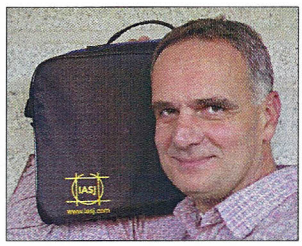
FROM THE EDITOR



The last five years I have developed a severe and expensive habit: I eat a large quantity of fruit every morning. Whatever fruit the season offers, I will eat it. One piece of fruit is always there: the banana, the other pieces of fruit may vary. If one thinks of a banana, one might think of a banana republic. In a banana republic the economy of a country is dependent on one product only although it is seldom bananas themselves!!

Jazz education is a banana republic as well. In only one type of educational setting is it successful but beside that it does not really exist. Jazz education has settled well on the higher professional music education, the conservatory level. On any of the other levels of education it is only marginally paid attention to. In general music education the word jazz is mentioned but none of the kids really learn how to improvise, let alone swing. In the USA the situation might be a bit better thanks to the IAJE and their collaboration with the MENC but much remains to be done. In Europe, a country like Denmark makes serious efforts to offer jazz education on the conservatory level but also in other kinds of music education. However, in a country like Italy, jazz education is restricted to some very fine jazz schools like the one in Siena but none of the conservatories have opened a real jazz department, although there was some sort of government mandate several years ago to include such programs. Jazz and jazz education is kept alive by individuals, driven men and women who fight their battles alone.

In many banana republics life is great. Outside the republic everybody wants bananas so for the people inside there is a lot of work. Some do much better than others but everybody is satisfied. The down side of it is that a banana republic is vulnerable. Bad weather, a banana disease, bad management, another country that produces better and cheaper bananas; it takes relatively little to end the paradise-like atmosphere of a banana republic. Likewise, if jazz education stays restricted to the level of education it has now, one cannot be sure that it will continue forever. The political support for jazz education on the conservatory level might decrease or fade away as many things change in politics nowadays.

The time has come for jazz education to establish better contacts with two other levels of education. One is the university level where education and research go hand in hand. The other level is primary education be it elementary or high school or in private music schools, (often referred to as K-12). Jazz education at the conservatory level is just a body that has to get both feet and a head. Not all kids will become jazz musicians but at least one time before the age of eighteen is reached they should have experienced the sensation of improvisation in music. Ten minutes after he starts I may want to pay the boy next door to stop drumming but I wish that all children of his age had learned how to swing. In general, academies and conservatories do not have a research and development department like universities might have. In order to improve this situation, we must develop an expanded collaboration with universities. At the 1st IASJ Jazz Education Conference 30 October–2 November 2003 in The Hague these and many other matters concerning the present state of jazz education will be discussed. A report will be made on what experts in the field have said. If you missed this conference, don't worry. The issue of the "banana republic" is too important and will reoccur at future IASJ Jazz Meetings, in the IASJ Newsletters and on the website.

W. Turkenburg

Walter Turkenburg
Editor