A FEW WEEKS AGO I started my jazz history classes. An exciting moment is always when we come to talk about jazz of the present times. How do we call the jazz style of today? Most of the people agree about the names of the jazz styles in the first half of the twentieth century. Nobody will deny that the new upcoming jazz style in the sixties was Free Jazz. The seventies were dominated by Rock Jazz although other names as cross-over and fusion are used as well. There are already books out that call the jazz of the eighties Neo Bop. Not everybody agrees with that name. Even less people agree to call the jazz of the nineties Eclectic Jazz. I have my reservations too about these names but for reasons of communication I use them in my classes. My students do have an interest in the older styles but they are eager to know what is going on in jazz today and how it will be called in say, ten or twenty years from now. I always tell them that I do not know and that nobody knows it right now. However, I tell them about the tendencies I see. I think it is one of the most fascinating parts of my job to discuss these tendencies with my advanced students.

Most, if not all of my students agree that there is nowadays still a large group of jazz players that continues to develop the older styles in jazz. Bebop is not dead yet, nor is Swing, Hard Bop, Cool Jazz or any of the styles that are generally associated with a specific decade in the last century. If you can improvise well in one of these styles and you have the right sense for the swing or the grooves that come with that style, new paths can be found, the language is living and the music sounds familiar but fresh. I am not talking about young jazz musicians that merely copy the older styles or want to put them in a museum. I am talking about young jazz musicians that really know how to play and improvise but prefer to do that within the self chosen framework of a jazz style that started, if you really look at it, not so long ago.

Most of my students, but surely not all of them, agree that the large group of players who are mixing various styles in music can still be considered jazz musicians since there is a jazz ethos which underlies their work. A musician like Bill Frisell does the mixing more sophisticated or even more tasteful that a Russel Gunn but both basically have the same approach: mixing of musical styles however remote they seem at first glance. Eclectic Jazz is indeed a very well chosen name for it.

It is my guess, I tell my students, that this unbridled and sometimes unashamed mixing will come to an end. I do not think that it will stop. It will rather be filtered. A consensus will grow on what can be mixed and what not. The audience will develop a taste concerning what is a good choice and what is over the top. And eventually a new name will come up for the style of jazz in this first decade of the century. There is no doubt in my mind however, that this new name will be discussed at length in both the digital IASJ Ongoing Dialogues on internet and face to face at the Annual IASJ Jazz Meetings.

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