

FUTURE OF JAZZ - CONCERNING BUT HOPEFUL

(Changes in NYC Jazz Scene perspective)

SPRING '2022 /By K.J. Reilly

The possibility of Jazz Music becoming a forgotten genre is a scary thought. There are not enough young people choosing to listen to, learn or play Jazz music, so this could become a lost art in another 50 years, if we don't make a commitment to make the music accessible, to keep it alive by introducing it to the younger generations to ensure that the Jazz Music does not become a lost National treasure.

When looking at the changing landscape in the music industry in general (given the advancement of technology, namely the internet and social media), there is a cosmic shift in how people listen to, purchase, and share music. This impacted all aspects of the music industry. This was a major blow to Record labels' bottom line, so they had to change and alter the structure of their contracts with artists to expand the scope of how they generate revenues.

Let's consider how the Jazz music genre has been lagging behind in popularity, sales, marketing, radio play, streaming, etcetera.

Even though Congress designated Jazz music a National American Treasure in a 1987 resolution, its popularity was already diminishing. By the time the internet, eCommerce and streaming came into play, the Jazz Music genre was brought to its knees, in terms of records sales and downloads and streaming revenues. Case in point, in 2018, Jazz genre record sales amounted to only 1.1% of the overall sales for that year. According to an article in Billboard Magazine, the total Jazz record sales in 1987 was 4.9% of all annual sales, which declined gradually to 2.8% by 1997 (source: Billboard, April 17, 1999). This is disturbing especially for the established and aspiring Jazz artists. In reality, the avantgard, alternative and Jazz Music acts have to depend on tours outside the country to earn a living, especially these days.

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So bringing it back to the local scene here in New York; It is a travesty when we compare it to the once booming Jazz scene in New York, which has dwindled considerably over the past 30 years. There seemed to have been many more Jazz venues throughout the City in the nineteen sixties, seventies and even the eighties but there were signs of trouble when the 1990's rolled in, when many of the popular (non touristy) Jazz clubs began to close down. Club owners most often struggled with rising rents, making it impossible to eke out profits

In the seventies and eighties, however, there were a good number of small, no-frills clubs all over New York City, that starving artists could afford. It's places like this that foster development of aspiring musicians and singers who are looking to grow or maintain their chops. There were also programs like Jazz Mobile, University of the Streets, which hosted jazz workshops (Instructed by the Late Barry Harris) for over 40 years.

These Programs were safe havens for the musicians that couldn't afford private lessons, or couldn't afford to go to Mannes School for Jazz at the New School, or a Music Conservatory. In 2015, University of the Streets(UOTS) closed its East Village location, and moved to the Bronx, adding an afterschool music program, Dance and Martial Arts programs, as well as many other activities. Although UOTS still hosts live jazz, it doesn't serve the Jazz community as it once did.

Thankfully places like the Village Vanguard, the Blue Note and Smalls are still around, but they are super expensive ,catering primarily to tourists. If the jazz clubs that are around cater to established recording artists - target tourists, where does one go to hear or play jazz music without dipping into your savings account? Where does one go to develop their skills in front of a live audience?

The good news is that the small, local Jazz jam sessions are beginning to resurface,

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providing a much needed place for musicians
and singers to converge and jam and we are
grateful for that.

