

# Editorial: The other jazz

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In no one's mind have the music's ties to its country of origin been severed, yet the historical record proves that it has for some time had global significance... Jazz exists in our collective imagination as both a *national* and *postnational* music, but is studied almost exclusively in the former incarnation.<sup>1</sup>

This special issue of the *Jazz Research Journal*, 'The Other Jazz', was developed from a session at the 'Jazz and Race, Past and Present' conference held at The Open University, Milton Keynes, UK in November 2010 as part of the Arts and Humanities Research Council funded project 'What is Black British Jazz?' Following the conference, several authors were invited to develop ideas and submit articles for peer-review. For this issue, we are delighted to feature studies of jazz from three different parts of the world: Estonia, India and Malaysia.

Over the course of the last century, jazz has been adopted, absorbed, rejected and transformed within different national settings. Histories of jazz around the globe offer complex, and at times contradictory, narratives that are shaped by social and political circumstances, urbanization and cultural change, and the workings of different national ideologies. The three contributions to this issue provide insights into jazz scenes within radically different cultural settings and historical circumstances. And yet, these contributions are united in their desire to examine the role that jazz performs in relation to dominant social and political orders. Whether it is the Soviet-controlled Estonia of 1948, India under colonial rule, or the changing nature of the contemporary Islamic Malaysian state, jazz offers itself as a fascinating vehicle for understanding the politics of national cultures and the shifting boundaries of 'Otherness'.

Heli Reimann's opening article presents a close reading of material from a unique source—an almanac containing articles written by members of the Estonian jazz group 'Swing Club'—to examine approaches to jazz in Estonia under the Soviet regime which began to dominate cultural life from 1948. Her analysis exposes the nature of local responses to jazz as Ameri-

1. E. Taylor Atkins, *Jazz Planet* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2003), xiii.

can music, albeit mediated by the pervasive influence of Soviet values on both discourse and music-making, which particularly privileged swing over bebop. Reimann's study is followed by Stephane Dorin's 'Jazz and race in colonial India: The role of Anglo-Indian musicians in the diffusion of jazz in Calcutta', an article that explores the way in which jazz fed into the construction and redefinition of racial categories in colonial India. Dorin's work discusses Anglo-Indians as cultural mediators who helped to place jazz within the national culture and touches on the paradoxes of globalization, where the popularity of jazz becomes bound up simultaneously with the Americanization of culture, on the one hand, and a developing sense of a national sound (albeit under colonial rule), on the other. Finally, Gisa Jähnichen's article 'Jazz in Kuala Lumpur' explores the various ways in which Malaysian jazz musicians have gone beyond replicating American jazz models towards creating forms of local jazz which draw on traditional music and instruments, as well as more modern cultural forms, such as karaoke. This local jazz also reflects differing ideas about national identity – from the official 'One Malaysia' to deliberate incorporation of musical characteristics from across the diverse spectrum of identities in the community.

Taylor Atkins' words that open this issue offer a reminder of the need to resist American exceptionalist readings of jazz history and, instead, to develop fresh insights into the global spread of jazz and the way in which the music functions as both a national and transnational phenomenon. While the narratives included in this issue clearly acknowledge particular aspects of the global impact of African American music, they also provide tangible accounts of diverse local contributions and the politics of place in shaping different understandings of jazz.