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Individualists, Traditionalists, Revolutionaries, or Opportunists? The Political and Social Constellations of Jazz in Hungary during the 1950s–1960s¹

Abstract

Focussing on Hungary, this study considers the role of jazz from the time it was banned by the cultural administration in the late 1940s to its acceptance and integration from the 1960s onwards. During the Cold War, the ethos of freedom permeating jazz was fuelled by American political hegemony and consumerist mass culture, on the one hand, and the anti-Americanism of the communist regime, on the other. Not surprisingly, it lost its revolutionary myth as soon as it was given official approval. Attempts to imbue the genre once more with ideology and use it to counterbalance the impact of rock ‘n’ roll and beat music failed, last but not least because modern jazz arrived in Hungary with no less than a 15-year delay. The irony in the post-1945 history of jazz in Hungary is that it had lost its potential audience by the time it was tolerated by the regime.

I. Introduction

The myth that liberty permeated jazz during the Cold War was fuelled by American political authority and a consumerist mass culture on the one hand, and the America-phobia of the communist regimes on the other. These factors are what shaped the sometimes heroic image that many remember the genre by. János Gonda, the greatest and virtually only theorist of Hungarian jazz, agrees that jazz was a kind of symbol of resistance. His normative assertion that the political administration concerned itself with

1 An extended version of this chapter, entitled “Individualista, tradicionalista, forradalmár vagy megalkuvó emberek? A jazz politikai és társadalmi megítélése az ötvenes és a hatvanas években” [Individualists, traditionalists, revolutionaries or conformists? Political and social attitudes to jazz in the 1950s and 1960s], appeared in: *Korall*, 2010, vol. 10, no. 39, pp. 5–31.

jazz far more than its importance and popularity warranted appears to have been intended to bolster the mythical image of jazz though:

It is quite peculiar that it was jazz of all genres, with its relatively restricted audience, that managed to appear on the political radar. [...] Jazz in the 20th century not only drew the attention of the powers that were, but continually irritated them as well, and the manner of their chosen intervention, depending on the particular political situation, ranging from outright bans to more subtle, indirect means.²

After 1956, the jazz scene in Hungary was initiated and organised as part of the state's official cultural policy and thus lost its bourgeois and subversive air. Next to the official jazz scene there also existed another, unofficial jazz scene, which for the most part diffused into rock, folk, or the avant-garde.

Foreign literature on the Hungarian jazz scene in the 1950s and 1960s is ample and wide-ranging.³ The corresponding material produced in Hungary, however, is rather scant, typically one-sided (i.e. theory-heavy), and short of social interpretations – echoing the insular and uncritical ways of the Hungarian jazz scene. Indeed, there exist only a handful of sociological studies attempting to map the audiences and values associated with jazz.⁴

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- 2 Gonda, J.: *Jazzvilág [Jazzworld]*. Rózsavölgyi és Társa: Budapest, 2004, p. 11. All translations from Hungarian into English by the author.
 - 3 Indispensable texts include Jost, E.: *Free Jazz* (Studies in Jazz Research 4). Universal Edition: Graz, 1974; Broecking, C.: *Der Marsalis-Faktor: Gespräche über afroamerikanische Kultur in den neunziger Jahren [The Marsalis Factor: Conversations about Afro-American Culture in the 1990s]*. Oreos: Waakirchen-Schaftlach, 1995; Hersch, C.: *Democratic Artworks: Politics and the Arts from Trilling to Dylan*. State University of New York: Albany NY, 1998; Von Eschen, P. M.: *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge MA, 2004.
 - 4 Key studies worth mentioning here are: Losonczy, Á.: *A zene életének szociológiája [Sociology of Musical Life]*. Zeneműkiadó: Budapest, 1969; Malecz, A.: *A jazz Magyarországon [Jazz in Hungary]*. Tömegkommunikációs Kutatóközpont – Népművelési Intézet: Budapest, 1981; Lencsés, G. / Táborosi, G.: “Jazz és közönsége” [Jazz and its audience]. In: *Társadalomkutatás [Social Research]*, 1995, 1–4, pp. 35–51. While several articles, essays and monographs were published about jazz between the end-1950s and mid-1960s (e.g. Finkelstein, S.: “A Jazz” [Jazz]. In: *Valóság [Reality]*, 1961, 4(1), pp. 42–51; Pernye, A.: *A Jazz [Jazz]*. Gondolat: Budapest, 1964; Gonda, J.: *Jazz: Történet, Elmélet, Gyakorlat [Jazz: History, Theory, Practice]*. Zeneműkiadó: Budapest, 1965), the trend then came to a halt, not to be revitalised even after the transition to

Twenty years after the transition to democracy one can only hope that a new generation of scholars – aside from those authors cited so far, dominating writing on jazz in Hungary – will emerge to explore, for example, who was involved at the coalface of jazz, organising jazz clubs and concerts? How did they, from an entirely different position, regard the relationship between jazz and the regime? What did their career paths look like? What survival strategies did they adopt? Furthermore, the careers of and the discourse surrounding Romani jazz musicians would merit, perhaps in parallel with Afro-American jazz musicians, a survey in itself. And the archives of Radio Free Europe, along with those of other radio stations like Magyar Rádió, internationally known as Radio Budapest, would deserve more attention and detailed analysis, regarding programme policy in particular. Other documents not consulted for the present study – state security records for instance – attest that from the 1960s onwards some jazz musicians were brought under state security surveillance for having committed economic offences while touring abroad.⁵ State security reports also reveal that even some Elvis Presley-fans were officially classified as fans of jazz music.⁶ Compared to the beat and rock scenes, however, the amount of documents assembled with regard to the jazz scene is negligible; the genre was not considered a direct threat to the state and so no state security intervention was considered necessary – save for the general suspicion jazz was regarded with.⁷ Nevertheless, the relevant state security documents require further research: there still is a lot to uncover about the jazz scene of the era.

democracy in the 1990s. The peripheral nature of jazz in Hungary is affirmed by the fact that there exists no genre-specific journal in the country to date, and that jazz clubs, in marked contrast to other European countries, are hard to come by. Only the number of concerts and festivals have seen a rise since the political transition (cf. Kornél Zipernovszky's talk at the conference on jazz held at the Goethe Institut in Budapest on 12 September 2009).

- 5 Cf. Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security (ÁBTL), File of Agent Gara, M-37332, 15–137. It should here be stressed, however, that illegal exports to and imports from the West were not restricted to jazz musicians at the time.
- 6 Cf. Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security (ÁBTL), File of Agent Gerendás, M-22437, 52. A similar challenge proved the categorisation of hooligans.
- 7 Szőnyei, T.: *Nyilván tartottak. Titkos szolgák a magyar rock körül 1960–1990* [*Under Surveillance. State Security and Hungarian Rock 1960–1990*]. Magyar Narancs – Tihanyi Rév Kiadó: Budapest, 2005.

Having been given official approval, the revolutionary myth surrounding jazz became untenable in Hungary. To counteract the popularity of rock ‘n’ roll and beat, jazz was infused with the state ideology and actively promoted by the *Magyar Kommunista Ifjúsági Szövetség* (KISZ), the Hungarian Young Communist League, to the country’s youth. But the modern (abstract) jazz that reached Hungary with a 15–20 year delay in the 1960s was unsuited for the purpose, as by this time the young people had already distanced themselves from such old-fashioned forms of jazz. Beat and rock thus took over the aura of revolution once associated with jazz.

The tragic irony in the history of post-war jazz in Hungary thus is that by the time the regime finally granted free rein to the genre its potential audience had already deserted it. The appearance and diffusion of beat music among the younger generation is a prominent factor in the waning of the popularity of jazz. This is all the more remarkable as right until 1950 the popular base of jazz – particularly in Budapest and the larger cities – was substantial; it only became available to the youth at large though when the beat-revolution exploded.⁸

Further to a brief discourse on methodology, the following examines the political and social constellations of jazz in Hungary in the 1950s and 1960s, also providing some background on the years prior to 1950 and an outlook onto the 1970s and 1980s.

II. Social historical and microhistorical context

This chapter combines the use of historical sources (archives and press documents) with a methodological approach developed in the social sciences to describe and comprehend Hungary’s post-war jazz culture: its audiences, the values it promoted, the myths that surrounded it, the role it played in ordinary people’s lives, and the relationship of its different sub-genres to official cultural policy.⁹

8 Cf. Vajna, T.: “A magyar dzsessz hányattatásai: A Dália papjai” [Misadventures of Hungarian Jazz: Priests of Dália]. In: *HVG*, 2005, 27(51–52), pp. 119–122 and Jávorszky, B. Sz. / Sebők J.: *A magyarrock története* [History of Hungarian Rock]. Népszabadság Zrt: Budapest, 2009.

9 This approach called for a review and analysis of articles and essays on Hungarian jazz, the consultation of historical sources and the conduct and analysis of a

To uncover these diverse issues, all based on a dynamic notional interpretation of everyday life and the many roles defining it, a microhistorical and ‘oral history’ approach coupled with a traditional social history approach was considered most appropriate for the project. It sees history through the eyes of the individual and his/her experiences and identities: ‘*Alltagsgeschichte* [the history of everyday life]’, as Gábor Gyáni explains Alf Lüdtke’s methodological approach, ‘undertakes to explore the way a person can be agent and object of their own history. The social scientist or historian working in this approach must demonstrate or even prove that social pressures or incentives are perceived and processed as a network of interests, needs, anxieties, and hopes, and even, how these emerge as a result of such processes. To put it another way: the forms through which people ‘appropriate’ and transform their ‘own’ world will be highlighted.’¹⁰ Gyáni then goes on to cite the American Natalie Z. Davis and the Italian Giovanni Levi who respectively defined the microhistorian’s unique mission as a marshalling of historical evidence to support the historically possible options open to the exercising of free will at a specific time and place. This methodological approach thus constitutes the antithesis to all deterministic views of history.¹¹

It here is worth recalling the manifesto of the journal *Historische Anthropologie*, founded in 1993, which established the methodology in scientific theory terms: ‘[Our goal] is to investigate the factors which comprise the human activities through which human beings craft their own ‘worlds’.

number of interviews with witnesses from the period: jazz musicians, composers, key players of the jazz scene (club leaders, concert organisers, jazz writers) as well as those not connected to jazz per se (party officials and propagandists). In total, sixteen interviews were conducted (Károly Binder, Attila Csányi, Ferenc Gayer, László Gerecs, Imre Kiss, György Kocsis, Róbert Maloschik, Tibor Márkus, Mihály Ráduly, Tamás Rónai, György Szabados, Péter Szigeti, Mihály Tabányi, Gábor Turi, György Veress, Ernő Wessely) and a two further, conducted by others and kindly made available for the present study (János Gonda, Tommy Vigh), analysed. The author would here like to express his sincere thanks for all assistance received and memories shared.

10 Gyáni, G.: “A mindennapi élet mint kutatási probléma” [Everyday Life as a Research Problem]. In: *Aetas*, 1997, 12(1), pp. 129–137; see also http://aetas.hu/1997_1/1997_t9.htm [as accessed on 1 February 2010].

11 *Ibid.*

We will further focus on how people interact with each other as separate individuals and as members of a distinct social group, sex, or age group, and the way they treat their environment we call ‘nature’.¹²

III. The political and social significance of jazz in Hungary and elsewhere

1. Introduction

The fact that jazz lacked any direct political significance may have been one of its defining qualities.¹³ After all, jazz never spurred a revolution,¹⁴ there never was any overtly political resistance present anywhere in the world of jazz; rather, it was rock music that lent itself to explicit political statement, such as protests against the system.¹⁵ Jazz musicians themselves often

12 Anonymous / the Editors: “A Korall körkérdése a társadalomtörténet-írás helyzetéről” [Discussion about the state of social historical writing]. In: *Korall*, 2002, vol. 2, no. 7–8, pp. 187–206, here at p. 188.

13 What is jazz? From the 1960s onwards, an increasing number of Hungarian authors also tried to answer this prevalent question, mostly in popular interest essays and articles (e.g. Nagy, P.: “Beszéljünk a jazz-ről” [Let’s Talk About Jazz]. In: *Parlando*, 1962, 4(1), pp. 9–11; Pernye, A.: “A jazzről” [On Jazz]. In: *Valóság* [Reality], 1962, 5, pp. 57–70; and János Gonda’s various publications). ‘Jazz’, according to András Pernye (1964: 18–21), ‘is the amalgamation of an improvisational Afro-American folk music (blues) and harmonising European musical compositions.’ Is jazz a separate art form or ‘just’ a musical style? This question, among several others, is what preoccupied aficionados of classical music and jazz (e.g. Nagy 1962; Pernye 1962; Gonda 1965).

14 From the 1960s onwards, writings depicting modern jazz as a sort of musical revolution could be published in Hungary too (e.g. Finkelstein 1961; Pernye 1962). The latter publication portrayed modern jazz as the cultural revolution of a universal musical language, the development of which neither administrative backstabbing nor the disdain of ‘erudite composers’ could halt. Socialist cultural policy misinterpreted the revolutionary aspects of jazz along Marxist ideology, and described the Afro-American struggle for emancipation in terms of the international class struggle (cf. Finkelstein 1961).

15 The clichés originated from the urban culture of the genre, more precisely the urban sociology observations of the Chicago School. Jazz was born at the turn of the century in American metropolises where different cultures as well as different social strata mingled freely. To this end classical jazz, as it also spread across Europe in the 1920s, was more a reflection of the integration of a multicultural

asserted that all they did was to play music. There is, of course, more to the question than this; consider, for example, the mythology of jazz, which presents jazz as the music of freedom, an attitude founded on democratic values and socialist ideals.¹⁶ Some of the political and social aspects of jazz clearly follow on from this point of view.¹⁷

During the Cold War, the fact that jazz apparently lacked any political affiliation was used by both the Western and Soviet bloc powers as a political weapon.¹⁸ This took on two basic forms: one was to send jazz musicians on tours abroad (as organised and sponsored by the state), the other was to make best use of the radio. The American administration discovered early during the Second World War that jazz performances were very well received by Europe's youth. As the Cold War unfolded, American politicians started to consciously exploit the mobilising power of jazz to further their political aims. It is for this reason that individual and groups of musicians were sponsored to tour, as the American political agenda required, various countries, not only in the Eastern Bloc. The American historian Penny Von Eschen has described the significance subsequent US governments accorded to the idea of promoting personal liberty in Eastern Bloc countries in her

musical scene into metropolitan life than a symbol of the fight against Black segregation. This was much more, from the 1940s onwards, a characteristic of modern jazz and its Afro-American players (Jost 1974 and Jost, E.: *Sozialgeschichte des Jazz [A Social History of Jazz]*. Zweitausendundeins: Frankfurt a.M., 2003).

- 16 In "Jazz and the 'Popular Front': 'Swing' Musicians and the Left-Wing Movement of the 1930s–1940s", as published in *Jazz Perspectives*, 2009, 3(1), pp. 35–56, the Canadian jazz-historian Jonathon Bakan links the swing music and identity of the 1930s and 1940s to the radical left-wing, even communist 'Popular Front' social movements in Harlem, as they had emerged in response to the Great Depression.
- 17 Cf. Ritter, Rüdiger: *Gefährliche Waffe – oder einfach nur Musik? Jazz im Kalten Krieg [Dangerous Weapon – Or Simply Music? Jazz In The Cold War]*. In: JIPSS [Journal for Intelligence, Propaganda and Security Studies] 8,1 (2014), p. 152–163.
- 18 The genre flourished in the USSR in the 1930s and 1940s, until Stalin's Cold War politics silenced it. When Khrushchev came to power in 1953, jazz soon enjoyed a renaissance, whereby the official propaganda did not fail to put it to its own uses and portrayed it as the folk music of the exploited US working class. This attitude was to play a crucial role in the subsequent legitimisation of jazz in Hungary (cf. Finkelstein 1961).

work.¹⁹ Their primary goal in this context was to provide a counterexample to the ideology and control of the socialist state.

It is even more intriguing to approach the question as seen by Eric Hobsbawm, the well-known Marxist historian. He depicts jazz in a mythical light, and, as a recognized authority on the subject, affirmed this skewed interpretation in a work published in Hungary in 2009.²⁰ János Gonda, in line with Hobsbawm, portrays jazz as the music of the working classes and the poor black man – totally ignoring that it is mostly the (white) middle class and the cultural elite who repeat the phrase so frequently.²¹ The present study is a critique of such – all too often dominant – interpretations.

The openness to accept and the skill to understand other cultures in Europe has always been the prerogative of the bourgeois middle classes. This chapter argues that jazz always catered for the needs of the learned middle class and that it is a mistake to treat the genre as an instrument of rebellion and a(n) (self-)expression of poverty – at least before the 1950s.

2. The jazz ambassadors

During the presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953–1961), and more specifically from 1956 onwards, several American jazz musicians – starting with Dizzy Gillespie²² and his big band touring the Middle East – were

19 Von Eschen 2004.

20 Cf. Hobsbawm, E.: *Hétköznapi hősök: ellenállók, lázadók és a dzsessz [Uncommon People: Resistance, Rebellion and Jazz]*. L'Harmattan/Eszmélet Alapítvány: Budapest, 2009, at pp. 331–405. Indeed, Hobsbawm's works are considered canonised texts. Social history, in turn, is a subdiscipline defined by its subject matter, which analyses the structures, processes, and activities of society, for example: the family, social classes, ethnic groups, urbanisation, migration, social mobility, social protest, capitalism, social inequalities, and the way these are perceived. On the other hand, social history can also be defined as a sort of outlook onto the world, one that views history in general terms as well as in its discrete parts – politics, the economy and culture included – 'from the point of view of society'. It thus places social structures, processes, and phenomena into the foreground, just as Hobsbawm does.

21 Gonda 2004.

22 John Birks 'Dizzy' Gillespie (1917–1993) was a jazz trumpeter, bandleader, singer, and composer who himself referred to his touring band as 'the ambassadors of jazz'.

systematically dispatched on tours abroad, to the Far East and Southeast Asia, the USSR and Eastern Europe, and to South American and Africa. These supposed ‘cultural battle missions’ were meant to popularise the American way of life and present the United States in a more positive light, widely criticised for its racial inequalities. The ‘Jazz Ambassadors Programme’ continued until 1978. During the almost twenty years of its existence artists as diverse as Dizzy Gillespie, Benny Goodman,²³ Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, and Louis Armstrong all promoted the United States.²⁴ As Von Eschen has demonstrated by way of countless musical biographies, though, there existed at times quite a discrepancy between the intentions of the US government and the image the musicians themselves wanted to project on these tours.²⁵ To make her case, Von Eschen draws on contemporary interviews, which sometimes are couched in irony to expose the hypocrisy at the heart of the venture. While the musicians were obliged to submit to the Jim Crow laws back at home, mandating racial segregation in all public facilities in the southern states of the US, they were to project an image of racial equality whilst abroad.²⁶ However, being an envoy to Europe meant a stable income, and, what is more, a kind of liberation, an escape route for African American jazz musicians, who were very often ignored at home.²⁷ Even though Von Eschen is not an expert on jazz per

23 Benny Goodman (1909–1986) was a jazz clarinetist and bandleader who personally felt responsible for the liberty of music and racial emancipation. He also sent home all those musicians who would not represent the old style but only wanted to modernise; cf. Ritter 2014.

24 John Gennari, the American jazz historian, also placed Dave Brubeck into this group. See John Gennari: *Blowin’ Hot and Cool. Jazz and Its Critics*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2006, p. 213. These government-sponsored jazz musicians symbolised American pop culture and played in front of very large audiences soon gaining worldwide fame. The first large-scale jazz concert in Hungary took place in 1965, when Louis Armstrong played in the sold-out Népstadion in Budapest.

25 Von Eschen 2004.

26 The Jim Crow laws were in effect from 1876 to 1965. According to these laws, part of federal and state legislation, African Americans were provided with inferior medical care and education and could only settle freely in residential areas specifically designated for them.

27 Free jazz emerged as a sort of critique of this facade and the classical jazz performers upholding it; cf. Hersch 1998.

se, her work provides an insightful overview of how the US administration attempted to employ jazz to further its political ends during the Cold War. In her conclusion she maintains, however, that the audience could never be fooled and that a love for jazz did not immediately amount to an acceptance of American mass culture.²⁸

The other jazz ambassador was the radio. The US State Departments set up several radio stations to promote jazz, and especially to broadcast into the socialist parts of the world. The spontaneous and surprising success of military radio stations, such as the American Forces Network (AFN), had already shown during the Second World War how effective and important the radio was as a propaganda tool.²⁹ From the 1950s onwards, subsequent US governments also supplied Eastern European organizations in exile with radio equipment and cultural material, mostly records. Voice of America, Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty, the latter specifically targeting the Soviet Union, all received substantial financial support. Willis Conover, presenter for Voice of America, had an especially great impact on the jazz culture in the Eastern Bloc countries. But these initiatives, as Von Eschen has exposed, also created some conflicts, as the term ‘jazz’ took on quite a different life and meaning in the propaganda context compared to that associated with ‘real jazz’ at home.³⁰ While Conover’s shows enjoyed worldwide success, his broadcasts were banned in America, drawing a sharp line between professed and existing democracy and equality in America.

Unfortunately, studies on the history of jazz in Hungary still do not attempt – even several years after the transition to democracy – to detail the relationship the genre had with politics and society. Save for the collection of discographies, there is no evidence of any progressive, interdisciplinary research striving to come to terms with the recent past. In 1999, Simon Géza Gábor was the first to write a history of jazz in Hungary, but his eclectic collection of musicians’ anecdotes falls far short of any systematic

28 Von Eschen 2004.

29 The origins of the American Forces Network (AFN) go back to 26 May 1942, when the US War Department established the first Armed Forces Radio Service (AFRS), used to broadcast across Europe.

30 Von Eschen 2004.

treatment of the subject.³¹ In fact, only one comprehensive and scientifically sound work has been published on the history of jazz in Hungary to date: János Gonda's *Jazzvilág* [*Jazzworld*], as published by Rózsavölgyi és Társa in Budapest in 2004. But this also failed to make a fresh start, for Gonda does not explore the political and social aspects of jazz in Hungary – but then that may be too much to expect from a musicologist.

Historians studying Hungarian socialism often characterise the underlying political principles as being arbitrary and haphazard, and the carrying out of party orders as whimsical, governed above all by the personal interests and ambitions of party officials.³² The present study takes these factors into consideration and cites examples that demonstrate the distrust and inconsistent approach official pop music policymakers evinced with regard to jazz. At the same time, it refutes the notion that the control exercised over the country's cultural life was relaxed after 1957, when, in fact, it became stricter in a way, and certainly more present. What this chapter aims to do is to reflect on the relationship between politics and jazz in Hungary and, more specifically, to describe the development of jazz in the country's social and political systems after 1945 – that is during an era marked by totalitarian dictatorship.

3. Precursors: a brief history of Hungarian jazz up to 1950

Texts on the history of music in Hungary generally hold that the first Hungarian jazz bands, paralleling developments elsewhere in Europe, first emerged during the 1920s, and then came into their own in the bars and dance-halls of Pest in the 1930s, catering mainly for the middle classes

31 Simon Géza Gábor: *Magyar jazztörténet* [Hungarian jazz history], Budapest, 1999.

32 Cf. Kenyeres, I.: “A superman hippik és a tanácstalan rendőrök” [Superman Hippies and Dumbfounded Policemen]. In: Majtényi, Gy. / Ring, O. (eds.): *Közel-Múlt: Húsz történet a 20. századból* [The Near past. 20 Stories from the 20th century]. Magyar Országos Levéltár: Budapest, 2002, pp. 135–154; Horváth, S.: “Ifjúsági lázadás a hatvanas években? Önteremtés és beavatás: Feljegyzések a galeriból” [Youth rebellion in the 1960s? Self-creation and rites of passage: Notes from inside the gang]. In: *Fons*, 2006, 13(1), pp 21–59; Csatári, B.: “A KISZ könnyűzenei politikája” [The policies of the KISZ on light music]. In: *Múltunk*, 2007, 52(3), pp. 67–103.

and artists. The first popular interest books on jazz were also published at this time.³³ The mass culture of the day, reflecting the taste of the gentry, was dominated by urban Hungarian folk songs (*magyar nóta*) accompanied by Gypsy music, and operettas. Jazz, although it did not threaten the established music forms, quickly became an equally popular genre – last but not least because of the radio and gramophone, technological inventions of the 1920s. Strictly speaking, however, jazz did not constitute a separate genre until the late 1940s/early 1950s, but was eclectic in style, to a certain extent even epigonic, characterised by professional adaptations of American compositions. This meant that bands essentially took original songs and performed them note by note, only translating the lyrics. Modern dance music (foxtrot, onestep, Charleston, tango, and swing) mingled in these performances along with salon music. A particularly popular style of performing jazz-like dance music involved a female singer – a so-called *disease* – and a big band (sometimes counting more than twenty musicians) to accompany her.³⁴

The rise of the Nazi regime and the start of the Second World War did not have an immediate effect on the Hungarian jazz scene. Although Nazi propaganda had banned jazz in 1933,³⁵ the order was ignored, or only carried out in parts: the lyrics of jazz numbers were ‘Germanised’ and right into the 1940s the German military radios kept playing American and English swing songs thus transformed.³⁶ Interestingly, Hitler discontinued jazz education in Germany when he came to power in 1933, but allowed records, although ideologically suspect, to be released until the onset of war in 1939. In the case of Hungary, it was only with the Arrow Cross Party’s rise to power, the persecution of Jews, and the ravages of the war that jazz was silenced in 1944.

33 The first of these was *Jazzband* by Antal Molnár, published in 1928.

34 Popular diseases of the 1930s and 1940s include Kató Fényes, Anny Kapitány, Katalin Karádi, and Babi Kennedy.

35 ‘Jazz had numerous ‘sins’ for the Nazis: it was American, Black, and Jewish at the same time – and there were many Jews among the white players.’ (Gonda 2004, p. 440)

36 Simon, G. G.: “Jazztilalom a harmadik birodalomban” [Bans on Jazz in the Third Reich]. In: *Jazzkutatás [Jazz research]* at <http://jazzkutas.eu/article.php?id=66> [as accessed on 1 February 2010].

The short transitional period between 1945 and 1949 following the war is referred to by Hungarian jazz historians as the ‘golden age’ of jazz, which carried on where Hungarian jazz culture in the 1930s had left off. This was partly due to the fact that classical jazz and dance music had not yet separated and that the administrative tools to control and constrain jazz performances had not yet been put in place. The entertainment industry thrived on American culture, discuses, and big bands – indeed, jazz bands were all the rage.³⁷ Before modern jazz could have taken root in Hungary, however, the Magyar Dolgozók Pártja (MDP), the Hungarian Working People’s Party, banned the genre altogether. The entertainment and record manufacturing industries were nationalised, and only a handful of privileged musicians and bands were allowed to continue to perform in public. The list included names like the Budapest Radio Dance Music Band led by Lajos Martiny, Mihály Tabányi’s band (at the EMKE dance venue), the Solymossy-Beamter Duo (at the bar of the Bristol Hotel), the Garay Trio (on the terrace of the Gellért Hotel), Chappy³⁸ (at the Budagyöngye), and Kornél Kertész (at the Astoria Hotel bar).³⁹

Despite all this, even during the darkest days of the dictatorship, one would have had a chance to listen to jazz every day had there not been a serious lack of functioning radio sets among the general public, and had it not been so very dangerous to follow Western broadcasts.⁴⁰ The interviewees all

37 Some of the most popular performers, already known from the pre-war period, were: Jenő Orlay (Chappy) and band, Ákos Holéczy and band, the Martiny band, Mihály Tabányi, Fülöp Schenkelbach (Filu), Andor Kovács, Pál Herrér, Iván Zágón, Gábor Szabó, and Lajos ‘Lulu’ Solymossy. Cf. Simon, G. G.: *Magyar Jazztörténet* [History of Hungarian Jazz]. Magyar Jazzkutató Társaság: Budapest, 1999.

38 Jenő Orlay, known as ‘Chappy’ (1905–1977), was a band leader, composer and drummer. His real name was Obendorfer Jenő.

39 Jávorszky / Sebők 2009, p. 34.

40 It was only in 1954 that the production of consumer electronics was stepped up. The Vadásztölténygyár (a projectile factory) in Székesfehérvár then created, in collaboration with the KGM/A Telecommunications Directorate, ‘the prototype for a new radio receiver (for civilian use). Given the massive public demand, the Székesfehérvár factory rolled out 40,000 R-545 receivers in 1955. Because of the lack and backwardness of the supply industry, the Vadásztölténygyár was forced to construct and manufacture most electronic parts as well (capacitors,

agreed that it was due to the illegal foreign radio stations and programmes – the BBC, Radio Free Europe, RIAS Berlin, and the *Voice of America Jazz Hour*, a night broadcast unmatched in influence – that jazz as a genre was kept alive in Hungary. The *Voice of America Jazz Hour*'s presenter, Willis Conover, became immensely popular in the Eastern Bloc and soon was considered the number one ambassador of jazz. From the 1950s onwards, he started visiting the USSR and other Eastern European countries, Hungary amongst them. While in Hungary, he met several Hungarian jazz musicians and fans, one of whom was Péter Szigeti.⁴¹ This is what Szigeti had to say about Conover when interviewed:

I know a lot about him, because we later became good friends. [...] Later, we could get to know him in person. He visited Eastern European countries quite often, as a diplomatic envoy, and, by the way, as an agent of the USIA.⁴² This organization was not involved in intelligence work; it was more a 'soft power', a kind of popularising institution. He lived and breathed jazz; he was a good 'face' to pick. [...] Jazz was a kind of additional military division of the US Army, if I am allowed to use such an odd phrase. It was the precursor of America's influence all over Europe after the war. The US State Department spent vast amounts of money touring certain bands, especially to places where they would not have been welcomed to officially. Refined musicians were heavily sponsored, especially those who could speak in public and play host to themselves. That is how Louis Armstrong could come and play in 1965, also serving as a kind of cultural ambassador of sorts. Willis Conover kept all of this in motion; that is no doubt why he became a *Voice of America* presenter.

reeling-machines, etc.)' (Germuska, P.: "A magyar fogyasztói szocializmus zászlóshajói: Hadiipari vállalatok civil termelése, 1953–1963" [Flagships of Hungarian Consumerist Socialism: Civilian Output of the Military Industry, 1953–1963]. In: *Korall*, 2008, 9(33), pp. 62–80, here at p. 74).

41 Péter Szigeti's (b. 1941) activities are quite difficult to pin down. In jazz circles many refer to him as 'the walking and talking compendium of Hungarian jazz', alluding to his close ties to the genre. His life has meshed with the history of Hungarian jazz at several points since the 1950s. Uniquely, he has been active in both the high-brow and low-brow echelons of jazz. As he spoke fluent English already as a teenager, he was able to talk with foreign jazz musicians, fans, and journalists visiting Hungary; he met Willis Conover this way. Also, he used to organise the Várklub and Kassák Klub and used to tour across Hungary to deliver lectures in various jazz venues.

42 United States Information Agency.

Szigeti's reminiscences coincide with the assertions made in international publications on the history of jazz in Eastern Europe inasmuch as the MKP's crude ban of jazz in Hungary could not counterbalance the effects of the US jazz policy.⁴³ In hindsight, the ban had not even been necessary, as the aversion modern jazz – as it entered Hungary in the 1960s – had to political ideologies in general and the leftist critique of society it embraced did not engender subcultures and movements critical of the communist establishment. This is especially true of the ahistorical and depoliticised Hungarian society of the late 1950s and 1960s, which after the failed revolution of 1956 was totally disillusioned with the Western powers and turned to consumer culture for want of a better alternative.⁴⁴ Subsequently, avant-garde jazz (or free jazz) also failed to fill this gap.⁴⁵ Szigeti holds that the reason for this is that it had no mass appeal, moreover that Hungarian avant-garde jazz was not sufficiently intertwined with the other avant-garde arts, as was the case in Western Europe and Poland:

It is obvious that the avant-garde has no popular base and that it only accounts for a handful of people in Hungarian jazz. [...] The contemporary music workshop of the Kassák Klub is one, then there are Szabados's people [György Szabados], and when I was head of the jazz club at Várklub, they played a lot there. There were actually some people drawn to the avant-garde, but interestingly, the Hungarian avantgardists [sic], and I mean this in a wider artistic sense, well, they could not really come to terms with jazz and preferred alternative art forms. These people were also my friends. They had an explicit aversion to jazz; they thought of it as

43 Von Eschen, Penny: *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War*, Cambridge, MA, 2004; Ritter, Rüdiger: *Gefährliche Waffe – oder einfach nur Musik? Jazz im Kalten Krieg [Dangerous Weapon – Or Simply Music? Jazz In The Cold War]*. In: JIPSS [Journal for Intelligence, Propaganda and Security Studies] 8,1 (2014), p. 152–163.

44 The popular interest and theoretical works published on jazz at the time held up Czechoslovakia and, in particular, Poland as positive examples (cf. Nagy 1962; Gonda's publications of the mid-1960s) as jazz musicians enjoyed some more freedom in these countries. Also, jazz festivals were regularly held and jazz, as a result, was much more popular with the younger generation in both Czechoslovakia and Poland.

45 Avant-garde jazz is a combination of avant-garde artistic music and jazz compositional principles. It is virtually indistinguishable from free jazz, nevertheless, the two differ inasmuch as the former has a structure rooted in a well-defined musical tradition and – unlike the latter – is often fully composed note by note.

some kind of barroom music and favoured music that would now be called indie. Punk for example. [...] I remember how often we argued about this with Miklós Erdély. He just did not like jazz, but nevertheless frequently came to listen in on the Erkel street sessions.⁴⁶

To compare and contrast composed symphonic music and avant-garde jazz is also justified from the point of view of social philosophy. Theodor W. Adorno, the Marxist philosopher, music aesthetician, and, remarkably, composer of classical music, was, already by the 1930s, regarded as one of the most vitriolic critics of modern music. He viewed avant-garde art and Surrealism in particular as one of the most important means for relating to the world in a creative and, at the same time, communicative way. In marked contrast, he considered jazz to be the product of a mass culture he strongly despised; indeed, he never saw it as a cultural achievement brought about by a remarkable liberation from manipulation. The truth of the matter is that his arguments were based on the popular jazz of the 1920s–1940s.⁴⁷ Drawing an analogy between positions set out by the sociologist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas and the jazz pianist Keith Jarrett, the epistemologist and historian of sociology Gábor Felkai, in turn, contemplated Jarrett – widely considered one of the most prominent representatives of modern jazz and contemporary classical music – as

[...] striving to ‘stir up’ the manipulated, sedated popular sensibilities with jazz (that is, contemporary classical) music that requires responsible and authentic application, and, I feel, exemplifies considerations that reside on an ideological plane identical to proposals set out by Jürgen Habermas. The social philosopher and the contemporary jazz musician also inhabit roughly the same notional-mental plane when they both define what constitutes an ‘authentic lifestyle’ in terms of *participation*, whereby each understands participation as being based on a mature personality’s conscious interpretation of the term and this having the power to facilitate mutual enlightenment.⁴⁸

46 From an interview conducted by the author with Péter Szigeti in 2008.

47 Cf. Adorno, T. W.: *Einleitung in die Musiksoziologie: 12 theoretische Vorlesungen* [Introduction to the Sociology of Music: 12 Theoretical Lectures]. Suhrkamp: Frankfurt a.M., 1962.

48 Felkai G.: “Jürgen Habermas és Keith Jarrett: Az összehasonlító kulturális elemzés egy esete” [Jürgen Habermas and Keith Jarrett: A case in comparative cultural analysis]. In: *Szociológiai Figyelő* [Sociological Review], 1999, 11(1–2), pp. 24–39.

This could be understood as the theoretical foundation for the shift in jazz towards classical musical composition, a development which was perhaps taken farthest by the jazz composers György Szabados and Károly Binder.

4. Repression in the 1950s

The regime's attitude towards jazz was far from uniform; indeed, it varied significantly during the different eras of the communist dictatorship. After the brief 'golden age' of jazz, the Hungarian music scene, from 1948/1949 onwards, was increasingly controlled and regulated by the *Trade Union of Music Artists (Zeneművészek Szakszervezete)*, the *Hungarian Association of Musicians (Magyar Zeneművészek Szövetsége)*, and the *National Centre for Musical Entertainment (Országos Szórakoztatózenei Központ (OSZK))*, as appointed and governed by the *Magyar Dolgozók Pártja (MDP)*, the *Hungarian Working People's Party*.⁴⁹ Jazz was banned all through the 1950s right until the early 1960s,⁵⁰ as 'jazzy dance music is cosmopolitan and has not cut itself from the umbilical cord of American musical sensibilities' – to reiterate the words used in a report prepared by the *Hungarian Association of Musicians* for the *Agitation and Propaganda Department* of the MDP Central Committee (KV) in 1950.⁵¹

The *Hungarian Association of Musicians* was established in 1949. Its founding members, mostly composers, educationalists, and performers – who simultaneously served as the editors of the newly established *Új Zenei Szemle [New Musical Review]*⁵² – were to define, with the MDP's approval,

49 Later, from the 1960s onwards, the National Event Organising Agency (ORI) had the final say, since it determined the terms and pay of the performing artists.

50 That the authorities were seriously suspicious of jazz, enjoyed by the Budapest middle classes, is evident from the minutes of the Budapest city council: 'We must fight the cult of jazz proliferating in Budapest. The number of such bands have to be gradually reduced, and substituted by folk bands.' (Budapest City Archives XXIII.102 – Meeting of the City Council, 22 October, 1953).

51 National Archives of Hungary (MOL): M-KS 276–89. 383/1950 – Documents of the Agitation and Propaganda Department of the Hungarian Working People's Party, 1950–1954 / Report on the first year of the Hungarian Association of Musicians.

52 Prior to this, the *Magyar Zenei Szemle [Hungarian Musical Review]* was one of the regular and important journals between 1941 and 1944, edited by Dénes Bartha. This journal for classical music and musical aesthetics was superseded

Hungary's classical music culture for decades to come.⁵³ Any renegade artists seen to 'misinterpret' the tenets of socialist realism were forced out of the organization.⁵⁴ But some artists also benefited. The musicologist community seeking institutionalization, for example, was granted wider creative and research freedoms than other areas of artistic practice and scientific research.⁵⁵ In exchange for this position, none of the MDP's cultural policies were questioned, and thus effectively legitimised.

The best example is that of the composer Zoltán Kodály, who by not accepting any official positions maintained his independence and ultimately had a substantial influence on the music scene of the day. Interestingly,

by *Új Zenei Szemle*, which was based on Marxist-infused musicological foundations. Edited by János Maróthy, it remained in print until the disbanding of the *Hungarian Association of Musicians* in 1956.

- 53 Following the newly devised cultural policies of the MDP, a new Ministry of Education was established in 1949, headed by József Révai. This centralised the control of the arts, whereby the associations for the separate art forms were organised according to the Soviet model; this is how the Hungarian Association of Musicians came into being. The task of the respective associations was to 'rally the intelligentsia and artists behind socialist values and to convince them to adhere in their work to the norms of socialist cultural policies, better known as socialist realism. At the same time, the associations became expert advisers to the Arts Council to complement the work of the ministry, all with relatively extensive powers.' (Ujfalussy, J.: "Járdányi ügy" a Magyar Zeneművészeti Szövetségében (1951)) [The 'Járdányi-Incident' in the Hungarian Association of Musicians (1951)]. In: *Magyar Zene [Hungarian Music]*, 1992, 33(1), pp. 14–18, here at p. 14)
- 54 In 1951, the *Hungarian Association of Musicians* was divided on which Hungarian national musical traditions best conveyed the revolutionary spirit, on the national characteristics of intonation and the extent to which they had been present in the compositions of revolutionary composers in the 19th and 20th century. The composer and educationalist Pál Járdányi's argument, cherishing the diversity of music, was distorted to carry political overtones and he was accused of championing reactionary principles. Járdányi's consequent resignation from the board of the *Hungarian Association of Musicians* was, on account of his past contributions, not accepted, and the debaters were reconciled. The debate was symptomatic of the underlying problem of social realism that the grand motto 'socialist content in national form' never found a specific prototype. (cf. Ujfalussy 1992)
- 55 Ständeiszky, É. et al. (eds.): *A fordulat évei 1947–1949 [The Transitional Years 1947–1949]*. 1956-os Intézet: Budapest, 1999, pp.185–201.

the party honchos, aware of his status, tried to profit from his popularity rather than to marginalise him. In fact, they could not afford to antagonise Kodály, nor, for that matter, the highly influential music historian Bence Szabolcsi. The changes that occurred in the transition years thus clearly were beneficial for the classical music scene and music research, both seen to be compatible with the political (ideological) goals.⁵⁶

Révai had primary control of every area of music up until the mid-1950s, but was quite indifferent towards it. As a result and to the great benefit of music in Hungary, Kodály's word prevailed more often than not. Musicology and music education thus enjoyed greater autonomy – as did, for example, also medicine – than other disciplines.⁵⁷

As cultural policymakers were suspicious of every form of musical entertainment save classical and folk music, there existed no official policy on light music until the 1960s. Even more of a concern was music generated in capitalist countries, or connected to the bourgeois value system. Hence, jazz could not be talked about officially.

It is for this reason that reliable classical musicians and composers occupied key position in cultural policymaking in the 1950s. Several generations thus grew up listening to innocuous choir works for children and Soviet-style compositions. Apart from moulding musical taste, the cultural policymakers were expected to introduce the works of Soviet composers to the Hungarian general public. In return they were accorded privileges similar to those granted to prominent artists and sportspeople (e.g. cars, flats, and the permission to travel abroad). Also, they were frequently awarded state honours and often received monetary rewards. The appointed members of

56 Péteri, L.: “Zene, tudomány, politika. Zenetudományi Gründerzeit és államszocializmus (1951–1953)” [Music, Scholarship, Politics. The Founding Epoch of Musical Theory and State Socialism]. In: *Muzsika*, 2002, 45(1), pp. 16–22, here at pp. 17–21.

57 The feebleness of the cultural policy towards music, and the partial autonomy music enjoyed as a result of this, is exemplified by György Ránki's (1907–1992) opera *King Pomade's New Clothes*, which premiered at the Hungarian State Opera House in Budapest in 1953. The story was a political satire, with a covert criticism of the cult of personality surrounding Rákosi-style Stalinism (Mátyás Rákosi was Secretary General of the Hungarian Working People's Party (MDP) from 1945 to 1956). (György Szabados pointed this out when interviewed by the author).

the organization from 1950 onwards were all ‘excellent artists’ or ‘deserving artists’ (two of the top honours) and included: Sándor Asztalos, Miklós Csillag, Ferenc Farkas, Pál Járdányi, Pál Kadosa, Kamilló Lendvay, János Maróthy, András Mihály, György Ránki, Tibor Sári (secretary-general), István Sárközi, Ferenc Szabó,⁵⁸ Bence Szabolcsi (chairman), Endre Székely, Endre Szervánszky, and József Ujfalussy.⁵⁹

The *Hungarian Association of Musicians* was dissolved during the 1956 revolution, but was re-established in 1959, with practically the same people in place as before the revolution.⁶⁰ As a symbol of the legalization of jazz this privileged collective also included János Gonda, who was later promoted to the board of the organization and also served as chairman of the newly formed *Jazz Section* between 1972 and 1989.⁶¹

58 A composer, Ferenc Szabó was the person through which the MDP took influence on the Hungarian Music Artists Association.

59 The list is incomplete.

60 ‘The *Hungarian Association of Musicians* was officially dissolved at its meeting on 31 October 1956 and re-established as the *Hungarian Association of Free Musicians*. At the same meeting a Revolutionary Committee was elected. At the next meeting, held on 11 December 1956 and chaired by [the musicologist] Dénes Bartha, [the composer and educationalist] Pál Járdányi delivered a formal ‘farewell report’. The sovereignty of the association was officially revoked, however, in light of ‘anti-revolutionary incidents’ in January 1957 and a commissioner appointed by the Ministry of Education to head the organisation. *The Hungarian Association of Musicians* was re-established in 1959 and once again headed by [the musicologist] Bence Szabolcsi, while the title of honorary chairman once again being accorded to Zoltán Kodály. [The composer] Tibor Sári was entrusted with the newly established position of secretary-general.’ (Péteri, L.: “Légy résen! Támad a burzsoá avantgardizmus: Magyar zenészek gyümölcsöző moszkvai tanulmányútja” [Be Prepared! The Attack of the Bourgeois Avant-Garde: Hungarian Musicians’ Fruitful Field Trip in Moscow]. In: 2000, 2002, 14(3), pp. 63–68, here at p. 63).

61 Apart from Gonda there were only five jazz musicians or jazz theoreticians among the 140 members of the Hungarian Association of Musicians in 1976: Sándor Dobsa Sándor, Pál Herrer, Vilmos Körmendi, Lajos Martiny, and András Pernye. (National Archives of Hungary (MOL): XXVI-I-67 60 – Documents of the National Event Organisation Agency (ORI), 1959–1977 / Membership list of the Music Section of the Arts Fund of the People’s Republic of Hungary, 21 January 1976).

Aside from the membership of the organizations controlling musical culture, the number of jazz musicians and jazz theorists awarded a state honour during the 1950s also serves as a barometer of official attitude towards jazz and the prestige enjoyed by the genre. The obvious comparison is state-sponsored classical music. Indeed, it is a widely known fact that for some time the state, save for a token number of folk musicians, only supported classical musicians.⁶² The list of the recipients of musical awards between 1948 and 1970 is ample proof of this. The highest honour, the *Kossuth Prize*, could only be awarded to classical musicians, composers of classical music, and music aestheticians. In a similar vein the *Ferenc Erkel Prize* was long only awarded to composers of classical music, classical musicians, conductors, and music educationalists; in 1977, however, it was for the first time presented to a pop musician, the composer, singer and pianist Gábor Presser. A somewhat larger number of jazz musicians, though still only a handful, were awarded the *Ferenc Liszt Prize*. The pianist György Cziffra was the first to receive this honour in 1956, but mainly because he had abandoned barroom playing and taken up classical music. Likewise, in 1978, the jazz double-bass player Aladár Pege was awarded the *Ferenc Liszt Prize*, but mainly for his contributions to classical music – in fact, he did not explicitly define himself as a jazz musician, but as a double bass artist/teacher, who sometimes happens to play jazz.⁶³

Classical musicians generally talked down to those playing jazz; at least most classical musicians did not consider jazz musicians to be artists of equal stature, moreover regarded jazz as a genre unfit for artistic expression. Unsurprisingly, this is an issue overarching the narratives of jazz musicians. In fact, right up until the 1960s, classical music, and opera in particular, dominated the broadcasts of Radio Budapest. This was followed, in terms of average hours of broadcast, by operetta and urban Hungarian folk songs. Complementing the works of Soviet composers, the compositions of Béla

62 Later the so-called *pol-beat* singers and bands were added to this list. The music called *pol-beat* is a specific Hungarian phenomenon. In 1967 and 1968, two festivals with this music were held in Budapest. See Béla Jávorszky / János Sebők: *A magyarrock története*, Budapest: Népszabadság rt, 2005.

63 Turi, G.: *Azt mondom jazz: Interjúk magyar jazzmuzikusokkal* [I say: Jazz. Interviews with Hungarian Jazz Musicians]. Zeneműkiadó: Budapest, 1983.

Bartók, Zoltán Kodály, Leó Werner, Pál Kadosa, and György Ránki were most often played through the 1950s. While there was a stronger presence of operetta and urban folk music from the mid-1950s onwards, jazz did not make up more than one per cent of the daily broadcasts.⁶⁴ Those who wanted to listen to the genre had to turn to foreign radio stations.

Based on the above, jazz can hardly be said to have received any official support; rather, it was relegated to the fringes, and if featured at all, the jazz programmes on the radio were only temporary to begin with. The authorities were disinterested in jazz and let it be played only to the extent for it to survive. Szigeti has the following to say on this matter:

The radio worked in the same way for decades, from the 1960s right up until the transition [to democracy in the 1990s]. Radio Budapest sponsored certain jazz concerts and festivals in order to record them, and in this way also supported some of the musicians. Many thought that Imre Kiss, who was the main man behind this, was a kind soul, but in fact he only acted as instructed by the party. His job was to organise the events – at least this is what he claimed. All he cared about were the recordings; whether any audience turned up or not was of no interest to him. What Kiss and his helpers did was pay the requisite amount and make the recordings, but give no publicity to the events whatsoever. A substantial number of these recordings simply disappeared. They're still looking for them. There is no trace of them in the radio archives. Imre Kiss was, for all intents and purposes, a petty potentate who ruled a little kingdom and was as much a liability as a force for good. This was the strategy. A typical result of the 'sponsorship' policy of the Aczél-era: which meant sponsoring something so that it ideally collapsed by itself and no one could be blamed.⁶⁵

And in response to the question whether jazz was suppressed at the time:

I don't think it was suppressed after the dark 1950s. There was no need to suppress it; wherever jazz popped up, it got itself banned, as I mentioned when I talked

64 A report commissioned by the MDP KV states that between 1 July and 31 December 1950 Béla Bartók (2776 minutes), Zoltán Kodály (2041) and Leó Weiner (1118) were by far the three most-played composers on Radio Budapest (cf. National Archives of Hungary (MOL): M-KS 276–89. 386/1951 – Report on the first year of the Hungarian Association of Musicians).

65 From an interview conducted by the author with Péter Szigeti in 2008. György Aczél was Deputy Minister of Culture from 1958–1967 and then Minister of Culture until 1971.

about the attitude bar managers and patrons had towards it.⁶⁶ It wasn't a popular genre, and there were no mass events organised; no surprises there. The first jazz festival took place in 1965, in the Operettszínház theatre [in Budapest], with a capacity for almost 500 people.⁶⁷

That jazz was a word loaded with negative connotations is evident from party documents, which referred to jazz as being bourgeois, cosmopolitan, decadent, deranged, imperialistic, etc.⁶⁸ In the 1950s these ideology-infused expressions did not refer to jazz as a genre, however, but to individuals dancing and having fun *in a middle-class manner*. Official culture treated jazz as a mere style, a mode of performance; this attitude only started to change from the mid-1980s onwards.⁶⁹

English-language songs had to be translated and American-sounding band names to be changed. The jazz historian Attila Csányi, one-time leader of the *Orient Dixieland Jazz Band*, recaptured the times as follows in an interview:⁷⁰

There was this drummer called Bányai. He had a twelve-piece band in the Abbázia. He had spent the war in America and had become the leader of a big band with an extended horns section. My point is that the bandleader's most prized possession was the scores. Annotated scores, marked up with all the sections for the different instruments, were very costly and were treasured! Then came the transition, around 1948/49, and two men from the Trade Union of Music Artists showed

66 Szigeti had earlier explained that bars and restaurants did not like jazz because it only attracted a small audience not likely to consume much. Jazz musicians were therefore required to play 'standards, music hall, or salon music'. Szigeti was himself involved in the upper echelon of the hospitality industry from 1960 to the mid-1970s.

67 From an interview conducted by the author with Péter Szigeti in 2008.

68 'Cosmopolitan' as an epithet was carried over from the pre-war political vocabulary with no change in meaning: it was used to describe someone with a capitalist value system, anti-patriotic stand, and often was associated with Jewish world citizens. Jazz fans were thus often equated with the Budapest Jewry.

69 The opinions of Hungarian classical musicians, composers and Marxist social scientists converge on this evaluation and dating; cf. Maróthy, J.: *Zene és polgár, zene és proletár* [Music and the Bourgeoisie, Music and the Proletariat]. Akadémiai Kiadó: Budapest, 1966; Vitányi, I.: *A zenei szépség* [The Beauty of Music]. Zeneműkiadó: Budapest, 1971; Vitányi, I.: "Jazz". In: *Jazz Studium*, 1985, 5(4), pp. 11–15.

70 Attila Csányi's (b. 1940) main area of research are the biographies and discographies of Hungarian jazz musicians.

up and said, 'From now on you're called Béke [Peace] Orchestra!' (the band had had some English name). And everyone was issued a little badge, probably with a dove, that they were expected to pin on their lapels. The two men collected all the scores in saying, 'You won't be needing these any more.' The Hurrikán Band became the Harsányi Band, and were told, 'If we hear one more American number, you can say good-bye to your licences!'⁷¹

In the interview Csányi also related how American songs were smuggled into everyday standards:

The Trade Union of Music Artists had immense power at the time: they sent inspectors to the concerts to see if any American songs were played! Hotting, that is improvisation, was strictly forbidden. That was a no-no. And then there were the Warsaw Pact songs that they demanded. Not all of the inspectors knew the repertoire and so they asked the musicians what they were playing. And the musicians started pulling their legs, saying that the song was called 'Be Merry!' The inspector then asked, 'Who wrote it? Is it American?' Mihály T. responded, 'No, I wrote it!'⁷² In fact, he made a living out of this! All of the American hits were released on record with sham titles like that, and he was even paid royalties for them, because the liner notes said 'Composed by Mihály T.' And this despite all songs being American originals!⁷³

Communist cultural policy saw in jazz the dance music for the entertainment of the 'immoral' pre-war bourgeoisie. This is evident from the archives of the *Agitation and Propaganda Department* and the Culture Department of the MDP KV. The documents suggest that the party did not regard jazz as a separate genre, but used the term 'jazz' as a synonym for modern dance and light music. In 1954, the MDP KV formally did not consider it necessary to censor 'old-fashioned dance music' any longer, but practices essentially remained the same:

Today's dance music is basically still the regurgitation of foreign patterns, which are *anti-patriotic* and *cosmopolitan* to the core and do not have any connection to Hungarian national traditions as existent before Liberation. Hungarian light music will only be able to surmount its problems if it can present domestic musical achievements in a popular manner, and if it can conquer contemporary light music in open competition. We do not regard it appropriate to adopt administrative

71 From an interview conducted by the author with Attila Csányi in 2008.

72 Pseudonym chosen by the interviewee.

73 From an interview conducted by the author with Attila Csányi in 2008.

measures against old-fashioned dance music in this battle; however, we believe that the effective support of new experiments in dance music is necessary.⁷⁴

The control of pop music was relaxed because it was considered to have no significant influence on education and ‘socialist culture’:

Entertainment music cannot, by definition, be a primary factor in the education of the individual. One must therefore not overestimate its influence and confuse entertainment music with the authentic experience derived from classical music, which exists to enrich and ennoble. Nevertheless, entertainment music must be controlled, because if bad, it can cause substantial damage to individuals’ emotional and mental lives, as well as their behaviour.⁷⁵

Party officials – to reinforce ideology and policy – also had to consult Soviet advisors on cultural issues, who then set out recommendations, as a consequence of which the negative attitude towards jazz did not let up:

Comrade Svesnikov spoke approvingly of folk bands in Hungarian cultural life and the dedicated employees of its entertainment venues. His view is that they could provide a solid foundation for the elimination of the influence of *jazz* in our youth.⁷⁶

Until the 1950s, jazz – like Gypsy music – thrived in the spaces of the entertainment and hospitality industries in Hungary. Since these were nationalised between 1949 and 1953, the still only sporadically active jazz musicians were deprived of their habitat and audience.⁷⁷ The totalitarian regime took complete control of the entertainment industry and, with its policy of promoting folk traditions, subverted conventional music making and familiar modes of relaxation. Jazz – along with modern, American-style dance music genres such as the revue and the cabaret and with middle-class hospitality as a whole – was forced into exile. The propaganda machinery named jazz a phenomenon of the immoral pre-war bourgeoisie, a product spawned by the crisis of imperialism, and extended the definition to the hospitality establishments that had housed the music until the 1950s.⁷⁸

74 National Archives of Hungary (MOL): M-KS 276–91. 48/1954 – Status and Problems in Hungarian Music; italics by the author.

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid; italics by the author.

77 Cf. Jávorszky / Sebők 2009.

78 In Márton Keleti’s agitprop comedy *Dalolva szép az élet* from 1950, for example, the negative character ‘Swing’ Tóni dances to jazz wearing slim-fit trousers,

In 1951, responsibility for monitoring the entertainment provided in public venues passed from the Centre for Hotels and Catering, reporting to the Ministry of Domestic Trade, to the jurisdiction of the Budapest Council. Following recommendations made by the party, this immediately set to demolish the remnants of the bourgeoisie, including middle-class hospitality and, as a symbol of American entertainment, the jazz scene. The minutes of the meeting of the executive committee of the Budapest Council of 6 June 1952 attest to this, although – as will become evident later – not all of the councillors were convinced that the bourgeoisie could actually be destroyed:

The openly hostile numbers that dominated barrooms as late as 1950 have disappeared. There is, however, still a lot to do, as hostile ideology and Western bourgeois culture, if latent, still thrive in venues providing musical entertainment. This corrupts the taste of the workers, undermining the attendance of good theatres, good cinemas, and good concerts, as well as socialist culture as a whole.⁷⁹

A lack of reliable officials, especially trustworthy artists, was a matter of pressing concern for the party. The state therefore had to rely on propaganda and closed any offending bars and pubs. Jazz musicians in general were considered profiteers only really interested in tips:

The following problems were encountered at the cafés and restaurants of the Budapest Hospitality Company, as operating under Council jurisdiction: A major shortcoming of the present musical entertainment policies is that bands and pianists do not play enough new Hungarian, Soviet, and folk tunes. [...] In exchange for tips they cater to bourgeois and even hostile tastes. The mode of performance is frequently flawed. All too often Soviet musical numbers and good Hungarian dance numbers are performed in a rhythm or style reminiscent of American *jazz*. Discipline is usually also lax; many bands play in a state of drunkenness. Most ‘folk bands’ only very rarely play folk tunes. Rather, their repertoire is made up of melancholic art songs or dance numbers, very often played in a very *jazzy* manner.⁸⁰

steals from the workers’ property instead of working, and later joins a reactionary movement led by a choir master enthusiastic about jazz.

79 Budapest City Archives: XXIII.102.a – Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Budapest Council, 6 June 1952.

80 *Ibid.*; italics as in the original. Because of continuous friction, or simply because of the inaccessibility of Western culture, many talented artists, amongst which several jazz musicians and diseses, left the country. To name but the most prominent ones: Anny Kapitány, Attila Zoller in 1948, Katalin Karády in 1951, Lajos ‘Lulu’ Solymossy in 1954, and Gábor Szabó in 1956.

The authorities were suspicious of the jazz enjoyed by the one-time Budapest middle classes, even after the temporary lessening of Mátyás Rákosi's influence: 'We must fight the cult of jazz proliferating in Budapest. The number of such bands has to be gradually reduced and should be substituted by folk bands.'⁸¹ In line with Decree 11–252/1953, as issued by the Minister of Education and adopted by the Executive Committee of Budapest Council on 8 January 1953, the *Budapest Műsoriroda* [Budapest Programmes Agency], generally known by the abbreviation BUMI, was set up. Its purpose, aside from providing musicians to hospitality companies, factory balls and mass events, was to make jazz musicians toe the line.⁸² This, however, proved too much not only for BUMI, but also its successor, the *Budapesti Népi és Tánczenei Központ* [Budapest Centre for Folk and Dance Music], which took its place in 1954. Indeed, the complaints of Budapest's many unemployed musicians soon taking up most of the officials' time, it did not take long for the premises of BUMI – and later the *Budapesti Népi és Tánczenei Központ* – to 'resemble a honky-tonk more than a cultural policy institution' and for all policy implementation to come to a halt.⁸³

Moreover, the musicians sent by BUMI to events organised by the *Ministry of Domestic Trade* were frequently criticised at meetings of the *Executive Committee of Budapest Council* for playing jazz. Several musicians were summoned and warned that they were putting their jobs on the line by improvising on stage. As the archives attest, some councillors were regular patrons of night clubs and very watchful that socialist entertainment was provided in a pure and non-manipulated manner:

As part of my inspection rounds I went to the Bécsi kapu café two weeks ago, where the Kenedi-Wegner Duo [sic!] plays. I heard János Arany's beautiful ballad sung with very frightful lyrics and set to some wild, syncopated, twitching, and deranged American music. It was so disgusting and unbearable that I did not wait for appropriate official action, but summoned Babi Kenedi and her partner

81 Budapest City Archives: XXIII.102.a – Meeting of the City Council, 22 October 1953.

82 The agency, serving around 215 addresses, had approximately 700 musicians on contract, of which 300 were employed only infrequently; cf. Budapest City Archives: XXIII.102.a – Meeting of the City Council, 22 October 1953.

83 Budapest City Archives: XXIII.102.a – Meeting of the City Council, 22 October 1953.

to discuss their programme policy – in a way, I am sure, they will not forget very soon. They constantly sang in German and French: I checked twice in a row. I summoned the musicians and the head of the establishment.⁸⁴

Generally, warnings were issued by order of the local council. The party authorities often only gave general recommendations, but no specifics as to particular musical styles. This, of course, led to councillors and party honchos making ad hoc cultural policy decisions.⁸⁵ Unsurprisingly, these were implemented inconsistently. The reason for this is that on account of their popularity and the contribution made to respective establishments, many managers of bars, restaurants and community centres were reluctant to report musicians who did not adhere to socialist ideals. In the end cultural policymakers often gave up on them.⁸⁶

For instance, as is evident from the minutes of the *Executive Committee of Budapest Council*, Kálmán Pongrácz, chairman of the council from 1950 to 1958, protected the pianist of the *Pipacs* Piano Bár, who sometimes played jazz:

Szónyi: [...] The Ministry [Ministry of Domestic Trade] insists that sustaining the Pipacs is in our best political and economic interest. I disagree. We should change this through careful categorization. We should encourage the pianist playing there to choose his other calling over playing the piano. For your information, he is a doctor in his day job, but plays jazz and English and French numbers in the bar at night. Chairman: He does not always play jazz.

Szónyi: When Comrade Pongrácz visits, it takes the man eight full minutes, I'm told, to think of a song that does not offend. If the Executive Committee consents, I would like to suggest an auxiliary resolution to cover the Pipacs and bars like it, stating that the Executive Committee does not endorse such establishments, and that this is not a cultural policy issue. The agency [BUMI] usually complies with the demands made by the Ministry and the venues usually accept who is being sent to perform. These are issues very rarely discussed.⁸⁷

84 Ibid.

85 From 1959 onwards, jazz and 'light genres' could be discussed partially in public. Several experts and musicologists participated in the debate and wrote in some of the music journals – *Magyar Zene*, *Muzsika*, *Parlando*, and *Valóság* – of the time.

86 Cf. Csatóri 2007.

87 Budapest City Archives: XXIII.102.a – Meeting of the City Council, 22 October 1953.

The same applied to jazz bands hiding away in hospitality spaces, playing dance music out of necessity. Apart from the early 1950s, it was not so much official suppression that forced jazz off the dance floors, but economic considerations, as it simply was too costly for establishments to maintain large bands. Trios, duos, and solo pianos were the norm, which, needless to say, did not benefit the development of jazz. Those who could go abroad did so; in Hungary, no musician was able to earn a living playing jazz.

Despite all efforts, the regime could not completely eliminate the habits and values carried over from the days of the bourgeoisie.⁸⁸ In spite of merciless suppression, musicians, or at least some of them, managed to find loopholes to play jazz and thus make ends meet. Many of those interviewed mention places, usually watering holes for foreign visitors, Western diplomats and other musicians, where some kind of jazzy performance was allowed, or to be more precise, tolerated. In the bars of five-star hotels jazzy performances, strictly forbidden elsewhere, simply had to be submitted to.

Nevertheless, the state officials' deep mistrust and negative attitude towards jazz did not really subside until the mid-1960s. The general ignorance and party obedience of the cultural policy officials, their lack of musical training, and their prejudices against 'light genres' and young people made jazz unacceptable until the 1960s.

Disregarding all bans, entertainment musicians devoted to jazz continually enriched their knowledge of jazz by way of the Western broadcasts already mentioned as well records brought in from the West or collected from various embassies. They tried out new rhythms and sounds and regularly got together in private flats or their work venues – the bars, cafés and hotel restaurants – after regular hours. From 1957, jam sessions took place in several – semi-public – places, for example at the Savoy café, the Astoria Hotel bar, and the Journalists' Club. The respective venues welcomed these sessions as the musicians played for free and guests generally stayed longer and consumed more. But there soon was a backlash. The radio's light music review pilloried these gatherings, rejecting the modern jazz that was played there. In the same year, the Cultural Department of the Budapest Council had these sessions stopped and most jazz fans went back into hiding.

88 Cf. Havadi, G.: "Az 'Új népi szórakozóhely'" [The 'New Mass Entertainment Venue']. In: *Fons*, 2006, 13(3), pp. 315–354.

Official recognition only came in 1962, when the *Ifjúsági Jazz Klub* [Youth Jazz Club], headed by the jazz pianist Kornél Kertész, was established on the premises of the *Dália* café.⁸⁹

5. The 1960s: the legalization and institutionalization of jazz

The first signs of change can be detected in the documents of the *Magyar Kommunista Ifjúsági Szövetség* (KISZ), the *Hungarian Young Communist League*. Then, starting in 1962, when the first official jazz club – the *Ifjúsági Jazz Klub* – was established under the auspices of the KISZ, the cultural corps of the *Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt* (MSZMP), the *Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party*, slowly began to distinguish jazz from Western dance music and increasingly came to refer to it as a progressive genre, akin to classical music. This is when the ban on jazz was lifted.

The KISZ, founded in 1957, had a substantial role to play in shaping the musical scene in general. The aim of the organization was to indoctrinate the young and embed unconditional loyalty to the party in their thinking. At first, the KISZ expected strict ideological discipline from its members on cultural matters.⁹⁰ The KISZ explicitly abandoned the dogmatic youth policies of its predecessor, the *Dolgozó Ifjúság Szövetsége* (DISZ), the *Union of Working Youth*, which did not tolerate anything other than radical socialist realism. As early as in 1957 it had started to ‘culturally educate’ Hungary’s

89 The *Youth Jazz Club* was immensely popular with jazz musicians and young people craving for alternative culture. The club could open once a week and there were street-long queues outside before opening night. This was due to the fact that there was nothing other to listen to than symphonic music, operettas, and urban folk songs. The club’s mission statement was to teach Hungary’s youth to listen to and play jazz in a socialist manner. To this end the *Hungarian Young Communist League* commissioned Kornél Kertész, nicknamed ‘Lemon’ because of his strict pedagogical principles, to head the club. When interviewed, he admitted that he failed to reconcile jazz with the less constrained entertainment habits of the young. Because of a lapse in popularity, and the indoctrinating leadership, the club was first moved to Elek Fényes street and then, in 1966, closed altogether. The main reason for its decline, as beat entered the scene, lay in the changing demands and tastes of the young. For further details see Turi 1983 and Jávorszky / Sebők 2009.

90 Csatári 2007.

youth by establishing socialist clubs headed by ideologically trained young officials considered loyal to the party:

The cultural activity of the KISZ is founded on a system of youth centres. [...] The adolescents are provided with separate club halls. These clubs are headed by *communist* artists. It appears necessary to set up similar clubs for certain intellectual professions as well.⁹¹

Just as with the club leaders, the KISZ appointed the editors of the first jazz magazine exclusively on the basis of party loyalty:

We call on the Information Office of the Council of Ministers to allow the publication of the Youth Jazz Club Review by the Youth Jazz Club, as controlled and monitored by the Budapest Committee of the KISZ. [...] The aim of the Review is to inform the membership of the Youth Jazz Club of events related to jazz and to broaden the membership's knowledge with regard to cultural politics and theoretical questions. [...] Editor-in-chief: Ferenc Komornik, a contributor of the journal *Magyar Ifjúság*; publisher: György Kurcz, the secretary of the Budapest Committee of the KISZ.⁹²

As a result of the policies of the Budapest Committee of the KISZ supporting pop music culture and youth, the political authorities officially recognized jazz as a genre in 1962. Even Soviet composers came to speak approvingly of black American jazz icons at this time. Soviet composers like Shostakovich, Khachaturyan and Kabalevsky came to listen to Benny Goodman's music. The opening up of Soviet politics to the West sealed the legalization of jazz. Hungarian cultural policy, in turn, relaxed its grip on jazz once the USSR had formally accepted the genre.⁹³

As was set out above, the ban on playing jazz could be circumvented even during the darkest days of the dictatorship with some establishments

91 Political and Trade Union Archives (PIL): IV.289.13. 14/1957 – Cultural work of KISZ; italics as in the original.

92 Political and Trade Union Archives (PIL): IV.289.13. 28/1963 – Recommendation on the publication of the Youth Jazz Club Review.

93 An article published in *Sovetskaia Kultura* [*Soviet Culture*] and reviewed in *Élet és Irodalom* [*Life and Literature*] in 1961 shows the ebbing of opposition against this mode of musical expression. The author, Leonid Utësov, writes: 'It is damaging and unfeasible to make jazz a 'forbidden fruit'. We need it, as it can further our aims regarding the aesthetic education of our youth.' Indeed, soon the main concern in Hungary was no longer to see jazz accepted, but to catch up with the other Eastern Bloc countries with regard to jazz.

turning a blind eye, but in general jazz musicians were subject to disciplinary actions. From the 1960s onwards, however, only jazzmen explicitly criticising political authority or outright opposing the regime's values and norms by way of their behaviour or stage antics suffered suppression. It is against this background that Gyula Kovács was refused a passport to attend an international festival and that the American guest appearance of the progressive jazz-rock band *Syrius* was sabotaged.⁹⁴

The rise and diffusion of rock 'n' roll, kicking off in America in the 1950s and then also spreading across Europe, diverted the attention of politics away from jazz, as it ceased to be the hypnotic opiate of Western culture.⁹⁵ Jazz paid a heavy price for official acceptance and recognition, since its popular base among the youth eroded in the process. Indeed, it distanced itself from beat-loving youngsters on the one hand, and the older generation with a soft spot for music halls, operetta, and urban Hungarian folk on the other.⁹⁶ Furthermore, the unique experience associated with listening to jazz – it being associated with middle class activities and high culture (e.g. musical training and club life) and, whilst not overtly political, cosmopolitan and anti-establishment views – severely limited the scope of the audience that could comprehend, enjoy and participate in jazz.⁹⁷

94 A Los Angeles event organiser had offered *Syrius* a three-month work permit, a record deal and tour dates in April 1972. However, the Hungarian event organizer Interkoncert intercepted the letter and replied on behalf of the musicians stating that the band was not available on the given dates. *Syrius* was thus denied the opportunity to play abroad. For further details see Budai, E. (ed.): *Szétört álmok: A Syrius együttes története [Broken Dreams: The Story of Syrius]*. Stean Hungária: Öröm, 2006.

95 Modern rock 'n' roll is said to have been born in 1954, when Bill Haley released *Rock Around the Clock*. For political reasons the genre could not spread into Hungary at the time and *greasers*, dressing in rock 'n' roll fashion, were regularly beaten and stigmatised. Once political control eased, the genre was made popular by the band *Hungária* and the singer László Komár, in particular. For further details see Jávorszky / Sebők 2009.

96 This was less true of such classical forms as ragtime or dixieland, making the *Benkó Dixieland Band* – led and managed with amazing gusto and skill by Sándor Benkó – one of, if not the most popular 'jazz' band in the country.

97 Cf. Gonda 2004.

Sources and personal memories often contend that in the 1960s jazz was re-categorised as a so-called *suffering*, or, occasionally even *sponsored*, cultural product.⁹⁸ It would, however, be misleading to generalise about the relationship the regime had with any art form, including any of the music genres or even musical subcultures, as the categories devised by György Aczél – támogatott, tűrt, tiltott [sponsored, suffering, and suppressed] – were neither exclusive nor static. As before, the 1960s had their share of sponsored and suppressed musicians.

A benchmark for measuring the acceptance of and support for jazz is the frequency and length of performances broadcast on Radio Budapest and Hungarian Television, the line-up of jazz festivals organised by Radio Budapest, and the frequency with which the Hungarian record-producing company MHV, having a monopoly on the market, released jazz records.⁹⁹ With the institutionalization of jazz, Imre Kiss at Radio Budapest was the man put in charge of producing jazz programmes and organising jazz festivals. The most high-profile jazz musicians were typically prominent in other areas as well: they were in-house composers or university professors, who succeeded using both their expertise and social capital.¹⁰⁰

Regardless of these positive changes, the regime frowned upon jazz as late as in the mid-1960s, and often confused jazz bands with beat bands, the latter considered renegades. This is evident from a report submitted by the Party and Mass Organizations Department of the Budapest Party Committee to the Culture Department of the MSZMP Central Committee (KB):

On the one hand, intellectual white-collar workers are fervent supporters of classical music; on the other hand, most of the youth uncritically suck up Western jazz. Public taste has been eroded by musicians employed in the hospitality sector, as

98 Cf. Jávorszky / Sebők 2009.

99 MHV retained its monopoly until as late as the mid-1980s. The releases of the Adyton Association, supported for some time by the Soros Foundation, effected some change; in conjunction with the jazz journal *Jazz Studium*, for example, the label gave a voice to the avant-garde movement.

100 Such very widely employed and celebrated jazz musicians of the 1960s and 1970s included Sándor Benkó and band, the Bergendy band, János Gonda, Aladár Pege, Béla Szakcsi Lakatos, and György Vukán.

their sets are of poor quality, their artistic management has been neglected, and their repertoire has been dictated by financial concerns.¹⁰¹

This dogmatic and unsophisticated attitude also is to be blamed for the controversial incident that happened at the first major beat concert – and first major amateur music festival – organised at the Sportcsarnok indoor arena in Budapest in May 1963: Of the bands invited to play, *Illés* was at that time immensely popular with the young.¹⁰² It mostly played covers of foreign beat bands, prominently songs by *The Hurrricanes* and *The Shadows*. When the *Benkó Dixieland Band* appeared on the same stage playing traditional (and popular!) jazz, it was booed and pelted with eggs by the youngsters. The reactions of the cultural leadership and especially Aczél were fierce, resulting in sanctions being imposed against *Illés*.¹⁰³ This response revealed two things: first, that the authorities were not yet able to distinguish between beat and jazz, and second, that it was not so much the genres themselves as the behaviour of the bands and their fans that forced the authorities to react in the way they did.¹⁰⁴

The *Benkó Dixieland Band* came to be the prototype of how musicians and other entertainment artists could conform to the system. The same

101 National Archives of Hungary (MOL): M-KS 288–35. 10/1964 – A report on some issues concerning the ideological and cultural education of the working youth.

102 Many contemporaries attest that *Illés* also played as a side act in the Youth Jazz Club at the Dália café – jazzy numbers rather than beat songs.

103 Aczél initiated the official response at the meeting of the Agitation and Propaganda Department of the MSZMP on 7 August 1963: ‘Comrade Aczél has informed the Committee of what he found on the ‘jazz-file’. He believes that the main responsibility for this extreme and intolerable incident rests with the KISZ. The Committee recommends that the members of AgitProp, KISZ, the Ministry of Domestic Affairs and the Ministry of Education examine the problem and, if necessary, disband certain jazz bands (e.g. the *Illés* band). We further suggest that there be less dance music broadcast on television and radio.’ Cf. Szőnyei, T.: *Nyilván tartottak. Titkos szolgák a magyar rock körül 1960–1990* [*Under Surveillance. State Security and Hungarian Rock 1960–1990*]. Magyar Narancs – Tihanyi Rév Kiadó, 2005, pp. 220–221.

104 A more discerning approach – characterised by ‘give a little, take a little’ cultural policies and Kádár’s famous quote ‘Those not against us are with us.’ – came to typify the whole era; nonetheless, control and backlashes ruled the day until the mid-1980s.

applies to the *Bergendy Band*, and later the music groups *Neoton*, *Omega*, and *Karthágó*, which impressed with ever more elaborate stage designs.¹⁰⁵ These professionally run bands, working in diverse genres, conspicuously avoided any political or social issues in their lyrics. By putting their alliances with cultural policymakers to good use and exploiting the loopholes in the system, they procured continuous opportunities to perform at domestic festivals and live music clubs, regular broadcasts on radio and television, foreign tours, and record deals.

The slowly consolidating Kádár regime, in stark contrast to the policies pursued in the 1950s, paid a lot more attention to light music – including jazz – and the effect this had.¹⁰⁶ What drove this initiative was the MSZMP's aim to educate the youth. By making good use of the various organizations controlling culture (KISZ, OSZK, ORI, Interkoncert), the authorities did not lump diverse genres together, but singled out some bands to receive official support while tolerating and actively counteracting others. These decisions were however often haphazard. Some musicians or bands could rise above the others by way of alliances, lack of political stance, co-operation with the authorities, or a combination of these factors. Once the political pigeon-holing had been done, attitudes towards individual musicians and bands only changed very rarely and if so extremely slowly.

Despite the fact that Hungary was the first among the Eastern Bloc countries to institutionalise jazz in music schools in 1965, and the genre received ever more exposure on festivals, the radio, records and in the press, it never became a widespread, culturally influential force. With the rise of rock 'n' roll and beat, jazz lost its popular audience and started to strive towards high culture and classical music.¹⁰⁷ The main reasons for this – according to historical documents uncovered so far and such other sources as interviews – appears to have been its suppression by a dogmatic

105 Cf. Jávorszky / Sebők 2009.

106 Both the MSZMP and KISZ toyed with the idea of having a sociological survey conducted to map the musical preferences of the youth. See for instance National Archives of Hungary (MOL) 288. f. 35/1964 and Political and Trade Union Archives (PIL) 289. f. 13/1957.

107 Jazz, as opposed to the more rebellious rock 'n' roll and beat, was not merely a musical style, but asked for a certain artistic attitude and mindset. It also affiliated itself with literature, painting, and other contemporary arts.

state, the provincial officials positioned as gatekeepers,¹⁰⁸ and the lack of a sufficiently large audience able to engage with jazz. The death of journals dedicated to jazz and their irregular publication also imply a certain indifference towards the genre.¹⁰⁹

The KISZ compiled a lengthy report *on the principles of the communist education of the youth* for the Cultural Department of the MSZMP KB in 1964. This summarised how the organization sought to ‘discreetly’ increase its influence among the youth and implement its educational policies, all strictly in line with the resolutions issued by the MSZMP:

The mission of the Hungarian Young Communist League is to further *the communist education of the youth*. It therefore is an important political issue to know *where and how the youth spend their leisure time!* The authority and public image of our organization may be gauged by its sound and discreet guidance and the organization of the youth’s increasing leisure time. This will determine whether the KISZ may become an attractive and popular organization for young people. Without a good knowledge about leisure time in general and the various options available, and without a continuous monitoring of the inclinations of young people, our organization cannot fulfil its social mission, cannot gain, keep, and reinforce the love and trust our young people have in the MSZMP.¹¹⁰

Ten primary areas of educational focus were delineated: 1. reading; 2. film; 3. theatre; 4. music; 5. taste in the fine arts; 6. radio and television; 7. artistic activities; 8. modern ballroom dancing; 9. physical education and sports; and 10. excursions, tourism, camping. The relevant ministries provided

108 Imre Kiss, the programme director at Radio Budapest – a church organist by profession – was such a gatekeeper for jazz, while Péter Erdős played such a role with regard to pop and rock at MHV.

109 Jazz had no print medium of its own before 1963. The first to emerge was the *Youth Jazz Club Review (Ifjúsági Jazzklub híradója)* published after the *Youth Jazz Club* had started at the *Dália* café. This intelligent journal was only published every four months and, unfortunately, was already discontinued after six issues. Again, there was no jazz magazine until 1974, when the *Jazz Tájékoztató [Jazz Informer]* was started, initially with a circulation of 250 copies.

110 National Archives of Hungary (MOL): 288. 35 8/1964. 3 – A report of the KISZ KB Executive Committee: Insights into leisure time regarding some key areas of self-education, relaxation, and entertainment; italics as in the original. The material mentions the Youth for Socialism movement and the foundation of the National Mass-Educational Institute.

Radio Budapest, Hungarian Television, the trade unions (SZOT), various mass organizations (*Magyar Testnevelési és Sportszövetség* [Hungarian PE and Sports League], TIT, etc.), and such other interested parties like hospitality venues with a list of demands and principles.

The report had a great deal to say about dance music and, indirectly, jazz. It preferred ‘sophisticated jazz’ – made palatable for the regime – over modern dance music – read beat – and tried to build the genre up as an alternative music that the KISZ could offer the youth. In this respect it failed completely:

The growing influence of *modern dance music* is understandable and completely natural, if not entirely desirable. Although it washes away memories of the sickly sweet music of the 1900s, harking back to the ‘good-old pre-war years’, it also has certain destructive qualities of its own. The ‘dance boom’ produced a host of amateur dance bands that young people flocked to see and hear. The guitar became chic, and six times as many guitars are sold today compared to two years ago. Talented, trained musicians quickly rose above the rest, but when they attempted to interpret more sophisticated jazz, their audience gradually eroded. Not that of the poor bands, however! Some bands – usually in Budapest – with a slighter helping of talent, but with no exhibitionism to spare, took their ‘style’ from the dance music of foreign radio stations (e.g. Radio Free Europe, Radio Télévision Luxembourg), watered it down through imitation and ‘enriched’ it with *the eroticism of overblown rhythms*. Amateur crooners cannot popularise the sometimes silly and shoddy Hungarian dance music lyrics, but can cause a lot of damage by imitating Western idols and performing their badly translated, nonsensical lyrics. Young people who crave for modern dance music – particularly in Budapest – have gathered around such singers and bands. As a result, it has become difficult to distinguish between youth with cosmopolitan or existentialist leanings and those with simply bad taste.¹¹¹

From the 1960s onwards, official youth policy was consciously attempting to counterbalance rebellious beat and rock with jazz. The regime separated it off from the hospitality services, reinterpreted it as a cultural alternative, a sort of revolutionary tool to make it more appealing to young people – albeit without particular success.¹¹²

111 National Archives of Hungary (MOL): 288. 35 8/1964 – On the principles of the communist education of youth; italics as in the original; underline by the author.

112 Cf. Finkelstein 1961; Nagy 1962.

The youth welcome quality dance and jazz music, flock in great numbers to KISZ events, and the recently established youth jazz clubs prove that jazz, much more sophisticated than dance music, requires a higher level of musical refinement and greater virtuosity both to perform and to access it. It thus is a good candidate for preparing the youth for modern classical music. The efforts KISZ-affiliates have made to nurture the youth by way of dance and jazz have so far only involved a small circle of young people, but *rapid* and *radical* solutions to the *basic* problems are essential for further progress. [...] The artistic and professional control of professional musicians should be separated from the hospitality sector; their training and creative output should be overseen by qualified professional and political organizations. [...] The Music College and the musical vocational schools should introduce dance and jazz studies, and should also offer courses for professional and amateur dance musicians. Jazz clubs should be encouraged, and professional jazz musicians should be called upon to help in their work; as jazz music develops and assumes a higher level of musical culture, extensive knowledge of its musical history as well as virtuoso performance skills will be needed. [...] Every district in Budapest should have its appointed venue – at least second class – where, as arranged by the local KISZ committees and the proprietors of the respective venues, a once- or twice-weekly session of non-alcoholic musical entertainment should be organised between 6 and 10 pm. These evenings are to be overseen by the social authorities. To this end controlled set lists are to be used and the etiquette and wardrobes to be checked.¹¹³

The cultural thaw evinced in the document above, the use of indoor facilities in the symbolic Youth Park in winter, and the opening of the *Youth Jazz Club* in 1962 all served to regulate jazz and its audience, but also divided opinions in jazz circles. Whereas general staff was placed in control of concerts in the Youth Park, reliable jazzmen and KISZ officials were put in charge of those in the *Youth Jazz Club*.¹¹⁴

The Jazz Department of the *Béla Bartók Musical Arts Vocational School* started in 1965. Headed by János Gonda it certainly made a major contribution to the integration of the genre, but at the same time this kind of institutionalization did not inspire the jazz scene. Also, as the regime accepted

113 National Archives of Hungary (MOL): M-KS 288–35. 8/1964; italics as in the original; underline by the author.

114 Apart from football matches and organised Labour Day processions, there was virtually no opportunity for thousands of people to gather. The regime dreaded and thus restricted assembly. Whenever it created mass events, it sought to control them closely. Cf. Balázs, M.: “Az Ifipark” [Youth Park]. In: *Budapesti Negyed* [*The Budapest Quarter*], 1994, 2(1): 137–150.

the graduating certificate only as a vocation to complement the secondary school certificate, jazz still could not become an officially sponsored art, as classical music was. Jazz club life thus only received some indirect support, usually through the KISZ organizations, though this dwindled from the 1970s onwards. Other important and widely demanded steps were never taken. For example, jazz was never included in the musical curriculum at school, nor could jazz be studied at university level. This made it very difficult to recruit young blood from among those studying classical or folk music. The establishment of the Jazz Department at the *Béla Bartók Musical Arts Vocational School* thus simply meant that jazz was less regulated from 1965 onwards, that the regime had started to passively support it, and thus negated any notion of freedom that jazz had once stood for.¹¹⁵ It was also in 1965 that MHV released its first jazz record: János Gonda and his band were the first beneficiaries of the compromise between jazz and the powers that be.

The sources examined thus show that the reason for the regime's more positive approach to jazz was not that it had fundamentally changed its attitude towards the genre, or had come to recognize its unique artistic merits, but that it wanted to mould the jazz scene to fit its own ideas and infuse it with Soviet ideology. Also, it wanted to arrest its own development by way of its own institutions (i.e. community and youth centres). At the heart of all this was the – ultimately unfulfilled – desire to contain the effects of the new musical genres.

115 In an interview conducted in 1985, the jazz guitarist Sándor Szabó described the principles guiding jazz training in the 1980s as retrograde: '[At the jazz department in the early 1980s] there was nothing but bebop and the swing beat. Everything else they detested. Once I took one of my compositions to them: 'Wonderful!', they said, 'But we can't use it, it's not jazz!' They were training skilled musical labour there; everyone copied improvisations as if they were classical motifs. My hero is Szabados. Every note he plays contains everything that Hungarian musicians have expressed since Béla Bartók. He tried his best to make jazz truly Hungarian. [...] I'm an amateur, I don't play in six bands at the same time, I don't want to make a living out of jazz: I'm free!' (Libisch, K.: "Amatőr vagyok...: Életrajzi portré Szabó Sándor gitárosról" [I'm an Amateur...: Portrait of Sándor Szabó, Guitarist]. In: *Polifon*, 1985, 1(4), p. 19)

An important side-effect of the legalization of Hungarian jazz was that it distanced itself from mass culture and young people. The relationship jazz had with its audience was qualified by the fact that the genre was dissociated from musical entertainment, which in turn undermined its popularity. The values that jazz musicians insisted upon – such as freedom, independence, individuality, tolerance, and pacifism – and which characterise the genre to this day came into their own in the modern jazz of the 1940s and 1950s and even more so in the free and avant-garde jazz of the 1960s.¹¹⁶ The disharmonious, impulsive sound, the irregular metres, the intensive emotional elements characterising this type of jazz made the music a kind of critical commentary of its time. Jazz histories point out that the former style reached Hungary in the late 1950s, the latter in the 1970s. What is without question is that the above values continued to clash with the ideology of the communist party right up to its fall.

VI. Jazz culture in the 1970s and 1980s

1. Jazz concerts and festivals

An indication that official attitude towards jazz had changed was that from the 1960s onwards Hungarian musicians could travel to international jazz festivals (e.g. Bled, Dresden, Karlovy Vary, Montreux, Pori, Sacramento, San Sebastian, Warsaw, to name but the most important ones) and were allowed to work abroad.¹¹⁷ This new-found freedom only applied to those jazz musicians, however, who did not openly oppose the politics of the MSZMP and who were unlikely to defect, such as Gyula Kovács, the jazz-rock band *Syrius*, or the *Kelényi Band*.¹¹⁸ Between 1965 and 1971 Interkoncert and ORI (Országos Rendező Iroda, the National Organising Agency)

116 Notably in bebop, cool, hard bop, free jazz emerging in the late 1950s, and in (jazz-rock) fusion appearing in the late 1960s. Cf. Jost 2003.

117 The musician who made most extensive use of these new opportunities was Attila Garay (b. 1932), who played a lot in Turkey and in the Scandinavian countries, mostly in bars and jazz clubs; cf. Turi 1983, pp. 43–44.

118 The latter was allowed to go on tour to Iraq with the Magyar Állami Népi Együttes [State Folk Ensemble] and the singer Anka Kersics in 1959. The band behaved outrageously, however, and was called home before the tour had ended. Cf. National Archives of Hungary (MOL): XIX-A-33-a 1284 d.

brought such American stars to Budapest as Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Ella Fitzgerald, Dave Brubeck, Thelonious Monk, and Charles Mingus.¹¹⁹ These world famous musicians invariably drew huge

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- 119 Péter Szigeti recounted his experiences with Charles Mingus before his Budapest concert in an interview conducted by the author in 2008: ‘And another story, about the Charles Mingus band. I think it must have been in 1970. The band had been invited and was looked after by Interkoncert, also run by the Ministry, of course, so they took care of everything. The band arrived at Ferihegy Airport, the comrades picked them up and took them to the hotel. From there it was straight to the concert venue, then back to the hotel, then off to the airport the next morning. Could they move around freely? Well, there was a restaurant inside the hotel, and the musicians could also go to the hotel bar, if they wished. Sometimes, the American embassy in Zugliget would host a party for them. I attended some of these (as an interpreter), as did a couple of officials from the Hungarian Association of Musicians and sometimes also some other musicians. [...] What was interesting about Mingus was that he was quite a deviant guy. There exist lots of stories about this. In Paris, for example, he pushed the piano over the balcony onto the street – he had got upset about something. Another star threw a TV out the window. There are two plotlines here. The first is that my wife was working at the bar in the Liberty Hotel. She called me one afternoon, sometime around 1970 (I must have been on a day off, or had just finished my shift), saying, ‘There’s this man sitting here.’ She added that he seemed familiar and that she had seen him on an album cover. She described him, and so I took our child and was on my way. When I arrived, I saw Mingus sitting there like some kind of Buddha in the corner, in semi-darkness, and with the other musicians around him looking like courtiers. Mingus did not like to be told how to travel, so he had simply gone to the train station in Rome (which is where he came from), taken the train to Budapest, and sat down in the first hotel he happened on. The band arrived at Keleti railway station and so ended up at the Liberty Hotel, two or three days before the concert. The Interkoncert representative duly went to the airport at the predetermined time, but could not find the band anywhere. The officials were shocked. I couldn’t care less; I was interested in everything else. I’m not one for practical things. I took the band sightseeing and such. The saxophone player wanted a *tárogató* (a Turkish pipe commonly used in Hungarian folk music), the pianist a piano. He even ordered one for himself. I don’t know what became of that. We couldn’t get a *tárogató*. I sent him one later – and it reached him in a quite an unorthodox way. From then on, all of the European saxophone players came here to get *tárogátós*. [...] Well, I took Mingus and company to Buda Castle, and of course to the bars with live music. [...] If I remember correctly, Mingus finally said, ‘OK, let’s call the organiser about when and where to play!’ And so we called the venue; I didn’t

crowds, whether they played at the Erkel Theatre, the Operett Theatre, the Music Academy, or the Budapest Sports Arena (Armstrong played at the Népstadion, for example). The recognition jazz enjoyed in Hungary could be traced by the invitations extended to US jazz musicians. This thaw in relations was due to a milder spell in the Cold War and took its cue from contemporary Soviet cultural policy, now welcoming jazz.

In the late 1960s, organised by Radio Budapest at first, jazz festivals outside Budapest started to spring up. The most prominent ones were in Debrecen, Szeged, Székesfehérvár (the Alba Regia Jazz Festival), Nagykánizsa, and, from the 1980s, in Győr (from which grew the Mediawave Festival), providing opportunities to hear new and foreign jazz bands and to expand the audience interested in the genre.

2. Club culture

The year 1979 saw the establishment of the National Jazz Club Network in Tatabánya with János Gonda as its patron, uniting all country jazz clubs into one single organisation. The history of jazz clubs in Hungary nevertheless goes back as far as the early 1960s, as the first official club – the *Dália* Jazz Club in Budapest – was established in 1962. Clubs that solely focused on jazz were initially hard to come by; their numbers only started to swell in the 1970s, and then mostly in the country. The first of these were founded in universities, colleges, and community centres, and although local KISZ organisations always had to be consulted, the operation and survival of these clubs usually depended on the organisational skills and perseverance of individuals.¹²⁰ Although the genre was given a green light in 1965, its low popular appeal prevented it from becoming self-sufficient.

A sociological survey was conducted in 1981, the first to provide empirical data on the consumption of jazz in Hungary since 1945. Attila Malecz, an active jazz musician and band leader at the time,¹²¹ was the

even know who to call. And, I presume there were a lot of urgent telephone calls made after I had put down the receiver.’

120 Cf. the interview conducted by the author with Péter Szigeti in 2008.

121 Attila Malecz (b. 1957), jazz pianist and composer, was the leader of the band BOP ART. A graduate in mathematics from the University of Economics in Budapest, he wrote PhD thesis on *A jazz Magyarországon [Jazz in Hungary]*

project leader and although the Mass Communications Research Centre in Budapest sponsored and published the survey, it was only made available to a small group of experts.¹²² The survey took the jazz club crowd as its target audience. The reason given for this was that apart from the odd jazz programme on the radio or on television and a concert now and then, jazz fans had no authentic and accessible path to jazz but through jazz clubs. The underlying assumption was that radio and television, high-profile concerts and the radio industry did not have a substantial part to play in promoting the genre. As a result, their audiences were judged more varied and less competent.¹²³

Between March and May 1980 the survey examined a total of eleven clubs, seven in the capital and four in the country. Many of the interviewees being part of the contemporary jazz subculture, the problem of ‘rushed’ gigs, i.e. performances given back to back at different venues, was cited as an issue. While promising easy money, this practice resulted in fewer established bands and many more temporary band-projects cramming in as many performances as possible. The survey also asserted that jazz clubs did not encourage the formation of new band and believed that its assumption was verified by the findings presented in the survey.

Jazz clubs were defined for the purposes of the survey as institutions that staged a jazz-like programme at least once a month. These clubs, characteristic of jazz life at the time, did not open every day and their regulars were not all jazz fans.

(1981). Assisting Strém Kálmán, he also took part in musical research at the Mass Communications Research Institute. Cf. ‘The cult of noise reigns in the world, there is destruction wherever it goes, as the spirit of good, of creativity is subdued’. In: *Jazz Press* (special issue), 1990/2, pp. 6–7.

122 The survey examined the popularity of prominent jazz clubs in the jazz scene and the value orientation of their regulars, using questionnaires as well as qualitative methods. The survey revealed certain shortcomings, however: For instance, it was based on an arbitrary sample audience (including all jazz fans frequenting jazz clubs; excluding all jazz fans not frequenting jazz clubs), but drew generalising conclusions.

123 Radio Budapest, a very influential medium for jazz, only played 7–8 hours of jazz a week, which accounted for a mere 4–5 per cent of its broadcasts. Cf. Malecz 1981, p. 149.

There were in total 33 jazz clubs active outside Budapest in autumn 1980. Some cities could maintain several of them, like Szeged (4), Miskolc (3), Veszprém (3), Debrecen (2), Tatabánya (2), Győr (2), and Székesfehérvár (2). The majority of these jazz clubs (18, making up 55 per cent) operated in the seven county capitals, where, typically, there was also a college or university. The author also mentioned, however, that many of these clubs were experimental and volatile enterprises (e.g. jazz basements, jazz cafés, company clubs) and that 30 per cent had no live music.

Budapest had 19 clubs at the time, underlining the importance the capital had for the genre. The programmes here were much more intense and the audiences more numerous (which is the reason the author gives for including seven clubs from the capital and only four from the country). For practical reasons, however, jazz festivals were generally held in locations other than Budapest: while they still attracted musicians and bands from the capital, radio stations could cover them more easily and at less cost.

Regardless of the methodological flaws, the survey did produce at least one important finding: The almost 100 clubs that existed in Hungary did not amount to much, as they were largely inactive, i.e. without concerts and the sessions were few and far between (every two or three weeks at best). To make matters worse, almost 50 per cent of the regulars did not frequent the clubs to listen to jazz, but simply to enjoy some kind of entertainment. In Budapest's largest jazz club, the *Építők*, for example, the manager preferred blues and rock nights, as turnover always increased then. But there also were exceptions, institutions where jazz mattered most: in the *Kassák*, the jazz club in Marczibányi Square, the *Várklub*, and in the jazz club in Vác.

Gonda painted a similar picture in an article published in 1985.¹²⁴ He approached the topic by discussing the regular jazz concerts and festivals organized by the radio stations, mostly staging foreign, in particularly American musicians (e.g. Randy Brecker, Eddie Gomez, Paul Motian, Anthony Braxton, Charlie Mariano, Joanne Brackeen, Joe Henderson, Buster Williams). The veteran Dave Brubeck drew an audience almost 10,000 people strong at the *Sportcsarnok* in spring 1984, and in the same year Chick Corea and Gary Burton were applauded by even more at the same venue,

124 Gonda, J.: "Hol hallható jazz Magyarországon?" [Where Can Jazz Be Listened To In Hungary?]. In: *Polifon*, 1985, 1(1), pp. 10–12.

not to mention the *Art Ensemble of Chicago* playing at the Alba Regia Festival in Székesfehérvár, also in 1984. These events created a most lively atmosphere around jazz and raised its profile above the everyday routine. A much greater than the normal cross-section of people was present at these concerts than in the clubs.

A well-operating jazz club – according to Gonda – has regular opening hours and sufficient funding to organise live performances and shows. An appreciative community is also key, with regulars forming a cohesive and responsive coterie. In this constellation the management can procure a varied programme that appeals as much to the club members as to the jazz musicians, resulting in an authentic ‘jazz atmosphere’. Gonda was quick to add that such clubs were very rare in Hungary at the time: ‘Most of the clubs operate only irregularly, and are entirely dependent on the parent organisation’s (KISZ, council, college, university) financial support – and this is on the wane. There is no ‘cohesive hard core’ to the membership, there is no organised membership to begin with, live music is scarce, as are truly interesting programmes. The atmosphere of course also fails to materialise. University clubs are often in an even more peculiar position. Frequently established as the result of the dedicated lobbying of a well-connected student leader enthusiastic about jazz or a handful of jazz aficionados, the clubs often falter with the graduation of the original leaders. The problem is aggravated if the club leader (often an incompetent student appointed by the community centre as a go-between) is enthusiastic, but knows little to nothing about organisation, administration, and jazz.’¹²⁵

There were about 80 clubs in operation in Hungary in the 1980s; the exact number is difficult to determine, since many existed only in name, or closed down and the started off again under another name. One of the problems was that it was difficult to know what was happening, when, and where. There existed no programme leaflets, the clubs were in the nooks and crannies of towns, and often only insiders were privy to their programme details.¹²⁶

125 Ibid, p. 10.

126 Endes, M.: “A Debreceni Jazznapok 30 éve” [30 Years of the Debrecen Jazz Week]. Debreceni Kult. és Fesztiválközpont Kft.: Debrecen, 2001.

The *Jazz Informer* sought to bridge this gap between 1974 and 1981, but given that it was only published every four months, it failed. Gonda further mentioned that jazz clubs abroad were not some posh bar or elegant salon inside a restaurant or hotel, but rather felt like cafés or bars in Hungary: ‘Sometimes these smoke-filled jazz joints host world-famous jazzmen, who play among the clatter of glasses and plates, as in the Village Vanguard.’¹²⁷

‘Hospitality jazz’ – in other words profitable jazz – came to an end in Hungary sometime in the 1960s. This kind of mentality is now alien to both audience and industry. Attempts to bring jazz and restaurants together – such as the *Kornél Kertész Quartet* in the bar of the Astoria Hotel, the *Pege Band* in the bar of the Liberty Hotel, or the jazz club in the *Pilvax* café – have all come to an end. Apparently, Gonda thought that the main issue was that the jazz musicians did not play to please the audience – on the other hand, it was precisely such ‘wise old men’ as Bubi Beamter and Gyula Kovács who performed at the *Pilvax*.¹²⁸ This is not to mention the conflict that traditionally existed between the hospitality industry and jazz. As a new initiative, the renovated Budapest *Lido* Café featured jazz (Róbert Rátonyi, Frigyes Pleszkán, Róbert Szacsky) in the afternoon, but only to complement the standard fare of revue, folk dancing, and Gypsy music. As yet there existed no place for the less deep-pocketed customer to regularly enjoy good jazz.

3. Sociological features of jazz listeners and jazz fans

Thanks to the Kádár-era consolidations, Hungarian jazz could start again in the 1960s. This led to a mushrooming of jazz bands. Their artistic activities, however, were closely watched by the state, as archive documents show very clearly.¹²⁹ Jazz re-emerged just as the hospitality spaces could partially open up again, and it found a home in cafés, clubs, and night bars. Almost

127 Gonda 1985, p. 10.

128 Cf. interview conducted by the author with Péter Szigeti in 2008.

129 The meetings of the Executive Committee of Budapest Council, or those of its Mass Education Department (cf. MOL XXIII.102.a and 114.) show this most vividly, but also agent reports held in the Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security Services. They all reveal a lot about what official (state) culture thought of jazz.

all of the Hungarian jazz musicians played in pubs, usually out of financial necessity, as concerts and festivals were rare, no matter how much support jazz received from the state. In the 1970s and 1980s, the KISZ tried to breathe new life into jazz in community centres and cultural centres, which also housed most of the jazz clubs. All this coincided with the spread of avant-garde and fusion. From the 1980s onwards, most of the concerts and other jazz-related events had effectively concentrated in a few cities in the country (i.e. Debrecen, Győr, Szeged, Székesfehérvár, and Veszprém), but its primary audience and principal creative circle remained in the capital.¹³⁰

Hungarian (and foreign) jazz considers the 1970s and 1980s as a period of great creative freedom, but the genre had, by this time, come to correspond with the lifestyle of a very small ‘intellectual elite’ – indeed, many see this as a decadent shift. Beat and rock swept away its popular base, it lost its political significance, and it appealed to only a select few. Some jazz musicians adjusted by delving into social criticism (*free jazz*), some took up new and profitable styles (*fusion*), still others tried to capitalise on the lingering popularity of classic jazz (*ragtime*, *dixieland*), but there was no doubt that the genre had lost its significance.

130 Cf. Malecz 1981.