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Matthew F. Jordan, *Le Jazz: Jazz and French Cultural Identity*. Urbana, Chicago and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2010. x + 300 pp. Illustrations, notes, and index. \$75 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-252-03516-6; \$25 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-0-252-07706-7.

Review by Colin Nettelbeck, The University of Melbourne.

Over the past fifteen years or so, the common perception that the French have a special relationship with jazz has become a field of historical investigation in its own right. In France itself, Ludovic Tournès established himself as a leading figure with his *New Orleans sur Seine: histoire du jazz en France* (Paris; Fayard, 1999); this is a masterly work that, perhaps more than any other, serves to delineate the main parameters of the field. As well as Tournès, a substantial number of scholars, many of them American[1], have made important contributions to our understanding of a phenomenon that has turned out to have implications reaching well beyond the music itself. In this context, jazz is in other words more than jazz. It is also an effective prism through which France's cultural, social and political history can acquire new dimensions, and through which Franco-American intercultural relations can be given fresh meaning.

Within this framework, Matthew Jordan's book breaks a considerable amount of new ground. The originality lies partly in an emphasis on those elements in French culture that *resisted* the assimilation of jazz, rather than those favoring it; and partly in the scrutiny of an impressive array of source materials not previously drawn upon. Using, broadly speaking, a cultural studies approach combined with discourse analysis, Jordan focuses on a number of what he calls "historically situated conversations" (p. 7) in order to chart changes in both the discourse about French culture, and in French culture itself. Beginning with the early 1900s Paris cakewalk craze, which was strongly attacked by cultural conservatives, Jordan pursues his investigation chronologically, up to and through the 1940-44 Occupation period, concluding that the Liberation and its aftermath mark the virtual disappearance of anti-jazz voices. By the late 1940s, jazz in France was no longer seen as an intruder or a threat to authentic Frenchness: it had successfully made itself a home *within* French culture.

The story that Jordan tells is one of France's cultural modernisation, with attitudes to jazz serving as sign-posts in the evolution. In order to map that evolution, each chapter is built around a paradigmatic moment or event: the First World War and early 1920s, which saw the arrival of the first jazz musicians and the "dansomania" that came with them, as well as the spread of mechanical recording and reproduction devices which opened greater access to popular culture for the modern public; the extraordinary phenomenon of Josephine Baker and the *Revue nègre*, which coincided with the emergence of the great French school of ethnographers; the larger-than-life and paradoxical figure of Hugues Panassié, who did much to institutionalise jazz in France, despite an authoritarian and dogmatic personality that often threatened the cause; and finally, the *zazou* movement of the Occupation years, presented as a determined youthful resistance against oppression, and something of a counterbalance to the ambient collaborationism and anti-semitism of Vichy and the Paris pro-Nazis.

Of course, those who fervently and fearfully believed that jazz would somehow destroy "true" French culture were wrong: jazz, like so many cultural imports entering France over the centuries (from Renaissance Italy to German romanticism), proved to be a stimulus and

a catalyst for renewal—yet one more example of how the resilience and adaptability of the French cultural anatomy have been strong enough to embrace the Other and the New without losing its identity in any enduring way. However, in amassing so many of the narratives and commentaries that French culture threw up to defend itself *against* change, Jordan affords us many keen insights into the complexities of that assimilation process. One particularly enlightening section, for example, concerns those ethnographers such as Michel Leiris and André Schaeffner (often associated with the surrealist movement) for whom jazz became a laboratory for explorative thinking about the very nature of cultural development and for the creation of new theories about cultural hybridity (pp. 116-140).

Jordan has no qualms about adopting a critical approach to people like Panassié and André Hodeir, who have previously been treated largely with unquestioning admiration. With Panassié, in particular (p. 171ff), he creates a socio-historical and ideological context that allows for a more nuanced evaluation of the man and his contributions: and he is undoubtedly right that Panassié was as much interested in cultivating his own power and influence as he was passionate about jazz. This critique is muscular and persuasive, though some might reasonably argue that Jordan goes too far when he implies that Panassié's elevation of Louis Armstrong to the kingship of jazz was causally related to the fascist cult of the great leader (p. 177): while there were many on the French Right who admired Hitler and looked to National-Socialism for inspiration, we should not forget that France had its own authoritarian traditions—including, in the *Action Française*, an enduring nostalgia for the *ancien régime* and its monarchs. Panassié would surely have been closer to this line of thinking than to Hitler.

Le Jazz is enriched with numerous colorful anecdotes, such as the account of the outcry that arose at the Empire Theatre in 1926 when Harry Pilcer's band, thinking to pay homage to its audience, jazzed up the *Marseillaise* and got accused of virtual sacrilege. It also draws upon many striking examples that have not been covered by existing literature, and subjects them to penetrating analysis: a case in point is the treatment of Marcel L'Herbier's 1924 film *L'Inhumaine* (pp. 82-3). For those familiar with the field and the periods covered, many of the book's illustrations, which are largely reproduced from press cartoons, will have been seen before, albeit often in different contexts. Jordan has gathered and arranged them to strengthen his argument, and it is a fine piece of curatorship.

Chapter six, "*Zazou dans le métro*", is less successful than the others. The picture offered of life during the Occupation is rather caricatural, overemphasising the power of Vichy, not distinguishing between Vichy and the Paris hard-liners, underestimating the cultural resilience of the French population. Jordan rightly stresses how strong jazz was during this period, and how, in particular, French recording of jazz music flourished in the absence of American competition. But a similar situation pertained in the cinema industry: here, too, there were important differences between Vichy propaganda discourse (and indeed the censorship regime) on the one hand, and the pragmatics of public service management of culture on the other. Jordan does point out the ineffectiveness of Vichy laws against dancing (p. 227), but the fact is that Vichy was not a very effective government at all: its greatest "successes" were in the most shamefully repressive area of antisemitic persecution.

The very choice of the *zazous*—a loose grouping of largely middle-class rebellious young people who flaunted their eccentricities and their flamboyant fashions— as representative of French youth culture at the time is problematic. As W. D. Halls showed in his 1981 masterpiece, *The Youth of Vichy France* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), there was enormous diversity in the situation and experience of young French people during the war, and most historians today would agree that the *zazous* were a sociological epiphenomenon rather than a major movement. While Vichy's push for a single youth movement along the *Hitlerjugend* lines may, as Jordan implies, have received some increased momentum from the irritating antics of the *zazous*, there were formidable forces arrayed against any such tendency, not least the otherwise pro-Pétain hierarchy of the Catholic Church.

More generally, from a historical perspective, this chapter will disappoint those who have followed the development of Vichy period historiography over the past two or three decades. Jordan relies heavily on the work of Henri Amouroux, which was part of the long-lasting first wave of French reflection on life during the war, but it is often idiosyncratic and impressionistic, and needs to read in conjunction with the more systematic work of the likes of Azéma, Bédarida and Rousso.^[2] *Le Jazz* falters here because the history is not what it could and should be.

This is not to say that the chapter is without merit. It contains very sound and detailed analysis of the positions adopted towards jazz in the collaborationist press, and underlines continuities in the ways that wartime anti-swing discourse reproduced the cultural conservatism expressed when jazz first appeared in France. It shows, too, how collaborationist journalists deliberately linked swing and the *zazou* movement to gaullist resistance, as a means of indicting the former and belittling the latter. There is perceptive commentary on the sadistic manner in which collaborationist cartoonists used humour as a means to mask or mitigate cruelty (pp. 220-221). And those interested in the cinema of the Occupation will be delighted by the references to Richard Pottier's important but largely forgotten 1942 film, *Mademoiselle Swing* (pp. 217, 285).

Readers may well have other reservations about the book.^[3] These should not however be allowed to obscure the fact that the work overall is a valuable contribution to what has become an important field of research. In developing his discussion, Jordan brings to the table new sources and a new approach, and his willingness to question canonical positions is refreshing. More substantially, in tracking the complex and often dramatic evolution of the tensions between cultural assimilation and cultural resistance in the French experience of jazz, he demonstrates that the debates generated by the jazz phenomenon constitute a key historical measure of how France, over a half-century of great social and political upheaval, sought to come to terms with profound changes in cultural identity.

NOTES

[1] One can cite, for example, Tyler Stovall, *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996); Jody Blake, *Le Tumulte Noir: Modernist Arts and Popular Entertainment in Jazz-Age Paris, 1900-1930* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999); William Shack, *Harlem in Montmartre: A Paris Jazz Story between the Great Wars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Jeffrey Jackson, *Making Jazz French: Music and Modern Life in Interwar Paris* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003); Colin Nettelbeck, *Dancing with de Beauvoir: Jazz and the French* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2004); Jean-Louis Pautrot, *The André Hodeir Jazz Reader* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2006).

[2] See for instance Jean-Pierre Azéma and François Bédarida (eds), *Vichy et les Français* (Paris: Fayard, 1992) and *La France des années noires* (Paris: Seuil, 1993); or Henry Rousso, *Le syndrome de Vichy*, (Paris: Seuil, 1987); Henri Rousso and Eric Conan, *Vichy: un passé qui ne passe pas*, (Paris: Fayard, 1994). Jordan makes passing reference to Rousso (p. 185), but does not integrate the work into his analysis.

[3] For example, the index omits a fairly large number of proper names that appear in the text; and the copy editing process has let some dozens of typographical errors slip through.

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