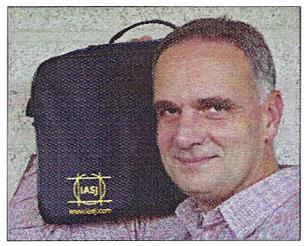
FROM THE EDITOR



What does jazz mean to people?

To the readers of this newsletter jazz is music. To many people jazz has some other meaning than the strictly musical one as well. Jazz to them is a symbol, a fetish, a lifestyle, a gimmick, a way to distinguish oneself from others.

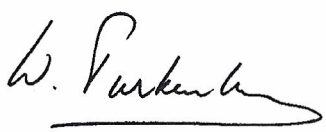
Years ago, I had an appointment with the jazz musician, educator, and author David Baker in Bloomington, Indiana, USA. I had never met him before nor had I seen a recent picture of him. We agreed to meet on a parking lot near a supermarket: "I will pick you up round noon". I asked him how I could recognize him. "Don't worry, you'll see!" He replied. I waited and waited and did worry. Suddenly a car pulled up and I knew it was him. On the license plate it said: bebop!

Everybody who works with computers knows the moment when you have to decide on something very personal: selecting a password or composing an e-mail address. It is not easy when you want to make it to be something personal or something that other people can remember easily. I am sure that it did not take long for Ronan Guilfoyle to come up with 251 in his e-mail address. Anyone who plays jazz knows that II-V-I are mystical numbers.

My son was born exactly hundred years after Duke Ellington. At the very moment he saw the light in his eyes for the first time, the big band of my school was playing a concert with only Ellington music. Up to that moment the name Edward and Kennedy, the first names of duke, did not appear in my family. They still don't but my wife and I did give it a thought.

No so long ago in a gas station you could buy gas for your car and maybe a newspaper also. Nowadays if you drive into a gas station along the highway in Europe only a small space is reserved to fill up the tank of your car. The rest of the vast compound is covered with a supermarket, one or two restaurants, a hotel, an exhibition, and a playground for kids, a fitness area, showers, toilets, coffee bars and what not. Many jazz magazines have gone through the same evolution. Once a collection of articles, interviews and reviews, the jazz magazine has now changed into a magazine that refers more to what jazz means not as music. The only jazz magazine in the Netherlands left is called "JAZZ". It has become a life-style magazine for people of a certain age with a certain amount of time and money to spend. The target group of the magazine "JAZZ" buy sound systems of high quality and price, are dressing up in a somewhat different style, and by the way, listen to some other music than most of the people are listening to. Apparently jazz can serve as a way to distinguish oneself from the ordinary for these people.

The relation between jazz and what is symbolizes for a person, has never been thoroughly researched. Jazz started in New Orleans as music of a subculture became popular music in the swing era, and since the era of free jazz it can be regarded as art music as well. Outside the music itself, why and what is it that people call their cars, their passwords, their children after jazz? What is this power of jazz doing to people and how does it work? Most likely it also works the other way around. Jazz as music is influenced by what it symbolizes. How the traffic in this two-way-street really works, nobody knows.

At this moment in time, jazz education is fully occupied with jazz as music and the teaching and learning of it. This much became clear at the 1st IASJ Jazz Education Conference 2003 in The Hague, the Netherlands. The effect, the power, the external value of jazz and the meaning jazz has in the lives of people has not only been partially studied. The needed interdisciplinary approach for a study of the external musical meaning of jazz will not take long to my mind. It takes just a few more buyers of jazz lifestyle magazines who want to turn their hobby into something more.

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