



REVIEW

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INTERVIEW WITH A FAMOUS JAZZ SINGER OF ALMATY CITY IRENE ARAVINA

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Abstract

This article is dedicated to the issues of jazz art and education in Kazakhstan. The well-known Kazakhstani jazz singer, lecturer and tireless exponent of jazz on television, in concerts – Irene Aravina, shares her views on the current state of jazz art in Kazakhstan in the interview. The author dwells on the problems of jazz education, on the teaching methodology of pop-jazz vocals, on issues of vocal improvisation and its essential features – on skat improvisation. A short excursion into the jazz art history in our country is made in the interview, the style of “ethno-jazz” is considered, as well as issues of the vocal-jazz school development are discussed. According to Irene Aravina, the organization and holding of international jazz festivals, introducing children to jazz from the first days of music study, focusing on the best world methods of jazz education, teaching the basics of jazz improvisation – all this contributes to the development of jazz art in Kazakhstan.

Keywords: jazz, pop-jazz vocals, ethno-jazz, skat improvisation, jazz festival.

Good day, Ms. Irene!

– Thank you for agreeing to meet with us. We know you as a great jazz singer, but at the same time, you have got a classical musical education

and graduated from the “Music Theory” department of the College of Music. Why did you choose jazz vocals and where did you learn this?

– Thank you for inviting me to an

interview, especially since the topic of our conversation does not leave me indifferent! Jazz in my parents' house was as natural as the anthem of the Soviet Union at 7 in the morning. Constant sessions with great musicians – Gogi Metaksa, Mikhail Yermolov, Takhir and Farhad Ibragimovs and many others sometimes dragged on until late at night and became a frequent and traditional phenomenon, attracting a large number of listeners, and my brother and I were among them. Of course, in addition to live concerts, jazz records were constantly sounded at home – all this predetermined my choice. I had a chance to learn from wonderful teachers and musicians – Rosean Vitro, Vered Dekkel, Irina Robinson, Donna McElroy, Denis Montgomery and others as well as from a great number of jazz full-time and onlineschools.

– We analyzed the state of the musical culture of Kazakhstan over the past 10-15 years and found that there are very few bright performers of vocal-jazz music even if society is keen with jazz. Why do you think so?

– This is probably due to the lack of a large-scale jazz vocal school in Kazakhstan. For many years Tagir Zaripov's Jazz School has been educating new generations of musicians, but these efforts are not enough to provide the country with strong performers. This profession, unlike classical vocals, requires the performer to have good knowledge of jazz harmony, ensemble and improvisation, the history of jazz and musical jazz literature.

– Once the famous Ella Fitzgerald sang with the accompaniment of a small instrumental ensemble, or accompanied by a piano or electric guitar, and the singer's soulful voice, her scat improvisationsounded in the foreground, and E. Fitzgerald herself

was the queen of the stage. Now there is a pile of electronic equipment, amplifiers, and speakerson stage, among which the performer is a little lost. Tell me, please, is there a need for such a sound reinforcement? Probably it is necessary to “lighten” the scene a little and entrust the singer with the “main role”?

– In the ChicWebb Orchestra, which was subsequently led by Ella Fitzgerald, there was a clear functions separation of the instrumental groups, where vocals were of secondary importance. In the first place, as in all big bands, there was a rhythm group that set the rhythm and drive of the orchestra. Soloists adorned and emphasized the role of the rhythm group. A competent and charismatic vocalist builds his/her “line” without disturbing the balance of the overall soundjust in such a hierarchy. Therefore, paradoxically, the modern sound of pop and rock ensembles originates precisely from the soundingbalance of a jazz big band, where rhythm is of paramount importance. But over time, harmony became simpler, electronic and compression tones were added, and the “aggression” of percussion and bass intensified. The vocalist's role is “enhanced” mainly in ballads. But each example needs to be analyzed separately.

– In one interview you said that “jazz is like air for you, you live by it” and your multidimensional, tireless creative activity becomes clear: participating in performances, author's programs on television “Midnight Jazz”, lectures in the open air, performances in parks, in the mountains, in cafes, etc. Tell me, please, is this caused by the desire to promote jazz or is it a way of self-expression?

– Most likely, this is a way to get closer

to “your” audience, to convey and tell the public your own discoveries and admiration for jazz history and performers, to “infect” people with interest in this art.

– Your grandfather, Petr Vasilyevich Aravin, a music scientist, lecturer, a wonderful propagandist of Dauletkerei’s creativity. Your Dad, Yuri Petrovich Aravin, is the author of numerous music radio and television programs, but you tirelessly talk about jazz and jazz musicians in your speeches. Is Musical enlightenment and education a family tradition, a call of the soul to share with the world what you know yourself or a desire to turn the listener in a special way, in tune with your feelings?

– Of course, I owe many of my projects to the example of my family – many in our family have become musicologists and historians in various fields of the musical foundation by vocation. Everyone hit their favorite “mark” – the Ethnicity of the northern peoples, Kazakh steppes or Russian classical music of the nineteenth century. It so happened that I wholeheartedly loved jazz and its history. (Figure 1)

– As you know, the basis of jazz vocal style is improvisation and its essential feature is scat improvisation. Listening to your speeches, one is amazed at the fluency in this skill. Tell me, please, how did you achieve such ease and freedom in skat-vocals?



Figure 1. Kazakhstani Jazz Singer Irene Aravina.

– In fact, I continue to study and improve in improvisation, and both modern teachers – carriers of this culture and the recordings of great jazzmen, not only vocalists, help me in this. Many instrumentalists, such as saxophonist Lester Young or trumpeters Chet Baker and Winton Marsales and many, many others know how to “speak” on their instrument.

The simplest exercise to comprehend different styles of improvisation is to notate solo and reproduce it.

– You, by performing songs from the great Edith Piaf’s repertoire, achieve the similarity of sound in timbre that sometimes it seems that you listen to the voice recording of this French

singer. Tell me, please, how do you achieve this, what inspires you?

– I never set out to be like the great Edith – this is impossible. I simply express my admiration by performing her repertoire.

– Jazz improvisation, designed for chamber, confidential communication between the performer and the audience, even in large concert halls, tends to attract the listener. This is the feeling we experienced at your concerts. What do you feel with such mutual understanding and unity with the audience?

– The question has already provides the answer - mutual understanding and unity!

– Let's discuss the issue of jazz education. What do you think, how should it be set and produced? What does not suit you in the modern educational system and what needs to be done so that we have more well-trained jazz vocalists in Kazakhstan?

– Comparing the American and Soviet (we still have the Soviet education system in music schools) systems, we see that children are not trusted with an understanding of time and vertical. As a result, after graduation from school, musicians have to re-learn the rhythm and feel of bass in the work. In the Soviet school, the alphanumeric chord system appears only in grade 7, while in the American school it starts from the beginning. Our solfeggio begins with one-voice and the American one with two-voice - melody plus bass and rhythm. If you correctly analyze all the strengths of the American musical literacy system and add them to the already existing one, quite voluminous and fundamental Soviet system, but completely divorced from modern sound, in a short time you can get great musicians who own the styles of the

twentieth century.

– Now in music colleges and in higher educational institutions they are training vocalists in two areas: academic and pop-jazz. Is there a relationship between the two directions?

– There are many examples of the interpenetration of classical and jazz, many experiments in this direction. There is a well-known style of Jazz classics, founded by the French pianist Jacques Lucier.

– A few questions about the methodology and pedagogy of pop-jazz vocals. It is believed that in order to master the art of jazz vocals, it is necessary to train the voice according to the classical method, and then, based on academic singing, you can develop a pop style. What's your opinion on this?

– I hear about such a technique for the first time. American jazz, gospel, Soul, R&B schools talk about the resonance of the lower jaw to reveal a sound similar to a brass instrument. Only the diaphragm breath setting is similar. Articulation is also the opposite.

– Ms. Irene, could you tell us about the state of jazz in Kazakhstan today? In particular about jazz vocalists? And a little history, whom did jazz in vocals in our country begin with? How did the vocal-jazz school develop?

– The state of jazz anywhere in the world is determined by the number and status of jazz festivals, jazz clubs and international projects of jazz groups, the number of records and the demand for musicians. There are several festivals in Kazakhstan - one in Nur-Sultan, two in Almaty and several in the regions - in Karaganda, in Shymkent, in Lissakovsk, in Pavlodar, in Aktau and others. They take place once a year, some two or three times,

most of them are organized by the initiative of local groups and philharmonic societies. There are much fewer jazz clubs, more often jazz groups are forced to perform in nightclubs or restaurants. New albums are released extremely rarely, only at the initiative of the musicians themselves, occasionally supported by patrons and practically not supported by the state. To date, the most successful groups include such groups as “MagicofNomads”, Big band led by A. Ablayev (Nur-Sultan), Big Band led by A. Belyakov (Almaty), Big band led by I. Andreychenko (Karaganda), Victor Khomenkov’s trio, “Steps”, “JazzHouse”, “Art-vocal”, “SoulNote” and many others (can be added).

– The history of jazz vocals in Kazakhstan began to develop with the group “Boomerang” and the Big Band led by E. Bogushevsky. Thus, thanks to the talent of jazz legends Tahir and Farhad Ibragimov, Eduard Bogushevsky and Mikhail Yermolov, such wonderful vocalists began to appear as Leonid Kogan, Zhanna Zhantureeva, Zhanna Sattarova, Rimma Walter and others. Today their successors are beautiful young vocalists such as Diana Makina, Gauhar Sattarova, Diana Samyken, Gaukhar Umirzakova, Zhanna Orynbasarova, Naziya Alzhanova, Alexey Timofeev, Julia Pereimo, Yekaterina Khomenkova and many others.

– Turning again to the musical educational system of our country, in your opinion, how to organize the musical educational process so that in the future we will have much more vivid names in instrumental and, especially, in vocal jazz music?

– The fastest and easiest way to help young musicians understand and love jazz music is to organize master classes of the bearers of this culture, as well as training according to American methods of vocal

improvisation, such as Bob Stoloff and James Abertsold. And of course, visiting jazz festivals and listening to the brightest stars of jazz.

– Mastering the art of scat improvisation is a complex and time-consuming process, but subject to training. You are actively engaged in pedagogy, which of your students can you mark as your follower who has mastered your methodology?

– I am very happy about the success of my students and for me they are primarily friends, like-minded people and colleagues. But I cannot call their achievements as the result of my technique, especially since it is not mine. This is their path of dedication, perseverance and a great love of music. And it is a great honor for me to witness their creative growth – Anastasia Petrova, Naziya Alzhanova, Alexander Mikheev and many others.

– In the Kazakh traditional music, in folk songs, there is a reception of improvisational syllable chants, reminiscent of scat improvisation, but not properly studied by modern pop-jazz performers and, often, not used by them. In your opinion, is it possible to use jazz scat improvisation in Kazakh folk songs?

– This is absolutely necessary and should be explored and used, especially by vocalists performing ethno-jazz. Since the uniqueness of each culture is valued throughout the world, which lies in the creativity of our ancestors, who left their character, individuality and image in traditional chants, as a message to posterity, a kind of musical DNA.

– Now is the difficult time connected with the pandemic and forced work at a distance, but, a person always lives with hopes for the best, please share your plans for the future?

– We are planning new theater and music staging, new concerts as part of our SILK MUSIC FEST festival, on the stage of which there are Kazakh and foreign groups, new lecture cycles that reveal world musicology from the point of view of anthropological development of cultures, moving away from the usual Western European centrism (this tendency is growing all over the world and becoming more and more popular science).

– Thank you very much, Ms. Irene, for the interview. We wish you success and good luck!

– Mutually! Many thanks!

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ИНТЕРВЬЮ С ИЗВЕСТНОЙ ДЖАЗОВОЙ ПЕВИЦЕЙ ГОРОДА АЛМАТЫ ИРЭНОЙ АРАВИНОЙ

Аннотация

Эта статья посвящена вопросам джазового искусства и образования в Казахстане. Известная казахстанская джазовая певица, лектор и неутомимый пропагандист джаза на телевидении, в концертах – Ирэн Аравина, в своем интервью делится взглядами на современное состояние искусства джаза в Казахстане. Автор останавливается на проблемах джазового образования, на методике преподавания эстрадно-джазового вокала, на вопросах вокальной импровизации и ее существенной особенности – на скэт-импровизации. В интервью совершается небольшой экскурс в историю джазового искусства в нашей стране, рассматривается стиль «этно-джаз», затрагиваются вопросы развития вокально-джазовой школы. По мнению Ирэн Аравиной, организация и проведение международных джазовых фестивалей, приобщение детей к джазу с первых дней обучения музыке, ориентация на лучшие мировые методики джазового образования, обучение основам джазовой импровизации, - все это способствует развитию джазового искусства в Казахстане.

Ключевые слова: джаз, эстрадно-джазовый вокал, этно-джаз, скэт-импровизация, джазовый фестиваль

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АЛМАТЫ ҚАЛАСЫНЫҢ ТАНЫМАЛ ДЖАЗ ӘНШІСІ

ИРЭН АРАВИНАМЕН СҰХБАТ

Аңдатпа

Бұл мақала Қазақстандағы джаз өнері мен білімі мәселелеріне арналған.

Танымал қазақстандық джаз әншісі, дәріскер және джазды теледидарда, концерттерде қажымайтын насихаттаушы – Ирэн Аравина өзінің сұхбатында Қазақстандағы джаздың қазіргі заманғы жағдайы туралы көзқарасымен бөлісті. Автор джаз бойынша білім беру мәселесіне, эстрадалық-джаз вокалды оқыту әдістемесіне, әнді суырып салып айту мәселелеріне, әсіресе, оның елеулі ерекшелігіне – скэт-импровизацияға тоқталады. Сұхбатта біздің еліміздегі джаз өнерінің тарихына шағын экскурс жасалды,

«этно-джаз» стилі қарастырылды, джаз-вокалдық мектебінің даму мәселелері қозғалды.

Ирэн Аравинаның пікірінше, халықаралық джаз фестивальдерінің ұйымдастырылуы және өткізілуі, балаларды музыкаға баулудың бірінші күндерінен джазға тарту, джаз білімінің ең үздік әлемдік әдістемесіне бағдарлану, джаз импровизациясының негіздерін оқыту, осының барлығы Қазақстандағы джаз өнерінің дамуына мүмкіндік туғызады.

Трек сөздер: джаз, джаз-эстрадалық вокал, этно-джаз, скэт-импровизация, джаз фестивалі.

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