

All that jazz: Hong Kong to host two-day extravaganza

Acclaimed jazz musicians will present workshops on April 30, while a jazz marathon concert will produce seven hours of exciting jazz on May 1

In partnership with
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Mokhtar Samba leads the Mokhtar Samba African Jazz Project, with special guest Eugene Pao, in the evening session.

Art, literature, film, music – by their nature as creative pursuits the arts take inspiration from many sources, including each other. Jazz, described by many as a fusion of Western

classical and African music, is one of the most eclectic and constantly evolving types of music, so it's no surprise that its influence has reached beyond the borders of its own art form.

Many great writers have professed a love for jazz, while jazz has been inspired by great literature. With Unesco's International Jazz Day taking place on April 30, there is opportunity to explore how the music has sparked brilliance on the page and made its way into global cultural consciousness.

One of modern literature's most well-known writers, whose work is inextricably linked to jazz, is F Scott Fitzgerald. *The Great Gatsby*, written in 1925, describes well-heeled New York of the time, funded by gangster-driven wealth and set against the backdrop of the Prohibition era, at a time when everyone was listening to a new, exciting form of music: jazz.



Eugene Pao, Hong Kong's most publicly recognised jazz musician, is one of the performers featured in the jazz marathon organised by Leisure and Cultural Services Department on April 30 and May 1.

"By seven o'clock the orchestra had arrived, no thin five-piece affair, but a whole pitful of oboes and trombones and saxophones and viols and cornets and piccolos, and low and high drums," says Nick Carraway, the book's protagonist and narrator of the story. There was "music from my neighbour's house through the summer nights. In his blue gardens men and girls came and went like moths among the whisperings and the champagne and the stars".



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While the novel reveals the emptiness of monetary success without moral conviction, millionaire Jay Gatsby “ironically ... remains one of the most admired of American literature’s romantic men”, says Linda Wagner-Martin, author of *Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald: An American Woman’s Story*, a biography of one of the most famous figures of the jazz age, F Scott Fitzgerald’s wife.

F Scott Fitzgerald’s book has inspired plays, radio adaptations, an opera, and numerous films, including Baz Luhrmann’s 2013 version starring Leonardo DiCaprio, Carey Mulligan, and Tobey Maguire that grossed an estimated US\$350 million. But while Jay Gatsby remains adored as a fictional character, not all readers – or writers – have admired the author as much as they have his literary creation.

Ernest Hemingway, in his posthumously published *A Moveable Feast* (1964), paints a cutting portrait of Fitzgerald, and of writers Gertrude Stein, Ford Madox Ford, and others. The book is a part autobiographical, part fictional account of the years Hemingway spent in Paris. It gives insight into the character of jazz age personalities and the prevailing cultural Zeitgeist.



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So, too, does Hemingway’s first novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, published in 1926. The book follows a group of American and British travel companions making their way to the annual running of the bulls festival at San Fermin in Pamplona, Spain. The novel aptly “captures the mood of the hard-drinking and hard-loving jazz age”, Wagner-Martin says.

Thirty years on and literature is feeling the impact of jazz in a different way, as it influences a new style of writing. The Beat Generation in the 1950s heralded a significant cultural turning point in the United States. Writers such as Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsburg brought a new sense of adventure and spontaneity to the page. Drugs, sexuality, nonconformity, and music were subjects that attracted writers and artists, and went on to inspire the 1960s counterculture movement.



Local jazz quartet In One Stroke will play original compositions that experiment with form, texture, and style led by Russian trumpet player Alex Sipiagin in the LCSD jazz marathon. Photo credit: Dino Zarafonitis

Kerouac was particularly fascinated by music, specifically bebop jazz. The frenetic, improvisational structure of bebop music weaves its way through his writing, his loose, racing pace on the page imitating the non-traditional structure of the music.

“No periods separating sentence structures already arbitrarily riddled by false colons and timid usually needless commas – but the vigorous space dash separating rhetorical breathing (as jazz musician drawing breath between outblown phrases),” writes Kerouac in his essay “Essentials of Spontaneous Prose”, his personal manifesto for writing.

In Kerouac’s best-known work, *On the Road*, published in 1957, jazz flows along with main character Sal Paradise and his friends as they travel on their coast-to-coast journey across America. The book is set in the 1940s, a peak period for jazz, and music is pervasive on the page: the Los Angeles music scene provides a backdrop for some sections of the book, while jazz musicians Miles Davis, Charlie Parker, Red Norvo and Dexter Gordon are referenced.

Contemporary literature continues to show strong traces of jazz's captivating, confounding magic. Haruki Murakami, considered one of the world's greatest living novelists, spent most of the 1970s running a jazz bar called Peter Cat in Tokyo.



Max De Aloe is considered one of the most active jazz harmonica players on the European scene. He will feature in the LCSD jazz marathon.

“I used to be the owner of a jazz club in Tokyo before I became a writer,” said Murakami in a rare public appearance, a lecture at MIT University in 2005. “Music means a lot to me ... the sound, rhythm and free improvisation. I learned a lot of things about writing from music.”

What he learned, and his own musical and improvisational – sometimes surreal – writing style has won him adoring fans the world over. Author of *A Wild Sheep Chase*, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, and *Kafka on the Shore*, Murakami has had his novels translated into 50 languages. He weaves jazz references into his novels, and directly writes about jazz in his essay collections “Portrait in Jazz” and “Portrait in Jazz 2”.



The Nils Landgren Funk Unit, a Swedish band led by trombone player Landgren (sitting), headlines the night session.

Still today, music remains a big influence on Murakami, providing an almost physical source of inspiration: “I have no brothers or sisters, I am alone at home, so I have three things to help me write: a cat, books and music. To write is a solitary thing, you have to work alone, and music is one of the things that helps me,” said Murakami at the awards ceremony for the 2011 International Catalunya Prize.

For Hongkongers wanting to find their own creative inspiration from jazz, or simply to enjoy the music’s eclectic style, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department is hosting a two-day jazz extravaganza on April 30 and May 1. Acclaimed international and local jazz musicians will present a series of workshops on 30 April, while a one-of-a-kind jazz marathon concert will provide the city with seven hours of varied and exciting jazz on May 1.



Cy Leo is a 23-year-old chromatic harmonica virtuoso, and will feature in the jazz marathon.

The jazz marathon brings together jazz from different origins and in different styles and forms of presentation, including mainstream and contemporary jazz, jazz blended with funk and African beats, and jazz by a unique harmonica trio. Each session will include overseas and local jazz musicians, improvisations and “playoffs”.

Headlining the afternoon session at 5.30pm will be three harmonica musicians, Hendrik Meurkens, Max de Aloe and CY Leo, backed by piano, bass and drums. German-born Meurkens is regarded as one of the most important jazz harmonica players since Toots Thielemans. Multi-award-winning De Aloe is one of the most active jazz harmonicists on the European scene, while 23-year-old chromatic harmonica virtuoso Leo has bagged 17 international championships since 2006.

Earlier in the afternoon, local jazz quartet In One Stroke will play original compositions that experiment with form, texture, and style joined by Russian trumpet player Alex

Sipiagin. Next up will be the Melissa Aldana Quartet, headed by the eponymous Chilean tenor saxophone player, performing with international touring guitarist Teriver Cheung.



Chilean tenor saxophone player Melissa Aldana

The night session will start at 7.15pm with the Mokhtar Samba African Jazz Project led by Senegalese/ Moroccan musician Mokhtar Samba, with special guest Eugene Pao. Hong Kong's most publicly recognised jazz musician, Pao is synonymous with jazz in our city. Expect experimental African rhythms laced in jazz standards that challenge expectations and thrill the ears.

Headlining the night session will be the Nils Landgren Funk Unit with special guest Jun Kung. Singer, songwriter and music producer Jun Kung is known as "the drummer" in Hong Kong. The Swedish Funk Unit is led by trombone player Landgren, who has taken home a Swedish Grammy for lifetime achievement. The band has been described as "the best funk band in Europe today" by *Stereo* magazine.

The action, taking place at the Queen Elizabeth Stadium, finishes at around 10pm.