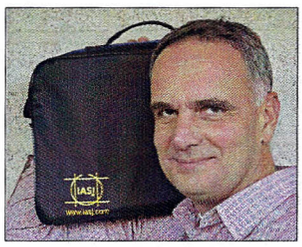

Jazz education and the popified world.

The world is "popified"!
Popification is the current world-wide process of transformation of all cultures. The process started at the end of the 20th century and is now, at the beginning of the 21st century, coming into full power. Age old traditions and institutions have disappeared to make place for an all-encompassing popificated, one-dimensional way of life. Traditional life in harmony with nature in rural areas has disappeared. The present clashing of cultures in cities has led to extremism and terrorism. Popification has not managed to unify the clashing cultures in the big cities of the world. It has only led to enlarge the extremes between cultures by underlining the differences between them. The soft blanket of popification has put a superficial thin layer of varnish on cultural diversity but has not strengthened it. Popification has no respect for the various cultures and no real answers to the problems of our racially diversified and multicultural life.

Through popification we are drawn in the popified world. The characteristics of the popified world are easy to describe. In the popified world life is informal, superficial, fashionable, "life-stylish" but there is not a real style of life. Sporting events and music festivals are not about sports or music anymore but have become popified events that are overwhelming, individuality killing. Then have become gatherings that are referring to a popified group-feeling.
In the popified world, silence and noise are taken over by a blanket of popified music: pop music, but also popified classical music, jazz and world music. In popified music it is stardom and glamour that count, not the music itself. Advertisements on radio, television, internet and in public areas bombard our perception system wanting us to believe that the ideal world is not the real world but a dream world, the bigger-than-life world: the popified world. As a result human relations are re-codified in popified behavior. Communication is done informally by the use of sms-messages, by sending e-mails using a new popified language not bringing us closer to each other. Of course, I am not against e-mail or mobile phones. I just do not like the popified use on new communication technology.

Pop music is often confused with popification but it is just a symptom of the popified world. Pop music helps popification a lot because it fits the profile of popification but it is not causing it. Blaming popular music for having caused the popified world is turning things upside down: one element is taken for the whole. In a way I feel pity for pop music because it has become one of the biggest victims of popification. Pop music has become popified sound that we cannot escape, that surrounds us all the time, and that holds us in its claws. Most of the pop music we hear all day long is no longer music but tranquilizing sounds that have become the slave of popification. It is meant to drug us, and keep us firmly in the popified world.

Can the popification be stopped? No! The generation that grew up on popified music is now coming into power and will be fully in power in the next decade. In the music business there are only five companies that control every step from the production-distribution-consumption chain. They own the copyrights, the record companies, the festivals, the manufacturing of audio and audiovisual equipment and with that power they control the artist. The power game is the same in the music business as it is in any other business.

We cannot escape the popified world but we can step out of it temporarily. If you play jazz or even if you listen really well to jazz, you are in another world. Interaction, creativity, personal skills and identity are all at work in jazz, both as a listener and a player. All these aspects do not match with the popified world in which interaction, creativity and individuality are gone. The possibility of escape from the popified world that jazz offers, surely is one of the explanations of the ongoing popularity of jazz education. Jazz musicians know very well what is going on in the world. However, they are a-typical to the popified world. They are not fashionable, they are individuals with their own sound and they do not like the masses. Most jazz musicians can play pop music, even very well, if they have to in order to earn money. Quite a few jazz musicians are active in genuine pop music, not popified pop music, and trying to merge or fuse it into their jazz playing.

Is the IASJ a save haven in the popified world? I think so. Of course, IASJ members cannot completely escape the popified world let alone avoid the popified music industry. They participate in that industry because of necessity, not out of free will. In one way or the other the IASJ has managed to exist for a decade and a half without being popified. This is a major achievement in itself. The IASJ is not fighting popification but it is presenting an alternative to it. Some years ago I came up with the slogan: the future of jazz is connected with the future of jazz education and the IASJ is the chain. I now present a second one: jazzification is the antidote to popificaton and the IASJ is the distribution center.

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