

Amateurism and professionalism in post-World War II European jazz

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Jazz has always been a field shared between amateurs and professionals. Over the course of its history, its organisational and promotional structures (concert and festival programming, record production, contests) and its internal discourse (journalistic and critical) have, very explicitly and sometimes disproportionately, emphasised this distinction. In practice, however, it is sometimes difficult to understand on what social, economic and aesthetic ground this polarisation of the jazz world into two distinct spheres is based.

This paper aims to address this issue by specifically exploring the context of European jazz in the post-World War II years. This period represents an important turning point in the history of jazz on the old continent, with many shifts (and even some crises) of an economic, aesthetic, organisational and generational nature. Not only do these factors provide criteria on which to draw a line between amateurs and professionals, but they also lead many musicians to renegotiate their relationship to musical practice and redefine their status as amateur, professional or, often, in an intermediate position.

The study of this context shows a complex, multi-layered and sometimes paradoxical situation, which leads to questioning the definition of the opposition between amateurs and professionals based on economic or competence criteria. It also invites to reflect on this question in terms of strategies for professional success and personal fulfilment, a dimension which in turn raises the question of artistic sincerity.