

Global celebrations held for International Jazz Day across more than 190 countries

The day, held each year on 30 April, highlights jazz as a means of promoting dialogue, cultural exchange and international cooperation, and serves as the culmination of Jazz Appreciation Month in April



African jazz legend Manu Dibango. Photo: Collected

International Jazz Day is being observed on Wednesday, marking the annual global celebration established by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in 2011 and endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly in 2012.

The day, held each year on 30 April, highlights jazz as a means of promoting dialogue, cultural exchange and international cooperation, and serves as the culmination of Jazz Appreciation Month in April, says Jazzday.

The initiative is chaired by UNESCO Director-General alongside jazz pianist Herbie Hancock, who also serves as a UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador. The Herbie Hancock Institute of Jazz, a nonprofit organisation, is responsible for organising and producing the annual programme of events.

According to organisers, the day is intended to promote peace and dialogue by recognising jazz as a vehicle for respect for human rights, diversity and human dignity. It also seeks to encourage global cooperation through engagement between communities, artists, educators and institutions, and to support efforts to reduce discrimination while promoting gender equality and freedom of expression.

Each year, a Global Host City anchors the celebrations, which include concerts, educational programmes and community outreach activities, culminating in an All-Star Global Concert featuring international musicians.

Chicago has been designated the Global Host City for the 2026 edition, marking the 15th anniversary of International Jazz Day. The city is described by organisers as a historic centre for the genre and a "jazz mecca", where the "Chicago style" developed in part through early 20th-century jazz figures such as Louis Armstrong.

Recent host cities have included Abu Dhabi in 2025, Tangier in 2024 and Havana in 2017. In 2014, International Jazz Day events were held across all seven continents for the first time, including at research stations in Antarctica.

The celebration involves participation from more than 190 countries each year, according to organisers. In addition to performances, the programme includes free master classes, workshops and panel discussions led by musician-educators, aimed at audiences of all ages and backgrounds.

Organisers say the educational component is central to the initiative's goal of deepening understanding of jazz history and its ongoing evolution.

Jazz, which originated in the early 20th century, was once widely criticised and referred to by some detractors as "The Devil's Music". It has since developed into a global genre with broad cultural influence.

Improvisation remains a defining feature of jazz performance, with each rendition typically differing from the last. The genre has also influenced a range of other musical styles, including hip-hop and R&B, and has had wider cultural impact across film, fashion and visual arts.

From its early history of racially diverse ensembles to its present-day international reach, jazz is presented by organisers of International Jazz Day as a cultural form associated with cross-cultural exchange and social cohesion.