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## A Tribute To All That Is Jazz On International Jazz Day



As a young naval officer, with a diadem of Alexander Selkirk's 'The Monarch of All I Survey' (in reference to the poem by William Cowper, 1731-1800) gait and anticipation, I was once enamoured to venture into the enticing doorway of a much-touted restaurant, famous for its live band that played to the chosen cognoscenti of 'Amchi Mumbai', in the up market Colaba Causeway, of the then Bombay in the early 1970s. Settled as I was, into my chair, accompanied by an equally doe-eyed partner, with all eyes on the band, we were offered an overture to begin with, with the inviting strains of the band's ensemble of trumpets, trombones, drums, guitars, cello and a lone piano. What followed was a solo rendering in a baritone voice of incandescent beauty, accompanied by the piano that offered paeans on an iconic name 'Mona Lisa', so fitting for the occasion that levitated my mind to a sequence of dreams. And I was in love again! That was my first foray into the world of Jazz, its beautiful aftermath that opened the jazz's Ali Baba's Cave of wonderment to me, and I have never stopped thanking the great doyen of Jazz, Nat King Cole, for his invigorating original 'Mona Lisa', offered to me in absentia on that unforgettable day of summer at Bombay. The love has only grown with a repertory of enticing experiences and a little library agog with a modest collection of Jazz memorabilia that I would love to share today.

If music is an art that brings together vocal and instrumental sounds for the aesthetic and artistic expressions of emotion, sensitivity, passion, sentiment, feelings and warmth; customarily standardized to a culture and a pattern that embodies rhythm, melody and harmony, then Jazz as, a form of music is an expression of animated, vivacious, spirited, swinging, syncopated and bold musical sounds.

#### History and Development of Jazz

Jazz, as a term, came into being in the 1913-15 chiefly practiced by black musicians, which represented a type of music that developed from an amalgamation of European and African music and came into prominence at the turn of the 19th century in New Orleans. The beginnings of Jazz was initiated by the highly syncopated 'Ragtime' Music, led by the inimitable Scott Joplin, who has been immortalized in the gangster film 'The Sting', its music being set with his famous Rags. His sentimental piano solos 'Solace' and 'The Entertainer' are my all-time favourites.

Ragtime lasted from 1890-1917.

Then came the 'Blues' craze in the 1900s, tempered with a slow and moody song of lamentation that was deeply influenced by the Negro spirituals. The pioneering Blues musician was WC Handy, whose 'Memphis Blues' and 'St. Louis Blues' are Jazz classics. He was followed by renowned Blues singers like Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday.

The subsequent history of Jazz has embraced a diversity of styles: starting in 1912 with 'Dixieland' that burrowed from both the Ragtime and the Blues, incorporating a new concept of a 'Band' performing, led by the trumpet. The most prominent of these 'Dixieland' musicians were the trumpet leader Louis Armstrong of the 'When The Saints Go Marching In' fame; and the pianist Jelly Roll Morton of the 'Dead Man Blues' fame.

In the 1920s, Jazz gained eminence and became a social craze with its spread across New York, Paris and London. The Jazz emerged as an ensemble of full big Bands playing to house-full audiences, with some exceptions of smaller bands in Chicago that led to a new style called 'Chicago' style with new improvisations. This exception saw the advent of Jazz composition and the first true composer in the genius of Duke Ellington, who was responsible for big Band classics like 'Mood Indigo' that is still a rage today.

The 1930s coincided with the style known as 'Swing' that, as the name denotes, set the mood for a necessitated dance amongst the listeners. Amongst the virtuosos of that style were Benny Goodman and Artie Shaw on their clarinets, Glenn Miller on his trombone and Gene Krupa on his drums.

The 1940s saw more Jazz improvisations with smaller bands and individualists and the 'Swing' gave way to 'Be-Bop'; with great emphasis on the tempo and rhythm of music. The leader of this style was alto saxophonist Charlie Parker (famous number 'I've Got Rhythm') and the trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie with his trend-setting 'Salt Peanuts'. 'Be-Bop' was later christened as 'Modern Jazz'. The phase of 'Modern Jazz' had its derivatives like 'Cool Jazz' led by Miles Davis (his impressive 'So What'), followed in 1960s by 'Free Jazz'.

However, as time rolled on, the golden era of Jazz was overshadowed by the emergence of 'Pop' and the Pop Groups of Beatles and the Rolling Stones.

There are many stalwarts of the Jazz Era, with their own significant contributions, but the limitations of the article precludes their inclusion.

#### Jazz and the Indian Connection

As Naresh Fernandes writes in his book, *Taj Mahal Foxtrot: The Story of Bombay's Jazz Age*, Jazz arrived in India through Mumbai, the Gateway of India, and then spread to all the metropolitan cities. The local Bombayites were instantly hooked, besides the availability of imported gramophone records in the well-known shop 'Rhythm House' at today's Kala Ghoda, Colaba, Mumbai. The Taj Hotel and the well-endowed seaside restaurants off the Marine Drive in Mumbai, became the first sought-after places where Jazz aficionados and the city's elite could listen to the new 'hot music' played by artists from the likes of Josic Menzie, Franklin Fernandes and Chic Chocolate (aka the Louis Armstrong of India). The drum rolls and the new music were infectious and by 1947, there would be more than 60 jazz bands in Mumbai. During the 1960s, the scene shifted from Mumbai to Calcutta. The city was alight with the new mood and music; with Jazz coming from every club in Park Street; names like the renowned 'Be-Bop' guitarist Carlton Kitto and the doyen of Indian Jazz, pianist Louis Banks performed six days a week in these places.

Sidharth Bhatia, in his book *India Psychedelic: The Story Of A Rocking Generation*, writes, "By the early to mid-1960s, the younger crowd was more interested in pop whose bands not only played in restaurants but also took their music to colleges. That made it more democratic than jazz. By the end of the '60s, as rock became popular, jazz was pretty much dead."

However, in the past couple of years, jazz seems to have made its presence felt strongly in the country like never before, with efforts to sustain the genre through organised efforts like the week-long 'Jazz Yatra' from the 70s that played to packed audiences; with its ripple effect of increased education, exposure and audiences, that has paved the way for a much-awaited Jazz resurgence. As an example, The Piano Jazz Club of Delhi has its own annual festival in November; 'Giants Of Jazz', that began around the same time as Delhi's other Jazz festivals like 'Jazz Utsav' and 'Delhi International Jazz Festival'.

#### International Jazz Day, 2020

"Now more than ever before, let's band together and spread the ethics of Jazz Day's global movement around the planet and use this as a golden opportunity for humankind to reconnect especially in the midst of all this isolation and uncertainty.

"We all want to live in a jazz world where we all work together, improvise together, are not afraid of taking chances and expressing ourselves."

Herbie Hancock, UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador

In November, 2011, the UNESCO General Conference proclaimed 30 April as 'International Jazz Day'. This International Day brings together communities, schools, artists, historians, academics, and jazz enthusiasts all over the world to celebrate and learn about the art of jazz, its roots, its future and its impact; raise awareness of the need for intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding; and reinforce international cooperation and communication.

This important international art form is celebrated for promoting peace, dialogue among cultures, diversity, and respect for human rights and human dignity, eradicating discrimination, promoting freedom of expression, fostering gender equality, and reinforcing the role of youth for social change.

"Jazz is a flourishing of beauty born of oppression - the music of improvisation and collective creation."

Audrey Azoulay

Director-General, Unesco

For this year, Cape Town, South Africa had been designated as the Global Host City for International Jazz Day 2020, with an extensive programme of education and community outreach activities planned.

However, due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the 9th annual International Jazz Day worldwide celebration will transition to a virtual format for 2020, instead of taking place as previously planned in Cape Town, South Africa, and other locations around the world on April 30. (Visit [jazzday.com](http://jazzday.com) to watch free streaming performances and educational content from around the world, all day long.)

International Jazz Day, 2020 in India

In India, the International Jazz Day is being celebrated today in the mandated Virtual Concert format with two major Jazz Concerts:

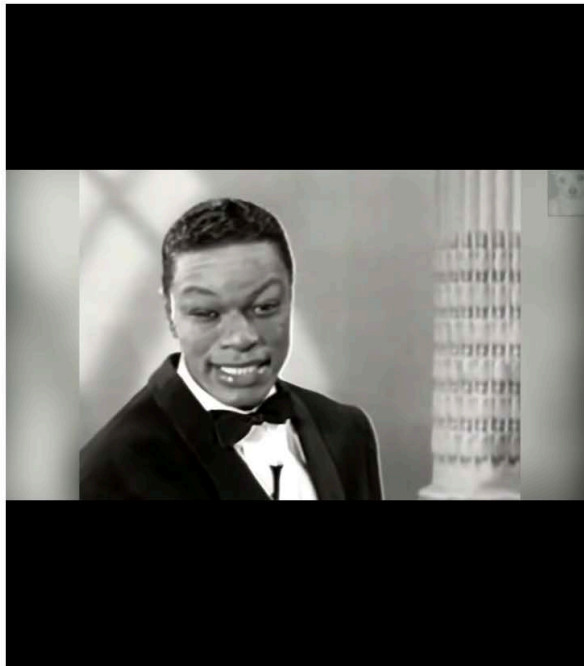
The first being in Mumbai at the NCPA Tata Auditorium, featuring some of the finest Jazz musicians of the country and the world, curated by the Indian legend Louis Banks and will be live streamed. Check the website and Social Media Handles to watch it live from evening today.

The other is the Virtual Concert being coordinated from New Delhi, wherein Jazz Artists from various cities in India will be performing live from their respective homes, and their performance will be live streamed on Facebook and other Social Media Handles.

The genre of Jazz music, to me, is like the invigorating breeze laden with the fragrance and the resplendent foliage of the Gul Mohars in full bloom, that not only satiates the mind to a quiet contemplation but also lingers like the sonorous piano notes of a solitary Scott Joplin, weaving his magical fingers at the keys for a 'Solace' of a different kind.

As I sign off, here are the links to some of the representational Jazz Music that I have quoted. Savour these immortal originals from the World of Jazz, in an obeisance to those great souls of Jazz, who gave so much:

## 1. Nat King Cole's "Mona Lisa":



"Poetry, like Jazz, is one of those dazzling diamonds of creative industry that help human beings make sense out of the comedies and tragedies that contextualise our lives

- Aberjhani

"If Music is a Place - then Jazz is the City, Folk is the Wilderness, Rock is the Road, Classical is a Temple.

- Vera Nazarian

"If you have to ask what Jazz is, you'll never know."

- Louis Armstrong

"There are only two things: love, and all sorts of love, with pretty girls, and the music of New Orleans or Duke Ellington. Everything else ought to go, because everything is ugly."

Boris Vian

Dailyhunt