

# ORIGINS OF JAZZ IN LATVIA (1922-1940)

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**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.