

The artist's view onstage at Porgy & Bess in Vienna, Austria.

COURTESY PORGY & BESS

## VIENNA

Vienna always will be celebrated as a classical music landmark. It was the seedbed of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert. Yet the musically fertile soil also extends into the jazz realm—as evidenced by one of Europe's finest jazz clubs, Porgy & Bess.

Celebrating its 25th anniversary in 2018, Porgy & Bess boasts auspicious beginnings through the efforts of the madcap musician Mathias Rüegg. His big band project, the Vienna Art Orchestra, earned a reputation as one of the most adventurous large ensembles in the world, incorporating humor, intricate charts and references to music beyond jazz.

The venue's original location was in what had been known in the 19th century as the Fledermaus Bar (a nod to the famous operetta by Johann Strauss II). The current 400-seat location has been the club's home since 2000 and formerly played host to a 19th-century theater.

"Of course, Vienna is associated with Mozart, Beethoven, Mahler and Schoenberg," said Christoph Huber, who has run Porgy & Bess since 2000. "But we also had a saxophone titan named Hans Koller [1921–2003]. Don't forget that in the 1950s, the German jazz scene was called 'jazz im Kollerland.' There was a jazz club [in Vienna] called Fatty's Saloon, programmed by the great clarinet player Fatty George."

Besides Porgy & Bess—known for embracing more experimental and avant-garde sounds—jazz fans in Vienna frequent the Blue Tomato and Vienna's oldest continuously running jazz club, Jazzland. That venue's founder and director, Axel Melhardt explained, "Back in 1972, there were only a few places to play jazz. So, Jazzland was founded, with concerts by Albert Nicholas and Ben Webster."

Vienna also boasts a hearty annual summer jazz festival, Jazzfest Wien, founded in 1991. It is part of the prestigious International Jazz Festival Organization, just as Porgy & Bess is connected with the European Jazz Network, which helps facilitate cooperative bookings with venues in other cities.

Jazzfest Wien generally books smaller shows into both Jazzland and Porgy & Bess during its run, along with booking high-profile shows in the grand Vienna State Opera.

"We have cooperated with the Jazzfest Wien for many years," said Porgy's Huber. "They usually program a week at the club in the beginning of July. The festival is an important event in the Viennese jazz life, but ... I definitively prefer the club," he added with a laugh.

—Josef Woodard

# Amsterdam

Amsterdam's jazz history is extensive. It even boasts a *Guinness Book of World Records* entry for the Ramblers as the world's longest-running dance band. The group formed in 1926 and gained legitimacy in 1934 when Coleman Hawkins, then starting out on a five-year sojourn through Europe, worked with the band. But the city truly made its mark in the '60s with the rise of the musicians who later would form the Instant Composers Pool—pianist Misha Mengelberg, drummer Han Bennink and saxophonist Willem Breuker—a collective that internalized the full breadth of jazz history while deploying feverish creativity.

In the decades since then, the city has established a reputation built upon a collision of tradition and rebellion, with a stellar cast of players steeped in that ICP ethos. Although it relocated to posh new digs in 2005, the Bimhuis has been the city's hot-house of experimentation since it opened in 1973.

The current century has seen the Amsterdam scene grow increasingly international while embracing a stronger emphasis on free improvisation. Guitarist/bassist Jasper Stadhouders said, "It's wonderful to see how ICP's history seeps through to the younger generation. Most musicians here



MAARTEN VAN DER KAMP

Jasper Stadhouders (left), Mark Sanders, Wilbert de Joode and John Dikeman perform at De Ruimte during the 2018 Doek Festival in Amsterdam.

have a strong musical identity without neglecting or ignoring the musical past—where improvised music came from—while at the same time feeling confident about their own way of viewing improvised music."

The sprawling North Sea Jazz Festival occurs each summer in Rotterdam, an hour drive away, but Amsterdam possesses such a rich assortment of venues that there's never a shortage of performances by locals and touring musicians.

Although modest in size, the annual Doek Festival in June provides an intriguing look at the scene's overall health, presenting veteran musicians alongside key new figures like expat Slovenian pianist Kaja Draksler and keyboardist Oscar Jan Hoogland.

—Peter Margasak

## COPENHAGEN

Copenhagen, Denmark, boasts one of Europe's oldest jazz clubs, even if it has changed location three times and was closed for 15 years (from 1995–2010). Jazzhus Montmartre first opened in 1959, booking many visiting or resident American artists, such as Dexter Gordon, Ben Webster, Stan Getz, Thad Jones and George Lewis. Now, it has a modern interior and returned to a location that previously housed the venue between 1961 and 1976.

At one point, a similarly named venue, Jazzhouse, was Copenhagen's main club for more wayward sounds, but this year, it merged with the venue Global to create Alice—a new place dedicated to jazz, electronica and folk music.

The city also boasts two jazz festivals: The massive summer incarnation of the Copenhagen Jazz Festival occupies nearly every possible venue in the city; its smaller winter incarnation still is fairly extensive. And the concept is all-encompassing, as the events welcome the biggest acts in large concert halls, as well as working with hardcore improvisers in alternative spaces. Many of its gigs are free, and the entire range of jazz styles is embraced.

One of Copenhagen's best (yet slightly overlooked) players is the guitarist Pierre Dørge, who has led his New Jungle Orchestra since 1980. The band remains active, mostly around the city, but DownBeat caught up with him during a run of gigs and asked him about the special qualities of the scene in Copenhagen: "There are many musicians



KRISTOFFER JUEL POULSEN

Singer Dee Dee Bridgewater (right) is one of the luminaries who has performed at the Copenhagen Jazz Festival in Denmark.

experimenting and creating spontaneous music stories, mixing and combining fragments not only from jazz history, but from the whole world, mixed with electronics and samples," he said. "Surprise is the key word."

Prominent players making a global impact include saxophonist Laura Toxværd, percussionist Marilyn Mazur, trumpeter Palle Mikkelborg, guitarist Jakob Bro and drummer Kresten Osgood. Toxværd is involved with the ILK improvising collective and record label, whose main haunt is much appreciated by Dørge.

"One of my favorite venues is in the old slaughterhouse named 5E," he said. "It was initiated by Kresten Osgood: a small, raw room with a wooden stove, where I heard my musical guru [and collaborator], John Tchicai, freestyling for the last time before he passed away." Indeed, that magisterial saxophonist was another Copenhagen-born treasure. —Martin Longley