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Jazz Jamboree as a National and International Event

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Abstract

This article presents the history of renowned Polish jazz festival Jazz Jamboree, from its beginnings to the end of state socialism. The authors discuss the transformation of Jazz Jamboree, from its humble beginnings in the mid-1950s to its flourishing in the 1960s, stagnation in the 1970s and crisis in the 1980s. They consider Jazz Jamboree as a national and international phenomenon, due to its showcasing the achievements of the Polish jazzmen to the international audience and bringing musicians from the socialist East, capitalist West and what in the past was labelled the Third World. As part of the international outreach of the festival, special attention is paid to Polish-Czechoslovak jazz relations. This research is based on Polish and international press, memoirs and biographies of jazz musicians, as well as an interview with a Polish veteran of Jazz Jamboree, drummer and singer Andrzej Dąbrowski.

Key words

Jazz Jamboree, Polish jazz, Eastern European Jazz, Polish-Czechoslovak collaboration, Krzysztof Komeda

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Jazz Jamboree (hereafter JJ) is the oldest jazz festival in Eastern Europe and it was undoubtedly the most prestigious jazz festival in this part of the world throughout the entirety of the state socialism period. However, despite its importance for jazz musicians and lovers of the genre, it attracted little academic attention. The purpose of this article is to fill this gap, by presenting its history, from its beginnings to the end of state socialism. We track the transformation of JJ, from its humble beginnings in the mid-1950s to its flourishing in the 1960s, stagnation in the 1970s and crisis in the 1980s. We consider JJ as a national and international phenomenon, due to its showcasing the achievements of the Polish jazzmen to the international audience and bringing musicians from the socialist East, capitalist West and what in the past was labelled the Third World. As part of the international outreach of the festival, special attention is paid to Polish-Czechoslovak jazz relations. Our research is based on studying Polish and international press, memoirs and biographies of jazz musicians, as well as an interview with a Polish veteran of JJ, drummer and singer Andrzej Dąbrowski (b. 1938).

The true beginning of JJ can be traced to 1956, when the first Polish jazz festival took place in Sopot, a resort on the Baltic coast and part of the area known as Tricity (with Gdansk and Gdynia). The year is very important in Polish postwar history. It was the year of the death of the Polish Stalinist leader Bolesław Bierut and the ascent of his successor Władysław Gomułka, which started a cultural and political thaw in Poland, known as the “Polish October” (*Polski Październik*). It was marked by immense cultural and artistic activity, following the demise of socialist realism.¹ For example, the Festival of Contemporary Music, Warsaw Autumn, was set up that year in Warsaw.² The fact that the mid-1950s was such a period of cultural flourishing in Poland, exceeding similar phenomena in other Eastern European countries, in part explains why this festival took place in Poland, as opposed to, for example, Prague, Budapest or Moscow.

In the years 1954–56, there were also heated discussions about jazz in the Polish press, conducted by journalists, popular and serious musicians and writers, which did not have their equivalent in the press of other socialist countries. The discussions largely concerned the poor state of Polish dance music, especially the Radio Orchestra of Jan Cajmer, a musician of the Jewish origin, who, together with Władysław Szpilman, occupied a privileged place on the Polish popular music scene. Another factor, which led to the first Jazz Festival, was the International Festival of Youth and Students in Warsaw, in 1955, which allowed Polish jazz bands to present their skills in an international company. The Youth Festival brought into high relief the outmodedness of the Cajmer Orchestra and similar ensembles by directing the limelight onto the Polish jazz bands of Jan Walasek

¹ See PIETRASZEWSKI, Igor. *Jazz w Polsce: Wolność improwizowana*. Krakow: Nomos, 2012.

² On this event see texts by Lisa Jakelski, for example *Pushing Boundaries: Mobility at the Warsaw Autumn International Festival of Contemporary Music*. *East European Politics and Societies*, 2015, vol. 29, no. 1, pp. 189–211.

and Andrzej Kurylewicz, which, although operated without any state support, impressed the guests with their professionalism and modernism.³ The Youth Festival thus blazed the trail for the Sopot Jazz Festival and the subsequent JJs through highlighting the difference between traditional dance music in the style of Cajmer and jazz-tinted dance music. It also showed that jazz does not need to be merely music for dancing – it can also work as music for listening and contemplation.

The Beginnings of Jazz Jamboree

The first Sopot Jazz Festival ran from the 6th to the 12th August 1956. There was no specific institutional body involved. The most important person behind it was Franciszek Walicki (1920–2005), an impresario operating on the Baltic coast, often described as the father of Polish popular music, due to playing a crucial role in the development of practically all main genres of Polish popular music, including jazz, rock and electronic music. Walicki was a great organiser and smooth operator, able to persuade authorities that any new development in Polish popular music would be beneficial to the official culture, playing down its possible subversive potential. He engaged a group of people interested in jazz. Included in the group was his contemporary Leopold Tyrmand (1920–1985), a well-known writer who, at the time, was probably the best Polish expert on jazz, as demonstrated by the fact that he is the author of the first Polish book on jazz, published in 1957, *U brzegów jazzu* (*At Jazz's Shores*, 2008).⁴ Tyrmand would become the compere of the early jazz festivals.⁵ Tyrmand is also granted with inventing the name of Jazz Jamboree (Jazz Meeting) to the later editions of the festival. Another person involved in the organisation was Jerzy Kosiński, head of Estrada in Gdańsk.⁶ The honorary committee was also made up of three writers and intellectuals, Stefan Kisielewski, Jan Kott, theoretician of theatre and the author of the influential book *Shakespeare, Our Contemporary* (1964) and, Marian Eile, the editor-in-chief of the cultural magazine *Przekrój*.⁷

3 ŚCIEŻYŃSKI, Jacek. O muzyce tanecznej. In *Polskie ścieżki do jazzu*. Krystian Brodacki (ed.). Warszawa: Sekcja Publicystów Polskiego Stowarzyszenia Jazzowego, 1980, pp. 46–47; DAIEMBOWSKA, Urszula. Jazz jazzowi nierówny. In *Polskie ścieżki do jazzu*. Krystian Brodacki (ed.). Warszawa: Sekcja Publicystów Polskiego Stowarzyszenia Jazzowego, 1980, pp. 47–48; CAJMER, Jan. Muzyka taneczna i jej zagadnienia. In *Polskie ścieżki do jazzu*. Krystian Brodacki (ed.). Warszawa: Sekcja Publicystów Polskiego Stowarzyszenia Jazzowego, 1980, pp. 41–42.

4 See BLÜML, Jan – OPEKAR, Aleš. *Popular Music Research Behind the Iron Curtain: Czech Musicology in the Context of Central European Culture and Politics*. Berlin: Peter Lang, 2025.

5 TOMASIK, Wojciech. All that Jazz! On Tyrmand's Challenge to Stalinism. *Blok*, 2004, vol. 3, pp. 179–186.

6 GRZEBĄŁKOWSKA, Magdalena. *Komeda: A Private Life in Jazz*. Trans. Halina Maria Boniszewska. Sheffield: Equinox, 2020, p. 101.

7 KAŁUŻNA, Ewa at al. Franciszek Walicki. In *Muzeum Jazzu*, <https://www.muzeumjazzu.pl/franciszek-walicki/>, accessed 11/04/2025.

The festival began with a parade through the streets of Sopot, New Orleans style. From there, it moved indoors to Pavilion A. One can appreciate just how large this jazz festival was from the size of its audience, which numbered between 30,000 and 50,000 people coming to Sopot, which had a population of merely 5,000 people at the time. The political and cultural significance of the festival cannot be overestimated – it connoted an immense quest for freedom and connection with western – principally American – culture. Among the performers was Krzysztof Komeda, who in subsequent years became the most famous Polish jazz musician nationally and internationally.⁸ In fact, one can argue that this festival made Komeda. His performance with the (short-lived) Komeda Sextet was regarded as the highlight of the festival, as much because of the modern character of music they played, which was different from the New Orleans idiom, as well as due to the image Komeda and his colleagues projected, sporting dark clothes, and matching haircuts, which led to a comparison with Hamlet. We find also praise of the Polish band Melomani with Jerzy Matuszkiewicz and Andrzej Trzaskowski, although with the caveat that it lags behind Komeda's band.⁹

The main purpose of the festival was to showcase the productions of Polish jazzmen to the Polish audience and to celebrate political freedom linked to the ascent of Gomułka.¹⁰ Nevertheless, it also had an international line-up, thanks to the invitation proffered to two bands from abroad: the Kamil Hála Orchestra from Czechoslovakia and the Dave Burman Jazz Band from the UK.

The second Jazz Festival took place again in Tricity, although this time not in Sopot but at the sports stadium in Gdansk Wrzeszcz. As with the first festival it was an informal, ad hoc affair but was more international, with guests from several countries, such as the United States, represented by clarinettist Albert Nicholas, West Germany and Italy. The socialist world was again represented by the band from Czechoslovakia, Dixieland 57, led by Gustav Brom. Despite the first two festivals having an audience counted in tens of thousands, they carried a significant financial deficit. Moreover, they had some bad press in Tricity, being linked to hooliganism and presented as trivial, on a par with a beauty pageant that took place at the same time as the first Jazz Festival, and which some journalists described as being a part of the jazz festival.¹¹ The decision was thus taken to discontinue

8 For example, the 3rd issue of *Jazz*, which is largely devoted to the Festival in Sopot, devotes more space to Komeda than to any other musician, including an interview with Komeda on its first page.

9 LIPOWICZ, Franciszek. Pierwszy ogólnopolski przegląd zespołów jazzowych w Sopocie. *Jazz*, 1956, no. 3, pp. 4–5.

10 CIESIELSKI, Rafał. Krytyka jazzowa o Ogólnopolskim Festiwalu Muzyki Jazzowej Sopot 1956. In *Słowami o dźwiękach... Muzyka w mediach (nie tylko doby PRL-u)*. Beata Afeltowicz – Artur Trudzik (eds.). Szczecin: Volumina, 2017, pp. 137–148.

11 Particularly influential was the report of Zbigniew Zapert in the popular daily, *Express Wieczorny*, 1956, 194. A detailed discussion of the criticism of the festival and the reaction of its defenders in the press can be found in CIESIELSKI, Rafał. *Polska krytyka jazzowa XX wieku: zagadnienia i postawy*. Zielona Góra:

it. By this point, however, Poland had a strong “jazz lobby”, as evidenced by the setting of the Federation of Polish Jazz Clubs and its media arm, the journal *Jazz* in 1956, the same year the festival was established. It was the first mainstream journal dedicated to jazz and popular music at large in European socialist states, which reported on and advocated the developing jazz culture and infrastructure through, among others, hosting regular events celebrating jazz.¹²

Hence, instead of killing the festival, it was moved to Warsaw, where it started in 1958. The first Warsaw Festival, whose official name was simply “Jazz 1958”, lasted three days – from 18 to 21 September. Subsequently, the Jazz Festivals would be hosted in autumn, usually in October. From this point, the festival had a proper institutional anchoring. Its main organiser was the Federation of Polish Jazz Clubs, which later morphed into the Polish Jazz Federation and the Students Federation. Such institutional framework was natural, given that the Federation, a young body at the time, decided on the programme and provided the venues.

The concerts took place in the students’ club *Stodoła* (barn). For the first time, this festival had “international” in its title. However, as it was hastily put together, it had only one set of international guests, from Denmark, the Luis Hjulmand Quartet, which played with Roman Dyląg, at the time a young double-bass player, who soon would join the “first division” of Polish jazzman. From Polish performers, Komeda was singled out, as the most original of the Polish jazzmen, somebody who not merely plays modern jazz, but transcends this idiom.¹³

In 1959, the festival had a similar character. It was the first JJ festival for our informant Andrzej Dąbrowski, as well as for a very young pianist from Silesia, Katarzyna Gärtner, who in the years to come would become one of the most prolific and successful composers of songs and musicals, somewhat softening the masculine character of JJ and Polish jazz in general.¹⁴ Again, its international dimension was limited, as the only guests from abroad came, again, from Denmark: the band Storyville Jazzmen.

It is impossible to establish with certainty why these two nominally international festivals were in fact so national, but the most likely reason was that they were still poorly organised, last-minute affairs. The early festivals were preserved in the memory of their

Uniwersytet Zielonogórski, 2017, pp. 209–211. See also *X lat festiwalu Jazz Jamboree*. *Jazz Forum*, nr. 7, 1967, p. 42.

12 In Czechoslovakia, jazz journalism developed already in the interwar period, and the first magazine, *Jazz*, was published in 1947–48. The periodical ceased to exist after the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia came to power. In the 1950s, however, jazz samizdats/fanzines were distributed. More about them here: VIDOMUS, Petr. Just Don’t Call It a Magazine: Czech Jazz Fanzines of Two Totalities (1944–1958). *Hudební věda*, 2024, vol. 61, no. 2, pp. 252–308.

13 SIELICKI, Leszek – MICHALAK, Maciej. Z notatek szarego słuchacza. *Jazz*, 1958, vol. 3, no. 10, p. 5.

14 For more information about her and the reception of her work in Czechoslovakia, see BARTOŠOVÁ, Nikoleta. Na Szkle Malowane: An Analysis of the Historical Origin of This Musical Phenomenon. *Czech and Slovak Journal of Humanities Musicologica*, 2019, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 5–30.

participants, including Andrzej Dąbrowski, as a grassroots, spontaneous events, free from political interference. They were meant to celebrate the vibrant jazz culture in the spirit of cooperation rather than competition. For this reason, they had no jury and gave no awards.¹⁵ This tradition continued in the subsequent decades.

Jazz Jamboree in the 1960s: Maturation

In the early 1960s JJ matured in terms of its organisation. It stopped being an event put together by an informal group of jazz enthusiasts and started to be organised by the Association of Polish Jazz Clubs (Federacja Polskich Klubów Jazzowych), set up in 1957, which later transformed into the Polskie Stowarzyszenie Jazzowe (Polish Jazz Association) and then Polska Federacja Jazzowa (Polish Jazz Federation). It was supported by the students' club Hybrydy and other students' organisations. The media patron of these early festivals became *Jazz* magazine. Inevitably, such a set-up rendered the festival as a grassroots event, organised by and for young people.

From 1961, Hybrydy stopped being a co-organiser of Jazz Festival. Its place was taken by the National Philharmonic (Filharmonia Narodowa), which provided one of its halls for concerts. This change can be seen as symbolic, as it marked a shift from an improvised, grassroots and popular music affair to one encouraged and supported by the cultural establishment. This transition was completed in 1964, when the main organisers of the festival, along with the National Philharmonic, became the Polish Radio and Pagart, the state agency responsible for promoting Polish artists abroad and bringing foreign artists to Poland.¹⁶

In 1960, the festival had, for the first time, many guests from abroad, including the legendary saxophonist (albeit with Jewish-Ukrainian roots), Stan Getz, who played with Polish jazzmen, the previously mentioned Dyląg, Dąbrowski on drums and Trzaskowski on the piano. His visit was heralded in the Polish press as the beginning of a new era, marked by a greater opening of Polish jazz to foreign influences. Dąbrowski remembers this performance as the highlight of jazz culture in the 1960s Poland. From 1964, JJ can be described as the festival of modern jazz, given that that year only one band representing traditional jazz was performing at the festival.

The presence of jazz musicians from Czechoslovakia, so strong in the early period of the jazz festival, decreased in the 1960s. There were several editions of the festivals when there were no musicians from this country at all. A likely factor of the decrease could be the poor financial conditions offered to the performers from the Eastern bloc. Another reason might have been the establishment of the International Jazz Festival in Prague

¹⁵ It is also likely that the lack of awards was also dictated by financial considerations.

¹⁶ BRODACKI, Krystian. *Historia jazzu w Polsce*. Kraków: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne SA, 2010, p. 232.

in 1964, which provided local musicians with sufficient international publicity. A further possible reason was Czechoslovaks' disillusionment with Polish jazz of this period, which moved towards the so-called "Third Stream" or "Third Wave" (*Trzeci nurt*), consisting of marrying jazz with experimental and classical music, often moving towards dodecaphony. It can be argued that Polish and Czechoslovak jazz scenes were located on the opposite poles of the jazz spectrum: swing orchestra dance style vs combo jazz experimental, with Czechoslovak jazzmen congregating near the former pole and Polish jazzmen near the latter. This is reflected by the tone of reviews practically throughout the entire history of JJ: the Polish musicians were praised for their originality, breaking new ground and solo work; Czechoslovaks for their professionalism, high standard of dance orchestras and traditional instrumental virtuosity.¹⁷ This can be explained by the fact that the Polish scene was a generation younger than the Czech scene, hence it was unburdened by tradition and more prone to avant-gardism in line with the general trend of the 1960s.

The 1960s, however, were a period when JJ began to be written about in the official Czechoslovak music press, emphasising its connection with the Polish National Philharmonic and, in this sense, also using this fact to justify jazz as a serious form of music. Even in the years when there were no jazz players from Czechoslovakia, there were guests from that country. The regular visitor was Lubomír Dorůžka, jazz enthusiast and the editor of a leading Czech popular music magazine *Melodie*. In one of the issues of *Jazz Forum* from 1968, he penned an article *My Contacts with Polish Jazz*, where he presented the different trajectories of Polish and Czechoslovak jazz. In addition, he mentioned among others that the existence of the vibrant jazz scene in Poland in the late 1950s and early 1960s had a beneficial influence on Czechoslovak jazz musicians. Not only did it allow them to meet their Polish counterparts, but it boosted their morale by allowing them to move from restaurants, where they normally played in Czechoslovakia, to more prestigious venues. This refers to the band of Kamil Hála, who not only had a concert tour in Poland but recorded some of their work there when jazz records in Czechoslovakia were non-existent.¹⁸ In addition, Dorůžka claims that aside from Polish musicians inspiring Czechoslovak jazzmen, they also instigated their organisation in the Jazz Federation, which became one of the catalysts of the Polish scene, and which later initiated the establishment of the European Jazz Federation, founded jointly by Polish colleagues and Czechoslovak and Yugoslav jazz journalists and organisers.

The thriving jazz scene in Poland eventually led to setting up the previously mentioned International Jazz Festival in Prague. The organisers of the Prague and Warsaw festivals were in close contact, making sure that these events complemented rather than competed with each other. In the following years, they jointly coordinated the musical programming with regard to foreign performers. Thus, the musical content of the Warsaw

¹⁷ See for example *X lat festiwalu Jazz Jamboree*. *Jazz Forum*, no. 7, 1967, pp. 41–54.

¹⁸ DORUŽKA, Lubomír. *Moje kontakty z polskim jazzem*. *Jazz Forum*, 1968, vol. 5, no. 8, pp. 52–54.

and Prague festivals were to some extent dependent on each other until the first half of the 1970s, when the Czechoslovak festival was discontinued as a result of normalisation. Both festivals were held in the autumn, either immediately following each other or directly overlapping in date. Thus, the guest performers could easily visit both Prague and Warsaw during their Central European tours.

While the representation from Czechoslovakia became relatively smaller at JJ in the 1960s, there were, overall, more musicians from the socialist East in comparison with previous years, including from countries such as Hungary, the Soviet Union and East Germany. More could have come if it was not for the cost of travel. It is worth asking why Poland could afford to invite guests from the United States, given the much higher cost of their travel, while it could not cover the costs of musicians from Czechoslovakia or Hungary. The answer is that American institutions, such as the American Embassy, covered the cost of the trips of their musicians, using the investment as exercising American soft power.¹⁹ It has been suggested that the stars from the West – and especially the USA – enjoyed visiting Poland. As argued by the Dutch composer and pianist Pim Jacobs, this was because the West was full of stars, therefore western audiences were more blasé about their performances. In Poland, which was not spoilt from this perspective, the audiences were more enthusiastic.²⁰

In 1965 the connection of JJ with the musical establishment was confirmed by the increase in its venues including those belonging to the Operetta and the Congress Hall in the Palace of Culture, which, with a capacity of 3,000 seats, was regarded as the most prestigious venue in Warsaw. In due course, many journalists and guests commented that Poland was unique in having such a large fanbase of jazz music. In other countries it would be impossible for even the greatest stars to fill venues of this size. Throughout the remaining editions of the 1960s, the connections of JJ with the music and political establishment were strengthened even more. This was particularly visible in 1966, when the group of the festival sponsors was joined by the Minister for Culture and the Arts, Lucjan Motyka, the Chairman of the Radio and Television Committee, Jerzy Sokorski and the Head of the Warsaw Council, General Jerzy Zarzycki. The cosyng up of its organisers to the political establishment was not to everybody's taste. Some jazz enthusiasts regarded it as a betrayal of the festival's ethos. The most notable example was the previously mentioned co-organiser of the first festivals, Leopold Tyrmand. In 1966, Tyrmand left Poland for the United States, and never returned. The maturity of JJ and the Polish jazz scene was marked by the introduction of a second jazz magazine in Poland, the *Jazz Forum*, in 1965.

The 1960s, as far as jazz in Poland was concerned, can be described as the decade of Krzysztof Komeda. He was widely regarded as the best Polish jazz composer of this period

¹⁹ More on this issue, for example RITTER, Rüdiger. *Waffe oder Brücke? Willis Conover und der Jazz im Kalten Krieg*. Berlin: Peter Lang, 2023.

²⁰ JACOBS, Pim. 1964... Jazz Jamboree. *Jazz*, 1964, vol. 9, no. 100, p. 4.

and the discussions about the Polishness of Polish jazz centred around his style of composing and performing. He was also seen as the main ambassador of Polish jazz, thanks to his travels to Scandinavia and scoring Roman Polanski films. Up to 1967, Komeda, with different configurations of his band, performed at every edition of JJ. In 1968, he was absent for the first time, due to working on the score for *Rosemary's Baby*, directed by Roman Polanski. In 1969, he was again absent, having died as a result of an accident he suffered in Los Angeles. His death can be seen as symbolic in the history of Polish jazz and JJ.

In the 1960s, JJ stopped being international in name only and became international in reality. Its performers could be divided into two categories. One category involved musicians from the United States, such as Stan Getz and Dizzy Gillespie. They were the stars, who were granted the largest venues and the best performance schedules. The other musicians came from Europe. Over the years, more countries were represented, including Czechoslovakia, Hungary, East Germany, the Soviet Union, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, West Germany, Austria, Italy and Belgium. Generally, in reviews, guests from the socialist East are treated similarly to those from Western European countries, namely usually as good, but not as good as the Americans and Poles. Apart from those already mentioned, Eastern European jazzmen, included, among others, the Reduta Quintet from Czechoslovakia, Joachim Kuhn and the Günther Fischer Quartet from East Germany, the Andor Kovacs Quartet, the Aladar Pege Quartet and Zsuzsa Kosa from Hungary. Similarly to the situation in Czechoslovakia, East German and Soviet performers were praised, but in a patronising manner, given that less was expected from them than from performers with more established jazz scenes.

As we have already mentioned, the concerts of JJ were very well attended. Who were their audiences? There was no sociological research on festival attendance at the time, so their composition can only be gleaned from reviews and memoirs. These point to several segments of the audience. One consisted of young people, reflecting the fact that in the 1950s and 1960s jazz was seen as the music of the young, even though at some point it started to face competition from rock. Another segment included the Polish cultural and intellectual elites, and especially those from Warsaw. JJ was a festival at which one was expected to be seen, as much for the music as for social reasons. In this pre-Internet era it was more difficult for visitors from the provinces to attend the festival, as tickets had to be ordered and sent by post. The third important segment of the audience comprised visitors from abroad, especially from the neighbouring countries. For them, the main attraction of the festival was the presence of foreign stars, mostly from the United States. In the case of visitors from Czechoslovakia, tours to the Polish festival were organised by the Youth Union's travel agency; later, in the 1970s, the Jazz Section organized trips to Polish festivals for its members.²¹ Given the distance involved in getting there, it was a source of frustration when the festival announced that it included some important guests, and then

²¹ See KOUŘIL, Vladimír. *Jazzová sekce v čase a nečase, 1971–1987*. Praha: Torst, 1999.

in the end they did not come, which was frequently the case in the 1960s and 1970s. Apart from its live audience, JJ also reached its audience through the media: radio, television and albums. Parts of it were broadcast by Czechoslovak and Hungarian television. Typically, two LPs were produced with festival recordings.

The 1960s is widely regarded as the golden age of JJ, which established itself as one of the most important jazz festivals in Europe. It also acted as a trailblazer, showing other countries how to organise their own festivals. In Warsaw, it became one of the most important events in the cultural calendar. It also established jazz in Poland as a “protected” music, receiving preferential treatment over other genres of popular music, as testified by frequent trips to the West by Polish jazzmen and their making records faster than rockers and pop singers, even though jazz records sold fewer copies. At this time JJ did not have much competition in Poland; for several years it was the only jazz festival in the country.

The 1970s: Stagnation and Experimentation

The 1970s can be described as the years in which JJ stagnated. One reason for this was that the novelty of jazz wore off in Poland and it stopped being regarded as the music of (rebellious) youth. Instead, it became associated with the middle-age generation, the cultural elites and the establishment. Paradoxically, the sense of stagnation was not linked to the festival offering more of the same music, but due to experimenting too much and moving out of the jazz mainstream. It was also a time of discussion about the most propitious direction for jazz in light of the fact that, in order to renew itself, jazz was looking at other genres. After the Third Stream, mentioned in the previous section, it moved to free jazz with its experimental approach to improvisation. At the same time, jazz was borrowing from rock, the genre seen as being closest to jazz. The connection with rock was already detectable in 1969, when among the performers was the rock band Dżamble, with their charismatic singer Andrzej Zaucha and the blues rock band Breakout. Their inclusion also had much to do with financial considerations, because jazz in Poland had stopped being profitable, while rock was.²² Rafał Ciesielski argues that in reviews published at the time, the focus was not on innovation, but professionalism and the need to return to the roots of jazz.²³ Some critics suggested that the formula of “concert jazz” stopped being attractive to the audience. It was time to return to jazz as a club phenomenon, played in smaller, more intimate venues. Other complained that after the death of Komeda, Poland lacked stars of his format.²⁴

²² BRODAKCI, op. cit., p. 232.

²³ CIESIELSKI, Rafał. *Polska krytyka jazzowa XX wieku: zagadnienia i postawy*. Zielona Góra: Uniwersytet Zielonogórski, 2017, pp. 357–400.

²⁴ Ibid.

As in the 1960s, in the 1970s there was an unspoken hierarchy of performers, with the greatest stars coming from the USA, who were followed by the best of Polish and European jazzmen. In 1971, one such star was Duke Ellington and his Big Band. A well-known journalist Tomasz Tłuczkiewicz, who for many years was also a director of JJ, confirmed in a radio interview that the awe surrounding the visits of the American guests was not only to do with the quality of their performance, but also the implicit assumption that everything coming from the West was better than what was coming from the East and the lack of intimate knowledge of the western scenes and hierarchies. One could also sense the pride and gratitude towards western jazzmen visiting JJ, even though usually their visits were only a stop on larger tours in Western Europe. That said, over the years, a more subtle hierarchy of performers appeared, with musicians from Scandinavia being singled out, along with Poles, as the best in Europe. In a large part, this was thanks to performances by saxophonists Bernt Rosengren (1937–2023) – who first performed at JJ in 1961 as a member of Komeda's band – and Jan Garbarek (b. 1947) from Norway, who gave one of his first performances at JJ in 1966. Garbarek, in particular, attracted great attention in Poland, becoming the most covered jazz musician in the Polish music press in the 1970s. He also became a yardstick, with which music by other European jazzmen was measured. This could be, in part, attributed to the fact that he was ethnically half-Polish, as his father was a Polish prisoner of war. More importantly, however, Garbarek represented tradition, which was close to the Polish school of jazz, particularly Komeda, thanks to drawing on different sources of inspiration, many of them falling outside of jazz, such as classical, choral and world music. Of the Polish jazzmen, the most praised were the saxophonists Tomasz Stańko and Zbigniew Namysłowski, collaborators with Komeda. They were joined by the pianist Adam Makowicz, who became a star of JJ '77.²⁵

Some foreign musicians kept returning to JJ. This applies to Gustav Brom, who came with his big band, in 1975. Mateusz Świącicki, in his review for *Jazz Forum*, devotes probably more attention to their performance than to any other band from Eastern Europe in reports from JJ, published in that magazine. He praises the quality and versatility of Brom's ensemble, as proven by making records in different styles. However, he criticises Brom for being, on this occasion, too experimental, playing polytonal music with unexpected juxtapositions of tones and timbres and, consequently, putting the audience off, as demonstrated by many viewers leaving the concert before its end.²⁶ We should not read too much into this review, but we can hypothesise that the Czech guests, after observing in the 1960s that JJ favoured modern, even experimental jazz, tried to adjust to such expectations and somewhat missed the boat, because in the 1970s JJ saw the return to more classical idioms and the audience being less keen on experiments and more keen on simple, fun-inducing music, with which Gustav Brom's Big Band was associated. Another

²⁵ SADOWSKI, Krzysztof. Jazz Jamboree '77. *Jazz Forum*, 1977, vol. 14, no. 51, p. 7.

²⁶ ŚWIECICKI, Mateusz. Jazz Jamboree 1975. *Jazz Forum*, 1976, vol. 13, no. 11, p. 7.

returnee from Czechoslovakia was Kamil Hála, who performed with his orchestra in 1976. It was, again, praised by Polish critics for its professionalism.²⁷

In the 1970s JJ was still a very popular festival. Dorůžka, writing about the 1973 edition of JJ, noted: *“The biggest asset of JJ is their audience. I don’t know any other country in Europe where you can organise the [jazz] festival, not necessarily with the biggest stars, and fill a venue of the size of the Congress Hall in the Palace of Culture.”*²⁸

It should be mentioned that, from 1973, the collaboration between JJ and the National Philharmonic, lasting 15 years, was severed. The reason was the growing hostility between these two institutions. The Philharmonic accused the audience attending jazz concerts of anti-social behaviour, namely drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes, trying to enter the venue without tickets and vandalism. The organisers of jazz concerts, on the other hand, accused the Philharmonic of the high costs for renting their venues and of hostility shown by its employees towards both the jazz audience and musicians. The final straw was the Michał Urbaniak concert in May 1973, when the crowd forced itself into the Philharmonic and destroyed the ornamental metal bar located next to the cloakroom and the marble banisters.²⁹ The end of the collaboration was symbolic, as it suggested that the attempts to include jazz into high art had ultimately failed.

The 1980s and Beyond: the Crisis Years

The 1980s are regarded as the crisis years in the history of Polish jazz. Some of the reasons were related to the political situation in Poland; others to jazz itself. The first pertains to the fact that in December 1981 Poland introduced martial law as a means to contain the spread of the Solidarity movement, which emerged as the alternative source of political power to the Party and the government. Following the imposition of martial law, many creative societies, events and publications were suspended, including *Jazz Forum*, which was not printed for several months. JJ did not find itself on the list of blacklisted events, but the Polish Jazz Federation decided not to organise the festival in 1982, because it would mean endorsing martial law and supporting the government. However, this decision was not conveyed to the American Embassy in Warsaw, which had already arranged the visits of guests from the United States. In order not to lose the chance to showcase their music and offend their American partners, a different type of event took place that year, called *Manewry Jazzowe* (Jazz Manoeuvres), in which artists

²⁷ KOWAL, Roman. Jazz Jamboree '76. *Jazz Forum*, 1977, vol. 14, no. 1, p. 7.

²⁸ DORUŽKA, Lubomír. In *Zagraniczni korespondenci Jazz Forum o Jazz Jamboree*. *Jazz Forum*, 1973, 26, p. 5.

²⁹ This incident is described in detail in interviews with the vice-director of the National Philharmonic, Marian Gołębiowski and Jerzy Brieze, the representative of the concert section of the Polish Jazz Federation. See A.R. and J.B. *Co jest grane? Jazz w Filharmonii Narodowej*. *Jazz Forum*, 1973, vol. 10, no. 5, pp. 4–6.

such as Alphonse Mouzon, Sam Rivers, Barry Altschul and Luther Guitar Junior Johnson performed. A year later, in 1983, JJ hosted one of its most prominent guests, Miles Davis. Davis also performed at the festival in 1987. This was a big success for the Polish organisers, not least because of the high demands of the guest regarding the menu and having a hotel with a swimming pool.

There were also probably more western stars in the 1980s, than in the 1960s and the 1970s combined. They included Wynton Marsalis in 1983, Sun Ra in 1987 and Bobby McFerrin in 1985. These visits bore fruit for the Polish artists in the form of their cooperation with these foreign stars. For example, thanks to Tomasz Tłuczkiewicz, the audience of JJ in 1985 could admire a duet with Urszula Dudziak and Bobby McFerrin. On the record *Tutu* (1986) by Miles Davis, on the track 'Lose Your Mind' we can also hear Michał Urbaniak playing solo on the electric violin.

The festivals in the 1980s attempted to move beyond the three geographical regions – Poland, the USA and continental Europe with their respective jazz idioms – by introducing styles that had not been previously represented. such as Latino and African jazz in 1985, in a special event titled "Que Viva El Jazz!", which included performances from artists from Cuba and Uruguay. Moreover, elements of exotic music, or what would be later termed "world music", became an important element of artists originating from Europe or the United States, as in the case of the previously mentioned Sun Ra.

Despite the presence of these stars, there was a sense that JJ had lost its spark. The clearest sign of this was that events at the fringe of the festival attracted more interest than the main programme of the instrumental modern jazz. The audience congregated around Polish stars of jazz-rock, many of them women, such as Ewa Bem, Grażyna Łobaszewska and Krystyna Prońko.³⁰ During the instrumental concerts, the audience often left in the middle of performance because performers played for too long. Much disappointment was caused by Polish players who had previously been singled out for their high quality. This was, to a large extent, caused by the absence of the Polish stars, who emigrated to the United States, such as Adam Makowicz and Michał Urbaniak. The 1980s also saw a demise of discussion, both at the festivals and in the specialist press, about the most advantageous route for Polish and global JJ. The question was not how to develop the jazz scene in Poland, but how to prevent it from withering away in the face of diminishing interest in this event.³¹

The subsequent decades deepened the crisis, in part reflecting the problems resulting from the transformation of Polish popular music from being state-owned and centralised to being driven by market centralisation and fragmented. This led to numerous conflicts and court cases concerning the legacy of state socialist music institutions. JJ was not free

³⁰ WIEROŃSKI, Marek. Poljazz Festival. *Jazz Forum*, 1982, vol. 19, no. 74, pp. 10–11.

³¹ See CIESIELSKI, Rafał. *Polska krytyka jazzowa XX wieku: zagadnienia i postawy*. Zielona Góra: Uniwersytet Zielonogórski, 2017, pp. 394–400.

from them. It started in the 1990s, when the Polish Patent Office registered the name “Jazz Jamboree” as a trademark belonging to the Polish Jazz Federation (PSJ). The organisation, however, struggled due to financial difficulties and accrued debts, which in turn led to court cases. In one such case, in 2003, the Regional Court in Warsaw requested that the PSJ to sell the “Jazz Jamboree” trademark to Ars Polona. PSJ did not accept this decision, resulting in more court cases and the final decline of the festival, which was even suspended for some years. Eventually, from 2001, the organisation of the festival was taken over by the agency Adamiak & Brzeski Partners, which had previously organised another jazz festival in Warsaw, X Warsaw Summer Jazz Days.³² In this way, the divorce between JJ and the Polish Jazz Federation was complete, to the sadness of those who were nostalgic for the atmosphere of the old festivals and to the joy of those who were glad it was not wiped off the map of global jazz events.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the Jazz Jamboree played a significant role in the development of Polish, Eastern European and global jazz culture. First, it showcased Polish jazz to the Polish and international audience, helping Polish jazzmen to break into the international market. Second, it allowed artists and jazzophiles from Eastern Europe, particularly Czechoslovakia and Hungary, to present their work and be in contact with jazzmen and jazz aficionados from other countries. Third, it acted as a model for jazz festivals in Eastern Europe, especially Prague. While remaining the most important jazz festival in Eastern Europe, with the passage of time JJ lost some of its significance. This resulted from jazz losing much of its subcultural capital, being supplanted by rock, a proliferation of jazz festivals in Europe, including in Eastern Europe, and the development of their own jazz music scenes in countries such as Czechoslovakia, Hungary, East Germany and the Soviet Union. The final straw for JJ was the marketisation of popular music in Poland after 1989, or rather its side effects, such as copyright disputes and the diminished support of the state for the previously prestigious events. Given the new landscape, one should be glad that JJ is still running.

³² Mariusz Adamiak odradza Jazz Jamboree. Festiwal wraca do świetności, 25 August 2001, <https://kultura.onet.pl/mariusz-adamiak-odradza-jazz-jamboree-festiwal-wraca-do-swietnosci/l76vbjo>, accessed 2/04/2025. Sądowy spór o prawo do nazwy festiwalu ‘Jazz Jamboree’, Wiadomości Wirtualna Polska, 10 March 2008, <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/sadowy-spor-o-prawo-do-nazwy-festiwalu-jazz-jamboree-6036627155182721a>, accessed 3/03/2025.

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