

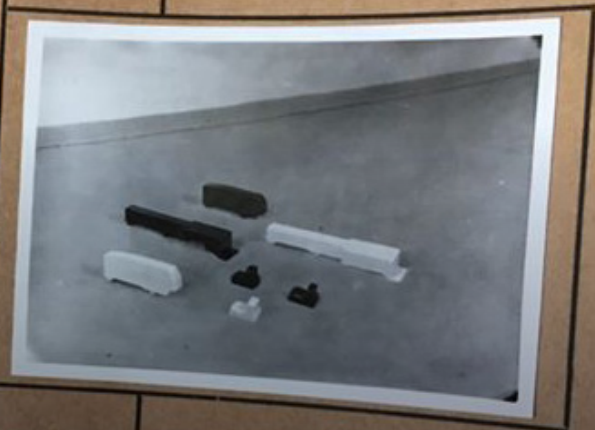


JAZZ IN LATVIA **2020**

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT JAZZ IN LATVIA!

This issue was created by the Latvian Music Information Centre, with the support of the the State Culture Capital Foundation of Latvia and in collaboration with JAZZin.lv, exclusively for the **Jazzahead!** trade fair and its guests to introduce our local talents to the world.

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Aleksandra Line

A Hammond organ story: investigate and appreciate

Digital organ that was produced in Latvia
as licensed by Laurens Hammond — where is it now?

In 2019 the Latvian State Electrotechnical Factory (VEF) celebrated its centenary. People say this factory produced everything from needles to airplanes, and a surprising fact is that for a time VEF also produced Hammond organs with a unique design by Latvian designer Ādolfs Irbīte. Some of the instruments still exist today.

HThe Hammond organ was invented by Laurens Hammond, and its production began in the United States back in 1934. The instrument was a cheaper alternative to a traditional pipe organ, opening up much broader market opportunities. In 1937 the State Electrotechnical Factory purchased a license from Hammond to begin organ production in Latvia. Unlike in the United States, in Latvia the client

was able to choose the finish for the instrument, be it the same as that of the original Hammond, or with a finish made of oak or other type of wood. The wood was sourced locally in Latvia and so was the unique design of these Hammond organs, which was developed by the prominent local designer and constructor Ādolfs Irbīte, whose VEF radio receiver design took the Grand Prix and several gold medals at the World Expos in Paris and Brussels. The VEF electric organ was first introduced to a wider audience in August of 1937 at a huge Zemgale Region expo in the town of Jelgava, where it was praised by Kārlis Ulmanis, the president of the Republic of Latvia at that time.

As in the United States, the instrument was popular in Latvia not just because of its sound quality but also be-

cause it was much cheaper than a pipe organ. Over the coming years, at least ten VEF-made organs were purchased by museums and churches; unfortunately, several of these instruments were destroyed during the Second World War. Many of the Hammond instruments produced at VEF no longer exist, and we now have been able to locate only three remaining instruments. One is in the Literature and Music Museum, one is in the Luther Church in Liepāja, and the Daile Theatre in Riga also still has an instrument purchased in 1940.

VEF Culture Palace in Riga hosts a State Electrotechnical Factory history museum, and its collection contains original catalogues listing many instrument parts produced at VEF, for example, keys from a historical Hammond organ, which, along with many others found at the museum, provide a context for our own history.

Issue No. 57 of the Latvijas kareivis (Latvian Warrior) newspaper, published on March 11, 1938, states: «The organ in St. John's Church has been built according to a patent by Laurens Hammond that was given to VEF.» The article begins with the lines «Nowadays technology is taking giant steps forward. Where for thousands of years things have remained silent, the sharp eye of a scientist now sees new opportunities.» The author was admiring the scientific progress of the day, and now, after 80 years have passed, we can still take pride in these techno-

logical achievements and victories produced right here in Latvia, at the State Electrotechnical Factory.

However, this story has a sad ending. None of the instruments that once appeared thanks to the «sharp eye of a scientist» are currently in a condition to be played. The Hammond organ at the Daile Theatre, for example, was found in the theatre storage room and painted with a dark-red paint for some play or another, turning a rare and valuable instrument into a cheap prop. Considering that only three of these instruments remain, it would be fair to restore them and hear how they sound. We can only hope that someone will take the initiative to do this and help these rare organs once produced in our country make listeners proud again. ●



Dr. Art. Indriķis Veitners

From KIKOK to «Vasaras Ritmi»

The development of jazz festivals in Latvia
from the early 1960s to the 1990s



Latvian jazz history after the Second World War, during the time when Latvia was occupied and incorporated in the Soviet Union, is characterised by two important phenomena. The first of these is the activities of two big bands: REO (Rīgas Estrādes Orķestris/Riga Variety Orchestra) and the Latvian Radio Light and Variety Music Orchestra. The second phenomenon is the Vasaras Ritmi jazz festival, which began in 1976 thanks to jazz enthusiasts and musicians who, taking into account the state of affairs at the time, had the opportunity to organise an important jazz event that quickly gained popularity and prestige in the whole Soviet Union and became the main jazz event of the year in Latvia.

However, fourteen years before this another event took place in Riga, which can be defined as the very first jazz festi-

val in Latvia. It was organised by a group of jazz musicians and friends under the auspices of the Riga Cinema Studio. The group was named KIKOK (Kino-komjau-niešu klubs/Cinema-Komsomol Youth Club), and although the club managed to organise only one event – on December 18, 1962 – it was the very first jazz festival in Latvia.

In order to understand the significance of this event, a short introduction to the historical context is necessary. After the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953, a group of young and enthusiastic but also somewhat patriotic and liberally minded communists – the so-called national-communist generation – were at the helm of the government of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic. Their leadership coincided with the so-called “thaw” during the Khrushchev era, when the repressive policies of

the previous regime became laxer, including those pertaining to culture. Within a couple of years a new approach to culture administration developed and both the regime and the situation became more liberal. With regard to jazz, it is worth mentioning that REO (Riga Variety Orchestra) was established during this period, in 1958. Unfortunately, this development was interrupted in the summer of 1959 due to a coup in the Latvian Communist Party, after which the regime became very reactionary and stagnant, obsequiously and diligently following the directions of the central power, including policies pertaining to culture.

These changes in the party leadership were followed by “personnel cleansing” in all of the most important state institutions. Nevertheless, a more liberal and creative atmosphere remained alive in many state institutions, including the Riga Cinema Studio, and it was there that the idea of organising KIKOK was born. At the very beginning there were informal meetings organised by the cinema studio’s youth. These meetings would end

with a party, dancing and jazz music. It is from these events – and under the auspices of the Komsomol (because there were no other opportunities for any type of social activities outside of the official Soviet organisations – the Communist Party and the Komsomol) – that the KIKOK youth organisation emerged.

The events organised by the club were frequently attended not only by people from the cinema circles, but also by musicians, artists and like-minded people. Soon enough, KIKOK had a group of musicians who played dance music at the events organised by the club. These were mainly musicians of the younger generation – students, but also professional musi-

cians who mainly played at Riga restaurants and in orchestras – and they all shared a passion for jazz.

After a while, it was clear that a permanent venue for meeting and playing music was necessary. Such a place was found in the basement of the building at Mārstaļu iela 17 in Riga, which belonged to the Latvian Association of Hunters and



Anglers and where regular, private jazz concerts began in September of 1962. The majority of the musicians participating were professional musicians who actively performed in Riga's restaurants and musicians of the younger generation, some



of whom went on to become Latvian jazz legends. The main initiators were singer Bruno Oja (1933–2002) and bass player J. Āķis; musicologist Pēteris Pečerskis (1914–1974) was also active in the club as the official music expert. The club gradually became popular. The first article about KIKOK in the *Padomju Jaunatne* (Soviet Youth) magazine, published on November 11, 1962, viewed the club's organised educational events for youth rather approvingly and encouraged it to continue these activities.

After the first jam sessions came the idea to organise a larger event, and the A. Popov Riga Radio Factory clubhouse at Radiotehnikas iela 41 (now Mūkusalas iela 72b) was chosen as the venue. The main ideological leader and driving force behind the event was Bruno Oja. The programme for the event lists twelve bands, ranging from a trio to a small big band.

According to eyewitness memories, the concert was four hours long, with approximately 800 people attending, including the musicians themselves. It was common at the time to organise events encompassing different genres, with performances in all genres of the arts. This concert as well was preceded by a modern puppet theatre performance, the screening of cartoons, ballet performances, etc. It is unique that the concert was recorded. Some years prior, J. Juris Āķis had worked as a sound director at Latvian Radio and, thanks to his connections, a recording of the concert on tape by Latvian Radio could be organised. Unfortunately, the recording was most likely later deleted, as it cannot be found in Latvian Radio's library of recordings.

Thirteen bands were planned as concert participants – trios, quartets, quintets and orchestras – fifty people in total. Practically all of the Riga clubhouse orchestras were listed as concert guests – thirteen orchestras (140 people) in total. Representatives from the Komsomol committee, the television and radio, the composers' association and the press were also mentioned. By comparing the available materials, it is possible to reconstruct the festival: fifteen bands participated in the concert, five of which were orchestras, the rest were trios, quartets and quintets. Frequently the same musicians played in various combinations. The leading performers were young musicians Raimonds Raubiško (tenor sax), Ivars Vīgners (piano), Ivars Birkāns (baritone sax), Aivars

OTRDIEN, 1962. g. 18. DECEMBRĪ
PLKST. 19.00

RIGAS RADIORŪPNĪCAS KLUBĀ
RADIOTEHNIKAS IELĀ 41.

Zitars (double bass), Juris Kļava (piano) and Zigurds Rezevskis (drums), to name a few. It is very interesting to analyse the performed repertoire. There was a large number of original compositions, by both the concert participants themselves and other Latvian composers. Stylistically the repertoire varied greatly, from Dixieland and swing to hard bop, experiments in the third-stream style and contemporary Latvian variety music.

Unfortunately, the scale of KIKOK's activities and the way the group resonated with society did not go unnoticed by the authorities. Jazz was the least welcome music in Soviet Latvia, especially in the context of the political tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union, which reached their peak in late 1962 with the Cuban Missile Crisis. In addition, a state-organised campaign against modern art and culture began following Nikita Khrushchev's visit to the exhibition of "scandalous" avantgarde artists at the Manege Central Exhibition Hall in Moscow in December of 1962. A

crucial impulse for this campaign was Khrushchev's speech on March 8, 1963, during a meeting with representatives of the arts and entertainment community, in which he criticised jazz music, proclaiming it as harmful and unwelcome. Therefore it is no surprise that KIKOK and its concert were heavily criticised by Augusts



Voss, the leader of the Latvian Communist Party. KIKOK was described as "the apostle" of inferior jazz music of foreign descent that propagates the worst examples of

jazz music and even the impermissible arrangements of Borodin's and Chopin's compositions by Ivars Birkāns. After this sort of critique, the existence of KIKOK was discontinued.

However, as far as we know, the organisers and musicians were spared any punitive measures. According to unverified statements, some participants of the concert were expelled from higher-education institutions. Nevertheless, it seems that, for the time being, the authorities were satisfied with the fact that KIKOK

had ceased to exist, and no other measures against the participants were taken. That said, the consequences were quite far-reaching, because the word 'jazz' disappeared completely from the pages of the Latvian press. Only in 1967 did it slowly start returning to the public discourse in connection with preparations for the popular Tallinn Jazz Festival as well as the establishment of the Latvian Radio Light and Variety Music Orchestra in 1967.

The next attempt after KIKOK to organise a jazz festival in Latvia took place in 1976, with the first Vasaras Ritmi festival in Riga. The Riga Jazz Club established

in 1975 became one of the most important organisers of jazz life in Latvia up to 1991. KIKOK's historical importance does not stem only from its organisation of the first jazz festival in Latvia; the group also provided a very strong impulse to young musicians and jazz fans in Latvia to continue playing and improving. It showed that, in spite of the adverse attitude of the authorities, with wit and a lot of energy even seemingly impossible things could become a reality. And, to a degree, KIKOK became a point of reference for the further development of Latvian jazz, as clearly evidenced by the lives of the majority of the festival participants. ●



1962

THE MANY ROADS

The past ten years of jazz in Latvia have been truly spectacular. This is noticeable in the number of events that take place all year long, and in recent years it has become a fashionable trend to host jazz music in some very unexpected places, such as in the middle of a lake. But let's face it, usually when you open a magazine or newspaper, you'll find a lot of information on where to listen to jazz, but not where to see it, learn it or talk about it and so on. In this very same magazine or newspaper you might find information about the places that host jazz music events, such as clubs, concert halls and festivals, but here, right now we want to concentrate on some other options available to you apart from being a listener. It's time to engage your other senses!



Learn it

Are you still in school but already want to learn to play jazz? Boy, have we got some choices for you! If you visit Latvia in the summer, consider participating in a workshop or summer camp. The Rigas Ritmi festival, which usually takes place at the end of June or beginning of July, offers workshops led by almost every artist performing at the festival. You can choose a single workshop or buy a pass for all of the workshops together. The same festival also organises winter and spring sessions, so Riga is full of opportunities all year long.

Moving on to the end of July, that's when you can enjoy a full week of jazz music and workshops by the sea, at Saulkrasti Jazz. This event is an intensive summer camp for participants of all levels and ages, with teachers

both local and from abroad. During the day you can learn, learn, learn, and in the evenings enjoy three concerts in a row! What more could you want from life? The pine forest, sea breezes and jazz...

A month later, two other coastal Latvian towns host workshop sessions: Ventspils and Liepāja. Both last for a week and have teachers both local and from abroad, bringing attendees a lot of joy with classes, concerts and a very creative atmosphere. The first event, Ventspils Groove, takes place in the newly built "Latvija" Concert Hall. A week or so later, a second workshop session in Liepāja brings the sounds of jazz music to the Great Amber Concert Hall. Both amazing events take place in August and are suited for all levels and ages.

Another jazz festival and workshop session, called Škiuņa Džezs, takes place at the other end of the country, in the region called Latgale, which has its own rich history and enticing traditions. Taking place at the historical Lūzna Manor, it brings joy to musicians and listeners and provides an opportunity to both learn and enjoy jazz music.

At approximately the same time in yet another part of Latvia – this time on the border with Estonia – the Valka Jam gathers musicians from all of the neighbouring countries for a day of workshops, concerts and a huge jam session that lasts long into the night. So, if by any chance you're in Valka, join the jam!

If you're already (or still) in university/academy or any other type of higher-education institution and are considering your options for an exchange programme, don't forget to check out the Jāzeps Vitols Latvian Academy of Music. Its jazz department has recently celebrated a decade of excellent work, has wonderful teachers and offers vast opportunities to learn and play. If you're just in town and want to learn something new without actually enrolling as a student – no worries, the academy regularly hosts various workshops that are open to everyone interested and require no participation fee.

If you happen to speak Latvian and want to learn to play jazz, there are various schools and colleges across the country that accept people of all ages and levels. Several of these

TO JAZZ IN LATVIA

are located in the capital, Riga (Riga Cathedral Choir School, Jāzeps Mediņš Riga School of Music, Rīdze Evening Music School); others are in Ventspils (Ventspils Music School), Liepāja (Liepāja Music, Art and Design School), Cēsis (Alfrēds Kalniņš Cēsis Music School) and other towns. And of course, you can always arrange a private lesson with one of the amazing musicians we have, and we have plenty!



Move it

Did you know that you can not only play jazz but also dance it? That's right, you can dance jazz, and you can even be picky about it! Do you want to be cool and leisurely but at the same time groovy? Do you want to be energetic and passionate? Consider learning to dance swing by checking out the lessons at www.swingdance.lv. If you just want to watch other people dance jazz, you can either try your luck and attend one of several jam session venues in town (because these guys tend to pop in unannounced and surprise everyone) or check out swingdance.lv for their upcoming events all around town.

Do you prefer to dance'n'drum it? Well, tap dancing has become quite a thing in Latvia, and the most famous group nowadays is Soul Tap, which not only performs but also teaches and organises tap jams at least once a month. In summer, you can participate in Soul Tap's camp programme. You'll find lots of useful information on the group's website www.soultap.lv.

Do you want to dance jazz in a more aca-

demical setting? No problem, because we've got Riga City Jazz Dance and its energetic leader Alisa Košeļeva, who teaches at least eight types of jazz dance. If you want to know more, check out the article in Issue No. 4 of JAZZin.lv online magazine. Oh, and if you don't feel like moving around yourself and want to just watch the dancers, Riga City Jazz Dance performs quite regularly and is very enjoyable to watch!



Read about it

Do you speak Latvian? No? No problem! We've got a solution! We in Latvia have our very own online magazine dedicated to jazz music in our country (and sometimes even outside of it, imagine that). It's called JAZZin.lv, and it began with the noble intention of informing people about upcoming jazz events. Over time, however, appetites to inform and educate have grown, and this unique issue was born. The content creators are musicians, music journalists, musicologists, critics, managers and activists. A new issue is released every three months and publishes stories about the old times (some history never did anyone any harm), introduces new releases, and tells about people who are active in the jazz world. The main language of the magazine is Latvian, but twice a year the articles are translated into English, because this information needs to be shared worldwide! In fact, the newest English edition has just been published, and you can easily access it by visiting the JAZZin.lv website. Don't be shy – allow yourself to indulge in this pleasure and find out more about our amazing Latvian jazz! ●

Jazz in Latvia 2020

Compilation CD featuring the most recent recordings representing Latvian jazz music scene. Reviewed by Dāvis Eņģelis.

— TRACK 01 —

«Sievietes sapņi» (Woman's Dreams) — Inga Bērziņa, Tuomo Uusitalo

(Inga Bērziņa (music) / Dace Micāne-Zālite (lyrics), «Sievietes sapņi» by Musica Baltica, 2019)

The smooth mingling of vocal improvisation and Latvian-language lyrics sung by Inga Bērziņa is an accomplishment of musicianship that stood out in the Latvian jazz scene of 2019. Together with Finnish pianist Tuomo Uusitalo, they created a collection of miniatures that reflect a subtle feeling of musical form and texture. True, you won't catch the interplay between the lyrics and musical phrasing if you don't speak Latvian, but the refined chamber-music quality of this album is there for everyone to enjoy.

— TRACK 02 —

«False Alarm» — Anna Wibe Sextet

(Anna Wibe (music), «Vibes», 2020)

The young pianist and singer Anna Wibe introduced us recently to her debut album, Vibes. Except for one cover, the arrangements and compositions are all by Wibe. Add some Estonian peers, and you have a group of musicians who execute Wibe's music passionately and candidly. "False Alarm" encompasses the harmonic elegance of Wibe's songwriting as well as some of the best solos on the album.

— TRACK 03 —

«River» — Deniss Pashkevich, Christian Frank, Claus Kaarsgaard, Carsten Landors

(Deniss Pashkevich (music), «Asta In Madrid» by Riga Room Records, 2019)

On album after album with different bands, Deniss Pashkevich stays loyal to the musical narratives and soundscapes of abstract thought and clear intentions of devotion and integrity. His palette of characters ranges from dark and murky avantgarde jazz to the crisp, palpable textures and soothing tone we hear in "River". Pashkevich, who is one of the leading Latvian sax players of his generation, produces music that sticks with the listener for a long while. And it is safe to say that in the latest recordings his output is ultra-sharp.

— TRACK 04 —

«Korālis II» — Kārlis Auziņš

(Kārlis Auziņš (music), «Oneness and the Transcendent Truth» by Gotta Let It Out, 2019)

As one reviewer said in a radio show, Auziņš manages to keep melodic lines of improvisation as intelligent and collected as ever, even at the fastest tempos. Equally, one can appreciate how he wanders through the possibilities of the saxophone. His newest solo album is very much on the experimental side, leading to some fascinating results. Auziņš manages to produce effects you have to hear twice to believe they are a) analogue and b) created only by breath, touch, voice and sax. In this piece, his tone and vibe are ever so calm and tranquil.

— TRACK 05 —

«The Seducer Of Eve» — Kārlis Auziņš, Matīss Čudars, Ivars Arutyunyan

(Kārlis Auziņš (music), «The Maze» by Jersika Records, 2020)

In recent years, the Auziņš/Čudars/Arutyunyan trio has shined on the more intellectual side of Latvian contemporary jazz. Their album Baltic deservedly won the 2018 award for best Latvian jazz album. The music challenges the listener with rhythmic complexity (even hidden Easter eggs) and melodic adventures that sometimes seem to draw from serial techniques. The trio's overall avantgarde approach ranges from playful to sophisticated, and both can be said about "The Seducer of Eve".

— TRACK 06 —

«My Love Is Building A Building» — Krists Saržants

(Krists Saržants (music), Aleksandra Line (lyrics), «Then And Now», 2020)

Pianist Krists Saržants keeps this ballad simple, and exactly therein lies the impact of the song. A sense of melancholy mingles with affirmative chords, and singer Evilena Protektore carries the lyrics by Aleksandra Line through the piece with sincere emotion.

TRACK 07**«Walking Alone» — Janis Rubiks & Chamber Jazz Collective**

(Jānis Rubiks (music), «Live in Salaspils», 2019)

Double bass player Jānis Rubiks has shown prowess in composition, particularly in his concert programme *Live in Salaspils*. “Walking Alone” displays his down-to-earth, lyrical writing style in a nutshell. The double bass and piano solos provide a contrast between a warm yet slightly aching sound and tighter, tension-building vibes. The strings add to the texture with ease, thus providing the additional aesthetic pleasure of the successful symbiosis between a jazz combo and a string quartet.

TRACK 08**«Hopes And Dreams» — Latvian Radio Big Band**

(Kārlis Vanags (music), «Identities» by Jersika Records, 2020)

Saxophonist Kārlis Vanags keeps leading the Latvian Radio Big Band to new heights of sound and execution. The composition “Hopes and Dreams” exhibits the colour and taut, firm phrasing of the horns, and the tight rhythm section shines through from the very first bars, as does the piano solo by Viktors Ritovs later in the piece.

TRACK 09**«Every Day» — Andre Yevsukov & Jam Orchestra**

(Andre Yevsukov (music), «Sunset», 2019)

Andre Yevsukov is a prominent jazz guitar virtuoso who adds to this music list a flavour of mainstream fusion infused with energetic solo guitar as well as piping hot sax and drums.

TRACK 10**«Let’s Stay Home» — Jazzatomy**

(Evilena Protektore (music & lyrics), upcoming album «Lilacs», 2020)

Evilena Protektore possesses one of the most powerful and beautiful jazz vocals of the new generation of Latvian musicians. She brings both poetic warmth and firmness to the lyrics. With the help of the Jazzatomy ensemble’s piano and sax, her voice creates glimmering textures in the song “Let’s Stay Home”.

TRACK 11**«Dancing Among The Stars» — Eduarda Lazdiņa Fusion Quartet**

(Eduarda Lazdiņa (music), «Moonbeams», 2019)

Dreamy, wave-like guitar timbres and chord changes that start out very romantic but continue with more subtle chiaroscuro characterise the piece “Dancing Among the Stars”. The band swings impeccably, and the guitar solo dwells on the sunny side of the day.

TRACK 12**«Stragls Ir Liels (live)» — Very Cool People feat. Edavārdi, ansis & Kristīne Prauliņa**

(Kristaps Lubovs, Niklāvs Sekačs (music) / Eduards Gorbunovs (lyrics), «Koncertprogramma Pa Apli» by Very Cool People, 2020)

Very Cool People are the Latvian flagmen of an exciting blend of jazz, funk, rock and hip-hop. They earn the attention of audiences with an aggressive groove, razor-sharp arrangements and an outpouring of energy and stage presence. The group’s collaboration with soloists is crucial in doubling the amount of energy, and here jazz singer Kristīne Prauliņa is joined by two notable Latvian hip-hop artists. ●





Evilena Protēktore

A decade of jazz education at the Latvian Academy of Music — a milestone signifying much more to come

While Latvia has a very strong jazz tradition (the first jazz concert by a touring band from the United States took place here in the 1920s), its history in our land is full of challenges. By the end of the 1970s the genre had gone so far underground that no one could have imagined that this music would rise again and become so popular among the young and stylish crowds. The 1990s brought us jazz workshops and jam sessions, followed shortly by the establishment of the first jazz colleges, and then in 2009 a jazz department at the Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music was born. The head of the department is our own jazz historian and receiver of the Order of the Three Stars (Latvia's highest state decoration, awarded by the president) Indriķis Veitners, who also initiated the establishment of the department. Here's how the story goes!

Indriķis Veitners: The idea to create a jazz department at the Academy of Music originally belongs to Artis Simanis. He called me and said, "Join us!" That happened the same year he was elected as the rector of the school. After Simanis got elected, I sent him an SMS with my congratulations, because I've known him for years. We had played together in various big bands, and he also used to work for the Latvian Radio Big Band. And that's basically it. A week

later he called me with an invitation to meet. I came over, and he said that it was time to open a jazz music department. So I took a piece of paper and scribbled down everything I thought the department should be. It wasn't hard to do, because we had already had five years of experience with jazz at the Riga Cathedral Choir School (RDKS).

Then I took my scribbles and went to visit Irēna Baltābola, who is still the director of study programmes and the ECTS coordinator at the academy. She informed me that my plan was a complete failure and began solving some mystical math equations involving credits and hours, and in the end, with a lot of sweat and tears, we did it. That's how the first year went by, with licensing the programme and all of the bureaucracy. The first thing Baltābola did was send me to the annual AEC meeting, where I made a lot of useful contacts, seeing as it's an association of European music academies. So we participate every year.

The team of teachers has remained almost same as when we when we first started the department. We've also had some very successful collaborations with teachers from abroad, such as composer Linas Rimsha from Lithuania. The Fulbright scholarship programme has brought us Anne Farnsworth on piano and vocals, Chris

Beaty on saxophone and Lynn Seaton on double bass. And our core team is as strong as ever, with Inga Bērziņa on vocals, Madars Kalniņš and Viktors Ritovs on piano, Andrejs Jevsjukovs on guitar and Artis Orubs on drums. I'm also very grateful to Taavo Rimmel, who still travels from Estonia to teach double bass. He was our saviour when we had no one to fill the position. It was also difficult when our dear friend and colleague Nic passed away [Nic Gotham, 1959–2013]. The main criteria I had when choosing the teachers was a combination of professionalism and integrity. I have to admit this was based on my own opinion, and it still is, but then I'm the one who bears the weight of responsibility. That's also the reason why I sometimes seem sceptical when someone proposes something new, because I have to think about how it might affect our common goal. This is the sort of magic that can't be born at a moment's notice, but happens through hard work.

One of the main problems we have is that part of the team still works at RDKS and the academy is intertwined with the school. Or at least it was at the beginning. It was logical, because we already had experience with RDKS and we were building on top of that – a second storey, so to say. But it was also challenging, because RDKS was built with the idea of it being pretty self-sufficient, because at that time no jazz department at the higher education level was in sight. So we tried to give the students the maximum. As a result, it's a very high standard for a school, and it's a standard that also sets the bar of expectations from the academy at a very impressive level.

The other thing, which is impossible to predict, are the changes in the music itself. The generations have changed, living conditions are different, there's a completely new information flow, the environment... Things that were relevant then are irrelevant now; we have different problems nowadays. The music market has changed. And it's hard to keep up with these changes, because the Academy of Music is a huge beast that is slow to adapt. It involves a lot of paperwork, bureaucracy. RDKS had the advantage that we could make changes within our department without much struggle; at the academy, however, the smallest detail has to be scrutinised and approved by various administrative layers. Because in truth, we are a small part of a huge institution with some pretty old traditions and a deep history. But we've never-

theless managed to change quite a lot over the years, and it's quite interesting to compare our department today with how it looked ten years ago. Also, it's very interesting to understand how it all works, what is dependent on what.

And we are now yet again at a point of change, this one happening on various levels simultaneously. One of these changes is internal, because the generation has changed and we need to find new ways of approaching things, add some new blood to our team. Another thing, and it's a big one: we've come to the point where we have to reevaluate the whole concept of the jazz department, to understand what we see as the final result of the studies, what it is that we're teaching. The genre changes, the borders have become blurred, the things our students are interested in are very different. Our responsibility is to provide enough choice, at the same time keeping our identity intact. It's a very interesting stage but also a very complicated and responsible one. That's why we've made it a regular practice to have meetings with students and arrange different collaborations and work groups. We try changing things together, because in my opinion the students are the very people who can tell us what they want and need, and this has to be in balance with what we can and deem necessary to give.

Our goal has always been clear: to make sure that when a student graduates, he or she is a professional musician who is absolutely ready to participate and work in Latvia's music market and is able to compete with others and contribute to that market's development. The second, but no less important, goal is to maintain and develop Latvia's jazz community. That's why I'm such an advocate of Latvian jazz and its history – no one but us, Latvians, will be bothered to do it nor will be able to do it. Our history and our community are what make us different from all other countries.

There are a lot of things I'm proud of, but one stands out the most. It's our 100% statistical success rate. All of our students stay in music after they graduate. No other department at the academy has that result, but we do. In my opinion, that is a success. ●

Best jazz album of the year recorded by three Baltic legends: free music by Ganelin, Pashkevich and Gotesman

Evilena Protoktore & Dr.Art. Indriķis Veitners



For over twenty years now, Latvian musicians get a chance to compete for an award that's just like a Grammy, but local. It's called the Zelta Mikrofons, or Golden Microphone. It awards the best album of the year in various categories, and jazz is one of the genres that's eligible to take part.

First, a competent jury listens to all the submitted albums and distributes points for different aspects of each album, such as creativity, arrangement, performance quality and sound quality. Every year, only five of all the albums submitted in each category are nominated. At the end, everyone gathers in a concert hall and enjoys the awards ceremony, which features a variety of performances and is also aired on local television.

This year our jazz category was represented by nine completely different albums, demonstrating funk, fusion, contemporary, free and avantgarde jazz. All

of the albums are available on various streaming platforms and some are also included on this year's compilation CD. Check it out, you will not be disappointed!

- ☪ LUPA – “SEQUENCES AND CONSEQUENCES”
- ☪ Endless Roar – “RUSH HUSH”
- ☪ Vyacheslav Ganelin, Deniss Pashkevich, Arkady Gotesman – “VARIATIONS”
- ☪ Deniss Pashkevich, Christian Frank, Claus Kaarsgaard, Carsten Landors – “ASTA IN MADRID”
- ☪ Very Cool People – “CAUTION! CONTAINS WORDS!”
- ☪ Inga Bērziņa, Tuomo Uusitalo – “SIEVIETES SAPNI”
- ☪ Kārlis Auziņš – “ONENESS AND THE TRANSCENDENT TRUTH”
- ☪ Eduarda Lazdiņa Fusion Quartet – “MOON-BEAMS”
- ☪ Edgars Ćirulis, Arta Jēkabsone, Alise Golovacka, Svens Vilsons, Federico Nelson Fioravanti, Kenneth Dahl Knudsen, Matias Fischer-Mogensen – “AISMA I”

And the work that won the award for best jazz album of 2019... is the free jazz masterpiece by three Baltic legends: “Variations” by Vyacheslav Ganelin, Deniss Pashkevich and Arkady Gotesman, released by the Jersika Records label. Here’s an excerpt of the conversation that Indriķis Veitners had with Ganelin and Gotesman about being free in music and jazz. The full version is available in Issue №11 of the JAZZin.lv online magazine.

Where does this idea or impulse to play free, the way you do, come from? You create compositions on the spot, and you do so in a completely free manner. Where does it come from?

Vyacheslav Ganelin: Long ago, when I played more or less traditional jazz, there were already free music ideas in me. In the first part of my life I composed, then I switched to composing only the first part of a tune and playing the second part free. I moved to Israel thirty years ago, and there I played only free. I have no idea what I’ll play when I go on stage. It’s always interesting for me to not fail – I want it to be natural, improvised. There are some colleagues who understand this direction, but not everyone does. I was living in Israel, and I was invited to do a solo performance at a festival in Berlin, but I felt like Tchaikovsky there compared to all the others – I still play melodically, I still have to have something to stick to. I think that there’s no freedom; there’s only responsibility for what you’re doing, and this is something important. Music is a very simple thing – it has to begin with a theme or an intro to a theme, then a second theme can follow, but I try to always remember what I began with in order to end with something similar, then there’s a logic in it.

How spontaneous is a composition? Is it partly spontaneous and partly prepared beforehand?

Ganelin: It’s completely spontaneous. I perform with various people. Once someone approached me after a concert with a talented singer and asked how prepared she was and how many rehearsals we had. The same thing happens at workshops – I can explain how the improvisation is built, but I warn people right away that they won’t believe me, they’ll say “You are prepared, you just want to earn some money.” All the beauty is in how you emphasise the improvised material, how far your imagination goes.

It’s easier to play traditional jazz – it’s a form of variations with a certain amount of bars, sequences, harmonies. Many people like to do that, especially after studies at Berklee, but I’m against it. I don’t approve of complete learning by heart – then your brain doesn’t work. People are scared to change what they’ve already learned; I’ve seen it among my students. It doesn’t make any sense, knowing why famous people have played in such or such a style – you have to play something of your own. The meaning of improvisation itself is to express your own point of view on this material. And then, when we see genius musicians, they let the theme go, they play around it. Average musicians have only learned the parts the theme consists of.

If everything is spontaneous, what about the risk of clichés? We all know we repeat things from time to time...

Ganelin: This is why I don’t like playing too many concerts. You are responsible for the music that you want to make special. That’s just how I am – I want to play differently every time. There certainly will be some clichés in the phrasing. Why do we recognise Tchaikovsky, for example?

We recognise him by his clichés. We recognise Chopin by his clichés as well. Those who have their own musical language are recognisable. You can try to play differently every single time, if you have the drive to do so.

We play both tonal and atonal music. There are more colours, more sonorics in tonal music, but atonal creates a definition of sorts. We also began with normal jazz, then broke it up a bit, then returned back to it – that was the principle. I usually play the first part philosophically, chamber-symphonically, dramatically tragically; it's the part that makes me think more. And then I play the second part more jazzy. That's because people come to listen to jazz, and during the first part they think "Alright, what is he actually playing?" But when they like it, they think "OK, there's something in it." And when the more jazzy melodies begin in the second part, they think "OK, I recognise that." But after the applause I usually play a more recognisable style, like, "Here you go, have some candy."

And what do you think of rehearsals?

Ganelin: They don't make any sense. You just have to find the right colleagues. I don't play anything even at home, except some exercises.

What does it mean to you to play free music, and what is the hardest part of it?

Arkady Gotesman: There isn't anything complicated in it at all; if you like it and you play it long enough, you simply fall in love. This freedom is very limited, though. It has its own logic and its own truths, and it's very real. It has its own rules of the game. Every musician can allow himself to play free, but it depends on how prepared you are for it.

Actually, I'm a lucky man – I'm a student of the very first improvisation school, named after a man called Ganelin. We were students in Vilnius, and we saw it from the very early years. Until recently nobody played bebop; they used to just improvise over everything. I remember one occasion – we were playing at restaurants, had made some money, and Slava [Vyacheslav] with his trio had returned from India and was talking about it everywhere. If there are people who've dedicated their whole lives to this music, who think compositionally and create music without any pathos, without asking for anything in return, we have to learn from them. I've been playing this music for a long time, I've collaborated with Slava for a long time, and it's all about that love for the music, sound, yourself, that respect for the time that has to be dedicated to something in your life.

How do you see the situation in the Baltic countries? How do you see our jazz future?

Gotesman: I think we just have to look at those who come to us and play with us. Big stars come to our countries, they participate in our projects, and that's a statement; it means that someone needs us. They don't come just because they need to earn money. We have many projects uniting musicians from different countries, so I think that we're able to compete with much more powerful countries with stronger economies and where there are more opportunities to let people achieve something.

Do you see potential?

Gotesman: Huge potential. Moreover, it's almost the same huge potential in all the Baltic countries. It would be nice if we could charge the same prices for concert tickets. ●

ANNUAL JAZZ EVENTS AND CONCERT SERIES

■ FESTIVALS

RĪGAS RITMI

Each year at the beginning of July, Riga hosts the biggest jazz festival in the country – Rīgas Ritmi. For the past twenty years, this event has been bringing excellent artists from all over the world to Latvia to perform at a variety of venues ranging from open-air stages to cosy restaurants. Every day ends with a nighttime jam session, as it ought to at a true jazz festival. One of the essential parts of the festival is a series of workshops led by the performing artists. Naturally, this year's programme promises many interesting performers, such as Roberto Fonseca & Danay Suarez, Liselotte Östblom, Tom Syson, Clark Beckham, Bokanté and many more.

rigasritmi.lv

SAULKRASTI JAZZ

One of the oldest festivals in our country, Saulkrasti Jazz continues to not only bring amazing artists together on one stage, but also to play an active role in the education of young jazz talents. Each year the event hosts a week-long jazz camp with all-day workshops and combo sessions. One of the noticeable happenings during the festival is Baltic Drummers League, an annual competition for musicians under the age of twenty-five. Each day of the week culminates in a concert featuring several artists, both local and from abroad. The festival takes place in the middle of July, and this year it will feature the Stanley Jordan

Quartet, the Mauro Sigura Quartet, the Sketchbook Quartet, performances by music academy students from all of the Baltic countries and much more.

saulkrastijazz.lv

VENTSPILS GROOVE

In the middle of August, jazz fans travel to another city by the sea, Ventspils, to enjoy the groovy sounds arriving on the sea-salt breeze. Ventspils Groove has long ago become a place for creative exchange, a place where the experience of an international team of professional musicians intertwines with talents of the young generation. The festival features two-part workshops: students work with instrument teachers in the morning and learn a combo programme in the afternoon, and at the end of the week they present to the audience what they've learned. Meanwhile, every evening listeners enjoy concerts by amazing jazz musicians, and the week ends with a special gala night.

fb.com/ventspilsgroove

ŠĶIŅŅA DŽEZS

Take a spectacular old manor house in southern Latvia called Lūznava Manor. Add lots of interest in jazz music, collaboration with aspiring and established jazz musicians and a special late-August atmosphere. What you get is the first Baltic jazz festival. This idea originally belonged to the talented young jazz double-bassist and composer Toms Lipskis, who unfortunately passed away much too soon. Nevertheless, it was soothing to see that the festival started last year and has been devoted to Lipskis' memory. Its motto "Continuation" honours

the work he began – it is a continuation of the ideas initiated by Lipskis, a continuation of jazz music, a continuation of experienced jazz musicians passing on knowledge to young musicians. The festival offers workshops by Baltic jazz musicians, concerts by jazz departments at the music academies of all the Baltic countries and many concerts to attend.

fb.com/luznavasmuiza

WORLD JAZZ FESTIVAL

Since 2014, Riga has become home to yet another jazz music festival, this time organised by our jazz friends from Russia: well-known saxophonist Igor Butman and composer/producer Arkady Ukupnik. Every year in July the festival organises a several-day-long jazz marathon on Riga's largest stages featuring many local and international artists. This year the festival takes place on July 30 and 31.

worldjazzfest.com

JAM SESSION SERIES

JAZZ ROOM JAM

In recent years Riga has become famous in the Baltic states for its great number of jam sessions held each month. Just imagine, a small city such as ours having at least eight jam nights at a variety of clubs! One of these venues is a truly historic place, having hosted jazz now for more than two decades. In the past couple of years, leading Latvian saxophonist Deniss Pashkevich has taken over the organisation of these nights and continues actively involving students and experienced musicians in the thing jazz musicians love the most – the jam session. So if you're in town and it's Monday

night, be sure to visit the Hamlets club and enjoy the Jazz Room Jam!

fb.com/rigaroom

THURSDAY JAM SESSIONS AT TROMPETE

Trompete Taproom opened a few years ago as a jazz bar. Even though it has now transformed into a beer restaurant, it still hosts live jazz concerts from time to time, and its Thursday jazz jam tradition is very much alive, gathering both local and international musicians on stage to play music and share the vibe. So, if you're around the Old Town on a Thursday night, feel free to drop by!

fb.com/trompeteLV

VALKA JAM

For the fourth year in a row, young jazz musicians will gather at the Valka City Cultural Centre to celebrate music and life. The event has been popular right from the start, and its organiser Ilmārs Priede has decided to continue it, not only for the benefit of the musicians, who enjoy spending time in a stress-free atmosphere, but also for the people in the region, who see the event as a chance to get to know jazz better. Valka Jam takes place at the end of August.

fb.com/valkajam

JAM WITH VENTSPILS BIG BAND

Ventspils doesn't keep quiet. In addition to the annual jazz festival, it also hosts occasional jam sessions. The organisers invite Latvian jazz music legends to contribute some of their original music, they arrange it for big band with strings, and then they host sympho jazz concerts that have gained the trust of and become

popular among local audiences. The next jam will feature Susanna Aleksandra (Estonia) on vocals and Gerhard Orinig (Austria) on the trumpet performing together with the Ventspils Big Band.

fb.com/ventspilsbigbands

JAM SESSIONS AT GREAT AMBER LIEPĀJA

Another seaside Latvian city, Liepāja, also has a well-established jam culture: improvisation evenings in the Civita Nova art space at the Great Amber Concert Hall take place once every month or two and are organised by the local music school. The first part of the jam always involves a guest artist performing original compositions and jazz standards together with the house band, which is made up of teachers from the school; a jazz, pop and Latin jam follows. Upcoming jam sessions in 2020 will feature such stars as Alex Vansalen (Belgium), Madars Kalniņš (Latvia), Villu Veski (Estonia) and Sebastian Studnitzky (Germany).

fb.com/jamsessionliepaja

■ REGULAR JAZZ CONCERT SERIES ■

VEF JAZZ CLUB

The VEF Jazz Club event series began in 2018 and has continued to organise six to eight jazz nights per year for three years running. An architectural monument of national importance, the VEF Culture Palace is one of the most prominent cultural venues in Latvia. The palace's various spaces and halls are home to professional and amateur arts and music groups representing many different genres. Upcoming events this year at the VEF Jazz Club include the

UNESCO International Jazz Day Latvia pre-party event with Raphael Wressnig and Latvian Groove on April 29, the Auziņš-Čudars-Arutjunyan trio on September 22 and Secret Swing Society on November 26.

vef.kp.lv

MINOX JAZZ SESSIONS

Minox is a cocktail bar inspired by Art Deco chic and Central American flavours that's located on the 14th floor of the Teodors building in the Jaunā Teika neighbourhood with a stunning view over downtown Riga. Every second Saturday of the month the bar hosts jazz sessions that attract Latvian jazz musicians mostly focusing on contemporary jazz, neo-soul and R&B jazz as well as some traditional jazz. Expect original compositions; arrangements by Robert Glasper, Erykah Badu, Gretchen Parlato, Kendrick Scott and Aaron Parks; neo-soul jazz crossover; and some top-notch cocktails to boot.

fb.com/MinoxCocktailBar

LIEPAJA LAKE MUSIC

Liepāja Lake Music announced its fourth season in the summer of 2020. An initially crazy idea to hold a live concert on the waters of Lake Liepāja was greatly appreciated by the audience, and this year Liepāja Lake Music is ready to offer an entire series of thirteen concerts and jazz sessions featuring local and foreign artists. The adventure starts shortly before sunset, listeners get in boats, catamarans or rafts and enjoy live music performed on a floating stage.

fb.com/liepajalakemusic

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This issue is brought to you by musicians, managers and music journalists who are dedicated to spreading the word about the history of jazz in our country, our artists and other things that make our jazz community so special.

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