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The diffusion of jazz culture across the globe brought a variety of changes to jazz music, as well as a variety of scholarship regarding said music. Sociologist Paul Gilroy, in his 1993 publication The Black Atlantic posited that to understand the dissemination of jazz one has to detach the national identity of a region from the music and instead focus on the cultures that participated in the diaspora.¹ This is one of many responses to the phenomenon that is the globalization of jazz. This stance, however, and some others can be seen as problematic because of their dismissal of the role that local adaptation plays in creating unique jazz culture. This principle, known as “glocalization”—a conflation of the terms “globalization” and “localization”—is heavily emphasized in Stuart Nicholson’s 2014 publication Jazz and Culture in a Global Age. Japanese economists, the originators of the term, used it to describe the “adaptation of certain farming techniques to local conditions” (Loc 2163). The term was later applied to the

cultural arena by British sociologist Roland Robertson. The notion of “glocalization” appears frequently within the pages of Nicholson’s book, highlighting a central theme of his work and further revealing his take on jazz and culture in our global age.

Nicholson presents his theory within the pages of five brilliantly clear chapters: “Jazz and the Perfect Storm,” “Jazz May Be Universal, but Does it Have a Universal Meaning?,” “Jazz and American Cultural Power,” “The Globalization of Jazz,” and “Jazz and Modernism.” He begins each chapter with a brief yet thorough summation of what is to come, whetting the appetite of the reader with material that encourages full comprehension of his discussion.

Nicholson begins his book with a startling revelation regarding what he considers to be the anaemic condition of American jazz. He discusses important barriers to its growth/success, all the while imploring the new age of jazz musicians to “find a way to continue to speak to the society” (Loc 933). Following this assessment of the current state of jazz, Nicholson surveys the psychology, culture, and history surrounding the field. He makes it quite clear that he is in favour of forward motion, of forging new paths in jazz as opposed to venerating the past. He bolsters his opinion by using his words to paint disquieting images of currently struggling young artists and a dying jazz culture.

In his second chapter, Nicholson opens our minds to the notion that though two cultures may consume the same product, the way that product is understood is likely to vary depending on different cultural identities. He applies this notion to the consumption of jazz music, theorizing that what the music connotes (and the emotions that ensue) will be unique across cultures. According to Nicholson, besides differing cultural values, the way music is consumed also plays an important role in how cultures react and relate to it. He highlights this by reminding his reader of the ready availability of the phonograph (and recordings) in Europe, where the live jazz bands were absent, resulting in very different musical priorities in European jazz music from those of Americans.

In his third chapter Nicholson emphasizes the mammoth strength of jazz as a “soft” power. Seemingly oxymoronic, Nicholson’s neologism stands to highlight the covert ability of jazz (and other propaganda), to incite fervour for American (or any other) culture. This soft power approach arose amidst post World War II societies— many of which struggled to stand on their feet. Nicholson details the efforts of the United States’s government to selectively display an American way of life. The zeal birthed of this campaign translated

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into a world culture that became increasingly defined by American ideals.

As chapter four unfolds, Nicholson finally arrives at his central point: *glocalization*. He carefully demonstrates how jazz, though an American concept, was able to adapt to the regions it permeated, ultimately becoming a vehicle for the perpetuation of a region’s identity. He highlights the rise of nationalism and the demonizing of America during the Vietnam War, as significant contributing factors. He also draws upon the experiences of foreign musicians to further support his claims. If all of this is not enough, Nicholson also provides several brief descriptions of foreign jazz styles, stating what they take from American jazz while also truly underscoring what connects them to their own cultures.

Chapter five’s narrative places jazz within the context of a rapidly evolving, immediately post-World-War-I, global society. Nicholson reminds us that the striking sounds and techniques that continue to define jazz were not unusual to the musical climate of that time. The rejection of romantic—meaning German—musical decadence was a major priority during the interwar period as the world began shifting gears. This led influential composers (i.e. Stravinsky, Ives, Bartók, and others) to seek inspiration from nationalistic musics, exotic musics, as well as jazz music. Through incorporating these disparate influences, these musicians, along with other thinkers and creators, successfully thrust the globe into the modern age. Younger artists, (i.e. Wynton Marsalis and his contemporaries) have since continued to push the envelope and further develop jazz music as an avant-garde art form.

One has to commend the breadth of Nicholson’s theory. It is magnificently structured and very clearly unfolds from page to page. Each chapter’s introduction truly maintains the reader’s attention, and we are presented with just enough information to follow Nicholson without a forfeiting of a sense of anticipation. It is also easy to appreciate Nicholson’s opinions because he regularly notes that each culture has a unique identity. The cultural awareness he exhibits makes the book especially interesting.

The prose Nicholson employs to present his information is witty, sharp, and full of detail. Each topic he sets out to elaborate, he does skilfully. One of my favourite displays of the humour in his voice is his assertion that “Gabbard’s aspiration to sweep jazz appreciation into the closed shop of university research... might simply confirm younger audiences’ worst fears about the music—that it is so remote from their daily lives it is marginally more enticing than a barium enema” (Loc 523). I chuckled aloud at that quip and many others throughout the book.

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3 Krin Gabbard is an academic who wrote *The Jazz Canon and Its Consequences*. 

*Critical Voices: The University of Guelph Book Review Project* is part of the curriculum at the School of Fine Art and Music, University of Guelph, Ontario, Canada.
It is almost impossible to dispute Nicholson’s erudition. The way he combines the musical narrative with the cultural is admirable and certainly places his argument in context. Nicholson goes above and beyond the lofty goal he sets for himself as implied by his title, providing breadth of historical coverage on his topic that is more than substantial. Moreover, the book is satisfyingly lengthy, but I would have preferred it to be slightly longer so that the ideas could be more thoroughly elaborated. Publications like *Global Culture Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity: A Theory, Culture & Society Special Issue* by Mike Featherstone or *Modernist America: Art, Music, Movies, and the Globalization of American Culture* by Richard Pells would be brilliant companions, eliminating the need for length that favours the cultural climate. They elaborate on information regarding the cultures that Nicholson’s book examines. They also offer the reader a chance to compare related ideas.

Furthermore, the reader is left wanting more from Nicholson concerning the theories behind *glocalization*. It is such an interesting framework that I craved a more in-depth treatment of it, particularly as concerns everyday events. Though I appreciated Nicholson’s treatment of jazz in other cultures, I was hoping to gain more general insights into jazz’s global presence. While Nicholson did indeed touch on a number of cultures, he only briefly surveyed the information regarding their unique jazz identities. He did stress several times that “these examples are not intended to be a definitive listing of glocalized styles,” but there was certainly room for more information (Loc 3137). Indeed, his emphasis on Europe was somewhat tiring given how closely related Western European culture is to America’s culture. A more all-encompassing look at the development of jazz would have been refreshing.

I long for the contrast that a more extensive examination of an African country, whose essence is not so wounded by colonialism, would provide. Nicholson focused a great deal of his energy on South African varieties of jazz. Engagement with the jazz traditions found in East and North Africa, if only briefly, would have enriched the text. Regarding Nicholson’s treatment of West African Jazz, he provides only a fleeting account that compares the rhythmic aspects of this glocalized tradition to the Latin clave (which is based on traditional West African rhythms, anyway). I found this section in particular lacking, especially the paucity of citations that left me wondering how he

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acquired his information.

Regarding other areas of this narrative, the heavy emphasis on Paul Whiteman as an extremely important figure in jazz was an interesting stance and is further evidence of Nicholson’s tendency to go against the grain. The narratives of Jazz that are most recognized tend to highlight the “blackness” of the music’s roots, however, Nicholson makes a point of highlighting the important role that white musicians played in its development. This role cannot be ignored.

Overall, Nicholson gives us a delightful taste of his jazz principles with his publication, *Jazz and Culture in a Global Age*. This book is exceptionally written, so much so that its shortcomings are made more disappointing. Certainly, not everyone will feel this way, as this book is full of Nicholson’s personality and opinions. This may be a perfect fit for some but it will definitely ruffle the feathers of others. I certainly appreciate the book. It is indeed a game-changing publication. It highlights much that often goes ignored and it dares to combat ideas that have since remained unchallenged. I look forward to seeing what responses will emerge from the scholarly community at large.

**For Further Reading:**


