

continued from page 18

The figures show that people from non-European cultural backgrounds (even those that are relatively well-educated and affluent) tend not to attend these formal concerts; what's more, younger people from all backgrounds seem similarly alienated by them, as shown by research for the London Arts Board in the 1990s.

So how is all this to be explained, and what are the implications for jazz? One of the most influential explanations comes from sociologist Richard Peterson ('Pete' as he's known in the trade) of Vanderbilt University, who believes that what we are seeing is a change from a time when there was a single accepted hierarchy of cultural prestige - with classical music and opera at the top - to a situation where a wide range of art forms and cultural activities are now seen as equally valuable.

In Professor Peterson's blunt terms, in the past people who valued high culture were 'snobs' who saw other modes of expression (like jazz) as inferior. More people are now 'omnivores' who are attracted by all sorts of experiences, and value a wide range of cultural forms and styles. Peterson's theory is contentious, but it does explain the decline of traditional art forms, and the simultaneous increasing interest in such forms as the visual arts - and jazz, as a non-European style of music. These, it has been suggested, are much more appealing in a post-modern era which values multiculturalism and an openness to a range of experiences.

If this is right, we can conclude that the jazz audience is likely to continue its steady growth. However, we should be wary of presenting it in traditional concerts. If what today's audiences - and especially their younger members - value is informality, then there is a great opportunity to think creatively about ways of presenting a music which has always flourished when both players and listeners feel relaxed. Yet at the same time, both groups are sharing a sense of shared involvement in the creation of great music.

SOURCES:

DeVeaux, Scott (1995) 'Jazz in America: Who's Listening?' National Endowment for the Arts, Research Report #31.

DiMaggio, Paul and Mukhtar, Toqir (2004) 'Arts Participation as Cultural Capital in the United States, 1982-2002. Signs of Decline?' Poetics (32).

Kolb, Bonita M (2001) 'The Effect of Generational Change on Classical Music Concert Attendance and Orchestras' Response in the UK and US', Cultural Trends (41).

Peterson, Richard and Kern, Roger (1996) 'Changing Highbrow Taste: From Snob to Omnivore', American Sociological Review (61).

SO YOU THINK YOU COULD RUN A JAZZ CLUB?



Godfrey Pratt

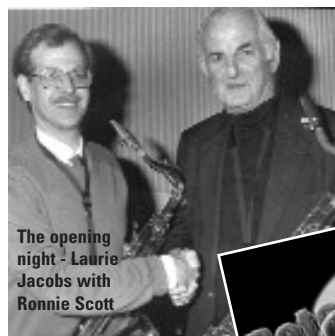
'RUNNING A JAZZ CLUB' - No.53 in the series 'Work Hard, Have Fun, Make No Money'. The same axiom applies to No. 52 in the same series: 'Becoming A Jazz Musician'. Or so says Peterborough Jazz Club's GODFREY PRATT

It's a hard life running a jazz club. No, really, it is. Well, OK, you get to hear lots of great music, and you get sent loads of demo CDs, some of which are so good they can keep you sidetracked for hours. You can even blag your way into other clubs - not so easy at Frith Street, although a few intrepid adventurers have been known to manage it. And lots of very nice people want to talk to you, which is also usually great. Except for the ones who want you to realise they know far more about obscure 1930s big band sidemen than you ever will - or will ever want to.

But the hard part comes when everyone has gone home. You've paid the band, packed up all the kit, the PA, the CD stall, the flyers for other people's events and finished someone's bottle of wine. You sit down to cash up and find that, by the time you've paid for the room, what's left in the tin is less than you drew out of the bank that morning for the float.

It's not always like that these days, fortunately. But it was when Peterborough Jazz Club founder Laurie Jacobs invited a few of the regular attenders at the venue - Joe Dobson, David Moll and me - to get involved. That's when we realised what a hero he'd been, running the club as a solo act for eight years and putting his hand in his own pocket when there wasn't enough in the tin. And that's when we resolved that between us we would build a club that paid its way.

That first committee meeting went



The opening night - Laurie Jacobs with Ronnie Scott

on for ages, mostly because we spent hours talking about jazz, the way you do when jazzers get together. But before we all toddled off home (and before we even touched on obscure 1930s big band sidemen) we had figured out that we had to work harder at covering our costs.

Indeed, a shocking truth had dawned. We had to run the club as a business. We needed to talk the talk, the business-talk. So first we needed the right product. Laurie had set the club's musical benchmark from Day One by booking the Ronnie Scott Sextet for the opening concert. We all agreed that Quality had to be the club's mantra: top quality across all the genres of the modern jazz idiom. We figured that more folk would pay good money to hear top bands - for us it seemed a better bet than the alternative of fewer folk paying less money to hear 'hopefuls'.

So that was the product sorted. But it's no good building the best if you don't tell anyone you're selling it, so we started to do the unthinkable: we started promoting ourselves. Laurie wrote to everyone on the mailing list, we launched our website, sent out press releases and wooed our audience. We tried things that worked and a few that didn't. These are some of the things that worked :

- Allocate tasks. In our case it was David for the website, Joe for equipment and setting up, myself for commercial issues and Laurie for bookings and PR.
- Establish a clear vision of the kind of music you want your club to be known for.
- Book the best bands you can get
- Inform your audience with user-friendly programme notes and regular

the jazz economy PART TWO

mailings.

- Launch a Patrons scheme (we already had a membership scheme).
- Give added-value: we send our members a free copy of *JazzUK!*
- Don't let up on sending out press releases.
- Get sponsorship wherever you can.

• Produce club CDs - we got excellent local and national coverage with ours.

- Involve local musicians.
- Introduce members' nights with special deals for club members who bring friends.
- Don't undercharge : it only undervalues the music.
- Try new things and don't stop working at improving your act.

We also incorporated the club as a registered charity which gives a greater air of respectability in our dealings with the outside (of jazz) world.

There are still nights when not enough people turn up. But fortunately there are now fewer nights when the cash tin doesn't cover the float, and over the years we've even been able to build up a small reserve at the bank. Laurie tells us we're saving up so one day he can book Michael Brecker. Laurie's still the guvnor round here, so anything's possible.

Meanwhile life at the club goes on. One promising new initiative was to start each season with a gig by one of the local big bands. We put these on with a low ticket price and we always pull in a good crowd made up of our regulars plus all the friends and relations of the guys in the band. The last one of these was just a few weeks ago and was attended by the hotel proprietor where the club holds its concerts. He could see the place was heaving, so it was probably no coincidence that the following week Laurie was told the room hire charge would be going up !

Like I said, it's a hard life running a jazz club.

Check out Peterborough Jazz Club at www.peterboroughjazzclub.co.uk, or call 07761 726343.