

"God Loves Black Sound

Jazz Music and Christianity

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1. Foreword

"God loves black sound": This quote by saxophonist Rahsaan Roland Kirk makes it clear that jazz and religion have a long history. Jazz musicians have always understood improvisation and groove as a spiritual experience. And African-American religiosity has always taken shape in the encounter with jazz and jazz-related music. Blues and spiritual, gospel music and traditional jazz, these are the sibling pairs that stand at the beginning of jazz history.

This spiritual side of jazz has repeatedly led to impressive works of art. Duke Ellington's "Sacred Concerts", John Coltrane's "A Love Supreme" and May Lou Williams' "Black Christ from the Andes" are mentioned here as representative of many other musicians and recordings. The form of religiosity effective in jazz is undogmatic and open to influences from all religions. Thus, the turn of many Afro-Americans towards Islam in the 1940s and 1950s and the interest in Asian religions in the 1960s and 1970s also left their mark on jazz¹.

There is extensive research on this aspect of jazz history, perhaps most comprehensively in the book "Spirits Rejoice" by Jason C. Bivins. In Germany, the Protestant Church initiated a research project on jazz in the liturgy in 2015-2018, which found expression in the publications "Jazz und Kirche" and "Blue Church".

In this compilation of essays, I am concerned with the cultural-philosophical and theological connections that appear in the connection between jazz and Christian religious practice. I start directly from my personal situation as a jazz musician on the one hand and as a Catholic Christian of Franciscan influence on the other. I have circled this specific location from three different perspectives. The first essay is about the Christian-Jewish attitude to prayer in general and its relationship to jazz. The second deals with the essential features of the Catholic form of Christianity, and the third with Franciscan attitudes². Finally, there is a short text with general reflections on jazz as church music.

All four texts were written in response to specific requests. The essay on the Psalms goes back to a request from a priest who was looking for suggestions for a sermon in a jazz service. The text with reference to the Catholic Church was written as a supplement to this and was thoroughly revised again for publication in the anthology "Blue Church". I originally wrote the chapter on the connec-

¹ For example, Art Blakey and McCoy Tyner, who were practising Muslims, Dizzy Gillespie as a Bahai, Wayne Shorter as a Buddhist and John McLoughlin as a Hindu.

² Information and thoughts on Francis of Assisi, his order and Franciscan spirituality can be found in other texts on my website.

tion between jazz and Franciscan spirituality for a book by Fr Hermann Schallück, OFM, which dealt with the creative impulse of the Franciscan bortschaft. Finally, the article "Jazz as Church Music" was written for the magazine "Musica Sacra".

This history of the texts' development means that trains of thought are occasionally repeated, especially the presentation of my personal relationship to the subject. Nevertheless, I have left these passages unchanged because otherwise the argumentative unity of the texts would have been damaged. Based on these premises, I wish all readers a stimulating read. Perhaps this small collection of essays can be an impulse to give jazz the space it deserves as a contemporary and universal music in the German church as well.

2. "You have turned my lamenting into dancing" - Jazz Music and Psalm Prayer

I have been active as a jazz musician for many years and have my cultural roots in this music. At the same time, I am a Catholic Christian and mainly encounter completely different forms of music in church. I have repeatedly tried to address this tension in my artistic work, e.g. in the projects "Psalms and Canticles for Choir and Jazz Ensemble" and "Franciscan Inventions". In the process, the question of the legitimacy of such an approach has also arisen for me. Jazz in the church: is that even possible? Or, to put it another way: What enables jazz to be an expression and vehicle of a Christian relationship with God, indeed ultimately a musical form of prayer? I would like to try to give an answer to this question by starting from the spirit and the prayerful attitude of the Psalms.

The Psalms are Old Testament prayer texts which, according to tradition, were written by King David. Some of them actually date from that time, but some were also written in the centuries that followed. They express all the feelings that the believer can have towards God: Praise, thanksgiving and rejoicing; but also mourning, lamentation, accusation, anger and even despair. The Psalms still play a central role in Jewish worship today, and in the Catholic and Orthodox Churches they are also part of the so-called Liturgy of the Hours, the regular prayer times of religious and priests. Because of their great importance in worship, there are psalm settings from all epochs and in all musical styles.

Psalm 88, 2-6

Lord, God of my salvation, to you I cry by day and by night.

Let my prayer come to you, turn your ear to my supplication!

For my soul is filled with sorrow, my life is near to the realm of the dead.

Already I am counted among those who sink down into the grave,

I am like a man from whom all strength has been taken.

I am taken away to the dead like slain men who rest in the grave;

you no longer think of them, for they are withdrawn from your hand.

This lament over one's own powerlessness, this cry to God for salvation and help is a basic message of many Psalms. The quiet solemnity of the Gregorian melodies in which the Psalms are so often sung sometimes makes us forget the elemental drama that takes place in these texts. Here there are no polite or pious phrases, no concerns about good taste or artistic decorum. All that counts here is

the existential experience of life and its immediate expression.

Here the Psalms meet with an important basic form of jazz, the blues. In the blues, too, the musician's suffering and lament expresses itself with original force. The sound of the voice and the instruments does not follow any standardised ideal of beauty. The expressiveness and fragility of the sound reflects the musician's personality with its unmistakable individuality. The emotional closeness of the displaced and enslaved blacks in the USA to the biblical people of Israel, who repeatedly had to suffer expulsion and exile, is also evident in the jazz-related black church music, the spirituals and gospel songs, in which Israel's experience of slavery in Egypt or Babylonian captivity plays a major role. (e.g. "Go down, Moses")

Psalm 30, 2-4; 9; 12-13

*I will praise You Lord, for You have pulled me out of the depths
and will not let my enemies triumph over me.*

Lord my God, I cried out to You and You healed me.

*Lord, You brought me out of the kingdom of death,
out of the crowd of the dead You called me to life.*

To You, Lord, I cried for help, I begged my Lord for mercy.

*Then You changed my lamentation into dancing, You
took off my garment of mourning and girded me with joy.*

Therefore my heart sings to You and will not be silenced.

Lord, my God, I will thank you for ever and ever.

But the Psalms do not stop at this lament. It is precisely the admission of one's own weakness and the courage to present one's own personality with all its fractures and fears before God that make God's saving intervention possible. Even when the psalmist feels oppressed by the storms of life, he knows that his life is in God's hands.

This direct reference to God and the trust in his help is of course not directly contained in a mainly instrumental music like jazz. But also in jazz, and even more so in the blues, a new energy emerges from the lament, a rhythmic and tonal energy that generates courage to live and leads back to a vitality that overcomes everyday problems. This basic trust in God is explicitly reflected in the lyrics of gospel music, which is stylistically closely related to jazz. The lament of the Psalms and the Blues differs fundamentally in this respect from the "Weltschmerz" of German Romanticism, for example, which always has a resigned mood and which retreats from the world as it is in reality.

The openness to the future, the trust in life that underlies jazz, is also evident in the fact that this music is never perfect or finished. In improvisation, the musician is open to what doesn't work out so well. He trusts that the ideas will come, that he does not have to control and master the music, but that the music flows through him.

Psalm 98, 4-8

Rejoice before the Lord, all the lands of the earth; be glad, exult and sing!

Play to the Lord with the harp, with the harp to loud singing!

To the sound of trumpets and horns rejoice before the Lord, the King!

Let the sea roar, and all that fills it, the world and its inhabitants.

Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains rejoice in chorus.

This experience of liberation, of being carried, cannot of course be expressed only in quiet tones, neither in the Psalms nor in jazz. It demands a powerful expression, rhythm, movement and loud sounds. Yes, even the volume is part of it, if it arises from the personal energy of the musician and is not generated electrically by an amplification system.

This experience of liberation does not remain in the realm of the merely private, it encompasses the whole of creation, the sea, the earth, the mountains and the rivers. Everything is included in the gratitude to the Creator and in the joy of life and salvation from danger.

And there is another step that the Psalms take in common with jazz music: after the lament and its transformation into dance and new life energy; after the jubilation and its expansion to the whole universe, the view from the cosmic expanse returns to everyday reality and leads here to political consequences.

Psalm 72, 1-7

Grant Thy judicial office, O God, to the king;

to the king's son give Thy righteous rule.

Let him rule thy people in righteousness, and thy poor in judgment.

Then the mountains shall bear peace for the people, and the high places righteousness.

He shall bring justice to the afflicted of the people, help to the children of the poor;

he shall crush the oppressors.

He shall live as long as the sun endures and as long as the moon, even to the remotest generations.

Let him pour down like rain on the fields, like showers that wet the earth.

Let justice flourish in his days, and great peace, until the moon is no more.

Just as the psalmist asks God for the arrival of the messianic kingdom of peace, jazz musicians have also repeatedly stood up for freedom, peace and justice: from the black civil rights movement in the USA to the silent protest of unconventional deviants in the Eastern Bloc to the critique of consumption and media that jazz represents in our society by its very existence. When, for example, the jazz bassist Charles Mingus sang full of fervour in the 1960s: "Oh Lord, don't let them drop that atomic bomb on me!", this is not only an eccentric and somewhat aberrant statement by an outsider, but also ties in, perhaps unconsciously, but nevertheless clearly with the biblical experience of God.

All this shows that jazz music contains the essential elements of Judeo-Christian spirituality. For myself, both Christianity and jazz are, each in their own way, part of the roots that sustain my life, and I have never felt a contradiction between the two. Like many jazz musicians before me, I can express what moves me in my relationship with God seamlessly through the musical means of jazz. As the saxophonist Roland Kirk once said, "God loves black sound!"

January 2006

3. Jazz Music and Catholic Faith Tradition

3.1. Introduction

Here the magnificent cathedrals, there the small and often shabby jazz clubs; here a worldwide, clearly structured hierarchy, there the loose connectedness in small groups and "scenes"; here the carefully planned and quiet movement play of the liturgy, there the spontaneous interaction within a band and with the audience; in short: here incense, there cigarette smoke.

At first glance, it seems as if the contrast between the Catholic Church or the faith tradition effective in it and jazz could not be greater, as if there were no points of contact at all. I myself am both a jazz musician and a Catholic Christian and thus stand in the field of tension between these two cultural and ideological currents. At the grassroots level, in the congregation, the connection is usually not a problem. When I occasionally play in the service, most people are happy to hear different music than they are used to in church. The cultural range and tolerance of Catholic congregations is

considerably greater than is often portrayed in public.

For me, however, what is more decisive is the level of content. And there we can see that beyond the very different surface effects, there are common basic attitudes that bring about the inner dynamics of both the spiritual foundations of the Catholic Church and of jazz.

Of course, it is not without problems to compare a musical style and a religious community, since both have completely different objectives, thematic emphases and patterns of action, and each responds to its own human needs. In addition, a satisfactory definition of the terms "jazz" and "Catholic faith tradition" is a practically impossible task. Both have changed in the course of their history, are composed of a multitude of different currents and are extremely blurred at the edges, i.e. they exhibit numerous hybrid and transitional forms to other musical styles or religious traditions.

A thorough comparison based on scientific criteria would have to take these difficulties into account and work through them in a way that is not possible within the framework of this contribution. Here, in a personal and essayistic context, a few basic remarks must suffice:

- Time and again it becomes apparent that jazz is more than just a musical style. Musicians and listeners are connected in a way that in many respects also includes social behaviour, value orientations and ideological convictions. Conversely, the Catholic faith has always stimulated and produced cultural developments and social structures. There are thus thematic overlaps within which comparisons are not only permissible, but meaningful and fruitful.

- Despite the difficulties in defining the two phenomena precisely, one cannot deny that each has its own identity that connects the historical levels and different currents. On the one hand, this is due to the uninterrupted process in which the numerous manifestations of both jazz and the Catholic tradition have developed apart. And on the other hand, it is rooted in the identity-forming principles from which this development was fed. It is precisely here that the present comparison can provide an unusual and stimulating view.

From what has been said so far, it is clear that the text is based primarily on my personal experience. It tries to make clear what my attitude as a Catholic jazz musician is based on and in which points I see points of contact between my music and my faith. I find the similarities surprising and inspiring. They have helped me to find appropriate forms of improvised music for Catholic worship services, and they have also influenced my path as a creative jazz musician. For this reason, I have also disregarded the differences and contrasts here.

I have already written something about the similarities between jazz and the Jewish-Christian attitude to prayer in general in the text "Jazz Music and Psalm Prayer". Here I will now deal with ele-

ments that belong to the special characteristics of the Catholic faith tradition, especially in contrast to the other denominations. In doing so, I have not so much referred to the magisterial structure of the Catholic Church, but to the basic attitudes effective in the spirituality and attitude to life of Catholic Christians and congregations. I would like to present the commonalities on the basis of five points:

- Physical presence
- Orality and practice
- Historical awareness
- Universality
- Order and freedom

3.2. Physical presence

It is immediately obvious that jazz is closely connected with the physical presence of the musicians and the sensual experience of musical interaction. The rhythms and sounds that emerge in the improvisations are not abstract and one-sidedly rational, but unite body and spirit, mind and feeling. At the same time, the artist as a human being can never be separated from his artistic message. He must create it anew in each improvisation and shape it in its material acoustic reality.

Listening to the music created in this way therefore also requires physical co-experience. This can be seen, for example, in the spontaneous movements of the listeners such as finger snapping or foot rocking, through which they become absorbed in the rhythmic dimension of the music. A community is created between the band and the audience, which is stimulated by the musicians' physical feeling.

What seems to have been somewhat forgotten, however, is the fact that the bodily-sensual communication of faith and the encounter with God also plays a central role in the Catholic Church, especially in comparison to the Protestant Church. The sacraments such as Eucharist (Lord's Supper) and baptism are meant to keep Jesus present in his personal and physical activity. They are not merely explanatory and interpretative symbols that refer to a spiritual reality, but extend the physical presence of Jesus into our everyday lives.

In this context, the priest is not only the proclaimer of an abstract truth or a special kind of social worker, but the representative of Jesus in his actions for people. This presence of Jesus, also understood physically, establishes the community of the Church. Catholic Christians are connected to each other in a similar way, encompassing spiritual and physical aspects, as the members of a jazz

band are connected to each other and to the audience. It is not for nothing that the Church is referred to in the Catholic tradition as the "mystical body of Christ" as well as "the wandering people of God".

The often rich artistic design of Catholic churches, the cultural expressions of Catholicism in terms of architecture, music and visual arts in all eras are a consequence of this basic attitude. God is also physically close to people, he can be experienced sensually, he makes himself touchable.

3.3. Orality and practice

The forms of community and design described above have another thing in common: a distanced relationship to writing. The essential contents of a jazz concert or a liturgical celebration cannot be fixed in writing. They lie in the actions themselves and are also bound to these actions. In this context, texts or notes can only be instructions and reminders; they do not contain the actual message. Here it is similar to cooking recipes: no matter how beautifully they are formulated, it is only the prepared food that fills you up.

The comparison with cooking also shows that it is not just about theoretical knowledge, but above all about skills. These have to be developed through oral transmission and practice. You can't become a jazz musician by reading textbooks, by reading and practising in a quiet room. Lively exchange, making music together and also conversations with other musicians of one's own generation, but also of earlier generations, are irreplaceable.

In the same way, Catholic Christians gradually grow into the expressive world and the common performance of the Catholic liturgy. The community of the congregation helps in the practice and understanding of the rituals, the common celebration of the divine service strengthens the emotional experience, and the conversation within the congregation helps to relate faith and life to each other and to act together. Those who only know the Catholic Church from books or newspaper reports will not understand the essentials. In the same way, books on music theory can be a help in understanding jazz improvisations. But a real approach, which is above all an emotional one, is only opened up by the shared listening experience.³

³ From a Catholic perspective, it seems that in a very similar way there is an affinity between classical music and the Protestant attitude of faith. In a way, the principle of "sola scriptura" applies to both of these traditions. In classical music it is the scores of the great composers, in the Protestant faith communities it is the holy scriptures, the Bible. Both groups are strongly convinced that the contents are contained most clearly and densely in the respective scriptural form.

3.4. Historical awareness

The important role that bodily presence and orality play in jazz and in the Catholic faith tradition produces another common feature: a particularly pronounced awareness of history.

For the Catholic Church, this seems clear. Everyone knows that tradition plays a major role here and that there is a very clear insistence on the immutability of certain doctrines and structures. On the one hand, this seems to stabilise the Church, on the other hand, it makes its ability to develop and its contact with modernity more difficult.

But if you take a closer look, you will see that things are not so simple. This can be well illustrated by a quote from Pope John XXIII in his opening address for the Second Vatican Council: "But it is not our task merely to preserve this precious treasure (the faith that has been handed down, note), as if we were interested only in what is old; rather, let us now joyfully and fearlessly set about the work that our time demands, and continue the journey that the Church has been making for 20 centuries".⁴

In the Catholic Church, tradition means walking through history on a path that is open to the future, as well as an orientation towards principles that apply to all generations. Tradition thus virtually requires a further development of the status quo, a "joyful and fearless" encounter with new times and new tasks. The word "ecclesia semper reformanda", the Church that is always and at all times in need of reform, also aims in this direction. Church history shows how often and profoundly the Catholic Church has already changed in the course of this further development without abandoning its foundations. It shows that the very personalities who have initiated particularly effective changes have had a strong relationship with tradition and at the same time a fresh and courageous view of it. There is a saying in the Catholic scene that illustrates this connection well: "Tradition is the passing on of the fire and not the keeping of the ashes."⁵

While historical consciousness is obviously an important trait of the Catholic attitude to life, the opposite seems to be the case for jazz music. Jazz is associated with departure, spontaneity, constant renewal. Of course, this is also the case with good musicians. But it is easy to overlook the fact that the constantly emerging new forms emerge from the older ones in a very similar way to what I have outlined above for the Catholic Church. This connection of new musical styles with jazz history has several aspects:

⁴ Pope's address "Gaudet mater ecclesia" at the opening of the 2nd Vatican Council;
[http://www.kathpedia.com/index.php?title=Gaudet_mater_ecclesia_\(text\)](http://www.kathpedia.com/index.php?title=Gaudet_mater_ecclesia_(text))

⁵ The quote originally comes from Gustav Mahler, but is also often used in connection with church reforms.

- First of all, the oral learning of improvisation, rhythm and phrasing means that each new generation has close contact with the previous one. Almost all famous jazz musicians played with the best of the older musicians in the early years of their careers and learned in their bands. Moreover, it is natural for young musicians to listen to the most important recordings of earlier eras, to talk about them and to get advice from older musicians. And even in lessons at the music school, it is noticeable that young people interested in jazz, at an age when they are distancing themselves from parents and teachers, are happy to listen and ask questions when instrumental teachers or band leaders talk about their experiences and musical adventures.

- Another aspect is the basic principles underlying jazz music of all eras. Groove, individual sound and improvisation are the essential elements of all jazz styles. They are practised by learning older styles and they also underlie all further developments and innovations. It is the intuitive and often unconscious loyalty to these basic principles that enables the integration of ever new suggestions and techniques and thus the development of new styles.

- Finally, there is the fact that jazz history itself is a rich source of inspiration from which the great innovators of jazz in particular have drawn extensively. Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Thelonious Monk, Ornette Coleman, Charles Mingus and many others are characterised by the sovereignty with which they drew on different layers of time and styles, formed a personal sound from them and thus arrived at completely new results, which in turn became part of jazz history.

To sum up: outwardly, the Catholic Church emphasises the unchangeable nature of its teachings, while jazz emphasises the new and spontaneous in music. In reality, however, both maintain an equally respectful and flexible relationship to tradition based on a living knowledge of earlier epochs. Through this form of historical consciousness, they are able to react in a differentiated way to new challenges and to renew themselves again and again.

3.5. Universality

The form of historical consciousness presented in the previous section brings about a community across the generations. This group formation across epochs leads to the need to constantly reassure oneself of one's own identity. This could lead to a narrow and delimiting attitude towards other types of culture and belief, a kind of self-commitment to preserve the achievements of the past in an unchanged way. In fact, this narrowness is occasionally encountered, both in the realm of the church and that of jazz. Examples from recent years are, for example, the Catholic traditionalist association Pius X, and for jazz the circle of musicians around the trumpeter Wynton Marsalis and the critic

Stanley Crouch. So this tendency exists, but it is balanced and cancelled out overall by the universality that characterises the claim of both jazz and the Catholic Church.

Universality means being able to appeal and persuade across cultures. A universal idea is understandable, plausible and attractive to people who otherwise have little in common and come from different cultural and social contexts. It can be applied in many ways and integrated into personal life and sensibilities. Likewise, universality also includes the reverse direction of movement: new and foreign influences can affect the original idea and change it without it losing its fundamental identity. Both are true for jazz as well as for the Catholic Church.

This universality has been in jazz's cradle, so to speak, from the very beginning. It came into being through the encounter of African and European musical forms, it adopted elements from both traditions and brought them together to form a new and coherent unity. Only a few years after its emergence, jazz music aroused worldwide interest and enthusiasm across all cultures and classes. Jazz bands played in New York, Shanghai, Rio de Janeiro and Berlin, and listeners came from working-class neighbourhoods, bourgeois houses and occasionally even princely castles.

Jazz has retained this universal openness. It has inspired numerous forms of popular music and been influenced by them in turn. In many bands and artistic projects since the 1950s, there have been encounters and dialogues with practically all the musical cultures of the world, from European classical to South American, African and Indian to Arabic music, which has played a recurring role in the concepts of European jazz musicians since the late 1990s.

At the same time, jazz and jazz musicians almost always succeeded in maintaining the basic identity of the music and the self-evident connection to each other. On the one hand, this has to do with the connection to the jazz tradition described above: even a jazz musician who improvises together with techno DJs or Arab musicians is naturally able to interpret a piece by Duke Ellington or Charlie Parker in the proper style. On the other hand, it is due to the fidelity to the unspoken principles of jazz founded in improvisation: even if the jazz musician plays in an electronic or world music context, he will always be concerned with the spontaneous creation of sounds and rhythms.

Although jazz has long been a music for a relatively small number of dedicated listeners, it is able to build bridges into many other areas and to appeal to and inspire people from other cultures. Still, or perhaps even more than ever, jazz is a universal music.

The emergence of Christianity and the development of the Catholic Church and its tradition of faith have a number of analogies with the history of jazz. The Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles of

Paul in the New Testament already bear witness to the encounter between Jewish and Greek culture. The formulation of the fundamental Christian doctrinal statements took place in the confrontation with ancient philosophy. Categories of Roman legal and state thought also shaped the development of the Church. In the expressions of Catholic popular piety, diverse cultural and religious traditions were processed.

I do not want to deny or gloss over the negative sides of this process. These exist in two directions: both the cases of the use of violence in missionary work and the fact that problematic aspects of other cultures have overlaid the message of the Gospel through cultural mixing cast a clear shadow on church history.⁶ This shows an important difference to jazz, which as a pure cultural expression has neither a claim to truth nor a political-formative power and is thus less affected by violent conflicts.

It remains to be said, however, that the Catholic Church has been able to truly convince many people in all parts of the world of its faith and that the encounter with other cultures has enriched the life of the Church and fertilised its further development. In doing so, it succeeded in preserving the core of its message despite all its diversity. Unifying elements for many centuries were the Latin language and scholastic theology, which ensured a worldwide community at the level of bishops and theologians. At the beginning of the 1960s, the Second Vatican Council finally opened the Catholic liturgy to the many languages of the world and made possible a wider inclusion of the cultural traditions of the peoples of Africa and Asia in Catholic theology. This further promoted awareness of the global dimension of the Church. Many German parishes, for example, have close relations with parishes in other continents, with both partners learning from each other. African or Indian priests and religious sisters in Europe are no longer unusual.

Naturally, there are always conflicts and disputes between the Roman headquarters and the different needs of the local churches in the various regions of the earth. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church succeeds in uniting people from all cultures and walks of life into a true unity. A visit to St. Peter's Square in Rome makes the whole colourfulness and universality of the Church impressively clear.

3.6. Order and freedom

Even more than with the other points, the allocation seems to be clear here: the Catholic Church stands for order, jazz for freedom.

⁶ A particularly clear example of this is the Germanic leader and warrior culture that was a decisive impetus for the Crusades in the Middle Ages, which completely disregarded the Jesuit injunction to non-violence.

The Catholic Church advocates a world view set out in unchanging dogmas and postulates the assistance of the Holy Spirit for papal decisions in fundamental matters of faith, which is catchily but not entirely accurately called "infallibility". In the ethical sphere, the attempt is made to apply the ethics of the Gospel to every situation of human life through a precisely formulated system of commandments and rules in order to offer binding orientation.

In jazz, on the other hand, there are no dogmas; every musician is free in his or her creations. The boundaries between jazz and other forms of music are fluid and the meaningfulness of stylistic boundaries is often disputed, especially by jazz musicians.⁷ There is indeed a kind of "ethics of improvisation", but this is limited to the demand to preserve the spontaneity of improvisation, to develop one's own style and not to stand still in the search for new forms of improvised music. If one transfers this ethic of improvisation to life, the idea of striving for an original, self-designed life that resists external constraints emerges.

On closer inspection, however, one soon notices that this division does not correspond to reality, that it is rather based on attributions from outside or perhaps even on a form of self-stylisation.

For jazz, it quickly becomes clear that the postulated freedom is only possible if it is supported by a strong counter-momentum of order and self-discipline. This begins with learning the instrument. To be able to improvise truly freely requires a mastery of the instrument that can only be achieved through thousands of concentrated hours of practice. Hours of individual practice is an almost ascetic achievement that requires an extraordinary amount of patience, perseverance and self-criticism. In addition, an improviser in jazz needs comprehensive knowledge of the harmonic foundations of music, i.e. the musical ordering functions. Anyone who wants to improvise spontaneously and meaningfully on certain chord progressions at the same time must be able to deal confidently with the composition of the chords and the inner logic of their order in order to apply them within fractions of a second.

In addition, there is the bond to the jazz tradition described in point three. For jazz musicians, it is a matter of course to master the most important styles of earlier decades (the so-called "mainstream") in order to be able to play together with other musicians on this basis at any time. Only from this basis are new concepts and styles developed by young musicians. In the process, the postmodern and deconstructivist tendencies of the last 30 years demand of musicians the ability to interpret many different forms of jazz or jazz-related music in a way that is true to the style.

⁷ Nevertheless, it is of course the case that musicians of other musical genres very clearly identify jazz musicians as such. So the stylistic difference is also perceived when it is contested.

So an ethic of jazz involves not only personal freedom, but also consideration for the stylistic context. This naturally carries over into the group structure of a band. In a music that makes improvisation its central feature, mutual consideration and empathy are indispensable prerequisites for the success of a concert. Good music can only be created when everyone in the band takes responsibility for it.

So the conclusion is: creative freedom in jazz does exist. However, it requires a great deal of self-discipline in learning the instrument as well as the willingness to actively deal with music-theoretical structures. This freedom is also embedded in the social requirements of a group, without which it cannot develop. In jazz, therefore, the principles of freedom and order, individuality and responsibility are brought to a balance that ensures that this music does not lose its tension and dynamism.

Likewise, the ostensible law and dogma orientation of the Catholic Church is balanced by a strong moment of individual freedom. This applies both to the ideological-theological sphere, in which dogmas, i.e. unchanging doctrines, play a major role, and to Catholic ethics with its precisely formulated rules and laws.

First of all, one should assume that dogmatic formulations are an obstacle to free thinking due to their immutability. However, if one looks at the effectiveness of dogmas in church history, one finds the opposite. Dogmas came into being in a long process of discussion, often over centuries. They combine the concerns of different faith experiences and theological schools and bring them to a balance. In this way, they form a common basis that enables community and has been able to inspire theological reflection and piety in very different directions throughout the centuries.

This can be illustrated, for example, by the Christological dogma according to which Jesus Christ is "true man and true God at the same time". Taken by itself, this statement is first of all an empty formula. In order for it to have any meaning, it must be filled with content. This happens through the believers' living relationship with Jesus Christ. Some feel more addressed by the divine nature, they experience him as the "Logos", as the spiritual basic law of the world, as the guarantor of the resurrection and as the Lord of the last judgement. For others, Jesus is closer in his human nature, as a friend and brother who was exposed to temptations and suffering, as someone who resisted anti-human laws and traditions and promised justice to the poor.

The crucial point is that both faith experiences justify themselves via dogma, but not to the extent that they can deny the other side the right to exist. The dogma guarantees the freedom to find a personal approach to Jesus.

It is similar with most other dogmas: they do not restrict freedom, but form a foundation from which many interpretations are possible, but which are all interconnected through their tie back to the dogma. At the same time, dogmas also have an effect on different areas of life. They inspire both rational thinking, i.e. theology, and the emotionality of faith. They offer points of contact for the integration of other cultures and they receive diverse and individual expression in the popular piety of all epochs and continents.

In the field of ethics, the Catholic Church has produced a system of rules and laws that are supposed to apply the message of Jesus to as many life situations as possible. If one now actually applies these laws to all possible individual cases, situations arise in which these laws seem misanthropic or even absurd. And even apart from that, the impression arises that here a suspicious supervisory authority wants to prevent all independent and self-responsible action.

It must therefore be kept clearly in mind that this lawful system is only one component of Catholic ethics, which is limited in its importance by two far more important components.

On the one hand, this is the awareness of the fundamental weakness of human beings. In connection with the belief that God loves people precisely in this weakness, this awareness leads to a great liberation: no one can keep all the laws, no one can make himself righteous before God through his own faultless behaviour. All these laws are deeply relative. They offer an idealistic orientation to which one can direct the shaping of one's life and the growth of one's personality. How they are applied to one's own life, however, is entrusted to the discretion and effort of the individual. This can be seen in the ritual of confession. Here it is not a matter of presenting oneself as a perfect person or making a promise of future perfection, but of perceiving oneself as a whole person with all its faults and entrusting this whole person to God's love. If we consider for a moment how relentlessly perfect functioning is demanded in today's working world, we see what a liberating element lies in this confession of the imperfection of the human being.

On the other hand, the laws are relativised by the importance of conscience for the individual. It is one of the foundations of Catholic ethics that conscience always and in every situation has priority over the observance of the laws. Even in cases where conscience comes to a different conclusion than Church teaching (i.e. "errs" from the Church's point of view), one may and should follow it.

These two serious limitations of legal ethics make the following clear: it is not about blindly following a more or less sensible system of rules, but about the development of a personality oriented towards ethical principles, for which freedom and personal responsibility are the central values, and

for which the laws have an auxiliary function as signposts.⁸

If we go back to jazz, we can compare the church laws with the rules of harmony: they make sense and are correct to a certain extent, but they need to be interpreted in relation to the concrete situation. Just as the musician's ear ultimately decides whether a note fits or not, just as improvisation is not about "flawlessness" but about individual creativity, for the Catholic Christian, conscience and trust in God's love are the basis for one's own actions. The Church Father Augustine already said in the 5th century: "Love, and then do what you want."

3.7. Conclusion and evaluation

In five different areas I have presented commonalities between jazz and the Catholic faith tradition. These commonalities are first of all value-neutral. They do not make jazz and the Catholic form of faith better or worse than they are, they do not establish a claim to truth or moral primacy. Nor do they lead to the conclusion that jazz is actually the optimal form of Catholic church music; they do, however, point out that there is no substantive reason to reject jazz in the church.

Finally, if we look again at the consequences of these common basic principles of bodily presence, orality, specific historical consciousness, universality and the tension between freedom and order, one thing stands out above all: both groups are united by a continuity of creativity.

Even if you don't like jazz, you will have to admit that the diversity of styles and forms of expression, of playing techniques and of formative musical personalities within a scant century is without parallel in the entire history of music. And quite apart from the question of whether or not one believes the teachings of the Catholic Church to be true and how one judges its role in society, the abundance of different schools of thought, paths of faith and cultural forms of expression inspired by it is impressive. An immense number of individuals, active and contemplative, progressive and conservative, austere and serene, women and men, priests and lay people, have contributed to it. They have dedicated their lives to it and thereby realised it creatively.

It is this ceaseless stream of creative expressions of life that gives both jazz and the Catholic faith tradition an important role in meeting the cultural challenges of our time and in developing new visions and models of life. It should be reckoned with.

⁸ In view of the statements of some bishops, this thought may cause one or the other reader to frown. It is unfortunately a general observation that the representatives of a rigorist attitude in religious communities are often particularly vocal and present in the media. However, my remarks accurately reflect Catholic teaching and they also correspond to the normal reality in Catholic communities with regard to the integration of Church teaching into everyday life.

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4. Jazz music and Franciscan spirituality

My name is Matthias Petzold and I am a jazz musician: saxophonist, improviser, composer, band leader. I also belong to the Franciscan family through my pledge in the SFO, the Franciscan Lay Community.

I became a jazz musician at the age of 14 when I happened to listen to the radio programme "Jazzplatte der Woche" (Jazz Record of the Week) on SWF 2 and decided to find out what these fascinating and sometimes unwieldy sounds were all about. I became a Franciscan at the age of 26, when my wife and I, quite newly married, with a daughter of barely one year and only recently back in regular contact with the church, sat in a lecture about the 3rd Order of Franciscans. It was immediately clear to us that we belonged there, that we were in good hands with our concerns and peculiarities.

But what is the reason for that? Why is an improvising musician attracted to the Franciscan spirit? And why were the old ladies in the SFO community in my hometown so honestly and spontaneously delighted by my saxophone improvisations, which I soon contributed around church services? I will try to give an answer by highlighting some points that play a role in both jazz and Franciscan life.

4.1. Creativity

As a musician or artist, what fascinated me most directly and lastingly about Francis was his creative way of shaping his life and tackling problems. Many turning points in his life are linked to surprising and visually powerful ideas and actions with which he turned the whole situation around and found completely new solutions both for his own life and for the society in which he lived.

He met a leper and instead of just giving him some money and riding on, he got off his horse and embraced him, thus giving new meaning to both their lives. He was called to account by his father, and instead of either obeying him or getting into an argument with him, he gave him back his clothes and stood naked in the cathedral square of Assisi. He saw the dilapidated church of St. Damiano and heard Jesus' call: "Restore my house", and instead of talking or collecting money, he immediately and single-handedly began to repair the church. He was unsure which way to go at a crossroads, so he turned in circles until he sank down with dizziness and then took the direction he had fallen.

Whether one thinks of the Sermon on Birds, the visit to the Sultan, the creation of the Canticum of the Sun, his dealings with his brothers conveyed in numerous stories, or the ritualistic staging of his death: he always broke out of the paths of the usual and expected and created new ways of seeing, experiencing and changing the world.

In this, apart from his sovereign and cheerful disregard for all conventions, two things stand out in particular: the self-evident and unquestionable loyalty to what he had recognised as right before his conscience; and the complete renunciation of criticism of others. He wanted to convince people with his ideas, not force them on them. He emphasised both again and again in all clarity. In his testament, he wrote that no one had shown him what to do, but that the Most High Himself was the source of his way of life. And to his brothers he repeatedly inculcated that they should not take up positions of power, but only work by their example.

Francis did not want to change the world by fighting evil, but by recreating good. In this he meets with many contemporary artists who understand their work as a spiritual contribution to a transformation of the world. They rely on the transformative and life-shaping power of creativity, which overcomes conflicts and opens up new paths to the future.

4.2. Improvisation

There are many ways to be creative and to develop ideas. In European culture, writing has always played a major role. The author who writes a great work; the philosopher who puts down a complex system of thought in writing; the composer who composes symphonies or operas in his study: they are the prototypes of the Western cultural ideal.

As a European jazz musician, I certainly know and appreciate the value of the cultural form thus created. But I also know that something else lies in deeper and existentially more significant layers of the human soul: the spontaneous flow of ideas; the direct creation and shaping from the realm of the unconscious and unformed; the emergence of communal visions from the encounter of different people. In short: the improvisatory, which precedes all written fixation and which is the basic impulse of jazz.

Francis, too, always developed his ideas spontaneously and in relation to the respective situation. He never prepared his sermons, and it is reported several times that he occasionally did not think of anything to say. He often interrupted his speeches with songs or dance steps. A confrere told that he imitated a violin with two sticks while singing praises to God.

And he was always sceptical of the written definition, be it by theology, be it by canon law. He al-

lowed it because he saw the practical usefulness of these cultural techniques, but he knew that real life can never be captured or conserved in texts. In the letter to St. Anthony, who was also a theologian and teacher in the Order, he wrote: "I permit you to present sacred theology to the brothers, if only you do not extinguish the spirit of prayer and devotion through this study, as it is written in the Rule." So: allowed, yes, but the essence is in life and in living relationship with God and people.

Towards the end of his life, he said to his brothers: "Brothers, let us begin, because so far we have done very little or even nothing". For me, this Franciscan spirit of beginning is closely related to jazz music, which also emerges anew in every concert and leaves behind what has been achieved up to then.

4.3. Style formation

One could now raise the justified objection: spontaneity and renunciation of written fixation is all well and good; but in what way then did Francis pass on the message of his life?

Here we must come to a peculiar and even irritating point that Francis has always emphasised: the exemplary nature of a convincingly lived life. Again and again he speaks of the brothers doing or not doing this or that "for the sake of example". When he was pressed by a brother to finally write a Rule of the Order, he pointed excitedly at himself and said, "Here is your Rule." And he even staged his death publicly in the company of the entire Order, in order to impress his message clearly on the brothers once more. Later, this peculiarity was condensed into the formula that Francis was the "forma minorum", i.e. in his person the rule of life of his order.

In this consequence, it seems strange at first. In the area of love, devotion and piety, we expect the greatest possible lack of intention, and we are encouraged in this by the Gospel, which condemns public displays of religious acts as hypocrisy. That is why one has to look closely at Francis: first and foremost, all his actions are deeply authentic. He does what he thinks is right, without paying attention to public effect. In doing so, he also acts spontaneously and without a preconceived plan. Only in a second step does he realise that it is precisely through this that he sets people in motion, unfolds a spiritual power and shapes a lifestyle that others can orientate themselves by, but also rub against. Someone once said: "If Jesus is the Word of God made flesh, then the saints are commentaries on this Word made flesh. This is precisely Francis' concern. With his whole life he responds to the encounter with Jesus, and thus his life becomes a concrete and exemplary interpretation of the Gospel.

Here again there is a transition to the self-image of many contemporary artists, especially jazz mu-

sicians. Just as Francis coined a lifestyle to be effective in the world, it is the goal of artists to produce a style that expresses and communicates their own feelings and thoughts. This style is only successful if it is truly authentic. But it must also develop its own shape, which persists in different contexts and carries and communicates the message of this artist before all written definition.

For jazz musicians in particular, this style does not lie in the factually tangible structure of a piece of music. Rather, it is given in the indefinable overall aura that an artist creates as a person and through his or her artistic expressions. When the jazz trumpeter Miles Davis was asked what he would consider his lasting contribution to this world, he said: "My sound. That is, his sound, his unmistakable, sensitive and expressive trumpet tone, which is immediately recognisable. Perhaps this can best be compared to Francis' statements in which he speaks of the "fragrance" of certain words and situations.

In this context, one can also think of the action artist Josef Beuys, who regarded every person as an artist who gives shape to his or her life as a "social sculpture". For Beuys, encounter was an exchange of these social sculptures, which thereby influence each other. Accordingly, Francis shaped his life as a sculpture that he wanted to look more and more like Christ, but which is nevertheless, or rather precisely because of this, quite individual and unique.

4.4. Conclusion

As the thoughts expressed above show, for me personally there is a natural intersection where jazz music and Franciscan spirituality meet. I try to shape my life and my musical work from this basic experience. I am happy to be able to walk on this path, which gives me inspiration and strength. And I am happy that I receive a lot of positive feedback from Franciscan-minded sisters and brothers who feel touched by the music thus created.

August 2014

5. Jazz as church music

Jazz in the church? Isn't that a long-discarded topic from the 60s of the last century? When the church was still looking for new shores, jazz was in full bloom and most discussants were not really clear about the difference between jazz and pop music? Certainly: at present it seems that the field of Catholic church music is divided between traditional church music, the New Spiritual Song and a few experiments in the field of "new music". There seems to be neither space nor necessity for a form of music that is both artistically demanding and initially irritating, such as jazz.

In addition, jazz no longer occupies the place in the public consciousness that it had 40 or 50 years ago and, moreover, has developed and differentiated itself stylistically once again in the past 20 years, so that one can hardly speak of "jazz" as a closed musical style. Nevertheless, I believe that the basic elements of jazz contain creative principles that can give Catholic church music important impulses for further cultural and spiritual development.

An essential characteristic of the Catholic Church has always been openness to different cultural traditions, beginning with the encounter of Jewish and Greek thought in the New Testament to the diverse expressions that the universal Church of today has developed in different cultures. This reveals a central element of the Christian faith: the Church is sent to all peoples, it is to take in the best of all cultures and sanctify and transform them through the presence of Christ. The event of Pentecost already shows: Christianity has no uniform culture; the language of Christianity is the language of all peoples. This is precisely an important bridge to jazz in terms of content.

Jazz is also a music of cultural openness. Born out of the encounter between European and African musical traditions, it has conducted musical dialogues with all the major musical cultures of the world in the course of its history. Especially in the last 20 years, the stylistic development of jazz has once again set clear accents. Jazz in a German church: this includes the possibility of opening up not only to theology but also to the musical cultures of the "young churches" in Africa and South America. It is a clear statement for the vitality of the Catholic Church, which is not only the guardian of the "Christian West", but is entering the third millennium of its existence on a new and exciting path.

The second point I would like to mention is the connection with the spirituality of the Old Testament. In the Christian tradition, there has often been an opposition between body and spirit, in which the body was devalued and a purely spiritual Christianity was striven for. This has also influenced church music, in which the physical, rhythmic element was often viewed with suspicion.

The rediscovery of the Old Testament by Christian theology as well as the Jewish-Christian dialogue have led to a re-evaluation here: the human being is a unity of body and spirit and in this wholeness he faces God. When music is mentioned in the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms, this is clearly expressed. There is talk of loud rejoicing, people are asked to clap their hands, the trumpets sound, cymbals sound and the strings of the harp are played. So the image is much more that of a jazz band than a chorale schola. Jazz's ability to connect the physical and spiritual levels in people through improvisation and rhythm can be seen as a direct link to this holistic form of piety.

These two points alone make it clear that it is worthwhile to bring jazz back into the church; that is where it once came from, namely from the spirituals. Many jazz musicians are interested in religious themes. So church musicians who are willing to experiment will have no difficulty finding musical partners in the jazz scene.

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