the musical material in rehearsals, but I don't play the lead in the saxophone section, because I often have to pay attention to a lot of other nuances going on in the band. I play the second part, and during freer rubato parts I tend to conduct a bit where necessary. Of course, when we do projects like the opera arrangements, then we need a conductor up front.

**Where does the big band find new-generation talent?**

It's great to see that some of the new musicians are kids who began playing in the Big Band School when they were teenagers. That's the school I established together with a few other colleagues. I got the idea when I became the director of the City Jazz Big Band, because I understood that we need to create our own resources. It's important that kids start learning big band skills already at age 14 or 15, because it's a lot harder to influence a musician's thinking and perception when he's older.

The Big Band School is still going strong. It's a privately run programme operated by the City Jazz Riga rhythmic music society. It's now already got three groups: we've retained the name City Jazz Big Band, which is the highest level at the school and consists of youngsters from the age of 13–14 to 19–20; then there's the City Jazz Late Night Band, which are the so-called free-time musicians; and then there's also the City Jazz Youth Band, which are the youngest musicians, beginning around age 12–13.

**Sounds like a finely structured system that obviously works well. How do you envision the future of the Latvian Radio Big Band? You no doubt have some even higher goals and dreams.**

We're already achieving our goals and living our dreams. But it requires a lot of work. New programmes need to be developed, new compositions written, recordings made, many concerts performed both in Latvia and beyond its borders. Our main goal is for the Latvian Radio Big Band to be as well known as, say, the WDR Big Band in Cologne, Germany, or the Danish Radio Jazz Orchestra. It's a great pleasure that several guest soloists who've played with us have genuinely declared that our big band is in no way worse than those of certain other countries. And sometimes we're even more interesting because of our fresh outlook, because of the breath of fresh air we provide...

# THE WHEELS INVENTED AND FORTRESSES CONQUERED

ANETE AŠMANE

SINGER INGA BĒRZIŅA ON JAZZ EDUCATION



FIFTEEN YEARS AGO THE JAZZ SINGER INGA BĒRZIŅA ACCEPTED A CHALLENGE FROM HER COLLEAGUES AND TRIED HER HAND AT TEACHING, THEREBY BECOMING ONE OF THE PIONEERS OF LATVIA'S SYSTEM OF JAZZ MUSIC EDUCATION. OVER THE YEARS SHE HAS HELPED SEVERAL STUDENTS DEVELOP INTO ARTISTICALLY ACCOMPLISHED AND PROFESSIONAL SOLOISTS RECOGNISED BOTH LOGALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY. BUT MAYBE MORE IMPORTANTLY, SHE HAS ALSO CAREFULLY FOSTERED AND PROMOTED THE DEVELOPMENT OF LATVIA'S JAZZ ENVIRONMENT AND MADE IT A STABLE COMPONENT OF THE COUNTRY'S CULTURAL LIFE. BĒRZIŅA CURRENTLY TEACHES YOUNG SINGERS AT THE RIGA CATHEDRAL CHOIR SCHOOL, THE RIGA TEACHER TRAINING AND EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT ACADEMY AND THE JĀZEPS VĪTOLS LATVIAN ACADEMY OF MUSIC. FROM TIME TO TIME SHE CAN ALSO BE SEEN ON STAGE.

**Anete Ašmane:** It seems that you have been working as a jazz vocals pedagogue since the very beginning of jazz music education in Latvia. When exactly did it begin?

**Inga Bērziņa:** That was in 2002, when I was first offered a job in pedagogy. Fifteen years ago, when professional jazz music education began to develop in Latvia, we had to get by with local resources.

Today, jazz education enjoys a stable and serious position in Latvia's general music education system. People can count on it and decide for themselves whether to continue at the next level right here in Latvia or to go abroad. It has all developed quite naturally and logically, because, as we know, nothing is created in an empty space, and pedagogues also require time to understand priorities and methods of working. One needs to understand oneself not only as a performer but also as a teacher. At the beginning I, too, needed to develop my own system, invent my own personal wheel. Now I can tell a student in ten minutes some of the main things that actually took me a long time to discover.

I want to stress that all of the festivals and master classes that regularly take place here play an important role in jazz education. Also, the contribution made by the Riga Jazz Stage international jazz vocalist competition should not be underestimated. At first it was a local competition that tried to assess the local situation. Although the first year was largely experimental, the competition nevertheless discovered a few stars, such as Intars Busulis and Ieva Kerēvica. It was obvious that there were people in Latvia who knew how to sing jazz.

Over time, the competition has grown larger and more professional and has gained international visibility. So it brings even greater pleasure that our own musicians are able to

compete against strong talent from abroad and manage to take some prizes almost every year. In my work with young musicians, I've become convinced that Latvians as a people have been blessed with musical potential. That means we have to work, search and develop.

**AA: Do many young people wish to see themselves as jazz vocalists and study jazz?**

**IB:** Yes, the successes of our musicians create interest and a desire to learn and develop oneself in the jazz genre. Sometimes I'm asked whether our country needs so many jazz vocalists. Education does not guarantee an illustrious career, but it is a good professional foundation for further musical activity, whatever genre a musician eventually chooses to work in. As a teacher, I can offer students several happy years during which they can develop themselves and do what they enjoy most – sing.

As artists, we all sometimes make mistakes, make the wrong choices, fail to develop due to our personal traits or unexpected circumstances. But that's why you need to be convinced that this is the main and most important thing that you want to do in your life. It's not always easy to show oneself vividly on stage, to sing excellently, to feel free and creative. But each time we feel fear is a step backwards. You need to forge ahead, and that happens through stress, fear and mistakes.

I'm glad that I've met a lot of talented people precisely because they've decided to study jazz and hear my pedagogical advice. I consider it an honour and a great fortune to later be able to follow their development, their careers and their professional lives. I'm proud to say that my students have strong personalities, are professionally capable, and that they have surpassed their teacher. I'm glad that I've been able to inspire them, to motivate them, to help them. I try to discover that spark and different drumbeat in each person so that they can present themselves as individuals. Each of them has something special, but they don't always realise it or know how to accentuate it. They need a little help.

**AA: Which Latvian jazz singers have enjoyed international success?**

**IB:** Among the winners of Riga Jazz Stage over the years are Jūlija Zakirova, Kristīne Prauliņa and Daumants Kalniņš. Beāte Zviedre and Rūta Dūduma have also enjoyed success. Evilena Protektore placed in the competition, and so did Līva Dumpe last year. After graduating from the jazz department at a music high school, many of our singers have gone abroad to study, for example, Ronja Burve in the Netherlands, Jekaterina Šarigina in London, Kristīna Trezune in Austria, Arta Jēkabsons in the United States and Kristīne Liede in Finland. It's useful to become acquainted with other cultures, other environments, other

methods and experience what's happening on the jazz scene in a global context. I'm happy for every musician who is able to be accepted at a distinguished educational institution abroad with a wonderful reputation and long-standing traditions, and there are more and more such musicians.

And it's nice to see the fruits of the young Latvian jazz generation's labours right here, in Latvia. It's good to go abroad, study, gain experience...but Latvia is where they're from. The people here wait for them to return, they want to see the growth, the discoveries and the new projects.

**AA: Do you feel that a new generation of jazz pedagogues is also developing?**

**IB:** For a long time I had the feeling that I was preparing singers but wasn't meeting any new colleagues. But now the time has finally come that I can recommend my former students as good jazz pedagogues. The first master's degree students in jazz vocals will graduate from the Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music this year, and the first musicians who have earned master's degrees abroad will be returning home. It's a good feeling to know that I've lived to see the echoes of, the responses to, my work.

# THE WINNERS

## EVILENA PROTEKTORE

For jazz musicians, a competition rarely means a chance to show their superiority – it's not about "who's faster" or "who's stronger", but rather an opportunity to show their inner treasures to the world, to tell their stories in their own unique language. Here is a small introduction to Latvian heroes who have fought a fair fight to prove that they deserve to be called jazz musicians!

### JEKATERINA ŠARIGINA

Jazz Voices 2011 (LT), 1st place

Jekaterina Šarigina is currently based in London. A graduate of the jazz department at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama in London, she studied voice and improvisation with Brigitte Beraha and Scott Stroman. Šarigina's love for crafted arrangements and sensitive interpretations of texts has earned her the opportunity to do an exchange year at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et de Danse de Paris.



### ANDRIS BUIĶIS

Keep an Eye Jazz Awards 2011 (NL), 1st place  
(with the Daniel Mester Quartet)

Andris Buiķis is one of the most talented drummers in Latvia. He graduated from the Conservatorium van Amsterdam and returned to Latvia in 2013. He has participated in various Latvian and international bands, such as Very Cool People, The Brag Pack and K Trio. In 2014 Buiķis signed a contract with the Latvian drum makers BRO Creation and is one of the artists representing the company.



## **RŪTA DŪDUMA**

Nõmme Jazz competition 2013 (EE), 1st place

Rūta Dūduma is a singer who graduated from the Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music and is currently a soloist with the projects Framest and Vintāža. The young singer has gained much experience working with the best Latvian musicians and is now actively pursuing a solo career.



## **KRISTĪNE PRAULIŅA**

Rīga Jazz Stage 2014 (LV), Grand Prix

Kristīne Prauliņa started singing in the Riga Gospel Choir at age twelve. That's when she seriously got into music. Now she tours all around Latvia and the world as a soloist as well as with the Riga Gospel Choir, the Latvian Radio Big Band and other jazz, blues and pop music bands.



## **EVILENA PROTEKTORE**

Jazz Voices 2014 (LT), Grand Prix

Evilena Protektore is a jazz singer and composer and the leader of various ensembles. She received a Nic Gotham prize for her contribution to jazz music and jazz life in Latvia. She currently studies in the jazz department at the Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music and spent a year studying at the Conservatorio di Santa Cecilia under Prof. Maria Pia de Vito and another half year at the Hochschule für Musik, Theater und Medien Hannover studying under Romy Camerun. Protektore has collaborated with Lynn Seaton, Rob Duguay, Tommaso Troncon, Gilad Abro and others.



## **TOMS RUDZINSKIS**

Dutch Jazz Competition 2014 (NL), Grand Prix

Saxophonist and composer Toms Rudzinskis is one of the most innovative jazzmen in the country and has participated in a vast number of significant competitions and festivals, including the Dutch Jazz Competition (2014), the Burghausen Jazz Competition (2013) and Keep an Eye (2012). In 2012 he was selected as a jazz ambassador to the Bimhuis concert hall in Amsterdam.



## DAUMANTS KALNIŅŠ

Riga Jazz Stage 2015 (LV), Grand Prix

Daumants Kalniņš is a talented jazz singer with a certain stage charm. He graduated from the Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music specialising in jazz vocals and oboe. He collaborates with the Latvian National Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra Rīga and composer Raimonds Pauls. Kalniņš recently released his debut album, *Part of Me*, which was nominated for best jazz and blues album at the “Zelta Mikrofons” Latvian music awards.



## ARTA JĒKABSONE

Shure Montreux Jazz Voice Competition 2016 (CH), 1st place

Inspired by the quote “Love what you do and do what you love” (Ray Bradbury), Arta Jēkabsone is fulfilling herself with singing. Last year she graduated from the department of jazz and popular music at the Riga Cathedral Choir School and, having won a full scholarship at The New School for Jazz and Contemporary Music, she is continuing to improve her knowledge about jazz music in New York City under great mentors such as Janet Lawson, Kate Baker, Reggie Workman, La Tanya Hall, Cecil Bridgewater, Richard Boukas and many more.



## FRAMEST

vokal.total International A Cappella Competition 2016 (AT), Gold Diploma in the A Cappella Jazz Ensemble category

The vocal group Framest was founded in 2005 by students at the Riga Cathedral Choir School. Framest has developed its own repertoire ranging from jazz standards to original compositions, including arrangements of classical and popular music. The creative biography of Framest includes collaborations with the Grammy Award-winning vocal ensemble New York Voices and its artistic leader Peter Eldridge and also the famous Real Group from Sweden.





# RIGA JAZZ STAGE COMPETITION

ALEKSANDRA LINE

This international jazz artists' contest was founded in 2004 and is the only jazz contest in Latvia that has attained such recognition by gathering young and undiscovered jazz talent from all over the world. The contest is organised by the Contemporary Music Centre, and 142 jazz musicians from 21 countries have taken part in it since 2004.

The aim of Riga Jazz Stage is to give young jazz artists a chance to perform on an international stage together with musicians from different countries. Each year the contest draws more and more attention from local and foreign media.

Over the years, professional musicians, producers, directors of festivals and educators from the United States, Latvia, Finland, Switzerland, Estonia, United Kingdom, Turkey and Lithuania have been among the jury members. World-class musicians have given concerts as guests of the contest: drummers Terri Lyne Carrington (USA) and Jojo Mayer (Switzerland), guitarist Giorgio Serci (UK/Italy), vocalists Mandy Gaines (USA), Anthony Strong (UK), Svenja Schmidt (Germany), China Moses (France/USA) and many others.

In its beginning, the contest gathered jazz artists from the Baltic countries, who were later joined by artists from Finland. Since 2013 jazz musicians from the Baltic and Scandinavian countries, Poland, Belgium, Spain, Germany, Great Britain, Slovenia, Slovakia, Croatia, Israel, Georgia and even Canada and the United States have taken part in the contest.

In addition to the regular "Jazz Vocal" category, every year a different instrumental category is added. Guitar, piano, bass, drums, saxophone and trumpet have already been represented in the contest.



Riga Jazz Stage 2017 winners Shanel Johns (USA, Jazz Vocal) and Matīss Čudars (Latvia, Jazz Guitar)

### **RIGA JAZZ STAGE IN NUMBERS:**

- 2004:** "Jazz Vocal", 7 contestants, 3 countries
- 2005:** "Jazz Vocal" and "Jazz Guitar", 10 contestants, 3 countries
- 2006:** "Jazz Vocal" and "Jazz Bass", 11 contestants, 4 countries
- 2007:** "Jazz Vocal" and "Jazz Piano", 15 contestants, 4 countries
- 2008:** "Jazz Vocal" and "Jazz Drums", 12 contestants, 4 countries
- 2013:** "Jazz Vocal", 12 contestants, 8 countries
- 2014:** "Jazz Vocal" and "Jazz Saxophone", 26 contestants, 12 countries
- 2015:** "Jazz Vocal" and "Jazz Trumpet", 23 contestants, 12 countries
- 2016:** "Jazz Vocal" and "Jazz Trombone", 26 contestants, 15 countries
- 2017:** „Jazz Vocal" and „Jazz Guitar", 26 contestants, 13 countries

# “RĪGAS RITMI” FESTIVAL

ALEKSANDRA LINE

The Rīgas Ritmi Festival is one of the most popular music festivals in Latvia and its mission is to reinvigorate the jazz scene in Latvia. The festival's stages at different locations in Riga feature world-famous and award-winning artists as well as young and yet undiscovered musical talent.

The first Rīgas Ritmi Festival took place in July 2001; since then, around 500 artists from more than 20 countries have performed at more than 500 concerts (including free outdoor performances) to a total audience of more than 150,000 people. The festival has gained the status of a national cultural event by successfully promoting Riga and Latvia around the globe.

Initially the festival took place once a year, during the first week of July. Starting in 2011, the festival expanded to an additional winter and spring concert session, thus providing music lovers with concerts all year long.

The Rīgas Ritmi Festival is a true musical celebration with performances by outstanding artists, including Bobby McFerrin, Dianne Reeves, Take 6, Richard Bona, the BBC Big Band, Avishai Cohen, Patti Austin, Scott Hamilton, Freddy Cole, the Yellowjackets, Victor Wooten, Buika, Astillero, Jojo Mayer, Medeski Martin & Wood, Robert Glasper and Diane Schuur, as well as the greatest Latvian musicians and, as stated before, new talent.

The idea of an international contemporary jazz and improvisation music festival in Riga was initiated by Latvian jazz musician and producer Māris Briežkalns, who is the festival's artistic director and remains the driving force behind the festival today. Due to his contribution to the creative scene, Briežkalns has received some of the highest state honours, including the Order of the Three Stars.

## CULTURAL EDUCATION PROJECTS

One of the festival's main objectives is to educate, both the audience and young musicians. In addition to diverse concerts, the

festival also features jam sessions and workshops at which acclaimed musicians share their knowledge, experience, techniques and artistic vision to new talent, serving as an inspiration and turning point for many young musicians in their careers.

An integral part of the festival's audience comes from music and arts schools – every educational establishment for music and arts in Latvia receives two free-of-charge tickets to workshops and concerts at the Riga Congress Centre. Unforgettable workshops have been led by Horacio el Negro Hernandez, Victor Wooten, Markus Stockhausen, Vinx, Bo Stief and the Alex Wilson Salsa Orchestra.

### **RĪGAS RITMI SHOWCASE**

An important element of the Rīgas Ritmi Festival is the Showcase project, which aims to present the best Latvian jazz, improvisation and world music performers to the world's jazz scene. During Showcase, guests from abroad can meet new Latvian talent, watch them perform, meet them at workshops and talk to them during panel discussions.

### **RĪGAS RITMI FESTIVAL PRESENTATION IN THE USA**

In spring 2011 the festival made its presentation tour in the United States. The Rīgas Ritmi All Stars with the Māris Briežkalns Quintet gave a series of concerts and interviews around the United States. The tour culminated in the ensemble's debut at the world-famous Blue Note Jazz Club in New York City, which was the first time that Latvian artists headlined at the Blue Note. This programme was realised through the cooperation and sponsorship of New York University (NYU) and the New York Foundation for the Arts (NYFA).

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**IF RĪGAS RITMI CONTINUES PROGRAMMING SUCH COSMOPOLITAN ACTS AS CAÑIZARES, REEVES AND PARISIEN AND PEIRANI, WHILE ALSO PROVIDING HOMEGROWN JAZZ TALENT WITH SKILL-HONING INCUBATORS LIKE THE LATVIAN RADIO BIG BAND, ITS REPUTATION AS A WORLD-CLASS MUSIC FESTIVAL WILL ONLY GROW. AND THAT WILL SURELY HELP DESIGNATE RIGA AS A FIRST-RATE SUMMERTIME EUROPEAN DESTINATION FOR JAZZ LOVERS.**

**JOHN MURF, 2016**

MUSIC REMAINS A TOUGH BUSINESS, BUT FESTIVALS LIKE RIGAS RITMI AND YOUNG MUSICIANS SUCH AS THOSE I MET AND HEARD IN RIGA MAKE THE FUTURE LOOK HOPEFUL.

BRUCE LINDSAY, 2015

Māris Briežkalns Quintet at the Blue Note, New York



# PROVIDING HIGH DOSES OF JAZZ

## SAULKRASTI JAZZ FESTIVAL AND SUMMER CAMP

### EVILENA PROTEKTORE

Every jazz musician has been a student himself at some point in his life, and a student has to have a place to learn, whether it's a formal institution, a bunch of workshops, listening to recordings and following the self-education path at home, having a mentor or going to a jazz camp. Wait, a jazz camp? Well, that sounds interesting.... And you know what? There is just such a camp in Latvia, and this year it will be celebrating its 20th anniversary!

The Saulkrasti Jazz Festival and Summer Camp was founded in 1997. Based at a secluded living complex with a hotel and concert hall and very close to the seaside, it is a perfect place for both



students and listeners. The whole week is intense – workshops for the students from morning until evening, and then a concert and a jam session open to anyone who wants to listen or participate, or maybe both? Guest artists of the festival are always both local and international, and the same goes for the teachers, who work hard to introduce young people to the deep world of jazz music. The workshops are divided into specialties, so that musicians can practice their own playing skills but also learn to play in an ensemble, or a combo. At the end of the week there is always a special concert, at which the student combos present what they have been working on during the week.

Almost every jazz musician in Latvia has been a participant of Saulkrasti Jazz at least once; they say that it's a perfect way of getting high doses of jazz in a short amount of time and improving their playing and improvisation skills. And that is most certainly the truth. After all, one doesn't often get a chance to spend an entire week surrounded by world-famous jazz musicians and receive a piece of their wisdom. There have been some noticeable names amongst the teachers and performers, like Billy Cobham, Dave Weckl, James Taylor, Mezzoforte, Ola Onabule, Sophie Bernardo, Steinar Aadnekvam, Victor Bailey, Yuval Ron, Janet Lawson and many others. Saulkrasti Jazz Workshops is a unique chance to spend an unforgettable and glorious week side by side with world-famous musicians and develop musical skills in a wonderful jazzy ambience.

Alongside the festival and jazz camp, Saulkrasti Jazz is also the home of the Baltic Drummers' League, which is a young drummer competition organised by the "Vasaras mūzikas sesija" (Summer Music Session) association together with the Paiste. The participants are promising musicians from Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. They compete in semi-finals in their home countries, and then the best musicians come to Latvia to take part in the finals of the competition during the Saulkrasti Jazz Festival. The competitors are divided into two groups: Juniors (14- to 17-year-olds) and Seniors (18- to 25-year-olds)..

All in all, Saulkrasti Jazz can be called a cradle of young talent. Some of the students have earned a solid place not only on the Latvian music scene but also globally, by participating in competitions, bringing back winner titles and getting accepted to such notable schools as the Berklee College of Music, The New School of Jazz and Contemporary Music, the Conservatorium van Amsterdam, the Jazz-Institut Berlin and others. The organisers of the Saulkrasti Jazz Festival are proud of their students and are honoured to be the creators of one of those things that leaves such a grand footprint in the land called "jazz education in Latvia", bringing this amazing music not only to the listeners but also to the new generation of musicians in Latvia.

# WISE MUSIC SOCIETY

ALEKSANDRA LINE

Believe in the jazz musician. Be proud. Get close to every listener. Stay wise. And many more axioms serving as a life credo. The Wise Music Society is an association founded in Riga, Latvia, in 2013 with the aim of following all of the above.

Established by music theorists, practitioners and enthusiasts who have education, experience, passion and knowledge about jazz, funk and other music genres as well as a desire and the means to contribute to the development of the Latvian music scene, the Wise Music Society started with the ambition to inform everyone about the things happening daily in the jazz industry, no matter who or what the musician, the organiser or the concert location may be. The association's first project was Jazzin.lv, the first digital jazz concert and event guide in Latvia. The online weekly event list provides information about where one can find live music events, movie nights, jam session evenings and workshops happening in Latvia during the current month – everything related to jazz with the possibility of adding your own events to it as well. The webpage has a special design that resembles the black-and-white Latvian newspapers of the 1970s and symbolises cultural values that do not change over the years and generations.

During the first years of its existence, the organisation undertook a variety of projects: the Made in Latvia contest for young jazz/funk bands; the Latvian leg of the Songevity European tour; the first 360-degree immersive video in Latvia, called #STOP360; and the Wise Music Events series, to name just a few. In 2014 the Wise Music Society came up with an idea to gather the most famous Latvian bands that compose and play funk music and organise a festival called Riga Funk Fest. In August 2014 and 2015 the festival gathered on stage various Latvian and foreign funk bands and was attended by more than 7000 listeners from all over the world.

In 2011 UNESCO officially designated April 30 as International



Jazz Day in order to highlight jazz and its diplomatic role of uniting people in all corners of the globe. Despite the fact that even though the Latvian jazz community is very professional, jazz musicians have a lot to brag about, their technique and improvisation skills are exceptional, and their inner world and creativity is something that inspires the people around them, our jazz community is still relatively small and young. That's why it was so important for the Wise Music Society to bring the celebration of this day to Latvia.

In 2014 the International Jazz Day Latvia celebration took place for the first time, with 17 concerts and 142 musicians. In 2015 jazz was celebrated with 28 concerts in six Latvian cities and also the Latvian embassy in London. In 2016 International Jazz Day Latvia took place for the third time already, with 30 events happening in five Latvian cities.

The aim of International Jazz Day Latvia is to show the rich variety and colours of the jazz genre in Latvia as well as to help the country and musicians become a part of the international jazz movement. The idea of celebrating a jazz day in this way is to attract more musicians and more listeners and to show the audience that we've got a lot of awesome musicians in Latvia. Such events also show musicians that they have listeners and give them hope for a bright jazz future, because it is very important to motivate musicians to make music.

The main mission of the Wise Music Society is to help listeners find new music and to help bands find their listeners and attract new target audiences. The ultimate goal is to build a strong and united music community that can share experiences, organise and enjoy events and make music that addresses every listener. The society would like to see Latvians and guests of our beautiful country reacting to jazz positively, by attending events, enjoying them and spreading the word.

<http://jazzday.lv>

## INTERNATIONAL JAZZ DAY LATVIA

brought to you by  
WiseMusicSociety

STARPTAUTISKA

**DŽEZA  
DIENA**

LATVIJA

30. APRĪLIS 2017



# AINAVISTI\*. WITH A DESIRE TO BE HEARD

EDGARS CĪRULIS, PIANIST, COMPOSER

The value of any idea is zero when it is still in the start-up phase. Once resources and people become involved in the idea, it gains a form in which it can be sold. At the beginning, Ainavisti was just a random thought in my mind. But the group has now become a reality and a forum in which several people can express themselves. These are people who believed in my idea from the very start, when the potential results were not yet evident.

\*Ainavisti – landscape painters in Latvian

It is commonly believed that the most difficult time for any project is its beginning. I have a different view of things. I believe that all phases of a project are equally difficult and equally easy – everything depends on one's point of view and reactions. Often the only element of our lives that we can control are our reactions to events. And that's why we should allow things to happen and flow exactly as they are meant to do. By adhering to this philosophy, I discovered an organic and harmonious way of developing my group's sound, image and identity.

From the commercial aspect, it might seem that we have chosen a musical genre that is very complicated to sell. The foundations of Ainavisti's music can be found in jazz, a genre that occupies a very small niche in Latvia's already modestly sized music market. But we soon expanded our range of influences to adjacent genres and styles. By getting to know musicians from other musical contexts, we have introduced colours from the worlds of classical, ethnic and other styles of Western rhythmic music (which includes progressive rock, fusion and world music elements). In order to blur the boundaries even more, we recently also began involving "rhythm tap" in our concerts. One of my main mottos is "Do not limit your music in terms of style or genre! Make music authentically and honestly, and let the listener define it."

When asked what kind of music I play, I always respond, "We play good music, music that we'd be happy listening to ourselves." That's also one of the main things that motivates me. I want to create a message that I would be interested in hearing myself; I want to give listeners the opportunity to experience something out of the ordinary, at the same time letting them connect the dots, or, in other words, link the emotions they feel through the music with their own lives and experiences.

I was motivated to found the group Ainavisti by my need to create a platform in which both I and other musicians could fulfil ourselves, communicate with each other and search for the unknown. Although in the beginning I was the main leader/composer (this is evident on our debut album, titled "-"), the other musicians are now gradually coming forward with their own compositions and ideas, too, so that we can realise them together. We stand by our motto: "It's not our names or numbers that are important, but the idea that we represent." This means that Ainavisti can be a duet, a nonet with two step dancers, or a whole orchestra. The main thing is the music and its message, which will always be in harmony with Ainavisti's original impulse, namely, to create unique landscapes of sound from various sources of inspiration (paintings, nature, the city, people) and let listeners experience them through visually stimulating music.

And now a little about our album. I know that the title confuses people, so I'll explain. On the cover you see us, Ainavisti. The

# AINAVISTI –



dash after our name has a twofold meaning. It represents the Japanese kanji character for “one”, or “first”. But it can also be interpreted as a dash (which in Latvian is called a “thought sign”), encouraging listeners to come up with their own titles for the album. The album itself is like a piece of historical evidence, a record of what Ainavisti was like in 2015 and 2016. The music consists of my own original compositions inspired by paintings (Dali’s Clocks, Starry Night, Parquet Polishers), emotional landscapes (Full Moon Chronicles, A Dream Returning, Aadya, When the Common Path Takes Apart) and real places (Home, Walking) as well as a short suite about travelling (Wanderer I and Wanderer II). The music was created in a relatively short time, so it tells a very personal story about my own development as a composer, as a pianist and also as the leader of an ensemble.

I once heard a saying about music that really struck a chord with me: “Talking about music is like dancing about architecture.” It’s hard to succinctly and precisely describe what you hear on our album or at our concerts, but I’m convinced that what we create is very unique and even necessary for the music market in Latvia and the world. I don’t want to limit us only to the context of jazz, because I believe that wouldn’t really be fair either to jazz or to us. But I guess jazz is nevertheless the closest source. I feel that nowadays people are becoming more open and responsive towards the new and unusual. At first, people were often unnerved by or fearful of modern jazz, which was a style that did not originate here but was instead brought over from America and Scandinavia. But now that we’ve more or less integrated our national identity and let those ideas pass through our prism, listeners are ready to listen and delve deeper.

Right now, having stabilised the make-up of Ainavisti, I’m looking ahead to a bright future. I feel like each musician – and each dancer, too – is ready to say something and wants to be heard. By supporting each other we feel strong and full of energy, ambitious and reckless. At the same time, however, we are also level-headed and compassionate, ready to give ourselves completely to music and the listeners.



## QUIET JAZZ

MIKUS SOLOVEJS

CD Yours Faithfully, Deniss Pashkevich  
Published by Riga Room, released on September 30, 2016  
Deniss Pashkevich, Christian Frank, Aaron Parks, Kenneth  
Dahl Knudsen, Lisbeth Diers



Last autumn witnessed the release of a recording that is not only a jazz masterpiece but was also published right here in Latvia, on the Riga Room music label. The core of the Yours Faithfully album consists of Danish guitarist Christian Frank, world renowned Jewish-American pianist Aaron Parks from New York and our own saxophonist Deniss Pashkevich. Pashkevich is well known in Latvia, and practically no significant jazz event in the past twenty years has taken place in Latvia without him. He is a kind of jazz chameleon – there is hardly a style of modern jazz that he has not given a serious try. Sometimes it's even difficult to follow all the groups, recordings and concerts he has taken part in.

However, when listening to Yours Faithfully, it's clear that this is a special album, because here we meet an artist who has not only found his very own voice and signature style, but has also created a very personal album. This is music that is better suited to the concert hall than the club – this is music for church, not music for the bar. Taken more broadly, it's possible that 2016 will go down in history as a year of deeply personal and revealing recordings. At the beginning of the year we received David Bowie's letter of farewell, and at the end of summer Nick Cave released his diary of pain. Even Radiohead, those experimenters of modern rock, moved away from their usual tinkering to record a relatively simply structured "break-up" album. It seems that listeners are increasingly appreciating genuine and personal stories and that music's adherence to a specific genre is no longer so important.

Yours Faithfully proves that instrumental music can tell a personal story. Words can lie, but sound cannot. From the very first measures Pashkevich presents a kind of grounded stateliness and ache, which brings this music into the realm of John Coltrane's spiritual hymns, and the reference to the Judeo-Christian tradition and the Holy Scriptures in the track titles "Aramaic Man" and "Sons of Levy" is self-evident.

Parks' piano contributes notably to the general mood of the album. It is rare to find such a highly acclaimed musician who also manages so well in a comparatively second-tier role. The calibre of this musician is clear from the very first chords Parks plays, and yet he delicately remains in a supporting role even during his improvisations, which only strengthens the collective sound of the album. Apparently, musical modesty is the main quality of this album, with Frank's restrained guitar calling to mind some of the best examples of ascetic playing put out by the ECM label. Likewise, Kenneth Dahl Knudsen's contrabass and Lisbeth Diers' percussion do not simply provide a rhythmic foundation to the music; instead, they add a special levity in the style of European jazz. I cannot get the vision out of my head that Miles himself was together with them in the studio, whispering in his gravelly and hypnotic voice, "Play quieter, quieter. Fewer notes. Tell only your own story."

The highlights on the album are Pashkevich's compositions "Yours Faithfully" and "Aramaic Man". Their melodic lines are like thick, slow-flowing lava, their rhythmic lines like barely perceptible vibrations of the upper layer while the stressed tectonic plates underneath move in unexpected directions in response to the tension. And, believe me, it's very difficult to achieve such a mood. One can learn to play Charlie Parker's or Michael Brecker's improvisations and, by imitating the so-called freedom of jazz, throw strings of memorised notes at the dazed audience. But there's no quick trick to acquiring one's own unique vibration in such a slow and meditative mood. That kind of thing is taught in very different kinds of lessons, lessons that do not necessarily come during life's easier moments. Life experience, or "breaking out", as I believe it's sometimes called.

I often listen to Blue Note or Impulse recordings from the golden era of jazz recording and cannot understand how they achieved that particular sound. What magic did they possess? Why don't people play like that anymore? The level of skill is the same, the notes are the same, but the result isn't always as personal and beautiful. I won't be the one to judge whether the era of larger-than-life personalities is over. But it's no secret that form often takes precedence over content in jazz music today. Being able to break through form is always a gift and a miracle. And the musicians on Yours Faithfully have definitely done so.

Even the name of the recording, Yours Faithfully, carries a different sort of weight than it does when used as a worn-out closing to our daily emails. Here it's more about trust, a test of loyalty. Almost like a reference to the ancient story about Saint Anthony, who, all alone in the middle of the desert, looked to the sky and called out, "Where are you? Have you left me?" And only when he had used up all of his energy and all of his words did a quiet response come...

One wishes to listen to this album again and again, because, of course, each of us has our own deserts and our own lists of answered and unanswered questions. Strangely, this is one of the rare recordings that one can enjoy quietly. And that's because the musicians themselves play and work in harmony with the truth – if everyone around you is yelling, you speak what you must say quietly. People will hear you.

Yours Faithfully received the Latvian Music Recording Award in 2016, and it seems to have been a natural winner. I really had a hard time imagining a better candidate to win best jazz album of the year. This recording also has commercial potential. In fact, this is a case in which high-quality music may well find its way to a larger audience. This is Pashkevich's quiet album, which just might become his loudest album.

# ACROBATS, CLOWNS AND STUNTMEN. A FIRE-SHOW MASTER AND A BALLERINA... STOP!

EVILENA PROTEKTORE

It is the first – and still the only – 360-degree immersive music video in Latvia, filmed for the song “Stop!” by the band Pienegu Vins.

It can be confusing in the beginning, because what in the world does “immersive” mean? Easy, it is a panoramic experience in which the action happens all around and at the same time. Thus one of the main tasks of the project was to come up with as many short stories as possible and connect them all both in the script and on the stage so that every space available is filled with action. The video therefore looks different to everyone, depending on the viewing perspective. As an additional value to this unorthodox music video, one can watch it on different types of devices, thereby making the experience truly unique. You can watch it on a computer, navigating between the stories with the help of the arrows on your keyboard or with a mouse. Or, if you have a smartphone or a tablet with a gyroscope in it, you can physically move along with the plot, pretending you’re in the middle of the action, following one of the many stories told in the video. Just imagine holding your phone and spinning around while following the video!

An interesting fact about this project is that the rig holding the five GoPro action cameras was handmade, a creation of the director himself. Another fact is that the filming crew deserve the title of “panoramic pioneers”, because this technology was still slowly developing and, at the time that the video was released, video platforms such as YouTube were still not very keen on supporting





this kind of material. But mere months after the video was presented to the public, YouTube was right on board, and recently Vimeo has also joined the party, which proves that the world of technology doesn't stand still. But one of the most remarkable aspects of this project was that, despite the number of actors who participated in the filming of the video (which was slightly over 100 people, among them several acrobats, stuntmen, a fire-show master and a ballerina from Paris – wow!), everything was filmed in only one day. The filming location was also quite symbolic – a historical circus arena in Riga, which is perfectly round and matches the concept of the panoramic video and even some of the tune's lyrics: "The music's going round and round", exactly like the video.

So, if you are ready for your world to be rocked (or, better said, funk'd), put on your headphones and follow this link – [pienenuvins.lv/stop360/](http://pienenuvins.lv/stop360/) – to watch the first and only 360-degree immersive music video in Latvia! Also watch the "making of" video to know exactly what the musicians and the crew went through to create this masterpiece. And may your immersive experience be truly spectacular!

# OUTSIDE THE BOX

EVILENA PROTEKTORE

Latvian jazz music has been thriving and developing actively for the last couple of decades, and now we can proudly say that our country can offer listeners every variation of the genre – from cool jazz to hard bop, from bebop to free jazz, from fusion to funk. But our musicians are too bored to just play the music; they want to be creative in everything they do and produce things that they can be admired for, like putting together unexpected lineups (for example, a classical string quartet with a DJ and some spicy Spanish rap), or spoken word on top of a completely free improvisation, or musically educational CDs that are certainly the most exciting way to learn the history of funk.

## VERY COOL PEOPLE

Very Cool People is an active, gigging band in which all the members love and enjoy to perform live shows more than anything. When they are on stage, they “blow the roof off” the place, and the energy exuded by the musicians charges up the audience’s batteries.

With a backbone in jazz and funk and incorporating influences from rock and hip-hop, Very Cool People is creating modern, complex and listenable music. It uses contemporary tools to try to put jazz back on the dance floor and make it more accessible to everyone.



In September 2015 Very Cool People released their third album, Funkology, which is not just an album – it's a learning tool, because all the tunes on it are dedicated to well-known funk musicians who have made a significant contribution to the development of the music everyone loves (no one can stand still when exposed to the sound of funky grooves!). These important bands and musicians are Parliament-Funkadelic, Stevie Wonder, The Meters, Tower of Power, Curtis Mayfield and James Brown.

Several guest artists participated in the recording - Evilena Protektore, Dinara Rudan, Kristīne Prauliņa, Jānis Stībelis, Aija Vītoļiņa and Ralfs Eilands on vocals and Oskars Stolse-Semerovs on vocals and harmonica. Each guest artist was "responsible" for one of the funk idols, studied his style and then created a great tribute album together with the Very Cool People – Funkology. The album was nominated for the 2015 Latvian Music Awards in the best jazz and blues album category.

**Find out more about the band on their official website:**  
[verycoolpeople.org](http://verycoolpeople.org)



## **THE COCO'NUTS**

The Coco'nuts are also participating in the evolution of jazz and merging it together with other music styles in order to create something spectacular. Although the band is relatively young, created in 2012, they are absolutely outstanding in combining funk, blues, rock, swing and indie in a mind-blowing musical jungle, stretching the borders of music in their own unique way. The band's lineup is also rich – drums, bass, piano and a guitar are

followed by a duo of flute and saxophone, sometimes spicing it up with the harmonica, and led by three vocals.

In the spring of 2014 the Coco'nuts released their debut EP album, called Appetizer, and in the spring of 2016 they released their first full album, Amid Opposites, which was recorded during a two-week session in a live studio setting in a modified summer house located in the countryside.

**Find out more about the band on their official website:**  
[thecoconutsmusic.com](http://thecoconutsmusic.com)



### **Klausies. Слушай. Listen.**

Another example of a creative approach to jazz music in Latvia is an ensemble with a catchy name that serves not only as a name, but also as an invitation to listen to what the guys have to say – and they have a lot to say. The band Klausies. Слушай. Listen. is a space where poetry, or spoken word, meets jazz improvisation. A young poetess from Latvia writes texts in Latvian, Russian and English and sets them to music provided on the spot by three extremely talented jazz musicians. Everything happens without any preparation, the compositions are born on the spot, and every concert is different. This kind of performing always keeps the artists on high alert, and they themselves admit that their art is like vitamins – it gives everyone a boost of energy and is vitally necessary in order to live.

**Find out more about the band on their Facebook page:**  
[fb.com/klausies.slushaj.listen](https://fb.com/klausies.slushaj.listen)

# ORIGINS OF JAZZ IN LATVIA (1922-1940)

INDRIĶIS VEITNERS

Indriķis Veitners, clarinetist and saxophonist, is the director of the jazz department at the Jāzeps Vītols Music Academy of Latvia and an eminent researcher of Latvian jazz history. His research "History of Latvian Jazz (1922-1940)" will be published by Musica Baltica this autumn.

**NOVEMBER 18, 1918:** The Republic of Latvia is officially proclaimed.

**AUGUST 11, 1920:** Latvia and Soviet Russia conclude a peace treaty, and World War I ends in Latvia.

**JANUARY 28, 1922:** The word "jazz" appears for the first time in the Latvian print media. The Marine cinema in Rīga publishes an advertisement about the appearance of a jazz band: "A jazz band – only in our theatre!"

**FEBRUARY 1, 1922:** The first jazz advertisement by the Palais Royal restaurant: "Excellent dance evenings with a performance by the Original Jazz Band!"

Advertisements about jazz in 1922 mentioned the first Latvian musicians in the genre – pianist Emīls Kīnemans, as well as violinist and orchestra conductor Miša (Mihails) Aljanskis (1897-1942?). Jazz orchestras are often discussed together with "salon trios" and salon orchestras.

**JANUARY 8, 1925:** Journalist V. Janovs publishes the first major article about jazz in the Russian newspaper Segodniya Večerom, with many erroneous and incorrect claims. Janovs presents jazz as an exotic fashion fad.

**1925:** One of Latvia's first jazz orchestras, The Savoy Band, receives press attention. The band continues performing until 1935.



**DECEMBER 1926:** Orchestras with exotic names in English begin to appear, introducing the so-called “dance orchestra” phase in the development of Latvian jazz (1926-1931). Fashionable dances such as the Charleston and the Black Bottom are becoming very popular, and there are more than 60 orchestras in all – the Bubi Jazzband, the Banjo Dancing Band, the American Banjo Fifi Dancing Band, the Dancing Palace Band, the Jazz Band Figaro, and many others.

**SUMMER OF 1927:** The first African American jazz ensemble appears in Latvia at the Edinburgh Pavilion in Jūrmala. Known as “Happy Broadway,” the band includes George Lionel “Happy” Blake (1895-1960).

**AUTUMN 1928:** The US-based jazz musician, entrepreneur and adventurer George (Teddy) Carhart (1903-1984) appears in Latvia with various orchestras such as the New Yorker and Philadelphia Dancing Band, the Teddy Carhart Banjo Band, and the Columbia Band. Carhart occasionally appears in Latvia through 1934.

**1929:** Sound cinema appears in Latvia.

**NOVEMBER 23, 1929:** The American jazz song “Sonny Boy” from an eponymous movie becomes very popular in Latvia.

The violinist and orchestra conductor Jaša Levensons (1902-1941?) becomes active in 1929. Later known under the pseudonym Aldjanovs, his career is closely linked to jazz.

**FEBRUARY 1930:** Clarinetist and saxophonist Eric Bochar (1886-1934), a founder of jazz in Germany, appears at the Solomonski Circus in Riga with his Jazz-Schau-Kapelle jazz orchestra.

**NOVEMBER 19, 1931:** The businessman Helmars Rudzītis establishes the Bellacord Electro recording company, which quickly becomes the leading company in the industry in the Baltic States. The Bellacord Orchestra was also established, conducted by the violinist Teodors Vējš (1902-1965). Over the subsequent years it releases a great many records, including jazz recordings.

**1931:** New orchestras appear that are named after their conductors – the Šmidt-Kremer Jazz Band, the Teodors Keizers Orchestra, etc. This suggests a change in attitudes about jazz, with demand focusing on quality, specific orchestras and conductors with different sounds, members, repertoires and styles of music, thus launching the era of “qualitative development” in Latvian jazz (1931-1935).

**APRIL 10, 1932:** The debut of the “symphonic jazz” orchestra La-Si-Do at the hall of the Craftsmen’s Association in Rīga. The organiser is composer Jānis Vitoliņš (1886-1955), and the new tradition is an important one and can be tracked to this very day. George Gershwin’s Rhapsody in Blue is performed for the first time in Latvia.

**APRIL 11, 1932:** The first review of a jazz concert, “The First Symphonic Jazz Concert,” is published by critic and composer Jānis Zālītis (1884-1943), presenting a reticent attitude about the new genre in music. Other, subsequent reviews expressed denial and negative attitudes about jazz.

**1933:** The first mention of the distinguished jazz pianist Džeks Mihaļickis (1908-1941)



Oskars Saulespurēns



**1934:** The Y.M.C.A. “jazz orchestra” records Wheezy Anna by Leslie Sarony, this being identified as the first solo song recording in Latvian jazz history. The orchestra includes distinguished musicians such as trumpeter Voldemārs Lācis (1909-1985), saxophonist Oskars Saulespurēns (1906-1998), and banjoist Teodors Briedis (1901-1976).

**OCTOBER 1934:** The Joe Smith Ensemble, described as an “American Negro trio” appears at the Mascotte restaurant in Rīga under the leadership of trumpeter Joe Smith.

**1935:** A series of new orchestras appear to introduce the new swing period in Latvian jazz (1935-1940). Orchestras usually have 6-8 multi-instrumental musicians who perform a very broad repertoire. These ensembles are distinctly positioned as entertainment and dance orchestras.

**1935:** The Herberts Šmits Orchestra and the A. Štroms Jazz Orchestra appear on the scene.

**1936:** The L. Štukass Swing Band, Rudolfs Rubenis and his Merry Capella Band, the band of accordionist F. Zubkins, and the V. Kaņeps Merry Mosquito Dance Orchestra all appear on the scene.

**NOVEMBER 1936:** The Polish 5 Jurandi jazz vocalist ensemble appears at the Salomonski Circus in Rīga.

**1937:** The first performances by the Valentīns Jansons Orchestra, the Henrijs Polis Dance Orchestra, the R. Piebalgs Jazz Band, the Juris Bernšteins “Merry Men of Dzintari” Dance Orchestra and **OTHERS.**

**OCTOBER 1938:** Appearing at the Alhambra restaurant in Rīga is one of the most famous musicians in Europe, the distinguished trumpeter Ady Rosner (1910-1976) with his orchestra.

**SUMMER 1939:** The jazz orchestra led by Džeks Mihaļickis has a triumphant season at the Lido restaurant in Jūrmala, featuring various guest artists, including the 6 Comedian Ladies vocal ensemble from Germany.

**JULY 1939:** A women’s orchestra led by French actress and singer Simone Valmbelle-Raymond appears at the Lido and Alhambra restaurants.

**SUMMER 1939:** Jaša Levensons and his 6 Aldjanovi band appear in the Netherlands, though they are only allowed to appear under pseudonyms, without promoting themselves as an ensemble from Latvia.

**LATE 1939:** Džeks Mihaļickis, Oskars Saulespurēns and Verners Troics establish the Bar Trio, one of Latvia’s most important ensembles from the early period of Jazz. The trio appears at restaurants and cafés, releasing several recordings through the Bellaccord Electro recording company late in 1940.

**JUNE 17, 1940:** The Soviet Union occupied Latvia, violently interrupting musical development and introducing a new phase in the history of Latvian jazz.



## EVENTS

**Rigas Ritmi**

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**Riga Jazz Stage**

Organizer: Contemporary Music Centre  
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**Saulkrasti Jazz**

Organizer: Summer Music Session  
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**UNESCO International Jazz Day Latvia**

Organizer: Wise Music Society  
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## ORGANIZATIONS

**Contemporary Music Centre**

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