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## Jazz in the “Eastern Bloc” – Resistance through Cultural Transfer (Summary)

Research project at the FU Berlin

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The music of freedom, democracy and modernity as well as a symbol of the *American way of life* – these are the central elements of a myth that has surrounded jazz since its inception, and which became influential particularly in the state socialist societies of East-Central Europe after 1945. Scene insiders accord jazz an important role in resisting the state socialist order. We need to differentiate here: Forms of targeted political resistance are scarcely to be found in East-Central European jazz. Even at first glance, however, such “apolitical” phenomena as the simple joy of playing and improvisation or the existence of a jazz scene that was difficult for the regime to control necessarily made this music and its environment a political factor of the first rank, which was also shaped by the connection of jazz to its country of origin. The transfer of U.S. American cultural forms helped to bolster oppositional circles intellectually, which in turn was exploited by U.S. American propaganda officers who made jazz a political weapon in the Cold War.

The aim of the project (duration: 3 years) is to describe the impact of jazz in state socialism and contribute thereby to a cultural history of state socialism from a perspective that scholars have largely neglected thus far. To this end, the project will explore the protagonists, musical forms of expression, scope of action, media and institutions of jazz in the period from the end of the Second World War to the collapse of the state socialist regimes in Poland, the GDR, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia in an interdisciplinary context. In order to elucidate the specific intermediate position of jazz between resistance on the one hand and alternative culture on the other, and at the same time to illuminate the rebellious quality of jazz in its habitual character (Bourdieu), the working concept of “resistance” (Widerständigkeit) will be used to analyze the way in which jazz was politically charged.

The verification of the postulated “resistant” character of jazz is being undertaken in a total of eight closely interrelated sub-projects, which (with the exception of the fields treated by the project director and the project coordinator) have been organized as doctoral stipends. The first five sub-projects analyze the position of the jazz scene in the various societies. There are two conceivable poles here: Was jazz one of the germ-cells of a future civil society, or did those in power succeed, as it were, in “silencing” jazz as a field of social opposition? An example of the former case is the Polish jazz scene of the 1970s (sub-project 1), while the second case is represented by the fate of the Czechoslovakian “Jazz Section”, which was soon destroyed by the regime (sub-project 2). A typical intermediate form of “toleration” emerged in Hungarian Kádárism (sub-project 3). The completely opposite roles of the state towards the jazz scenes in Poland and the GDR become evident in a comparative analysis (sub-project 4). The widespread perception of jazz as “Jewish music”, particularly in Eastern and Eastern-Central Europe, and the contributions of Jewish musicians to the development of this musical genre is a further focus (sub-project 5). We hope that the work of these sub-projects, taken together, will describe the complex configurations of the jazz scenes in their dependence on the respective incarnations of state socialism.

The three remaining sub-projects will explore how resistance was encouraged precisely through the cultural transfer and adaptation of American motifs. U.S. propaganda officers deployed jazz as a weapon to weaken state socialist regimes (sub-project 6). In the Eastern-Central European countries themselves, the synthesis of local musical traditions with American jazz helped to strengthen their own identity concepts (sub-project 7). Particularly in Polish jazz, the intersection of the productive reception and transformation of the U.S. American model, the activation of national traditions, identity formation and the heightening of resistance is clearly evident (sub-project 8).

The joint result of the sub-projects should ultimately be to develop a theoretically and empirically sound thesis on the influence of jazz on state socialist societies that provides inspiration for further research on the function of other musical styles (rock, pop, classical) in the period under investigation.