

Specials > RADIO WAVES

Our *Specials* line of programs houses proposals by artists and curators, related in some way to the Museum's programming and the MACBA Collection.

Serge Guilbaut, curator of "Be-Bomb: the Transatlantic War of Images and All that Jazz. 1946-1956" (MACBA 2007) and director of this three-part series of radio programmes complementing the exhibition, describes "Radio Waves. Hot Songs for a Cold War" as a tool "enabling visitors to appreciate how music was intermeshed with the art scene and how, very often, the music of the time was also closely connected with the intense politics of the Cold War".

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Sound mastering by Raül Hinojosa.

RADIO WAVES

Hot Songs for a Cold War

01. First programme

In June 1940, just five weeks after the start of the Battle of France, Paris fell into the hands of the German army. The Nazi Occupation, which was to last four years, ending in August 1944, caused serious disruption on all levels – human, political, organisation and cultural. This first programme in this three-part series, entitled "Music to Restore the Soul", examines the crucial influence that American swing music had in France during the Occupation, through a collection of songs by French artists who found in swing, and in other exotic music forms from the other side of the Atlantic, a window to freedom, an open door through which they could return to normality and even an effective weapon of political subversion. France had already fostered its own important jazz tradition since the 1930s, thanks to the efforts, amongst others, of Charles Delaunay (son of the Orphic artists Robert and Sonia Delaunay), who catalogued and distributed all kinds of commercial recordings from the USA, and to the appearance of the influential Hot Club de France, the archetypal jazz club which opened its doors in Paris in 1932 and which later gave its name to the now-legendary Quintet du Hot Club de France.

Swing had become established as a distinct musical idiom almost a decade before it reached French shores, in the geographic triangle connecting Orleans, Kansas and New York, and was based on a fusion of rhythms imported from West Africa and the popular music of the day. Despite being overshadowed for a time by other genres, the syncopated rhythms laid down by the likes of Artie Shaw and Count Basie eventually became enormously popular amongst North American youth. Though frowned on in the Soviet Union and, particularly, in Germany, where the Hitler regime was quick to pillory this "music of Blacks and Jews", dismissing it as *entartete Kunst* ("degenerate art"), swing was adopted by different movements in the French music scene as a blueprint for renewal, both directly, in the form of cover versions practically identical to the originals by the orchestras of Duke Ellington, Benny Goodman, Glenn Miller, etc, and in more subtle ways, by incorporating certain elements into the local music culture.

Related links

- <http://www.iaje.org/article.asp?ArticleID=171>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wkvCDCOGzGc>
- <http://www.veotag.com/jalc/player.aspx?pid={A90FAC8A-6772-4AFC-B899-60432522FFBD}>
- <http://www.ucpress.edu/books/pages/6043.html>

02. Second programme

By the end of the Second World War, the Americanising airs that had played over French culture for years reached the height of their influence. For the leading singers and performers of the day, it was no longer enough to imitate musical styles imported from American dance halls and radio stations. Now, lyrics,



packed with Anglicisms that became neologisms overnight, song titles and the general feel of the music played by Johnny Hess, Georges Tabet, Jacques Pills, Charles Aznavour and even Yves Montand combined in a full-blooded celebration of Americanisation, a symbol of freedom that also gave testimony to the political union between the two countries.

This mimetic process, the direct consequence of the severe cultural identity crisis that was affecting France, spawned a host of sub-genres, music forms performed in many different styles: sometimes pessimistic, but more often imbued with almost blind faith in a brighter future. All this faithfully reflected a period in which French youth was struggling to turn the page and reclaim their freedom, whilst the first atomic tests showed the Cold War to be looming perilously near. This bird's-eye view of French postwar music also helps to spotlight the division between followers of classical New Orleans jazz (exemplified in the gentle rhythms of Sidney Bechet, Django Reinhardt, Claude Luter, etc) and fans of revolutionary bebop, which emerged basically in New York during the early years of the Second World War. The term "bebop" began to be widely used in Harlem jazz slang in the early-40s to define the essence of a fast, new syncopated style, the antithesis of melodic, easy-going swing and the immediate precursor of the anti-figurative spontaneity found in abstract expressionism. It was a logical continuation of the piano and wind instrument solos in the swing age, elevated to their highest power in a harmonic frenzy based on the constant improvisation laid down by such artists as Charlie Parker, Thelonius Monk, Charlie Christian and Dizzy Gillespie.

Related links

<http://swing-sked.wikispaces.com>

<http://www.redhotjazz.com/hotclubfrance.html>

<http://www.return2style.de/amiswhei.htm>

<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~AS1/musi212/emily/estyle.html>

<http://lsm.crt.state.la.us/post-ed1.htm>

<http://www.rossmerynk.com/swing.html>

03. Third programme

Towards the end of the 1940s, New York received a growing influx of musicians from California, who began to play at the city's jazz clubs, helping to forge an interesting transformation of the most prevalent music style. Bebop's wild harmonies and abstraction, which had dominated the East Coast until that moment, became fused with the more laid back West Coast sound and the easy rhythms of pianist Gil Evans and saxophone pioneers like Lee Konitz and Lester Young. This new musical language, in which the emphasis was on the intellectual component rather than on improvisation, as it had been with bebop, became known as "cool jazz": this was a sophisticated idiom, packed with strong feeling embodied in the profoundly cinematic arrangements of Django Reinhardt, Gerry Mulligan, Chet Baker, Stan Getz and other jazz icons of the mid-20th century. The most outstanding jazzman amongst them was Miles Davis. "The Birth of Cool", the album Davis recorded with his group between 1949 and 1950, traced an imaginary dividing line between the two schools, deeply marking both the American and French jazz scenes.

Nonetheless, the American influence in the French capital was not limited to cool jazz and its majestic introspection. At the opposite end of the musical spectrum, actor-singers like Tino Rossi and Charles Trenet (who also ended up triumphing in America) took a more light-hearted approach based on the new petit bourgeois and entertainment culture. At the same time, the Bohemian world of artist's studios and coffee shops in Paris's Quartier Latin, led by Boris Vian, countered this watered-down, Manichaeian vision of the country with a much cruder portrait of a social environment ravaged by open wounds and issues such as colonial war and racial segregation (coincidentally, two hot points that also concerned American blues and jazz artists, but which would soon cease to be the centre of



attention...). The consolidation of the new consumer culture and the US baby boom highlighted the paradox: despite attempts to create an image of sophistication that was exported through art and theatre productions since the mid-40s, the definitive influence of the United States on European culture would finally arrive at the hand of pop music and new teen idols such as Elvis Presley and Ritchie Valens, more concerned about their blue suede shoes than about the Korean war.

Related links

<http://www.live365.com/stations/gersch>

<http://www.culturekiosque.com/jazz/miles/rhemiles1.htm>

<http://www.prato.linux.it/~lmasetti/canzonicontrolaguerra/canzone.php?lang=en&id=1>

http://nomuzak.co.uk/dumbing_down.html

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