

JAZZ IN CANADA: The rise of jazz

The story of jazz in Canada is composed of regionalized developments, which began in Vancouver, Toronto, Winnipeg, and Montreal. The story of jazz in Canada is circumstantial and coincidental as opposed to a gradual and planned development in the United States. This essay will attempt to explain the aforementioned. 7 pages long.

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE RISE OF JAZZ IN CANADA

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Canada's early jazz development was dependent on touring musicians from the United States. Details of the first manifestations of jazz as played by Canadians are non-existent or very sketchy at best leaving Canada's fate, in terms of jazz music, in the hands of touring American musicians. Touring musicians would travel to cities, bordering Canada, which occasionally led them into cross-border cities. The most famous of these early musicians were JellyRoll Morton in Vancouver, and the Creole Band in Winnipeg, in the early teens. The musicians who did tour in Canada did so in a regionalized format. Musicians from the West Coast tended to tour Canada's West Coast such as Vancouver whereas musicians from Chicago tended to visit Winnipeg and Toronto, whereas Montreal's share of visitors came from New York. Author Mark Miller states "Typically, the early history of Jazz in Canada is a history of jazz in the cities, each an insular "scene" with only tenuous of links to the others".

The artists of ragtime and Dixieland such as Jelly Roll Morton, and the Creole Band came to Canada from industries that were booming and established in the United States by the mid teens. Proof of this, lies in their popularity, as the demand was such to enable them to tour, which led them, by chance, to Canada. At this point in time the Canadian jazz music industry was still in its infancy as compared to the States. This raises another important element in the development of jazz in Canada, but not an issue in the United States, such as film.

The silent film industry was responsible for providing work to many pianists and small orchestras, which was crucial to Canadian jazz while being completely overlooked in the United States. These theatres provided work opportunities to both local and imported talent, of which the most popular name to rise out of the movie palace scene was William Eckstein in Montreal. Furthermore the development of these working opportunities can be observed through the rate of movie palace building in this era. Montreal experienced a very notable movie palace building boom between 1900-1930, the era crucial to the development of jazz music in Canada, and job opportunities played an important role.

These palaces are important because not only do they represent jobs but they also added attractions to the downtown cores. One must also consider that along with the movie palace building boom, a demand for other surrounding industries such as restaurants and coffee shops was also increased which creates a nightlife industry in-itself. In fact Montreal was the home of what was believed to be the first movie palace to be built in the world, The Francais (where Club Metropolis is now located). By 1914, there were six legitimate theatres, two vaudeville houses, and 100 moving picture houses in Montreal. These movie houses, in essence, developed talented musicians like William Eckstein, Vera Guilaroff, and Mark White who then began to work in hotel, and small clubs. This being said the most popular movie palaces had not yet been built in 1914 such as the Regent, St. Denis, the Princess, Loew's, Belmont, Capitol, and the Palace, which were all added to the downtown core. The construction of these movie palaces also sparked an influx of vaudeville performers, who would add to the snowball effect of job opportunities while simultaneously producing an audience in Canada.

The amount of opportunities silent film orchestras provided for musicians in Canada prior to 1930, the industry's building stages, was crucial throughout Canada but was especially noticeable in the case of Montreal because of the documentation available on its movie palace boom. There may have been fewer theatres in other cities but nonetheless they still provided job opportunities for musicians in their respective markets.

The issue of film was often overlooked for two reasons. First and foremost films prior to 1927 were called silents but were anything but silent. Films were packaged with live performances and both films and live acts were accompanied by music, generally a pianist and drummer, and by an ensemble at the downtown theatres. The second reason lies in the state of the Canadian film industry up until 1939, which was non-existent, other than a few independent productions. Independent productions were few in numbers and consisted of mostly B features. Between 1914

and 1955, only 85 films, including those of the NFB (National Film Board of Canada) starting in 1939, were made in Canada thus illustrating the absence of a major film industry. In addition most movie theatres featured American films as opposed to Canadian films, which still remains true in the present day. The National Film Board of Canada was formed by documentarist John Grierson in 1939 with the goal of making documentaries as well as giving talented Canadian filmmakers a bureaucratic structure to allow them to express their viewpoints. In addition Canadian feature films began to be produced in 1953 with some consistency only being attained in 1958. This allowed for the issue of film to be completely overlooked, as far as being an employment outlet for musicians.

Vaudeville for its part was a show of many different specialty acts, which were always accompanied by a band, which varied in size depending on the type of vaudeville show. In addition to Broadway shows, vaudeville shows used the movie theatres as havens for performing their shows as each theatre was equipped with its own stage. One must remember that there was a point in time when there were no halls like Place Des Arts, Monument National etc... where vaudeville and Broadway shows could be held, therefore many of these venues chose to present their shows in the movie palace theatres. In essence the film industry and the resources of its movie palaces composed a major part of the first thirty years of Canada's developing jazz industry.

Radio, for its part was not operational until 1927, the date of its first broadcast. Furthermore these first broadcasts were only installed between Montreal and Toronto. Most of the jazz radio broadcasts came from the United States. For example Toronto Jazz 1948 - 1950 indicates that there were 59 radio broadcasts with jazz (Dixieland) content during this period. However when these broadcasts are analyzed closely we find that in fact only 6 originated from Toronto, with the remaining 53 being imported from radio stations in the United States. In light of this, Parliament did not pass much of its legislation forcing more Canadian content until April 1, 1961. Radio's absence, like film's, deprived Canadian musicians from attaining national status. When the CBC was born in 1936 it, for the most part only featured a variety of big American names like Percy Faith, Bob Hope, Bing Crosby etc...

Both radio and film were institutions, which were greatly relied on to promote various cultural institutions in the States in the final half of the century. These institutions were not operational in Canada in the developing stages of the jazz music industry therefore the lack of these centralized national institutions assured that there could be no national music Canadian stars. Americans have valued the nourishment of cultural institutions in the twentieth century making them supreme

in twentieth century culture. That is to say Americans can do it bigger and better, when it comes to the performing arts, because they have poured the necessary resources to develop such an industry. Can you name one country in the world, which could have had the talent and money to produce such universally accepted films like, Birth of the Nation, or Wizard of Oz?

On the other hand, events originating in the United States like prohibition between 1919 and 1933 greatly encouraged the Canadian jazz industry. Prohibition was helpful because jazz music and alcohol had earned the reputation as being synonymous. The search for alcohol propelled many American musicians to take extended leaves north of the border. In essence details on prohibition are not of any importance, however the fact that jazz musicians were highly involved in drinking is very important, especially for an open-wide city like Montreal.

In addition racial tension in U.S. cities provided another reason, for taking extended leaves and responsible for the Canadian market's development. For the most part there were no racial tensions in Canada, at least not to the extent of the United States. This in essence convinced a small number of blacks to form communities north of the border. The statistics for black populations in Canada are misleading, in terms of correlating the size of communities with jazz music because illegal aliens and musicians staying with relatives are not represented in these statistics. Legislation and restrictions for musicians travelling both in and out of Canada were very harsh; therefore, many musicians worked "under the table" or travelled extensively leaving them with no permanent address and hard to track down, and therefore out of the statistics. Therefore, statistics on black population do not take into account the hidden number of people who either stay in Canada or travel in and out of major cities every day.

In direct correlation with racial harmony the search for jobs, specifically as porters, added another undetermined number of people who may have trained in Canada for any given period who do not appear in the statistics. The Canadian railways, leaders in railway construction in the world, provided many job opportunities for potential porters in those days. Once again however Montreal benefited most because the main training centre for porters was located in the St. Antoine area in Montreal. Much of entertainment industry as far as nightlife was concerned consistently operated underground which explains why the sources for this information can only come from people within the industry.

In sum Canada's Jazz development was due in part to extended musician tours, the silent film industry, American prohibition, greater racial harmony in Canada, and

Afro American's search for employment. The combination of these issues led musicians along with their cultures to establish and build Canada's own jazz music identity, which provided a breeding ground allowing a generation of Canadian born musicians, led by Oscar Peterson, to rise in the forties.

by Pierre Hobson