THE BEGINNINGS OF THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS ON JAZZ IN BOHEMIA 1918–1962

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Jazz, or, more precisely said, music from the realm of jazz, diversified by new means of expression and, above all, interpretation practices from the broader domain of Afro-American and Iberoamerican music, made it to the Czech lands similarly to how it arrived in the rest of Europe during the course of the first decade of the 20th century. The bearer of these influences via a new musical idiom which was generally being mediated by third parties was the work of a great wind orchestra led by the American “King of Marches” John Philip Sousa (1854–1932), the work of an edition of sheet music of ragtime, originally American, and ultimately, even the first mechanical recordings thereof on phonographic cylinders. The repertory of Sousa’s orchestra included, in addition to band marches, also numerous arrangements of Black plantation melodies, as well as ragtime and even the newest two step tunes. This ensemble was heard by European listeners in the course of the World Exhibition in Paris in 19001 and repeatedly during several tours of the European continent from 1901 to 1905. In addition to England, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Austria, Russia and Scandinavia, it is possible that the band also visited the Czech lands, according to unverified sources.2

These first reactions to jazz and popular music influenced by jazz in our country were reflected with a considerable delay – similarly to the first domestic attempts at an interpretation of dance novelties imported from America in Prague’s Variete Club or in the Bohemian atmosphere of the former Montmarte bar in Řetězová street in the Old Town section of Prague during the period preceding the 1st World War – in literary commemorative memoirs, including, for example, the valuable recollections of Eduard Bass and Karel Čapek.3

A similar stir connected with the broader application of jazz infiltration into dance music, above all in the context of social entertainment here at home, was not brought

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2 Czechoslovakia is expressly mentioned in the enumeration of countries visited by Sousa’s orchestra by Barbara B. Heyman in the study Stravinsky and Ragtime, The Musical Quarterly, No. 4/1982, page 543.
here until the years following the war, last but not least as the result of an overall pro-
Western orientation of our independent Czechoslovak state. From this era as well we
have the first printed publication of compositions by domestic authors (Jára Beneš,
R. A. Dvorský, Rudolf Friml, Karel Hašler, František Procházka, Anatol Provazník
and others) marked with names of dances known at the time in fashionable society,
including one step, two step, respectively foxtrot, the Boston waltz, or the shimmy. In
this connection it also happened that the probably term “jazz” itself was first applied
in circles where the Czech language was spoken, when Otakar Samek gave his three-
step (sic!), published in the year 1919 in several different versions in a Barvitius
edition, the linguistically mutilated name, Wentery Jazz.  

Aside from the period publishing house flyers the magic little word “jazz” also
soon appeared in classified advertisement sections of daily newspapers and that
usually not as a generalized term for a new style, genre or kind of popular music, but
rather, as it used to be in our country, an unknown new arrival among instrumentalists
who played in coffee houses, bars and the like in ensembles to which percussion
instruments, drum sets, had been added, also sometimes referred to as “jazz band”.  

The nearly unconditional connection between new Afroamerican idiomatic music
and social dances of the period was quite naturally reflected in the fact that among the
very first published references were various manuals, popularizing and describing the
latest dance steps, which were, for that matter, already being taught in Prague dance
schools and courses as early as 1919–20.  

In addition, these thoroughly banalistic and, above all, commercially oriented
responses to new dance music had, not only for further social application and ancho-
ring in Czech musical life of same, but also for the qualitative development thereof
itself, a significantly greater connection, than had been connected with the many-
sidedly oriented activities of the Czech artistic avante garde of the time. In spite of
more or less incomplete knowledge of the history of real jazz, the very fact of its black
origins played, at the same time, a quite certainly decisive role, thanks to which it
became a part of the generally proclaimed efforts to establish a new proletarian
culture and art. In addition to Neumann’s Proletkult, directly connected with the
program of enlightenment of the Czech Communist Party, the message of jazz was
received with especial warmth in the circles of Devětsil. This originally informal
student organisation of top- or sixth-formers in a college preparatory school (similar
to what is in England referred to as grammar school) in Prague’s Křemencova street,
was officially established as an artistic union in the autumn of 1920, when Vladislav
Vančura was elected as its first Head. In addition to the founders, including Vančura,
Artuš Černík, Jaroslav Havlíček, Adolf Hoffmeister, Jaroslav Seifert and the main
spokesperson of the group, Karel Teige Devětsil gradually counted among its members
a foundation of the progressive artistic intelligentsia of the time: (Biebl, E. F. Burian,

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Please see an example of the sheet music in Josef Kotek: Dějiny české populární hudby a zpěvu [History of

This is how the ensemble of the Prague café Rococo was advertised, for example, in the evening edition of
the National Pages on the 31st of August, 1921.
Honzl, Ježek, Nezval, Štýrský, Toyen and others). At the same time, in published manifestos and theoretical treatises published in collections put out by Devětsil itself in the year 1922 (Disk, Fronta, Pásmo, ReD) as well as in independent literary papers by individual members, jazz itself was, from the beginning, a very frequently appearing symbol of new civilization processes and new modern art.

For period enchantment by jazz and the dances associated therewith, the generation of the members of Devětsil is peculiar in its inclusion in a “laughing world”, as already declared by Teige in his First Manifest of Poetism. It was exactly into this playful world of new art, joy in fun and a permanent feeling of happiness, classified by Oleg Sus as “poetistic felicitology”, that a jazz bandist praised by Nezval came to belong, having “in addition to his own drums and things, which belonged to him, equipment for shooting from blank cartridges and ordinarily ending his number with such a blast”. Just as did passionate devotees of new dances, he too fulfilled Teige’s well-known proclamation of “maximum emocionality, achieved by means of maximal physiological affectiveness” in a truly ideal manner. In the same way, the lifting up of “people’s democratic recreation, poetry of Sundays” (Teige) above officially sanctioned music in concert halls is symptomatic: “…magnetic rhythm of dance music, which captivates us more than any symphony or sonata and above that the lightning bolts vibrate, which glow in our blood so that we throw down our masks, those of dry patrons and cry out to the whole world with joy, that we are turning, jumping and that we are experiencing a feeling of giddiness”. From here it is only one small step to another generalization, in which the author of the previous quote, Ctibor Haluza, manifests a further postulate of new modern art – internationalism: “Such a foxtrot is a means of communication between all peoples”. And yet another declaration, this time from the pen of the editor of Devětsil’s Pásmo, Artuš Černík, which is, considering its emphatic tone, a typical Devětsil proclamation “A jazz-band! Listen to it once, no, better to listen to it several times, until you start to gain an appetite for it. Here you will find the squawking of automobile horns and electric sounds, sirens, tough low tones that offend the overly soft musical ear, thundering with colorful lightning, shots being fired, clamour closed in by some beautiful war or triumphal song”.

From the original membership of Devětsil we have E. F. Burian as well, a member of a well-known musician family and himself a professionally schooled composer, the author of our first book about jazz, exceptionally also in a worldwide context exactly

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6 První manifest poetismu [First Manifesto of Poetism], Host III, No. 9–10/1923–24.
12 Ibid.
13 Taken from a quote in Kotek’s work page 68. This richly documented study is minutely concerned with jazz in connection with the Devětsil by Iša Popelka Devětsil, Teige a jazz [Devětsil, Teige and Jazz]. Devět odstavců o devětsilské chvále synkopované hudby [Nine paragraphs about the Devětsils’ lauded syncopated music], in: Taneční hudba a Dance music and jazz 1968–69, Editio Supraphon, Praha – Bratislava 1968, page 49–64.
because it was the work of an expert. Burian’s book Jazz, written in the years 1925–27 and published by Štorch’s Aventinum in February of 1928, starts the independent history of theoretical reflections on jazz in the Czech lands, though even for that it is, especially in its introductory chapters, parallel in its characteristically enthusiastic spirit to the proclamation by the Devětsil group. Besides that it is not a coincidence that the motto of his book was chosen by the author from the comprehensive quote by Karl Teige: “music, just like theatre, cannot keep up with the times and with other arts. Concerts and chamber seances are really the putrefying water of a carp pond…the revival of music… is arising from external and worldly impulses. Although dead in the concert hall, music continues to live out in the world. Passionate love for the real live thing…will not be afraid, nor disdain instruments and interpreters thus far regarded as taboo, Jazz!”

Similarly declarative is also the Burian manuscript itself and that from the very first pages. Right at the start, the introductory sentence of the first volume of the book (Jazz) in the subchapter, “The necessity of new recorded performances” brings us an unequivocal statement with the character of a manifesto: “We are on the verge of a new era. The contrivances of past eras have been used up…we are searching for new means of expression. New techniques are based on new discoveries…a revolution in notes has begun and is in its most active phase.”

Interesting, although for Burian as a disciple of the Smetana and Janáček traditions quite understandable, is the placement of the problems caused by the crisis in contemporary music into the historical context of Smetana’s era, including a symptomatic emphasis on inset type and capitalization: “When we compare today’s battle with Smetana’s, we are referring to his standpoint at that time and not to his position today. The cutting edge of the contemporary period is actually a parallel to the turning point of Smetana’s revolution. We must, however, transport Smetanism into the present day and then our statement will be received quite differently.”

The following broadly discoursed upon chapters, “Means of Reproducing Music” and “The Survival of Music” first count off all the causes of the crisis in the Romantic Symphonic Orchestra, while giving numerous examples from the works of Stravinsky, Milhaud, Janáček (Zápisník zmizelého/Diary of One Who Vanished), Martinů (Half-time), Schulhoff, Ježek (piano concertos) and, without mentioning any specific compositions, refer to the microtonal system of Alois Hába, enumeratively defining for general use the new sound and its instrumentation: “a) the creation of chamber ensembles with unusual instrumentation, b) precisely indicating how particular groups are to be composed or, better said, the bringing out of those voices which are elsewhere in the background, c) the design of new kinds of instruments: 1. To serve the needs of tonal expression (quarter-tones), 2. To serve the need to build new instruments capable of meeting the demands of new compositional techniques.” Burian dedicates an independent chapter to the voiceband reproduction technique, with

which he actually already had, at the time, personal practical experience (the first performance of his voiceband took place within the framework of the artistic program of the Dada theater on the 22nd of April, 1927 and, in the same year, Burian even wrote an independent paper on this theme, “Choral Recitation and Theatre Music – Voice Band”).

A special chapter about jazz correctly refers to its Black origins and emphasizes the polyphony, polydynamics, blues polytonality and overall sound sensitivity, motor rhythms and union with dance, all characteristic of jazz. Using a multitude of examples, the usage of jazz techniques in both world and domestic contemporary music is illustrated. Sheet music samples by Satie, Stravinský, Milhaud, Auric, Wiéner, Hindemith and, among others, Ježek, are included. The other chapters of the book, Syncopation, New Instruments and Craft Orchestration, are dedicated to various technical aspects of jazz expression. The role of the arrangement is emphasized. A marginal mention is even made of such specifics as hot intonation, polyrythmics (cross rhythm), and off-beat, even though regularly called by other names (these terms were not even known in foreign jazz publishing at the time). The extensive bibliographic list of sources has the character of a valuable reference – to the degree possible under the conditions of that time, naturally – and includes a selected discography from the catalog of the company “His Mater’s Voice” as well as a concise lexicon according to subject or title.

From many points of view, Burian’s trail-blazing book was greeted with warmth, not only by the camp of jazz fans, but also in the scholarly press as well as on the pages of cultural columns in prestigious dailies, including the German-language Prager Presse, where the influential literary critic, poet and translator Pavel Eisner wrote a review about it. As an authority on Burian’s personality as a composer, high-performance interpreter, voiceband conductor and overall, an active organizer of musical and cultural life from all angles, he naturally attributes a certain value not only to his judgements, but also especially to his apostolic passion, with which – as was written at the time in Enlightened Points of View, “He fights for the future of jazz, believes therein and thinks that jazz is also the way to get something to happen in the world of classical music.”

In spite of the fact that most of Burian’s revolutionary futurologic predictions did not fulfill themselves, (it is not true even today and apparently won’t be true even in the future, as the author boldly contended, that “everyone from the provincial peasant to the bankers on Broadway will be dancing to Schönberg”) not only did jazz not take the place of establishment concert music, but even the role it has played in its revival has been much smaller than expected, the author’s founding contribution to Czech jazz theory and publishing remains undoubtable. More importantly, this contribution by Burian did not remain isolated, just one year later he published, as the first

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18 B. M. (probably Bohumíl Mathesius?): *E. F. Burianův Jazz* [E. F. Burian’s Jazz], Osvětové rozhledy [Enlightening Points of View], 1. 12. The 1st of December 1928, s. page 146.
volume of the picture library ReD from Odeon publishers, an independent brochure about Black Dance and a whole series of shorter works on this theme were disseminated in the weekly Radio Overview, Social Dancing Revue, Debates of Aventinum, Vest Pocket Revue and elsewhere. Nevertheless, with the passage of time, several of the opinions in his book even got so far as to experience an autocritical revision and, with an increase in the information available from abroad, Burian also replaced his original idols, Whiteman or Hylton, with more authentic representatives of the mainstream of jazz development, Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington.20

Somewhat curiously at odds with the quantitative growth of domestic jazz life and even the improvement in quality of its expression over the course of the thirties (Ježek, the orchestra of the Gramoklub and others) is the theoretical harvest of its reflection as compared with the fermentation of thought accompanying the entrance of jazz in the previous decade, in that it is relatively modest. A key personality in Czech jazz publishing of the period was the record collector and manysided organizer, Emanuel Uggé, committed to the gramophonic field and employed as the editor of Czech editions of the foreign gramophonic companies Brunswick, His Master’s Voice, Homocord, Imperial and Polydor. Within the framework of these activities, Uggé published numerous smaller informative sketches or outlines from the beginning, in various gramophonic newletters and propagational flyers, to which were later added more comprehensive articles in various magazines including the already mentioned Radio Overview, where he was the editor of an independent column about jazz starting in the year 1934. Thanks to his own collector’s activity and busy correspondence, which he kept up with numerous colleagues abroad, including both authors of the first French books about jazz, the Belgian Robert Goffin, the Parisian Hugues Panassié and the discographer Charles Delaunay, he had an excellent overview of doings abroad, which was reflected in the reliably high informational value of his articles, radio programs as well as numerous lectures (which, by the way, served as inspiration in the year 1935 for the birth of the already mentioned Gramoklub orchestra).

Under the borderless conception of the term jazz in use at the time, Uggé imagined an activity which was definitely new and aimed at bringing out the authentic values of Black hot jazz, emphasizing its racial and social origin and, above all, stressing the dividing line between jazz and its commercial derivatives. At the same time, however, he could not steer clear, in his missionary zeal, of an attendant sectarianism, as was also the case for the above-mentioned foreign colleagues. A more complete look at the history of jazz and therefore at the contemporary foreign jazz scene is applied in an article, characteristically named Hot jazz.21 A more detailed recapitualation of domestic happenings at the beginning of the thirties is presented in an article called Jazz in Czechoslovakia.22 It is also to Úggé’s credit that information about Czech jazz

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and its representatives was published abroad, especially in focussed musical periodicals, (in particular British Gramophone and Melody Maker and the French Music-Magazin international du jazz). From among the other significant authors who occasionally published on the topic of jazz during that period, it is proper to mention at least Václav Holzknecht, who regularly did so in connection with the furtherment of the musical creations of his close friend Jaroslav Ježek. Of course there were no independent books published in the thirties.

After a dampening of jazz activity during the course of the dark age under the Protectorate, a new shot in the arm in the area of jazz publishing was not seen until the post-war era. The new daily Mladá fronta (the editor of their Sunday jazz column was Lubomír Dorůžka, who, as early as during the war published, together with Milouš Vejvoda the illegally reproduced typewritten jazz flyer Circular correspondence) dedicated itself to jazz non-stop. Jazz was also regularly represented in the new weekly E. F. Burian’s Cultural Politics, edited by Emanuel Uggé. A more fundamental contribution was made by the extensive study Jazz in the journal Tempo by Jan Rychlík, who at the time a fresh graduate of the master school of the Prague Conservatory and who also had several years of experience behind him as a professional drummer in Karl Vlach’s swing orchestra. It contained, in addition to other relatively detailed descriptions of reproductive techniques on individual instruments, mentions of how to lead voices in both orchestral and vocal arrangements, chord structure including the “thickening” of the basic harmonies and references to recordings by specific musicians for listening purposes. As characterized by Lubomír Dorůžka and Ivan Poledňák, it has contributed “after the historically already overcome book by Burian, the first more informative view to be published on a scholarly platform about history and theoretical-esthetic problems in jazz music.”

An event of exceptional significance was the founding of an independent journal called Jazz, the first issue of which was published in May 1947. The editor-in-chief was Uggé and the managing editor was Lubomír Dorůžka. Among regular contributors, in addition to the names already mentioned, figured, for example: Miloslav Ducháč, Vlastimil Hála, František Hráuža, Stanislav Průcha, Jan Rychlík, Ludvík Šváb and others. This irregular periodical, eagerly awaited by the jazz public (a total of 15 issues were published in the years 1947 and 1948) represented, above all, a tribunal for viewpoints of its editor-in-chief, dividing, in a manner characteristic of Uggé, jazz into “pure” (primarily improvised music New Orleans style, originally piano boogie woogie and some manifestations of Afro-American folklore, especially blues) or “derived”. For this category, Uggé later introduced the term “music from the area of jazz” which has survived to a greater or lesser extent in the Czech musical publishing world to this very day. While Uggé understood under this term, for example, also orchestral swing music, today it is used more to indicate any modern popular music

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22 Emanuel Uggé: Jazz v Československu [Jazz in Czechoslovakia]. A Radio Overview No. 9/1932.
23 Jan Rychlík: Jazz, Tempo No. 2–3, page 80 and No. 5, page 149/1946–47.
24 Quoted from the book by Lubomír Dorůžka and Ivan Poledňák, page 90.
where the influence of the Afro-American idiom can be felt. In the friction between points of view (adherents of “true” as opposed to derived jazz), especially strong in February 1948, of the editors themselves as well as within the circle of regular contributors, Uggé’s puristic wing won the conflict temporarily. Surprisingly, a musical publicist of pro-Communist orientation, Bohumil Karásek, joined Uggé’s camp when he became, for a short time, a new member of the editing staff and therefore of the nomenclatural cadre as well. In the confusion that set in with the reorganization of domestic musical life and with the reception of the desired principles of cultural politics the magazine – partially due to Karásek’s contributing – ceased publication.

Jazz lovers were supposed to, of course, in the era of the building of the New Socialist Society in accordance with the Soviet model, be rid of not only their own platform for the presentation of individual points of view, but also they were to be protected in all possible ways from the influence of jazz as such itself. Under the new conditions, in the spirit of Gorky’s formal authoritative statement about jazz as “music of the fat”, all jazz as well as any related popular music was identified as serving the backlash aiming to put to sleep the class confidence of the working people and so on. In addition to numerous denouncing articles in the official organ of the newly set-up Union of Czechoslovak Composers, Musical Reviews (from the pen of Bohumil Karásek as well as others), Czech readers also soon awaited a translation of Gorodin’s book Music of Spiritual Poverty, now legendary. The authors’ classification of the overwhelming majority of Western musical culture, including jazz, as decadent, degenerate, false and cosmopolitan soon became the guiding indicator setting the norm for those who were influencing the direction of development of Czech culture at that time. Even before its Czech translation became available to the public, the original book by Antonín Sychra Party Musical Criticism as the Co-creator of New Music with the subtitle An Introduction to the Musical Esthetics of Socialist Realism was published. With a reference to the work by Gorodinský, the book described jazz as “typical escapist art of the corrupt bourgeoisie, which escapes to primitive instinctiveness, understood absolutely falsely on purpose, which attempts to isolate black people (and all working people, actually – after all, jazz inundated the whole world) and even lead them away from their own progressive culture, robbing them of any chance of defending themselves”. As late as the beginning of the fifties, a further slanted booklet/brochure aimed against jazz was published from another of the Party’s positions: About new Czech dance music developmental tendencies in dance music in the Czech Republic in the years 1945–1958. By a strange coincidence and historical reversal, the author, Dušan Havlíček, later met with the fate of a post-August emigrant.

In spite of these inveterate attacks, a certain sporadic revival of the jazz scene was experienced, in particular after Stalin’s death. Emanuel Uggé participated in it repeatedly, strongly engaging himself by delivering lectures and by means of various popularizing tapes. Aside from the slowly awakening concert activity (the creation of student groups led by Pavel Smetáček, which came to a head in the founding of The Study Group for Traditional Jazz and also in the area of modern jazz, the creation of the first professional Czech group exclusively oriented in the direction of Studio 5, also in 1959) there also were, especially following the 20th congress of the Soviet Communist Party, some isolated attempts to revive jazz publishing. The first returning swallows of the restitution of jazz into the context of domestic musical life in that field included the article by an amateur enthusiast from outside of Prague, Antonín Truhlář: Music of New Orleans in Mladá Fronta in the year 1955, the making public of a translation of the treatise by an Marxistically-oriented American critic, Sydney Finkelstein, the Odyssey of Jazz and especially the substantial study The Creative Sense of the History of Jazz, which, for the last time in 1957, chipped in to the Czech happenings regarding jazz with a sort of summarizing balance of the lifelong views of Emanuel Uggé (two years later he was jailed, after serving his sentence he made only a few rare public evening appearances as a lecturer and then he died, in the year 1970). The important thing was the both of the latter-mentioned works were published directly by the printing press of the organ of the Union of Composers, Musical Reviews. Gradually returning from a rather hesitant, wait-and-see position to jazz publishing, Lubomír Dorůžka, who in the meantime of course had dedicated himself to commendable publishing and translating activity in the area of Anglo-American literature. Among other works he put out an anthology of spirituals, blues and further Black songs, American Folk Poetry, which dealt with Afro-American music. In addition to newspaper and magazine articles in Musical Reviews, Dorůžka also even published as a study reference the valuable and, at that time, very sought-after text Music of American Black People.

Considering local conditions, the publication of an independent work in the form of a book, Superstitions and Problems Associated with Jazz by Jan Rychlík was a revolutionary and in any case unexpected happening, which was even published once again in the same year, 1959, as the already referred to denunciatorily conceived libel.
by Dušan Havlíček. Not only were the overall direction and many of the conclusions of its author ahead of their time, considering that the times required a rather general as well as more popularly oriented publication, but with its definitely subjective observations of several of the above problems (as well as clear errors), traditionally accompanying the given topic and above all with its unambiguous polemic spirit, it has remained up to the present day a thoroughly original and unique contribution to jazz literature which meets international standards. Aside from the fact that not even Rychlík himself was able to avoid several errors, especially with regard to factographic reliability, his book contributed an entirely new view of the parallels between jazz and classical music instead of the usual contrived comparisons, harped on ever since the publication of The Book of Jazz by American critic Leonard Feather and, what is more, he was the very first to point out some surprising connections with older historical music from as early as the pre-Baroque era.

The rehabilitation and full-fledged consummation of the emancipation of jazz in Czech musical life is, on the theoretical level, connected with the arrival of the young musicological generation as late as at the beginning of the nineteen sixties. A key personality in this process was, at the time, the fresh arrival from Brno, Ivan Poledňák. As opposed to the still-surviving official views about the more-or-less ephemeral character of jazz expression without more expressly specific esthetic values of any kind, represented the most loudly by Dušan Havlíček, Poledňák’s opinions presented, from the very beginning, a quite opposite approach, emphasizing the specificity of jazz as a complex made up of an entire cluster of mutually intertwining links, the repletion of which brings about that, which we can meaningfully refer to as jazz expression. This cornerstone theme of Poledňák’s reflections at that time already pervaded, to a greater or lesser extent, the first of his critical articles about jazz for Musical Reviews as well as on the pages of the weeklies Literary News and Culture. The very first of these articles, Studio 5 and some Czech jazz issues, which he published in the year 1960 together with the Slovak medical doctor Herbert Bulla, criticized, for example, the outer overclassicization and Baroque-ization of the way jazz groups played, as opposed to the reigning point of view of that time about the promise of the cool and west coast jazz styles as departure points, with some degree of their affinity for European classical music as the most suitable basis for the development of Czech jazz itself.

A part of Poledňák’s conception of the specificity of jazz was also the polemic with the still current requirement of the time, a resounding leftover from the conception of music desirable from the Socialist Realist point of view, that jazz expression have a “national” character and display a quality of “Czech-ness”. A downright exemplary demonstration of these opinions, or, better said, wishful thinking, can be found in the period jargon of Václav Kučera in an otherwise positively formulated apology to the Studio 5 group, which appeared in the collection of essays Dance music and jazz: “In

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34 Jan Rychlík: Pověry a problémy jazzu [Superstitions and Problems Associated with Jazz], SNKLHU, Praha 1959.
the melody of these originals of our creation, which Studio 5 brought to life (Author’s note: he is referring to the compositions of Luděk Hulan, Karel Velebný and Vítězslav Voborník), one can catch many definitely Czech intonational elements. The Czech-ness of the playing of Studio 5, however, can be seen above all in its rudimentary healthy musicality, which, “penetrating from blood to blood” leaves no listener cold. After all, the essential emotional tone was always a typical characteristic of Czech musicality, which has led and still leads Czech music to the solution of life’s tasks and never to shallow formalistic game-playing”. Just as inadequate was also the only one of Kučerov’s critical remarks regarding the group’s repertoire and his recommendation, arising exactly from the fact that he had slighted and failed to comprehend the specificity of jazz expression, that they make use of a greater formal diversity of composition: “The three-part song scheme A-B-A, in spite of being made fresher through improvisation, creates the same stereotypical impression in the listener after having heard several analogous compositions as would be created by any standard cliché”.36

With both thoughts – mechanical application of the principle of national community and even efforts to graft onto jazz the compositional principles of European Art Music – Ivan Poledňák, without prior knowledge of what Kučera wrote, unknowingly argued with him on the pages of the same collection of essays. He saw the way to a natural process of differentiation of jazz expression according to nationality otherwise: “in no case by the grafting of pre-prepared domestic schemes to schemes received from elsewhere, but on the basis of a broader understanding of what jazz is by means of a precise refining process of differentiation and individualization of expression, flowing from a variety of conditions which contribute to the co-formation of every form of creative expression.”37 Poledňák addressed this problem plainly in a review of the first gramophonic album from the supraphonic edition series Czechoslovak jazz 1960 when the editors of the record, Miloš Bergl and Jiří Vinařický, were forced by circumstances to put together a collection exclusively by Czech authors: “If, however, we are aware of the special position of the composition in relation to the arrangement and the area of creative jazz interpretation, the question arises as to whether or not the chosen approach doesn’t document the “Czechness” of our jazz in a superficial and inconclusive way.”38

Later, in the year 1961, Poledňák published a book, which the jazz public and wider circle of readers had, for a long time already, been calling for, in the form of a lucid compendium of basic information from the given field – Chapters on Jazz.39 A year later, the first version of his cardinal generalizing theoretical conception on the topic of the specificity of jazz finally appeared. It was originally conceived as a paper to be discussed in a free tribune, which took place on the occasion of Parade of Jazz Music with international participation in Karlsbad, where the author delivered it on the

37 Ivan Poledňák: Hlas naší kritiky [The voice of our criticism], in: ibid, page 142.
38 Ivan Poledňák: Jazzová deska [Jazz record], Musical Reviews 1962, page 127.
39 Ivan Poledňák: Kapitoly o jazzu [Chapters on Jazz], SHV, Praha 1961.
26th of May, 1962. Already in Autumn of the same year, a treatise with the title Comments on the issue of the specificity of jazz was published in Musical Reviews, from where it was, in an insignificantly altered form, reprinted in the year 1964 in the second book issue of Chapters on Jazz. In an expanded reworked version, in the year 1968, it became one of the three parts of Poledňák’s candidacy dissertation work, On the Problematics of Jazz Music, which was published later in the quarterly Musical Science.

The basic departure point of Poledňák’s conception of the specificity of jazz became the qualitative difference of jazz from other music as a result of the complex synthesizing processes of its historical origin as well as its completely new musical thought, being the result of the mutual contact between two cultures by penetration of the music of African blacks into the music of the white inhabitants of North America. If we are to paraphrase at least some of Poledňák’s main thoughts – from both cultures this new musical culture differs in that it has been modified by social functions as well as in that it has new content and therefore it also has new choices in the way it layers its structural elements. These decisively form-creating and consequently specific jazz means are made up of the dialectic unity of the beat principle and the principle of improvisation, as the basics of jazz, to which, in further layers, specific ideas about the beauty of tones have been added (hot intonation as a peculiar analogy or rather the equivalent of the German “Klangideal”), specific phrasing, the use of certain canonizing melodic and harmonic approaches, certain structural forms, and the like. Also discussed are different ways in which perception and reception of jazz can take place, as well as its technical aspects (differently understood compositional and formal principles and the accentuated role played by the arrangement), connections with the mechanisms of popular culture, the relationship between jazz and popular music, problematics of terminology as well as the nationality question. In the summarizing conclusion it is stated that “the central carrier of the consistency of jazz is not any one of the defined characteristics (features, parameters) of music, but a certain changeable collection of features”.

As important as it was to come up with an overall conceptual view of the problematics of jazz, this work also, as can convincingly be proven to be a fact, caused a series of consequences for practical musical life. After its publication, efforts at making inadequate demands on our jazz, including the vulgarly understood requirement that it have a national character, also gradually died out. Last but not least, it was itself an inspirational starting point for further specialists in musicology from the ranks of authors of a single generation (Fukač, Kotek) as well as younger colleagues, who established themselves in the field, among other means by contributing to the four pages of Musical Reviews which were dedicated to jazz and modern popular music and edited by Ivan Poledňák himself in the course of the already radically different atmosphere of the nineteen sixties.

40 Ivan Poledňák: Poznámky k otázce specifičnosti jazzu [Comments on the issue of the specificity of jazz], Musical Reviews 1962, page 926–928.
41 Ivan Poledňák: K otázce specifičnosti jazzu [On The Specific Features Of Jazz], Musical Science No. 4/1969.
ANFÄNGE DER THEORETISCHEN REFLEXION DES JAZZ
IN BÖHMEN IN DEN JAHREN 1918–1962

Zusammenfassung


zum Thema „Jazz und sein Spezifikum“ wurde die Emanzipation des Jazz im tschechischen musikalischen Leben vollendet und neue Ausgangspunkte für weitere Nachfolger angedeutet.

POČÁTKY TEORETICKÉ REFLEXE JAZZU V ČECHÁCH 1918–1962

Resumé

První vlna ohlasu jazzu a jím dotčené moderní populární hudby v českém tisku spadala (oproti ostatní západní Evropě opožděně) až do období po 1. světové válce a dvacátých let. Vedle brožurek s popisy nových společenských tanců a propagačně zacílených nakladatelstvích letáků, se dostalo jazzu zvláště nadšeného přijetí v kruzích české pokrokové umělecké avantgardy (umělecký svaz Devětsil). Z jejího okruhu pocházel autor první české knihy o jazzu E. F. Burian (1928), na rozdíl od autorů podobných knih ve Francii, Británii nebo Německu profesionálně výškolený skladatel a sám aktivní účastník dobového uměleckého dění. Kuriózně ke kvantitativnímu nárůstu českého jazzového života v průběhu třicátých let (Ježkův orchestr Osvobozeného divadla, Orchestr Gramoklubu, počátky swingového big bandu Karla Vlacha) nevydalo toto období podobně specializovaně zaměřenou knižní publikaci. Významná ovšem byla bohatá publicistická činnost diskofila a organizátora Emanuela Uggého, zaměřená – obdobně k usilování Charlese Dalauneye či Huguesa Panassié ve Francii nebo Roberta Goffina v Belgii – především na hodnoty autentického černošského hot jazzu. Násilné přerušení přirozeného vývoje českého jazzu v průběhu německé okupace a nové přeměny specializované jazzové publicistiky v prvních poválečných letech (Uggém redigovaný samostatný časopis Jazz) vystřídaly po komunistickém puči v únoru 1948 mocenské administrativní snahy o jeho likvidaci.

Tepře po XX. sjezdu KSSS nastala nová vlna pokusů o emancipaci jazzu v českém prostředí včetně jeho teoretických reflexí, v jejímž rámci vydal v roce 1959 další skladatel vážné hudby s bývalou praxí profesionálního jazzového hudebníka Jan Rychlík polemicky vyhrocenou knihu Pověry a problémy jazzu, korigující mnohé z omylů a legend běžné zahraniční jazzové publicistiky. Rychlíkův příklad byl vzpůsobem pro mladou generaci profesionálně připravených muzikologi (Jiří Fukač, Josef Kotek, Ivan Pološník aj.), kteří zaměřili na jazz soustavnou pozornost a svými odborně fundovanými pohledy se významně podíleli na překonání dogmat stalinistické kulturní politiky. Klíčovou osobností těchto procesů se na začátku šedesátých let stal zejména Ivan Pološník, jehož četné referáty a studie na téma specifičnosti jazzu dovršili jeho emancipaci v českém hudebním životě a staly se východiskem pro další následníky.

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