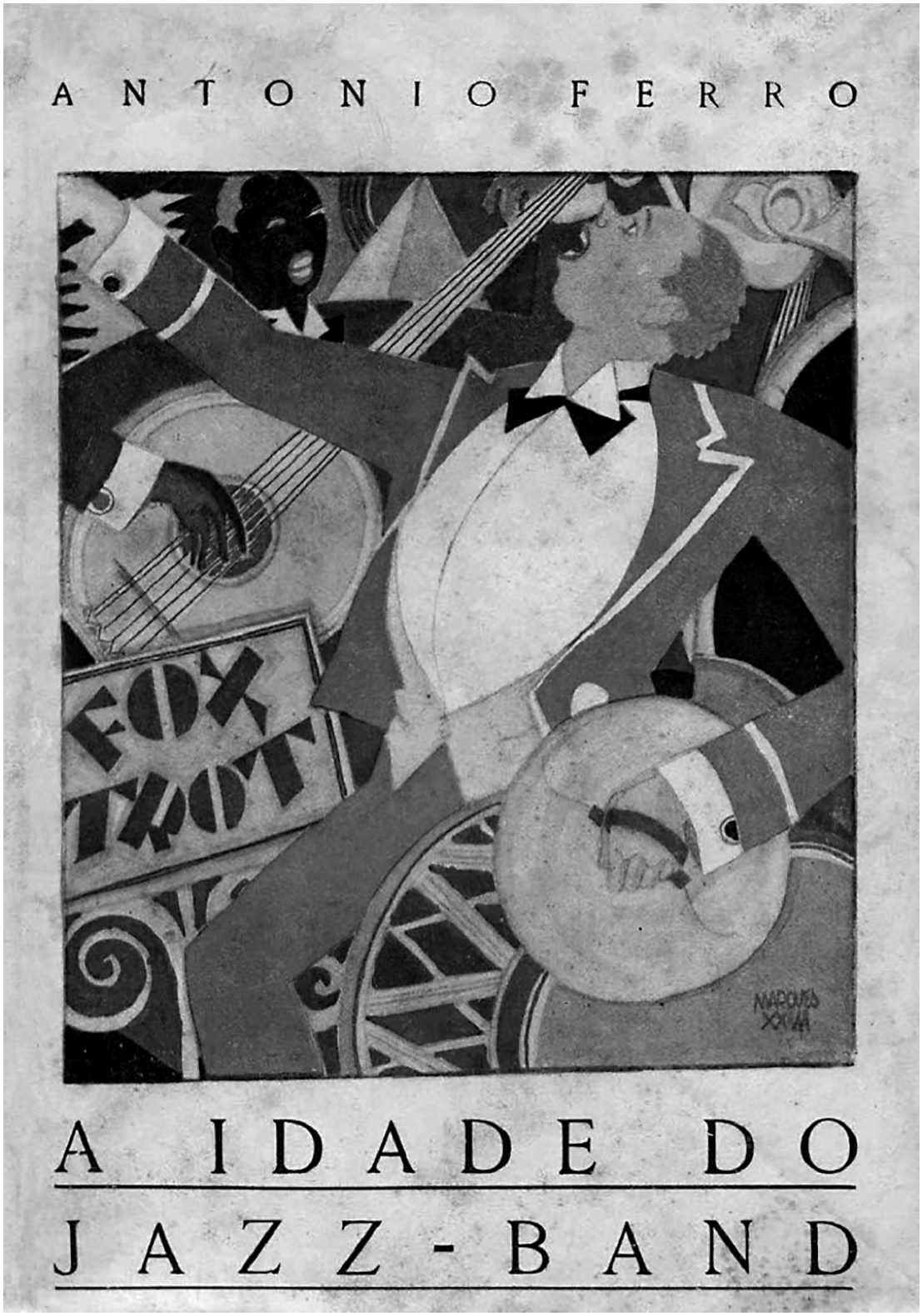
ANTONIO FERRO
FOX TROT
NADOUES XXIII
A IDADE DO
JAZZ-BAND

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Made in America for the world

Avant-garde responses to jazz

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The year 2022 was the centenary of *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*, but in 1922 jazz was what everyone was talking about. The February issue of "Vanity Fair" featured an article by Edmund Wilson, who had been its editor during the previous two years. Many of his friends were living in Paris. What these American expatriates found, Wilson reported, was that:

> the very things they have come abroad to get away from – the machines, the advertisements, the elevators and the jazz – have begun to fascinate the French at the expense of their own amenities[1].

Wilson's target was Dada, still raging in Paris. "Our skyscrapers may be monstrous but they are at least manifestations of force", he wrote; "our entertainments may be vulgar but they are at least terrifyingly alive" – in stark contrast, he maintained, to the "rather sophomoric" antics of Dada[2].

The category of the sophomore could be more accurately applied to a group of young men in Moscow, since they were teenagers in 1922 when they founded a performance collective called Factory of the Eccentric Actor. Their buoyant manifesto of eccentrism enumerated their allegiances:

> In literature – the cabaret singer, the cry of the auctioneer, street slang.
> In painting – the circus poster, pulp fiction cover illustrations.
> In music – the jazzband (the commotion of a Negro orchestra), circus marches.
> In ballet – American song and dance routines.
> In theatre – the music-hall, cinema, circus, cabaret, boxing[3].

In the summer of 1922, Lisbon native António Ferro toured Brazil, speaking on "The Age of Jazz" [Fig. 1]. The lectures were choreographed so that an unannounced jazz band would periodically inter-

1. António Ferro, *A Idade do Jazz-Band*, Lisbon 1924. Photo: author's collection

[1] **E. Wilson Jr.**, *The Aesthetic Upheaval in France: The Influence of Jazz in Paris and Americanization of French Literature and Art*, "Vanity Fair" 1922, No. 6, p. 49.

[2] *Ibidem*.

[3] Text adapted (with changes) from: **G. Kozintsev [*et al.*]**, *Eccentrism*, [in:] *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents*, Ed., Transl. **R. Taylor**, Co-ed., Introd. I. Christie, Cambridge 1988, p. 59.

rupt his presentation. A writer who attended one of Ferro's lectures observed that the:

> Past, for him, is a word without meaning. He only understands the future […] he believes in everything that hasn't happened yet […]. He doesn't smile, he laughs. Because he was born and lives at a time of cinematography, he sets up a colossal studio inside his head[4].

As a teenager, Ferro had been passionate about Italian futurism, which delighted Fernando Pessoa and Mario de Sá-Carneiro, who in 1915 published the avant-garde periodical "Orpheu", naming Ferro the editor even though he was too young to legally occupy the role. *Orpheu* is most famous for having introduced one of Pessoa's heteronyms, Álvaro de Campos, whose flamboyant "Triumphal Ode" concluded the first issue.

Ferro, having been fired up by futurism, proved equally receptive to jazz, which in his Brazilian lectures he called "the electric jolt of the universe" ("*O 'Jazz-band' é o arco voltaico do Universo*")[5]. In more down to earth terms, he said jazz was the "clock that best tells the time today"[6]. Edmund Wilson, for his part, was less enthusiastic about the avant-garde, and saw jazz as one among many aspects of American culture having an impact abroad – which is precisely what was registered in the manifesto of eccentrism, where it was part of a package, an item on a list, not a subject for extended consideration.

Jazz often appeared in lists of American loan words after the war, like "cocktail", "flirt", and "sex appeal", terms with presumed affinities to skyscrapers, radio broadcasting, chewing gum, comic strips, Gillette razorblades, bob haircuts and short skirts. In the February 1922 issue of the Berlin vanguard journal "Die Aktion", Alice Gerstel noted that on the dance floor and "in the jazz music what remains of the creative force of this sterile time unfolds: the genius of the eclectic, the cocktail mix of souls [*das Barmixertum der Seelen*]"[7]. Her article cites Dada and cubism as flavors spicing this apocalyptic cocktail.

In Paris, "If you accept the Jazz Band", Jean Cocteau insisted, "you should also welcome a literature that the intelligence can savor like a cocktail"[8]. Having enthusiastically acclaimed the Zurich periodical "Dada" as an amalgam of jazz and cocktails, he debuted "Jean Cocteau and His Parisian Jazz-Band" with Darius Milhaud and Georges Auric at the vernissage for Francis Picabia's art exhibit at Povolovsky Gallery in December 1920. Yet Cocteau's enthusiasm was short lived, as he peevishly complained of "a certain décor, a certain racket, a certain Jazz-bandism" convulsing Parisian nightclubs[9]. Milhaud more graciously compared jazz to a thunderstorm that cleanses the air. For many vanguard enthusiasts, the jazz infusion was embraced but quickly left behind, a salutary invigoration, but not meant to last.

[4] **K. D. Jackson**, *Cannibal Angels: Transatlantic Modernism and the Brazilian Avant-Garde*, Oxford 2020, p. 210.

[5] **A. Ferro**, *A Idade do Jazz-Band*, 2nd Ed., Lisbon 1924, p. 69.

[6] *Ibidem*, p. 61.

[7] **A. Gerstel**, *Jazz-Band*, "Die Aktion" 1922, No. 5/6, p. 92.

[8] **J. Willett**, *Art and Politics in the Weimar Period: The New Sobriety 1917–1933*, New York 1978, p. 59.

[9] **F. Brown**, *An Impersonation of Angels: A Biography of Jean Cocteau*, New York 1968, p. 200.

This was of course the positive aspect singled out by the European avant-garde turning up its noses at capital-A Art. What was prized was the ephemeral and the boisterous, that which proceeded without a backward glance and heedless of cultural gatekeepers. Dada fashioned the attitude, and jazz enlivened the dismissive gesture – until, as with Cocteau's circle, jazz too was dismissed.

The Bauhaus was a place where Cocteau's brand of lifestyle modernism intersected with the avant-garde, and in 1925, Bauhaus theatre director Oskar Schlemmer noted in his diary the school's embrace of "the latest, the most modern, up-to-the-minute, dadaism, circus, *variété*, jazz, hectic pace, movies, America, airplanes, the automobile. Those are the terms in which people here think"[10]. These are the conditions leading to the realization by the end of the decade that jazz was becoming "the face of nostalgia for our time" in the words of Italian futurist Anton Giulio Bragaglia, author of the manifesto *Futurist Photodynamism* in 1913, was one of several with avant-garde credentials who wrote early books on jazz[11] [Fig. 2].

Schlemmer's enumeration of Bauhaus proclivities echoes a rhetorical strategy adopted by Marinetti in his 1909 manifesto of futurism. While this and nearly all futurist manifestos proffered a numerical itemization of key points, Marinetti concluded his eleven-part manifesto with a celebration of the futurist enthusiasm for shipyards, railway stations, factories, ocean liners and other manifestations of modern industry (albeit couched in rather florid terms, like the "deep-chested locomotives whose wheels paw the tracks like the hooves of enormous steel horses bridled by tubing")[12]. Avant-garde manifestos everywhere soon adopted such lists of "the whole brilliant style of modern times – our trousers, jackets, shoes, trolley cars, airplanes, railways, grandiose steamships"[13]. This is from a Rayonist manifesto by Mikhail Larionov and Natalia Goncharova, published in Moscow in 1913. These tendencies reached an apotheosis in the Vorticist journal *Blast*, with its roster of blasts and blesses filling eighteen oversize display type pages.

Wyndham Lewis published *Blast* in June 1914, before jazz reached London (and before the music got that name in 1917). But some form of proto-jazz or accelerated ragtime factors into recollections of the Cabaret Theatre Club, recalled as "a super-heated vorticist garden of gesticulating figures, dancing and talking, while the rhythm of the primitive forms of ragtime throbbed through the whole room"[14]. English poet Frank Stuart Flint, who with Ezra Pound launched Imagism, was privy to these occasions, and in 1919 – when jazz had become an unavoidable reference – he wondered how to characterize a performance of the Cocteau-Satie-Picasso ballet *Parade*: "Cubo-futurist? Physical *vers-libre*? Plastic jazz? The decorative grotesque?"[15] (Apollinaire dealt with his own perplexity by coining the word "surrealism" in his program note for the inaugural production in 1917). Flint's questions are a reflex gesture of guesswork, and nothing prompted guessing more than jazz. As another English

[10] **O. Schlemmer**, *The Letters and Diaries*, Ed. **T. Schlemmer**, Transl. K. Winston, Middletown [Connecticut] 1972, p. 185.

[11] **A. G. Bragaglia**, *Jazz Band*, Milan 1929, p. 9.

[12] **F. T. Marinetti**, *Selected Writings*, Ed., Introd. **R. W. Flint**, Transl. *idem*, A. A. Coppotelli, New York 1972, p. 42.

[13] **M. Larionov**, **N. Goncharova**, *Rayonists and Futurists: A Manifesto, 1913*, [in:] *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism 1902–1934*, Ed., Transl. **J. E. Bowlt**, New York 1976, p. 89.

[14] **W. C. Wees**, *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde*, Toronto 1972, p. 49.

[15] **A. Young**, *Dada and After: Extremist Modernism and English Literature*, Manchester 1981, p. 49.

2. Anton Giulio Bragaglia, *Jazz Band*, Milan 1929. Photo: author's collection

commentator realized, in a Shakespearean idiom, "To Jazz or not to Jazz – that is the question"[16]. The question revealed that jazz could be a verb as well as a noun. This was the approach adopted by the Czech vanguard initiative, poetism.

In 1924 Karel Teige claimed that poetism encompassed film, radio, avionics and various optical and auditory inventions, as well as sport, dance, circus and music hall, "places of perpetual improvisation"[17]. For Teige and his comrades, jazz musicians and Charlie Chaplin were models of improvisation. The addition of Chaplin to the matrix of associations coming out of America suggested a different dimension to jazz, at least for the avant-garde. In America, Chaplin and jazz musicians were merely entertainers. But for those elsewhere, Chaplin embodied artistry, and it was jazz that benefitted from the reflected glow [Fig. 3].

What kind of artistry did Chaplin suggest? Despite a background in vaudeville, he was working in the new mass medium of cinema. Chaplin was central to what Gilbert Seldes called *The 7 Lively Arts* in his book of that title in 1924, in which the little tramp earned pride of place along with jazz. In "The Criterion" in April 1923, T. S. Eliot credited Chaplin with having "escaped in his own way from the realism of the cinema and invented a 'rhythm'"[18] This is a telling attribution, in that *The Waste Land* hangs together as an exercise in contrapuntal rhythms, and Eliot spent much of rest of his life trying to explain that the so-called music of poetry was in fact a subliminal rhythm, not a brocade of sound effects. And this, of course, was what everyone recognized in jazz.

I'm judiciously using the verb "recognize" because, in these early years of jazz after the Great War, the word "jazz" traveled more rapidly than the music. The word fills out advertisements for bars in Belgrade from the journal "Dada Tank" in the summer of 1922, followed by the instructively named *Dada Jazz*. Both journals were edited by Dragan Aleksić, cementing an alliance between two four letter words rarely paired. Previously, for a Dada sponsored ball in Geneva in 1920, Christian Schad combined them as a pictorial unit: "jazz band dada" [Fig. 4].

Because the music itself was often hearsay, what people around the world recognized was the word, a word heralding American modernity – "an American musical alphabet" a journalist called it in 1923, and "a genuine contribution to the gaiety of nations"[19]. In Karel Teige's illustration for a book of poems by Konstantin Biebl, the word hangs in an circle like a Christmas tree ornament [Fig. 5].

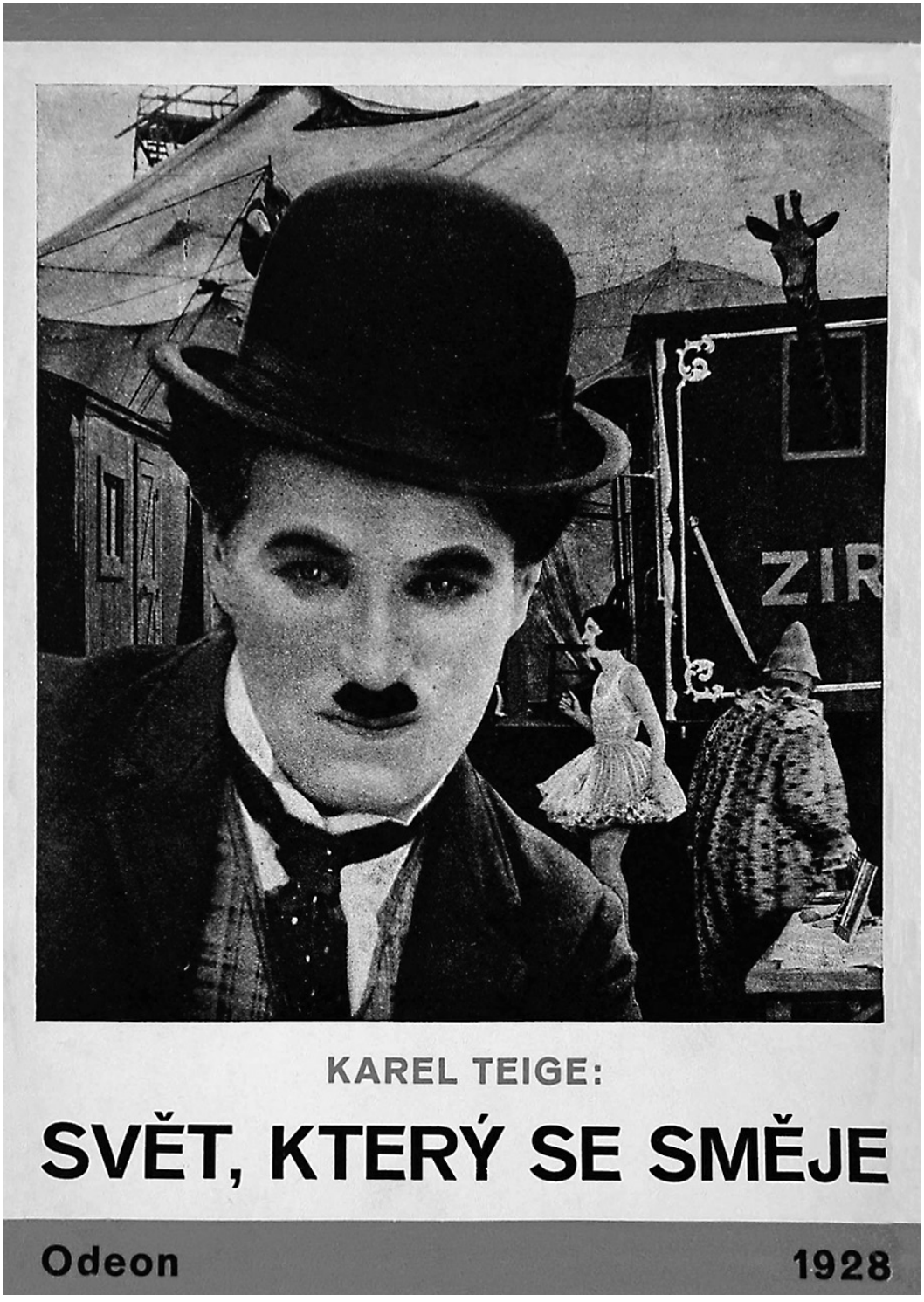
Curiously, the word had avant-garde connotations before the war, when it did not yet refer to music. In 1913, a San Francisco newspaper reported that jazz was "a futurist word which has just joined the language". The article was not about music, however, but about baseball. A newspaper column in Los Angeles from the previous year also cites jazz in this sports context, where it means the kind of spin

[16] **J. Godbolt**, *A History of Jazz in Britain 1919–1950*, London 1984, p. 9.

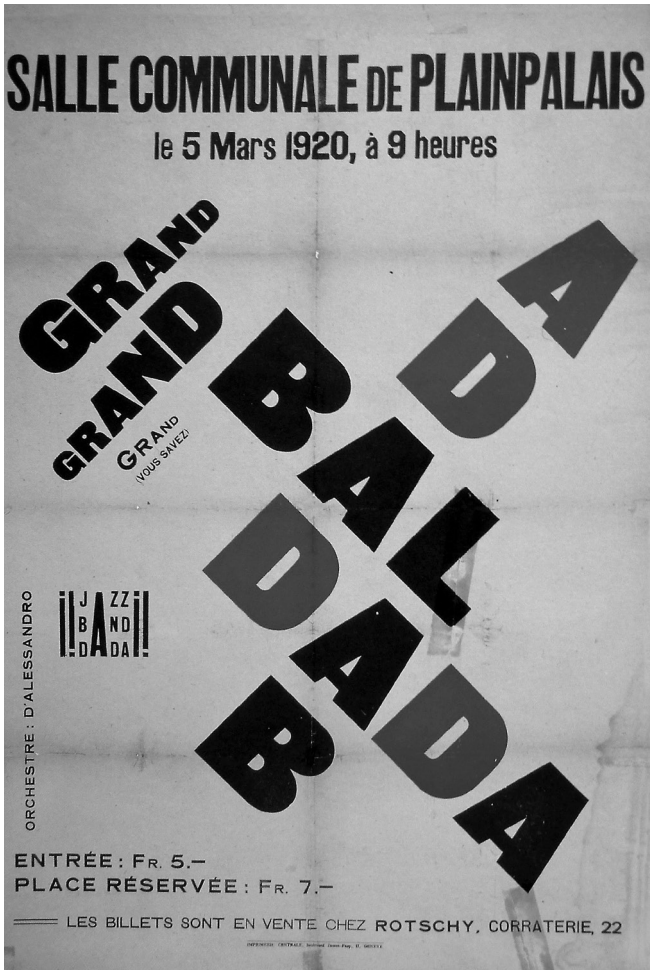
[17] *Karel Teige: L'Enfant Terrible of the Czech Modernist Avant-Garde*, Ed. **E. Dluhosch**, **R. Švácha**, Cambridge [Massachusetts] 1999, p. 70.

[18] **T. S. Eliot**, *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition*, Baltimore 2021, Ed. **A. Cuda**, **R. Schuchard**, Vol. 2: *The Perfect Critic, 1919–1926*, Baltimore 2021, p. 435.

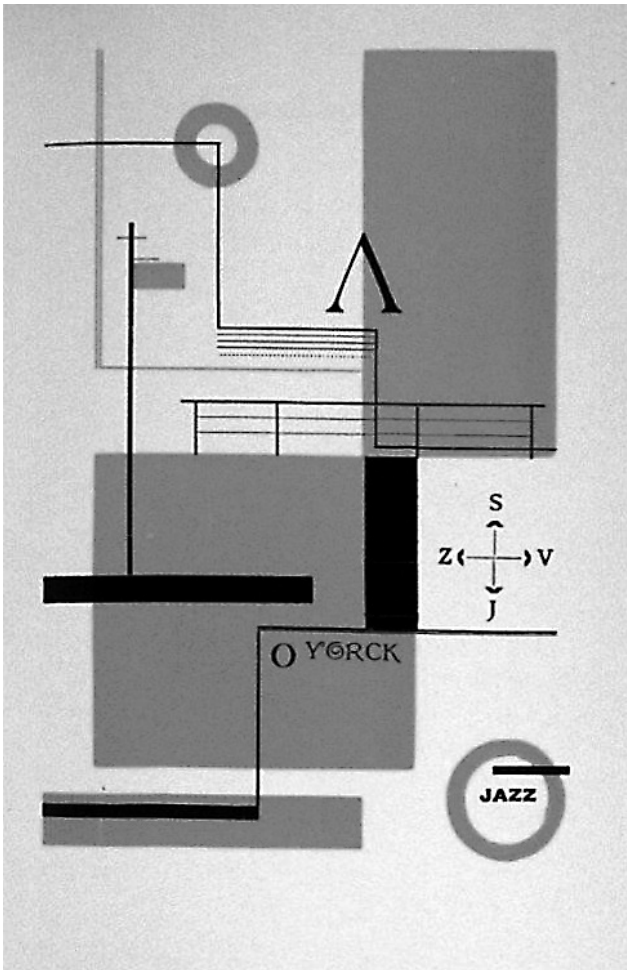
[19] **F. Gibbons**, *Pre-Jazz, Jazz, Post-Jazz*, [in:] *Jazz in Print (1856–1929): An Anthology of Selected Early Readings in Jazz History*, Ed. **K. Koenig**, Hillsdale [New York] 2002, p. 258; **E. W. S. Mendl**, *The Appeal of Jazz*, London 1927, p. 88.



3. Karel Teige, Svět, který se směje, Prague 1928. Photo: author's collection



4. Poster for Dada Grand Ball, Geneva, 1920. Photo: author's collection



5. Konstantin Biebl, *S Lodí Jež Dováží Čaj a Kávu*, Prague 1928. Photo: author's collection

a pitcher puts on a baseball (like a slider or a curveball in today's jargon)[20]. Futurism was not a reference to the vanguard movement, but a common expression for up to date or fashionable, like the "futurist caveau" at the Jockey Club in Paris, or Rector's in New York City that featured the Original Dixieland Jazz Band in its Futurist Room. When jazz became an international word for the music, it conveyed the message of a song by jazz pianist and composer James P. Johnson, "When you start to play modernistic, don't forget to be futuristic"[21]. Early in his career, it's worth noting, legendary jazz trumpeter Louis Armstrong was advertised as a "master of modernism" [Fig. 6].

As jazz spread around the world, it was recognized as "very American in its snap, speed, smartness and cosmopolitan character"[22]. These gestural resources were taken up in the circles of poetism in Prague, where "it is about dancing, reading pulp fiction, and

[20] See **J. Rasula**, *Acrobatic Modernism from the Avant-Garde to Prehistory*, Oxford 2020, p. 203.

[21] **S. Nicholson**, *Jazz and Culture in a Global Age*, Boston 2014, p. 211.

[22] **C. Smith**, *"Etude" Symposium*, [in:] *Keeping Time: Readings in Jazz History*, Ed. **R. Walser**, New York 1999, p. 54.

6. Advertisement for Louis Armstrong, 1927. Photo: author's collection

going to the movies"[23]. Notice the inferential borrowings: "it is about" yields another list. More perceptively, in Bucharest, vanguard editor and poet Ilarie Voronca in 1925 envisioned that, thanks to jazz, "new psycho-physiologies are growing". Voronca and his fellow editors of the Rumanian vanguard journals *Integral* and *75HP* acclaimed the "Filter-intelligence, surprise-lucidity" and "Rhythm-speed" of jazz[24]. Karel Teige called it "a little Cubist monster"[25].

Its in Teige's circle that we find the most discerning understanding of jazz. Poetism was understood to be "an art of life, 'an art of living and enjoying'". And these were the same criteria commonly applied to jazz[26]. Among those involved with poetism, composer and theatre director Emil Burian was inspired by the common term jazz-band to launch what he called a voice-band, which made its debut in April 1927 at the Dada Theatre in Prague. The poster for the occasion asked: "What is voice-band? If you love Dance, Jazzbands, Spectacle, the Beauty of the Czech Language, Enjoying Life to the Full, Modern Rhythms, Poets, Music, then come and hear voice-band"[27] [Fig. 7].

Burian recruited amateurs for the voice-band to avoid the ingrained prejudices of professional musicians. From jazz-bands, Burian recognized the "scope for exploiting so-called mistakes". The result, as he put it, was "raw sound and a rhythmically liberated tonality"[28]. Like Bragaglia's *Jazz Band*, Burian's *Jazz* was published in 1928, both among the earliest publications on the subject. In fact, such publications in Europe were often written by men with avant-garde affiliations[29].

Despite the complete indifference to music by André Breton and his fellow surrealists, Salvador Dalí detected in jazz "the rubber

[23] **E. F. Burian**, *Nejen o Hudbě: Texty 1925–1938*, Ed. **J. Paclt**, Praha 1981, p. 161. Translation courtesy of Josef Horáček.

[24] **Editors of "Integral"**, *Man*, [in:] *Between Worlds: A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-Gardes, 1910–1930*, Ed. **T. O. Benson**, **É. Forgács**, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Cambridge [Massachusetts] 2002, p. 554.

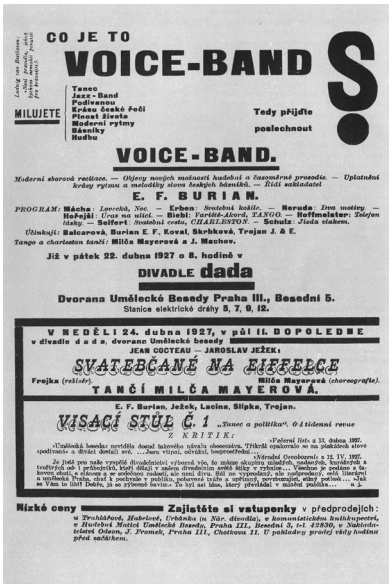
[25] **L. Bydžovská**, *Prague*, [in:] *Central European Avant-Gardes: Exchange and Transformation, 1910–1930*, Ed. **T. O. Benson**, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Cambridge [Massachusetts] 2002, p. 86.

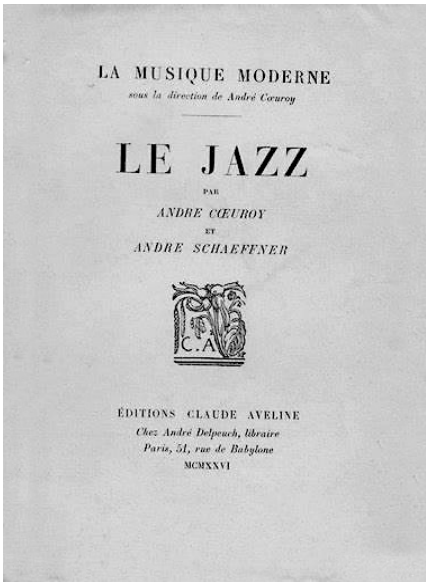
[26] See **J. Smékalová**, liner notes, Transl. G. Shepard, [in:] **B. Martinů**, *Works Inspired by Jazz and Sport* Prague 1996, p. 2.

[27] **A. Jochmanová**, *Voice-Band*, [in:] *A Glossary of Catchwords of the Czech Avant-Garde: Conceptions of Aesthetics and the Changing Faces of Art 1908–1958*, Ed. **P. A. Bílke**, **J. Vojvodík**, **J. Wiendl**, Prague 2011, p. 427.

[28] *Ibidem*, p. 429.

[29] Burian's book was published by Aventinum in Prague, which devoted much of its list to surrealism, poetism, and the avant-garde in general. As a composer, he wrote *Cocktails* for voice and jazz band (1926), a jazz opera *Bubu of Montparnasse* and *Jazz-Requiem* (both 1928). *Le Jazz* published in Paris in 1926 was co-authored by André Coeuroy and An-





7. Poster for Voice-Band concert, Prague, 1927. Photo: author's collection

8. André Coeuroy and André Schaeffner, *Le Jazz*, Paris 1926. Photo: author's collection

sound", and thus eligible for surrealist welcome[30]. In Breton's favorite analogy from Lautréamont, surrealism resembled the encounter of an umbrella and a sewing machine. Discrepancy was its genetic code – a code shared by jazz, as in British writer Mary Butts's agenda of "paederasty & jazz & opium & research" – or by "The Lively" Arts editor James Oppenheim's 1916 characterization of ragtime as "prophecy and philosophy and vulgarity"[31]. It was recognizably "a jumble of moods" to Charles S. Johnson, founder of the Harlem Renaissance journal "Opportunity". Edmund Wilson compressed the jumble to a neologism: *polycacophonic*[32] – a fitting term for this musical and cultural phenomenon that registered *something happening*, making it happen all around the world. The clock that keeps time, as Ferro called jazz.

Time-keeping inevitably involves entrances and exits, as Ferro registered in a telling analogy: "The Age of jazz-band is the precursory Age to this rebirth, the Age in which the human body is the deck of cards that one breaks up at the end of the game in order to use again". In a somewhat ominous yet, in 1924, hopeful in a postwar mood, jazz was "the great oven of the new humanity"[33]. In this oven, as André Coeuroy and André Schaeffner conclude in *Le Jazz*: "We close our ears to jazz in vain. It is life. It is art. It is the intoxication of sounds and noises. It is animal joy in supple movements. It is the melancholy of the passions. It is us today"[34] [Fig. 8].

We search in vain for some durable pledge cementing the bond between jazz and the avant-garde. Vanguard artists, no less than parliamentarians or engine drivers, responded individually to jazz, aware that jazz assimilated all responses into a global collective. For

dré Schaeffner, advocates of the music of Darius Milhaud, Igor Stravinsky, and Paul Hindemith among others, and Coeuroy wrote the scenario for Bohuslav Martinů's ballet *Checkmate* (1930). Coeuroy and Schaeffner counted among their friends Georges Bataille, Carl Einstein, and Michel Leiris. Another early French book was *Aux Frontières du Jazz* (1930) by Robert Goffin, allied with the Cubists.

[30] **S. Dalí**, *The Collected Writings*, Ed., Transl. **H. Finkelstein**, Cambridge 1998, p. 104.

[31] *The Journals of Mary Butts*, Ed. **N. Blondel**, New Haven [Connecticut] 2002, p. 248; **Ch. S. Johnson**, *Jazz*, "Opportunity" 1925, No. 29, p. 133.

[32] **E. Wilson**, *Discordant Encounters: Plays and Dialogues*, New York 1926, p. 153.

[33] **A. Ferro**, *op. cit.*, pp. 86–87, 60.

[34] **A. Coeuroy**, **A. Schaeffner**, *Le Jazz*, Paris 1926, p. 145.

a decade after the debacle of The Great War it made sense to think in terms of an Age of Jazz. Partisanship was not so much intellectual as animalistic. Czech composer Erwin Schulhoff avidly absorbed jazz both in his music and his lifestyle. "I go dancing night after night", he told Viennese composer Alban Berg, "purely out of rhythmic enthusiasm and subconscious sensuality; this gives my creative work a phenomenal impulse, because in my consciousness I am incredibly earthly, even bestial"[35].

On the dance floor, distinctions dissolved. A dancer was no longer an agent of Dada or constructivism, but an occupant of some primal respiration too easily mistaken for "primitivism". It went back farther than that, as Carola Giedion Welcker recognized. Writing about the extraordinary designs created by her friends Jean Arp, Sophie Taeuber and Theo Van Doesburg for the Aubette nightclub in Strasbourg, she observed: "Surely those who had the good fortune to dance in this modern prehistoric cavern moved not merely to the sounds of jazz, but were also inspired by the visual vitality and rhythms of Arp's creations", which she described as "reaching out like monumental tentacles" of a primordial embrace[36].

As a site that epitomizes the intersection of jazz and the avant-garde, the Aubette reveals an alliance grounded in temporal nourishment. "For the avant-gardes", writes Sascha Bru, "the past was always two things: a reason to revolt and begin again […] and a source for new beginnings"[37]. What jazz brought to the table was a nuanced approach to time, slivering past, present and future in a controlled fury of perceptual awareness. The rhythms of jazz made the past present in the oncoming dynamism of a future, moment by moment.

What more could an avant-garde want? It's the spell cast on the protagonist of Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man*. Listening to the music of Louis Armstrong, he finds that:

> Instead of the swift and imperceptible flowing of time, you are aware of its nodes, those points where time stands still or from which it leaps ahead. And you slip into the breaks and look around[38].

Coming to terms with this prospect compels a trans-historical reckoning: "That night I found myself hearing not only in time, but in space as well. I not only entered the music but descended, like Dante, into its depths"[39]. Jazz opened those depths for some, even as it expanded the glitter of surfaces for so many more. It encompassed vitality, superficiality and profundity all at once. It was the mirror of an age in which the vanguard could neither look past nor look away.

Słowa kluczowe
awangarda, jazz, nowoczesność, lata 20. XX w., manifesty

[35] **P.–E. Barbier**, liner notes, Transl. D. Yeld, [in:] **E. Schulhoff**, *Centenary Edition Chamber Music* [CD], Prague 1996, p. 10.

[36] **C. Giedion–Welcker**, *Jean Arp*, Document. M. Hagenbach, Transl. N. Guterman, New York 1957, p. XXX.

[37] **S. Bru**, *The European Avant–Gardes, 1905–1935: A Portable Guide*, Edinburgh 2018, p. 187.

[38] **R. Ellison**, *Invisible Man*, New York 1972, p. 8–9.

[39] *Ibidem*, p. 9.

Keywords
avant-garde, jazz, modernity, 1920s, manifestos

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Summary

JED RASULA (University of Georgia) / Made in America for the World. Avant-Garde responses to Jazz

The article is a selective survey of responses to American jazz by various figures associated with the avant-garde during the 1920s, the decade in which jazz had its initial global impact. As the article indicates, "jazz" was a somewhat free floating signifier, particularly for those who had not experienced the music in person. Yet it was widely understood as an American harbinger of modernity, and embraced as such.