



HELSINGIN HENKI

THE HELSINKI SPIRIT

A Report on the Annual Meeting of the European Jazz Network held in Helsinki, Finland between 2nd and 3rd September 2006.

The 2006 meeting of the European Jazz Network comprised the Working Parties meeting held on the 2nd September in the conference suites of the Hotel Sokos Presidentti and the General Assembly held on 3rd September at the UMO Jazz House.

The 2006 meeting came at crucial moment in the EJM's development. As chairman Lars Thorborg pointed out in his address, the success of the organization could be measured by its remarkable growth over the last five years, from fourteen members in 2000 to over fifty in 2006. Indeed, several new members were present for the first time at this year's meeting while several potential members had been identified who were committed to joining in the near future, including the internationally famous Porgy & Bess jazz club in Vienna. However at a time when the EJM was enjoying its greatest success, a key funding line from the EEU under its Culture 2000 programme was not renewed, news of which had only been conveyed to the EJM a matter of weeks before the meeting. As Lars Thorborg pointed out, this demanded an imaginative and creative response from the organization and while it certainly represented a challenge for the future, it also represented financial independence.



THE WORKING PARTIES MEETING

2nd September held in the Conference Suites of
the Hotel Sokos Presidentti

After a welcome address by EJM President Lars Thorborg and a brief outline why the EJM/European Jazz Network bid for continued funding from the EEU under their Culture 2000 Programme was unsuccessful, the membership were asked for innovative thinking in deciding the future direction of the organization. In order that the special needs of the various interest groups that comprise the EJM/EJO were best represented during the discussions, the membership split into the three working groups that were established at the Istanbul meeting in 2005:

- (a) Festival Organisers
- (b) National Organisations
- (c) Clubs

They were tasked with reporting back to the board under the following general headings:

- (i) What changes they felt were necessary to the website
- (ii) Ways in which the EJM/European Jazz Odyssey should go forward in light of unexpected developments from the EEU
- (iii) How the EJM should represent themselves to the world



(a) The Festival Organisers Working Group

Those present: Nod Knowles, John Cumming, Simona Maxim, Enrico Blumer, Margherita Rodigari, Indre Jucaite, Gábor Szél-Molnár, Zsuzsanna Rácz, Ildikó Nagy, Andras Halmos, Rainer Kern, Egbert Rühl, Antanas Gustys, Kenneth Hansen, Jan Ole Otnaes, Lennart Strömbäck, Peter Schulze, Jacques Panisset, Pompeo Benincasa, Tony Dudley-Evans, Kate Danielson, Anne Erm, Xavier Lemettre, Tamas Bogнар, Juhamatti Kauppinen, Juha Ruusunen, Steen Meier, Helleik Kuinnesland, Signe Lopdrop.

The Festival Organisers comprised the largest Working Party of the meeting, so after introductions by each member □ who they were, where they came from and when their festival took place □ the group split into two smaller units to facilitate discussion, one chaired by Nod Knowles and the other by John Cumming.



(i) Nod Knowles Working Group.

Discussions opened with suggested improvements to the website. An interactive section was proposed and there was support for a simple well constructed calendar of main events to promote wider collaborations between members. A “members only” private chat room was proposed where promoters could post short reviews □ for example, “saw XYZ, they were terrific and went down well” □ and exchange information on artists (whether they were good to work with, whether presented “problems” and so on) and market intelligence matters that included fees, new projects, and cheap flights. The group agreed on the importance of showing the public how jazz is alive and flourishing, despite the lack of attention from the mainstream media. Also, it was thought that the production of an EJM brochure would be a useful tool to impress potential sponsors, demonstrating how a local festival was a part of a larger, vibrant and flourishing pan-European whole. This led to a discussion on how such publicity could be used as a tool to give greater visibility to the music. The use of an EJM logo was suggested which could be used for branding purposes on festival programmes where, for example, it might give the public confidence to buy tickets for artists they may not have heard of if they were highlighted as “An EJM artist choice” or something similar. The main thrust of the discussion was on how to convey that jazz music played by European musicians was healthy and vibrant. This could be done by aggressive programming of European artists (examples were discussed of where this had been successful, such as the Grenoble Jazz Festival that last year booked 95% European artists and attracted an audience of some 16,000 to 20,000), or through web sites, mail-outs and so on.



(ii) John Cumming Working Group

The reasons why the continuation of the funding line from the EEU was denied was discussed at length. Suggestions for improvements to the website were called for, and many members were keen for an information sharing facility. Reasons given were that members were keen to know what fees were being demanded by agents and the point was made that small festivals should not be expected to pay as much as larger festivals. A strong consensus emerged for the sharing of discrete and market sensitive information in a “members only” forum on the website that would include market intelligence on how much American agents were trying to squeeze promoters ▫ one example discussed was where two similar festivals promoting the same artist paid different fees ▫ and keeping other members posted about successful projects. Other areas discussed were sharing successful best practice in fund raising, flagging up cross border collaborations and keeping members informed of potential new funding lines for travel. This led to the suggestion that a listing of fund providers be posted for the benefit of the members, such as the Goethe Institute, British Council and so on although it was pointed out that there was no consistency among these institutions on how, or even why, funds were allocated. Nevertheless, this was thought to be useful information that might benefit young bands. Here the importance of even small funding lines that could pay for travel and hotel expenses was agreed to be an important consideration since it had a bearing on the overall profitability of festivals since access to funding, even for amounts as small as €1000, could mean the difference between presenting and not presenting an artist.



(b) The National Organizations Working Group

Those present: Helge Skansen, Paul Gompes (chairman), Giambattista Tofoni, Annemiek Ebbink, Kirsi Lajunen, Kåre Emtoft, Christian Dalgas, Katrien van Remortel, Lilliane Graziani, Tore Flesjoe, Bengt Strokirk, Jaak Sooäär, Anki Heikkinen, Bo Grøningsaeter, Jan Granlie.

This discussion benefited from a PowerPoint presentation to discuss the EJN website. At the Istanbul meeting it was decided to create a portal to help stimulate mobility of jazz musicians within the continent. It was thought that this could be achieved by designing a section within the EJN website that provided a country by country breakdown of venues and festivals with basic information such as artistic profile, dates and contacts. To achieve this, Giambattista Tofoni pointed out that the two databases on the website would need to be combined. Not only would this increase the efficiency and speed of the website, but the portal for the National Organisations could also be implemented. Tofoni pointed out that the basic design of the EJN-website is now outdated so he asked a local Italian I.T. organization for a proposal to incorporate new services and technologies, and this proposal was presented to the members. In order to implement the first stage of the plan, it was agreed the National Organisations would supply certain information to the webmaster while Tofoni and Granlie (who presented a website design for the EJN at the Bremen meeting in March 2006) would respond with the format of the webpages. It was hoped the first version of these new pages would be presented during the next meeting of the National Organisations at the Dutch Jazz Meeting in Amsterdam on December 8-9, 2006. The content of information displayed by member's festival websites was examined and the question of what language/languages festivals chose to project themselves on the web was discussed. While each festival was of



course responsible for its own content, it was nevertheless thought that it should be possible to promote an initiative for uniformity among member organizations. The example of the Vossa Jazz Festival was cited, where the information was only in Norwegian. It was thought that if some sort of standardization was introduced, it would facilitate the downloading of information onto varied databases, such as word, excel and so on. Attention turned to the homepage of the website. A consensus emerged supporting the view that when entering the website it was not clear:

- (i) Who the EJM was
- (ii) What the EJM does
- (iii) What the aims of the EJM are.

It was also pointed out that it was by no means clear why a festival promoter, a national organization or a club promoter should become a member of EJM. In short, the EJM was failing to sell itself and the benefits of membership to potential jazz animators. Indeed, one member reported that he initially could not work out how to join the EJM from the website, and had to contact an EJM member for help in facilitating his membership application. This situation was clearly not satisfactory. While most agreed that the information as presently displayed





was confusing, there was debate about what information should be displayed on the opening pages. Some thought news was a priority, on the basis members should have easy access to what was going on, while others sought clarity about projecting the right “image” for the EJM. While some thought this could be resolved by an “About Us” icon, a majority felt that making the identity and objectives of the EJM – a so-called “mission statement” – clear before being directed into the site was essential. There was general agreement on the need for more transparency, particularly for the benefit of first time visitors to the site.

(c) The Jazz Club Working Group

Those Present: Gerry Godley (Chair); Lars Thorburg, Lars Mossefin, Huub Van Riel, Anna Majia Saarela, Jan Lundin, Andras Halmas, Wim Wabbes.

In reviewing activities for the past year it was noted that static funding had become an issue. While this may have been symptomatic of broader funding issues within the membership, it was thought it may be valuable at future assemblies to conduct a very basic audit of the overall funding situation, to determine underlying funding trends. In discussing these trends, it emerged that the larger, mature clubs with a long history of funding tended to work within 4-year cycles, while the remaining members worked with annual funding, with all the uncertainty this entailed. In general, jazz programming within the club environment seemed to work within a shorter programme windows than other areas of live art. Discussion of the seasonal nature of programme identified two seasons each year – a spring window (February to June) and an Autumn/Winter window (September to November), exceptions being those clubs that were directly involved in festival presentation. Festivals, it was agreed, tended to be leveraged very hard over a specific time frame (advertising, media interest, local participation such as shops taking up the jazz festival "theme" in their window dressing) and by their very nature, their audience included the non-committed and musically curious. On the other hand clubs are a year-round



activity and thus find it a challenge to sustain a nightly audience, so are perhaps more reflective of the music's core audience. It was how to attract and expand this audience that much discussion was centred. Traditionally, the core audience for clubs was drawn from the "baby boomer" generation – an audience who defined themselves by the music they listened to – but it was felt this audience was beginning to drop away, perhaps settling for a more sedentary lifestyle as they got older. If this was true, then it could be the thin end of the wedge of a trend that would probably be felt more acutely in five to ten years time. How then to address this problem? There was general agreement that there was a general lack of interest in jazz in the media, and audiences themselves seemed less musically curious. Fifteen years ago, if a new band was presented people would check it out, but today this is not the case. Yet people still appeared to want to belong to the cultural life of their area, but wanted their choices made easy. One answer was a ticket for five selected concerts, for example. The feeling was that people trusted the organisers and trusted their selection. It was not a



particular style of jazz that concerned them, but quality. Younger audiences were seen as a key area for audience development. These audiences also liked to be led. Does the word jazz or improvised music put them off or do we need a new word to appeal to them? There was a general consensus that any negative connotations the word jazz seemed to generate had its roots in a media obsessed with pop culture. Despite this, there was agreement that there was interest in jazz from younger audiences, provided they could be reached and convinced it was "hip." One way of achieving this was posting information about concerts on the right web-sites, and by e-mail newsletter. Promoters could no longer rely on newspapers, who, it was pointed out, spend three weeks talking-up a Rolling Stones concert and three weeks dissecting it afterwards. All voiced concerns about the issue of age profile among core audience, and how this could be countered with initiatives like keyhole marketing and targetted databases. It was agreed

that more discussion was needed about the issue of audience building, so the working group would return to this matter at its next meeting. On the issue of programming, it emerged that a mean average among the club working group was in favour of 60% domestic artists as against 40% international artists, either as working groups or in collaborative contexts with domestic musicians. There were, of course exceptions to this among the members present, but this seemed a fair average. Lars Thorburg then briefed the group on the Metropolitan Music Network, a new Scandinavian network with streamlined decision making processes to promote tours of American and European artists among its members. Key to its success were its straightforward rules:

- (i) A commitment to taking a date must be made at the meeting and honoured
- (ii) A tour need not involve all members and could be as small as just two dates
- (iii) Key is a good travel agent who can come up with competitive prices
- (iv) the network bargains collectively, but individual financial circumstances are taken into account, such as venue size, ticket price sensitivity, catchment which will be taken into account when apportioning contributions
- (v) A project is proposed by a network member, who then takes overall responsibility of tour planning, travel, production and in this way the administrative burden is shared fairly between the network.
- (vi) Important decisions around fee negotiation are taken quickly, with each member aware of the need to respond quickly via email, telephone to the key tour planner as necessary.

With these simple rules in place it enables the network to quickly arrive at a consensus, decide a package and use their collective bargaining power with agents to negotiate a satisfactory fee, which on several occasions has taken the form of "This is how much we will pay, here are the dates, take it or leave it!" In 2006, the MMN has toured the Tomasz Stanko Quartet, Marc Johnson Trio with Eliane Elias, Jon Balke Batagraf, Lizz Wright, Per Jørgensen, Anders Jormin and Marilyn Mazur with upcoming tours by Lura (Cape Verde) and Bojan Z Transpacific Trio planned. On the strength of the presentation, UMO indicated

that they wished to become a member of MMN. This cluster of clubs working in their own self interest provides a model that can either be expanded upon with other clubs from within EJM, or provide a successful best practice model for other EJM club members from southern, eastern Europe and Ireland/UK to replicate. All agreed that the meeting was productive and in the interests of keeping the momentum going, a further meeting of the Clubs Working Party will take place in Dublin and be hosted by Improvised Music Co in six months time. The Clubs Working Party general conclusions were:

- (i) A dedicated clubs database on the website where data germane to programming can be shared
- (ii) Clubs should share programming strands and create a touring spreadsheet with the following information: confirmed shows (excluding domestic) and who sourced from; facility to post information on shows; a wish-list to include prospective programming, working groups (one year ahead) and curated productions (two years ahead); undertaking to meet in six months time in Dublin.



The General Assembly held on 3rd September at the UMO Jazz House.

Present were representatives of: Vestnorsk Jazzsenter, Bath Festival, Serious/London Jazz Festival, Mediawave, Clusone, Tam factory - also representing ERJN Ravenna, Dutch Jazz Connection, Rikskonsertene Norway, Norwegian Jazz Forum, Podium, Sibiu Jazz Festival, Kaunas Jazz Festival, Moldejazz, Trafo, Improvised Music Company, Enjoy Jazz, Banlieues Bleues, Copenhagen Jazz House, Bimhuis, Peter Schulze - German Jazz Meeting - also representing Stadtgarten, Grenoble Jazz Festival - also representing AFIJMA, JazzCatania, Stavanger Jazzforum/ Maijazz, Rikskonserter, SWE Copenhagen Jazz Festival, Vooruit, Jazzkaar, Umeå Jazz Festival, Flanders Music Centre, Wallonie-Bruxelles Musiques, Budapest Music Center, Vilnius Jazz Festival, Jazz In Gothenburg/Nefertiti, Cheltenham Jazz Festival, Estonian Jazz Federation, Danish Jazz Federation, Tampere Jazz Happening, Jyväskylä Summer Jazz, Finnish Jazz Federation, Umo Jazz Club.

Chairman Lars Thorburg again welcomed those members present □ 38 in all, more than a two-third majority required for changes to the constitution. The proposal before the assembly was to expand the size of the board from nine members to eleven, with nine elected members plus two further members who could be co-opted for their expertise. The amendment was carried unanimously.

Although the President's Report was overshadowed by the setback of the EEU funding, Lars Thorburg took the opportunity to look back at the EJM's relatively short but nevertheless dynamic history. The EJM was established in Italy by Filippo Bianchi. In 2000 the board decided to move the EJM's official address from Ravenna to the offices of Banlieues Bleues, north of Paris. The membership was then 14 members, half of them from Italy. With the EEU calling for applications under the auspices of its Culture 2000 programme, which for the first time included the word "jazz," the EJM submitted an application for funding through Banlieues Bleues (since the EJM had not yet established an organisation/network in France at the time of the application deadline). In due course the application was approved. At the initiative of the EJM, the Europe Jazz Odyssey, a platform for cultural co-operation in the area of jazz involving several European partners, came into being. Their first meeting was held in Cologne in 2002 to discuss the jazz environment in the eight different countries of its then membership. In 2003, the annual meeting was held Kongsburg and Oslo where the theme was education, with special attention to the pedagogical approaches of the host nation. The 2004 meeting was held in Budapest in conjunction with the Dutch/Hungarian jazz meeting, its theme "Improvising Europe." With the expansion of the EEU, the EJM was able to welcome new members from former Eastern block countries. The membership was further expanded to 48 members with the realization its of common goals and objectives with TECNO, with whom it combined to produce the Budapesto political statement of aims. In 2005 the meeting was held in Istanbul, where a renewal of EEU funding line from the Culture 2000 programme was discussed in order to reflect the membership's aspirations for the future. After





the meeting, Margheritha Rodigari (with help from Bo Grønningsaeter and others) compiled a user friendly summation of the meeting, including profiles of each member, which was welcomed by the membership. Thorborg detailed how the funding application was submitted to the EEU in October 2005 with an answer promised in early spring. But by March 2006 the EEU had still not responded, but word was that the application had scored high. So it came as a complete surprise to learn in July 2006 that the application had been turned down, the brief explanation offered by the EEU being that it only supported “permanent activity.” This meant plans for a training programme had to be temporarily shelved, although some vital work to update the website, which now had an almost 1,000,000 hits per annum, might still go ahead. The challenge ahead was to find alternative lines of funding, as well as renewing the EEU application later in the year. “What should we change?” asked Thorborg. Clearly better guidelines are required from the EEU, and their mistaken belief that the EJM is not a “permanent” organization should be corrected. The National Organisations are willing to work on behalf of the EJM lobbying the EEU, and it was believed that this would carry considerable weight in the corridors of power. In summation, Thorborg said that the EEU’s response had come so late in the year there had been no time to formulate an alternative “Plan B,” and this was now an urgent imperative. But in the meantime he reminded everyone that the EJM was a networking organization and urged everyone to meet in 6 months time, even if it was not with the support of EEU funds. In the interim, while some future plans may have to be adjusted, he felt the organization could be run on a combination of membership fees and funding, and that the independence this gave suggested a bright and optimistic future for the organization.

Bo Grønningsaeter, the General Secretary gave a brief overview of the accounts using a PowerPoint presentation showing extracts from the accounts including cash in the bank and the 2005=6 income/outgoings. Hard copies of these figures were distributed to the membership. Statistics included € 38,293 on bank deposit, total income from the membership €51,000 and outgoings (2005/6) of €54,591 (which includes website rebuilding and part time clerical staff fees).

A brief presentation was given detailing the remarkable success of the EJM website by Battista Tofoni. It now has almost 1,000,000 hits per annum, with 2006 peak of 97,000 hits in one day. There are 5893 registered users that include musicians, promoters and agents and it is widely acknowledged by its users as one of the best resources available. Interestingly the most number of hits from any single country came from the United States (38.92% of the total number of hits). However, the website clearly needs updating, but funds available for this currently stand at €2000. Jan Granlie from JazzNytt in Norway has a proposal for improving the site that some members saw in Bremen in March 2006, and additional finance would be needed to carry out this work. As Nod Knowles said during the course of his summary from the festival organisers working group, it should be a priority to “redesign the website for clarity, including a mission statement of the EJM’s objectives for anyone entering the website.”

Then followed brief reports from the three working groups, whose work is summarized earlier. Plans for the new EEU application were discussed, and again a clear consensus emerged to make it clear to EEU that the EJM was indeed a “permanent organization.” Ideas for additional funding lines were taken from the floor, the most important being to approach large corporations with a pan-European presence



who might want to be associated with the cache of jazz □ modern, sophisticated and attracting the right demographic. Finally, the meeting was concluded with matters of protocol □ discussion of possible venues for the General Assembly of 2007 and 2008; the provisional budget for 2007, elections for the board that included the election of Nod Knowles of the Bath Festival as chairman, succeeding Lars Thorborg whose hard work on behalf of the EJM was acknowledged, and finally moving on to any other business before the meeting was closed.

However, earlier in the day Nod Knowles, when summarizing his Festival Working Party's discussions, struck a note that seemed to resonate strongly with the Assembly □ he said the EJM's mission should be to tell the rest of the world about itself and what it does, and to raise the profile of jazz, not just with the general public but with politicians, culture departments and major corporations. This, together with the enthusiasm and energy of the members, seemed to sum up the note of optimism in which this meeting was conducted and bode well for the future.



