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IASJ Newsletter

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From the editor

Over the years the members of the IASJ have taken many decisions. Some were easy to take, others were harder. Of all the decisions taken during all of the meetings, choosing the name was one of the hardest. The people assembled around the long table in the office of publishers Hans and Veronika Gruber in the spring of 1989 did not have many difficulties with the first two letters of our name, the I and the A. Yes, we were to be an International Association. Later I found out there are International Associations of about anything. From butchers to shoemakers, dentists, plumbers; any profession you could name. All these professions have an association at local, national and international level. If I had known there were so many IA's around, I might have objected to the I and the A.

Once we had agreed that we would soon be an International Association, the question arose, of what? Schools, yes, but what is a school! Some representatives were involved with a couple of jazz workshops every year, others, like myself, were associated with the jazz department of a conservatory over a century and a half old. It took another round of coffee and a couple of good laughs before we decided that everybody was representing the same thing. We all agreed that a Taller, an Estudio, a Conservatoire, a college, a university, a music academy and so on - all these institutions were schools of jazz. If there was teaching of jazz on a regular basis, it was a school of jazz.

Around about the time I was scribbling down IASJ as the result of an hour of discussions, someone raised the question whether or not we should call the music we were dealing with "jazz". Not again, I said to myself. Too late. Until that moment David Liebman clearly had the floor. Not anymore. Everybody was talking to everybody else in many different kinds of English. Jazz, improvised music, free music, new music, new improvisation music, actual music, world music, rhythmic music, free rhythmical music, and so on. I had come to the founding meeting of the IASJ hoping that this type of discussion would not take place on an international level. In the seventies and eighties in Holland this had been the inevitable issue among all jazz musicians and the discussion still goes on today. Finally, after at least another hour of chaotic talks at the long table, the association found its last letter and became the IASJ.

Now, ten years later, the discussion about the name has fortunately disappeared. In all ten years nobody has ever questioned the name of our organization. By choosing that name, I think that the more than a dozen people assembled in that room have given a direction to the course of things. We were legitimising what we were doing and giving it a name, a face, hands and feet. Changing the history of jazz education, at least, if not changing jazz itself. This is one of the hidden but important powers of the International Association of Schools of Jazz.

Walter Turkenburg
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