

Dr. Pekka Gronow

Was jazz invented in Paris in October 1932?

Jazz is one of the forms of American popular music which arrived in Europe since the beginning of the 20th century. They include music from North and South America, the Caribbean and even Hawaii, just annexed to the United States.

Much writing on the history of jazz in Europe has had a teleological character. It has looked at the development of jazz as a linear progression from “prehistoric” forms towards the music which is taught in the jazz departments of music schools today. But it can be argued that before World War Two, and certainly before 1930, there was little consensus on the definition of “jazz”. Even the most ardent supporters of the new music called it variously “hot dance music”, “rhythmic music”, and “swing”. Much of the music labeled “jazz” in the 1920s would not be accepted as jazz today.

I would argue that the evolution of the idea of jazz as a distinct form of music, different from other types of modern popular music, also needs to be studied. The idea of jazz first appeared in Francophone countries around 1932, marked by the publication of Robert Goffin’s *Aux frontières du jazz* and the founding of the Jazz Club de France. Jazz became the first form of modern popular music whose supporters saw their music as a new art form. Similar movements soon emerged in the United States, United Kingdom, and other European countries. The success of the jazz movement can be measured by the appearance of numerous periodicals devoted to jazz in many European languages, the first discographies, and reissues devoted to the documentation of jazz history.

I shall trace the development of the jazz movement and its ideology, which emphasized the character of jazz as a musical genre distinct from western art music and commercial popular music, and the importance of its African-American roots jazz. I shall also argue that after World War Two, the ideology also began to influence the practice of music, which can be seen both in the modernist movement and its counterpart, European traditional jazz.

Biography

Pekka Gronow is adjunct professor of ethnomusicology at the University of Helsinki. He has written extensively on the history of the recording industry and is a contributor to *Ethnomusicology*, *Popular Music*, *Grove’s Dictionary of Jazz* and other publications.

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