

# REVIEW | Remixing European Jazz Culture

*Kristin McGee*

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In *Remixing European Jazz Culture* Kristin McGee examines a culture of remixing jazz live that emerged in the 1990s in major European cities, as well as performance, recording and distribution practices that have transformed this culture since the 1980s. Additionally, the author provides a multifaceted cultural representation of European jazz and its protagonists. Musicians developed hybrid jazz styles by bringing studio tools into live performance. These artists and collectives cultivated some sort of transnational jazz community, regarding their musical techniques, which blurred the lines between studio engineered jazz production techniques and live jazz performance practice. By reintroducing youth cultures to these hybrid jazz styles and by reviving dance as a participatory act, remixing as a part of contemporary jazz has earned a significant place within European jazz culture. McGee explores the work of these often-overlooked artists, how they have contributed to the popularity and revitalisation of jazz in the twenty-first century. She also examines how cultural signifiers such as gender and race impact performance practice in the fields of jazz, crossover and transnational popular music. In her analysis, McGee unravels the complexities of the phenomenon by inspecting the function of popular music aesthetics, the role of music videos in jazz cultures, as well as the influence of record labels for jazz promotion. The geographically organized chapters in McGee's book provide engaging accounts of the hybrid jazz scenes of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Berlin, London and Oslo. Particular focus is given not just to key performers, but also to

the venues, record companies, festivals and jazz promotion organisations that have shaped jazz culture across Europe.

The multifaceted critical analysis of selected European jazz scenes makes the book a substantial contribution to the study of popular music, especially regarding the analyses of liveness and music videos, topics that remain heavily understudied in relation to jazz. McGee's analyses focus on the reuse of visual and audio iconography connected with recorded soundscapes and footage of live concert venues within music videos for manifesting a dialogical engagement within Europe's jazz past. Concerning the fact that women have been "continuously overlooked in the most prestigious areas of jazz practice, marketing, and documentation" (Tucker 2003), McGee's book is an attempt to "reveal the contributions of a variety of performers from various musical backgrounds and identities" (4) that differs from most scholarly texts that mainly focus on male musicianship.

McGee's starting point for the exploration of European jazz culture in selected cities, contexts and periods during the last three decades is the chapter "Jazz in Post-War Europe". As the opening of the book, it offers a critical overview of the development of European jazz following the Second World War. By focusing on the free, collective networks of the 1960s and 1970s, McGee uncovers the role of popular music for "stimulating crossover jazz movements" (21), examines the function of European, as well as transnational, record labels and the role of the counterculture, festivals and networks from the 1980s onwards. The author demonstrates how digitalisation leads to new modes of visibility, regarding jazz and popular music networks and crossover remix projects. This chapter makes the book a substantial contribution to musicological research on jazz in Post War Europe, regarding remixing culture, networks and digitalisation.

Chapter 2, 3 and 4 explore the scenes of selected cities, focusing on different aspects in jazz culture, such as crossover jazz platforms and jazz dance club series in Amsterdam (46-58), the Berlin based, producer-led outfit Jazzanova (63-80) or the role of Jazzland Recordings (98-116), an electronic jazz record label based in Oslo. In chapter 2 McGee offers a critical review of theoretical debates about "scenes, networks and circulations" (40-43) and analyses crossover jazz club series by drawing on her own ethnographic research. She concludes that "in Amsterdam's thriving electronic jazz spaces, tourists and locals together revel in the urban festivity and live performativity provided by cosmopolitan electronic jazz collectives" (58). Another aspect that intrigued me, was the role of Black musical archives for the sampling techniques of the collective Jazzanova. The DJs and producers "have brought forth the sounds of the Black past into their own transformative moment, forcing us to reconsider our own place in music history" (87). The author argues that priorities in relation to jazz praxis are transmitted through certain values and (studio-oriented) practices that include a particular knowledge of records, collectives, and collections of Black music. In her analysis, the author clearly refers to the responsibility of white, privileged, European artists in the process of creating "hybrid jazz-inflected grooves" (18) through various jazz production techniques. Studying the recording archive encourages us to learn more about the modes and techniques of inclusion and exclusion, of community building and resilience, in jazz culture and its hybrid spaces.

Lastly, I would like to highlight chapter 5, wherein McGee investigates the current jazz dance revival in Sweden by focusing on Lindy Hop and the Herräng. The author offers an insight into a jazz culture that prioritises the dancing body instead of recorded music. The author investigates the connection between Black American Jazz Dancers, especially the original Savoy Lindy Hop dancers, and European Jazz Dancers that “has led to Herräng’s prominence in the international swing dance community” (119). The Lindy Hop emerged out of the African American communities in Harlem, New York City, in the late 1920s as a fusion of various dances that were popular during its development. By using the movements and improvisation of African American dances along with the formal eight-count structure of European partner dances, Lindy Hop combines elements of partnered and solo dancing. The 1980s marked a renewed interest in the dance from (mainly white) American, Swedish and British dancers. This leads to the question “How did the Lindy Hop become white?”. By researching the Chicago swing dance scene, Black Hawk Hancock finds that “dancers fail to understand how the white embrace of the Lindy Hop may not be the result of a lack of African American interest in the dance but symbolic of the structural dynamics that define racial relations in contemporary American society” (2008: 793). McGee focuses on aspects such as the “original European Black Atlantic lindy roots/routes” (122), the “African American ‘oldtimers’ transnational relationship to the camp” (137) or the camp’s “library talks as embodied jazz discourse” (138) to critically reflect upon the racial dynamics of the mainly white, European Lindy Hop revival.

*Remixing European Jazz Culture* follows the recent turn of jazz scholarship that rejects the portrayal of jazz as uniquely American music. The last three decades have seen a rise of scholarly work, in historical and contemporary contexts, on the dissemination, reception and appropriation of jazz in European countries. By offering ethnographic, socio-cultural and practice-based analyses of selected collectives, networks, dance camps and labels, Kristin McGee examines the growing popularity of a live remixing jazz culture, prioritising socio-cultural, musical and performative aspects. Jazz as “a fluid and ever negotiated cultural field” (235) has been influenced by technological developments, globalisation, digitalisation and the changing landscape of gender politics and cultural identities. This book succeeds in reminding us that contemporary European jazz culture crosses traditional boundaries of genre, space, place and aesthetics. It will hopefully motivate further studies, concerning popular music, crossover, remix, dance or music video.

## References

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