

## Book Review

Jordan, M. F. (2010). *Le Jazz: Jazz and French Cultural Identity*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 298 pp. \$25.00.

In May 2009, I attended a conference, “Jazz and Europe,” in Graz, Austria, at which colleagues claiming to be the only two musicologists devoted exclusively to jazz with academic appointments in France were present: one provided an insightful paper on the French jazz critic Hugues Panassié, the other gave an overview of French jazz. Following the latter paper, I asked about the twins François and Louis Moutin (bass and drums, respectively), who had not been mentioned. The Moutins are an amazingly powerful and proficient rhythm section that I had witnessed at the December 2005 “L’Académie du Jazz” awards in Paris and again a week later with the pianist Martial Solal at a Radio France concert. The answer to my question was surprising. Because François had been trained at Berklee College of Music and now resided in New York, and because both brothers worked with American jazz artists on an international scale, my French colleague no longer considered them to be French jazz musicians, even though they were born in France. It is clear that the issue of French cultural identity for jazz musicians was more complex than I had surmised, yet I did not have to wait long for further elucidation. Matthew Jordan’s *Le Jazz: Jazz and French Cultural Identity* is a tightly focused and worthwhile study of the plethora of French discursive reactions to jazz and its ultimate assimilation into French culture, tracking ideas related to perceptions of *les nègres* and primitivism, American cultural influence expressed through music and dance, and the contested essence of what it means to be French.

Jordan begins his study with the furor surrounding the arrival of the cakewalk in Paris in 1903, largely to set the stage for discussion of the impact of jazz during World War I. Throughout the book, he demonstrates how jazz became a lightning rod for political struggles between the right and left, views on race and the operations of popular culture, issues related to cultural imperialism (African, American, Afro-American, and French), and visions of propriety, sanity, and hygiene tied to cultural behavior. Although the primary emphasis is on writing, there is ample consideration of the role of the phonograph, radio, film, song lyrics, and cartoons in French jazz debates, thus revealing the permutations of jazz in French popular culture broadly. Jordan’s exposition of the seminal influence of *La revue nègre* from 1925 in promoting a more nuanced discourse on jazz and race and its

catalyzing effect on André Schaeffner's application of surrealist ethnography in framing the study of jazz as hybridity is masterful. The consolidation of jazz opinion in the 1930s by Hugues Panassié with the proliferation of the Hot Club de France, the publication of his book, *Le Jazz Hot*, and the establishment of the club's official organ, *Jazz Hot: Revue Internationale de la Music de Jazz*, is thoroughly delineated; unlike the ill-fated United Hot Clubs of America, the Hot Club de France flourished during much of the 1930s and 40s, largely because of Panassié's literary prolificacy, organizational acuity, ubiquity, and intransigence. His domination of French jazz criticism during the 1930s went undisputed until he isolated himself in the unoccupied zone following the Fall of France in 1940 and relinquished control of the Metropole to his colleague Charles Delaunay. Jordan traces the rise of the Zazou youth movement during the Nazi occupation of Paris and the failed attempts of the Vichy press to first contain and then to violently eradicate it in 1942, thus demonstrating the power of jazz in France as a symbol of liberty and resistance to oppression, consonant with cosmopolitan republicanism. Jordan's primary thesis is that during World War II, jazz was fully integrated into French cultural consciousness and that although aesthetic debates continued afterward, the issue of whether jazz was deserving of a legitimate place in French culture was no longer contested.

Jordan's study is a valuable contribution to our understanding of the intellectual history of jazz (and not only with regard to France), but there are errors of fact and matters of scope and interpretation that nevertheless require attention. In his discussion of initial reactions to jazz from 1917, he does not effectively identify what the French were reacting to with any specificity, and the question of authenticity especially depends very much on details of style as conveyed in live performance or on phonograph records. Did Jim Europe's band(s)—in larger or smaller configurations—play in what could be considered an "authentic" jazz style? Despite Reid Badger's claims, that conclusion is debatable, yet Jordan characterizes Europe's "jazz bands" as "the most popular" (p. 255, note 29)—on the basis of what evidence? Given that jazz bands led by African Americans and Afro-French Creoles from New Orleans did not make recordings until 1922 (Ory's Sunshine Band) and 1923 (King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band, Jelly Roll Morton, and Sidney Bechet with Clarence Williams's Blue Five), recordings available in France before then would have been of White bands such as the Original Dixieland Jazz Band (not mentioned in Jordan's study, although Paul Whiteman receives considerable attention) or bands of questionable authenticity, such as Europe's. Moreover, oral history interviews at the Hogan Jazz Archive at Tulane University with the trombonist Jim Robinson (who learned how to play trombone while with the American Expeditionary Force in France) and his nephew Sidney Brown reveal that small jazz units made up of New Orleans musicians did perform throughout France, including rural areas, in 1918–1919. These events are not included in Jordan's study, but they provide

a fuller picture of how initial exposure occurred during World War I, supplying a missing piece of the puzzle. Later in the narrative, Jordan admits that access to “authentic” jazz was problematical prior to *La revue nègre* and the eventual exportation of a broader sampling of American jazz records. He does not pinpoint when this exportation occurred, but it was presumably around 1925–1926 (by which time Delaunay’s and Panassié’s families owned records by Armstrong, Morton, Ellington, and Beiderbecke). The same concerns about specificity relate to Darius Milhaud’s exposure to black jazz in Harlem and his sampling of Black Swan records in 1922 (p. 75). What artists did Milhaud hear? (Some recordings by Fletcher Henderson made for Black Swan in 1922 are described by Brian Rust as “of no jazz interest,” while others are alleged to be Sam Lanin’s Orchestra, a White band, despite the label markings as “Henderson’s Dance Orchestra.” By contrast, Alberta Hunter’s or Ethel Waters’s records for Black Swan in 1921–1922 were substantially jazz-informed. Thus, the details matter.)

The question of who translated Ernest Ansermet’s 1919 assessment of Sidney Bechet with the Southern Syncopated Orchestra into English requires clarification (pp. 52–53; pp. 256–257, note 52): Jordan faults Whitney Balliett and John Chilton for inaccuracies, but they were using Walter E. Schaap’s translation that appeared in *Jazz Hot* (November–December, 1938), which has been the standard text used by most jazz scholars since then. Further, the use of the word *swing* in a jazz context does not begin in 1930; it is present in publicity for the first jazz record, appearing in the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* (April 15, 1917). Farther along, one would also benefit from more detail on *Jazz 47* (p. 238)—a joint effort by Delaunay, Robert Goffin, Jean Cocteau, Jean-Paul Sartre, Boris Vian, and Andre Hodeir—especially with regard to *La Charte du Jazz* assembled by Hodeir, which was intended to reinitiate French youth into proper jazz appreciation after five years of German occupation. Jordan depicts Panassié’s exclusion from the volume as causing his feud with Delaunay. In fact, Panassié was included in *Jazz 47* (pp. 41–46, 75), but there were other issues at play, including Delaunay’s fraternization with the modernist critic Leonard Feather in producing Louis Armstrong records for the Swing label, unwarranted blame for the failure of Django Reinhardt’s collaboration with Duke Ellington, and accusations of “pornographic propaganda” extolling bebop. The statement that Delaunay’s “most thorough and scathing critique of Panassié came . . . in 1952” (p. 288, note 39) overlooks his “Attack on Critical Jabberwocky,” *Record Changer* (March 1949), 13–14, in which Panassié’s critical skills are compared to a “weathervane,” susceptible to the whims of American benefactors like Mezz Mezzrow (whose influence over Panassié Jordan misses entirely).

Such flaws do not detract substantially from the value of this monograph, and Matthew Jordan certainly answered my question about jazz and French cultural identity. Whereas my French colleague in Graz would

exclude the Moutin brothers from French jazz affiliation, under protectionist laws promoted by Jean-Marie Le Pen's Front National, by which 40% of the music on radio must be French, they would qualify because they were born in France, regardless of style. Meanwhile, one must ponder the more problematical issue relating to the current condition of jazz in France—that within the French university system there are only two musicologists who specialize in this music.

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