



THE VALUE OF JAZZ IN BRITAIN
by Mykaell Riley and Dave Laing

SPECIAL REPORT

Jazz in the Media

A comparative review of media coverage of jazz, classical & world music



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to examine the coverage of jazz by Britain's national 'broadsheet' newspapers, television channels and radio stations. Such coverage was monitored for a two month period at the end of 2007 and the beginning of 2008.

The principal conclusion of the report is that, despite the growth of interest in jazz, as evidenced by increases in festival and club audiences, the music is still treated as inferior to classical music in the press and on the air.

Previews and reviews of jazz in the press and on radio and television are strongly London-centric. In the newspapers, only large regional festivals or major tours that commence outside the capital draw the attention of London-based critics. Otherwise, reference to non-London events is basically confined to previews within the listings sections. In broadcasting, BBC Radio 3 and BBC 4 television will occasionally record a regional music event – shortly after the end of the review period BBC 4 re-ran 2007's Brecon Jazz Festival – but otherwise large scale outside broadcast facilities are only used outside London for major pop events like the Glastonbury Festival.

Within the media as a whole there are inconsistencies and divergences over genre definitions such as 'new music', 'world music' and 'pop'. While this may reflect the fact that music audiences are becoming increasingly eclectic in their interests, it can have a negative effect on the visibility of jazz in the media – especially when (unlike pop/rock and classical music) it has very few sites of regular coverage outside Radio 2, Radio 3 and *The Guardian* and *Financial Times* newspapers.

In this respect, the report found a distinct editorial tendency to prioritise what is perceived as novelty in music. If something is presented to journalists as 'jazz plus' another type of music or culture, they are more likely to preview or review it in the general arts pages. As a result, a publication may cover an event promoted by a jazz-based organisation under a non-jazz heading, especially 'World' music.

1. Introduction

This report measures the quantity and character of jazz coverage as compared to classical music and world music within the 'broadsheet' national press, television and radio (local and national). It covers a two-month period starting November 16 2007 – the opening of the London Jazz Festival – and ending on January 10 2008. The research was carried out for *The Value of Jazz* by Mick Sawyer and Jan Euden.

1.1 Print

The quantity of coverage in newspapers was measured in column inches, including space given over to photographs or any other illustrative feature.

The following items were monitored for each genre:

- Concert, tour & festival previews;
- Reviews of concerts and other live events;
- CD reviews;
- Feature articles.
- Reviews and previews of relevant radio and TV broadcasts
- Book reviews.

The category of feature articles embraces relevant news articles, op-ed pieces and obituaries. If obituaries were omitted, certain papers would look pretty thin on the jazz front. Similarly, in one or two instances, most significantly *The Daily & Sunday Telegraph*, if coverage of broadcasts and books were not included, jazz would not have received any coverage at all in certain newspapers during certain weeks.

1.2 Television and Radio

The output of the broadcast media was measured in hours/minutes per week, guided by listings in the *Radio Times* and elsewhere. This might have led to the omission from the data of short items included in the more 'newsy' arts features or review programmes.

For television, the output of the five terrestrial channels (BBC 1 and 2, ITV, Channels 4 and 5) was surveyed, along with the programming of the main Freeview channels, plus Sky Arts. In analysing radio broadcasts, Classic FM has been omitted altogether because of its almost 100% classical music content, although Jazz FM's successor, Smooth FM, was monitored to

measure its residual jazz output. Digital-only stations were not monitored, although Classic FM's 'sister' station The Jazz was on air during our monitoring period. Primarily, the research focused on the output of the main BBC national stations and the BBC local network.

1.3 Music Genre Definitions

In this report we have generally accepted the genre definitions made by each newspaper of their music coverage. In some cases, the same event or artist was categorised differently by different newspapers or by the same paper at different times. The most significant of these was Hugh Masekela's appearance with the LSO Choir and Jason Yarde at the Barbican Centre in London in December. The Masekela concert received most notice in *The Guardian*. A week before the show it ran a substantial article on the production's genesis on the Classical Music page of its Friday *Film & Music* section. Nevertheless, when the concert was reviewed in *The Guardian* a week later it was defined as a World music event – and given the credentials of Masekela and Yarde, it might equally have been defined as jazz. Another example was a series of pre-Christmas performances at Ronnie Scott's by the guitarist Jeff Beck. Depending upon which broadsheet you read, these were categorised variously as Jazz, Rock or Pop.

In our analysis of classical music media coverage, we have omitted all reviews, features or programmes featuring ballet or dance generally. Classical for our purposes has been narrowed down to orchestral works, smaller scale performances from the classical canon and opera. Were classical ballet to have been included, the disproportional coverage of classical music compared to jazz would have been substantially larger.

2. The Press

2.1 Overview

Music coverage generally has widened considerably in the broadsheets over the last decade, although the main beneficiary of this heightened interest has largely been mainstream pop, followed by this newly discovered World category. On the review pages, most broadsheets give classical and pop fairly even weighting.

Arts editors' decisions on music coverage still seem to be determined by their perception of the importance their readers and official culture in general, give to classical music.

Nevertheless, there seems to be an awareness that classical music is struggling to capture

new, younger audiences. Over the two month period various articles appeared that either criticised the classical world for its inability to adapt, or alternatively highlighted enterprises that were attempting to use the internet or other digital distribution models to extend the reach of classical music.

Meanwhile on the news and feature pages pop dominated. The two musical acts that excited most editorial interest in the run-up to Christmas were Led Zeppelin and The Spice Girls.

Within this environment, music that falls outside of the pop and classical mainstreams – as defined by the newspapers – really has to fight for attention. In the scramble for editorial territory, jazz now rarely gets dedicated space. Depending on the individual newspaper, jazz was often linked with world music or tacked on as an afterthought to a rock and pop section.

Certain dedicated jazz critics/reviewers seemed positively under-employed. *The Observer's* longstanding jazz critic Dave Gelly, for example, currently has a very small presence in the review section – usually limited to one or two CD reviews – and seldom appears at all in the paper's *Music Monthly* magazine. In the period under review he published only one substantial feature piece – a summary of the London Jazz Festival.

2.2 The London Jazz Festival (November 16th – 25th 2007)

Our review began with one of the beacons of the UK's jazz year – The London Jazz Festival – and if jazz was going to enjoy a period of enlarged limelight this would surely be the time. To some extent this was the case, although the LJF was running against the classically orientated Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, which the *Independent*, *Times* and *Daily Telegraph* all managed to give as much and, in the case of the last title, more space to.

Clearly the scale of the LJF is quite daunting; nearly 200 events packed into ten days. Even the most optimistic jazz fan would not imagine that the newspapers would cover more than a small fraction of these. More predictably, the majority of the broadsheets limited their reviews, previews and features to the appearances by veteran, mostly American performers – principally Sonny Rollins and Charlie Haden, along with Jan Gabarek.

The event that excited most coverage was the opening Tribute to Ella Fitzgerald. The concert was also broadcast on Radio 3 a few days later, and was further supported by a biographical

documentary on BBC4 (*Legends* tx: 16.11.07), both of which received almost equal newspaper coverage. It is safe to say that the late Ella Fitzgerald was – for the broadsheets at least – the star of the Festival. Her photograph was featured more than any other (living) performer.

In the Festival period only one paper – *The Guardian* – ran regular (virtually daily) reviews of the event and took note of concerts by both British artists and lesser-known international musicians.

As a simple comparison, here is a list of the artists/events that each daily paper reviewed or ran articles on during the first week of the Festival. Some of them were defined as World, and in such cases all reference to the London Jazz Festival was dropped:

The Guardian: Ella Fitzgerald (3); Heather Cornell; Andy Milne; Dankworth Big Band; Charlie Haden; Kinetika; Jan Gabarek; Charles Gayle; Charles Tolliver; The Apples; Tuxedomoon; Flat Earth Society; Vieux Farka Toure/Zeep

The Times: Ella Fitzgerald (2); Charlie Haden; Jan Garbarek; Charles Tolliver; Tuxedomoon; Barry Adamson

The Independent: Ella Fitzgerald; Charlie Haden; Chick Corea/Bela Fleck; Orchestra Baobab (2)

Financial Times: Charlie Haden/Gwilym Simcock; Jan Garbarek; Orchestra Baobab; Vieux Farka Toure

The Daily Telegraph: Ella Fitzgerald (TV & radio previews only); Robert Glasper

The first Table (overleaf) displays all the review/preview output of the five daily broadsheet titles during the full period of the London Jazz Festival. All three categories are included – jazz classical and world – sub divided into Live reviews (LR) and Live previews (LP).

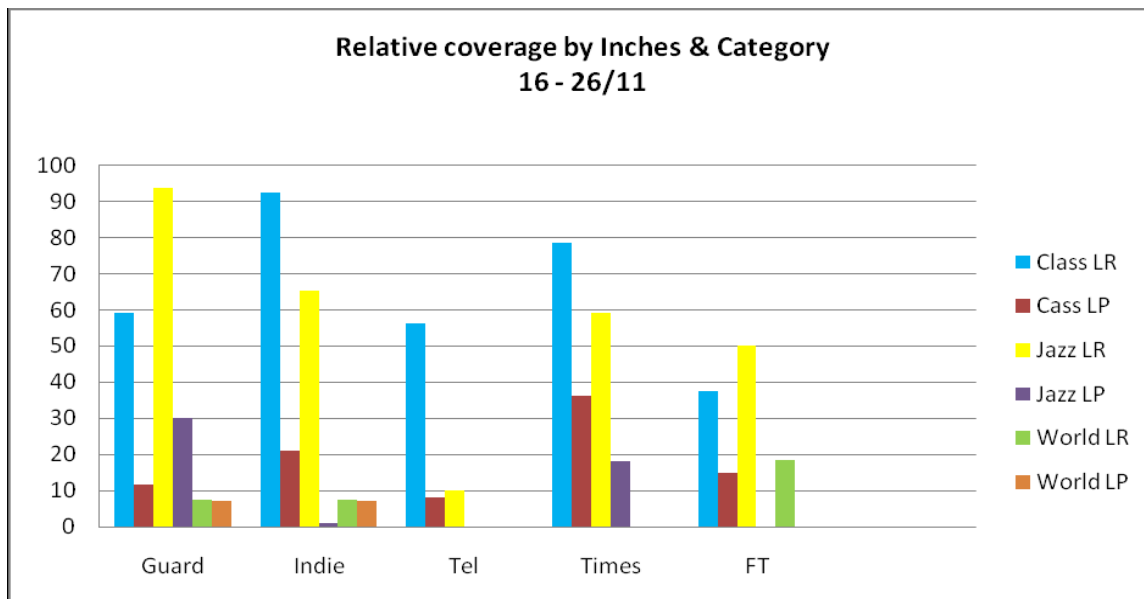


Table 1

The comparative proportions of classical, jazz & world coverage between the broadsheet titles over this period largely reflect a constant over the remaining period of review. The chart below shows the weekly averages over the eight weeks. Figures will be slightly distorted by the fact that *The Guardian* and the *FT* did not print on Boxing Day. We have also omitted jazz entries in *The Guardian's* special supplement *1000 Albums to Hear Before You Die*. These are discussed separately (see below).

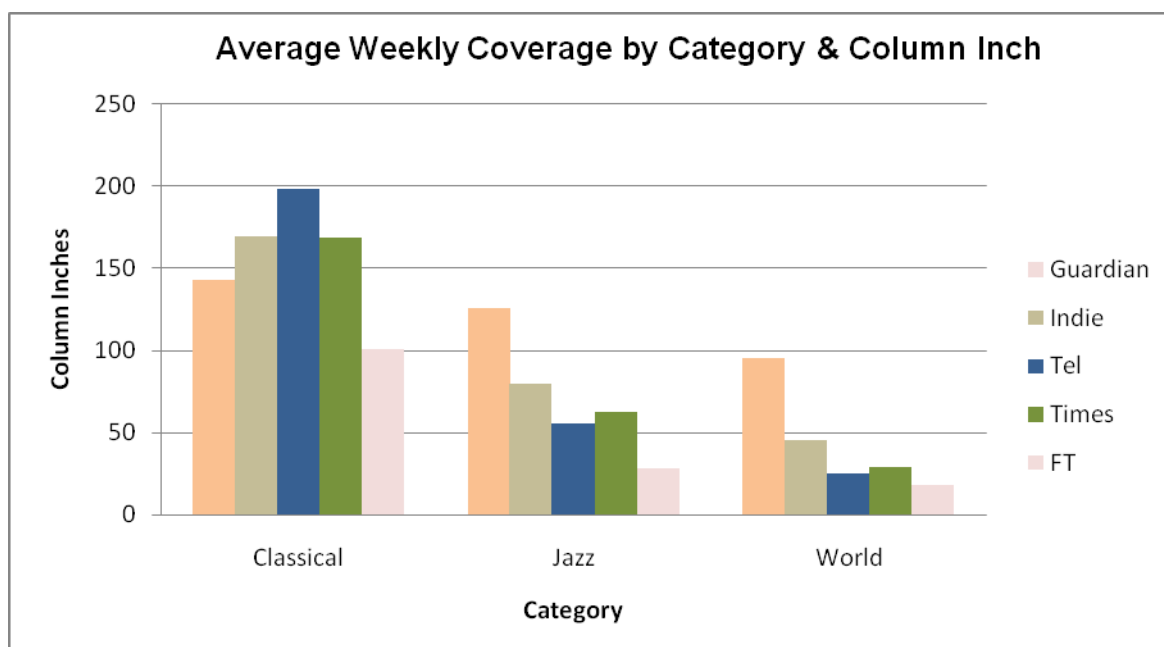


Table 2

Obviously, from a jazz perspective *The Guardian* has the greatest coverage but this is a paper that has invested heavily in music coverage in general. In some ways the *Financial Times* is more interesting given that only a very small amount of its content is dedicated to cultural matters in the first place.

2.3 The Daily Newspapers

Financial Times

The FT has an even-handed approach that over any given week quite mathematically allocates its editorial space to culture. Therefore, on a Friday when it dedicates its arts page to CD reviews, you know that you will get two jazz CDs, two world CDs and four or five pop and classical CD reviews, all occupying identical space each week. Similarly over a week, it will quite democratically deploy its limited live review space across a wide selection of topics. In the case of the FT, jazz is as likely to get a review as pop.

The Daily Telegraph

At the other end of the spectrum sits the *Telegraph*. This is a paper that sees, effectively, only two brands of music – pop and classical. It has belatedly started to feature the former because it is desperately trying to cultivate a younger readership, while its heavy coverage of the latter is designed to appease its older, conservative audience. Were it not for its radio critic, Gillian Reynolds regularly recommending Radio 3 programming, jazz would barely register in its pages. Only during the Festival period did jazz get any significant space, but this was mainly due to a lengthy feature article on Robert Glasper – a somewhat singular choice. But jazz is hardly alone, since any other 'minority' music is given the same low key coverage.

The Independent

During the review period this was the only paper to report of differences of interest between the owners and manager of Ronnie Scott's Club over booking policy. Equally, it gave more space than any other paper to the death of Oscar Peterson – a full page news story plus an obituary that covered nearly a page and a half. Elsewhere, like all of the broadsheets, classical coverage was consistently extensive, although in certain weeks the combined totals for jazz and world music almost equalled the space given to classical music.

The Times

In terms of coverage, *The Times* and *The Independent* gave jazz and world similar weighting, although *The Times* ploughs a less idiosyncratic furrow than the latter.

The Guardian

The Guardian stands alone in being the only paper where in certain weeks, jazz will actually get more coverage than classical music and if world music coverage is combined with jazz, in most weeks these outweigh the column inches devoted to classical music. Without doubt, *The Guardian's* John Fordham is the most heavily employed jazz critic in the national press. And yet this newspaper's classical coverage is still nearly equal to the other broadsheets, with the possible exception of the *Telegraph*. Its Friday *Film & Music* section is unique among the dailies. While some jazz aficionados may gripe at how jazz is placed with folk and world, this section is a clear demonstration of the paper's heavy investment in cultural content.

Guardian special supplement: 1000 Albums to Hear Before You Die.

During the first week of our review, *The Guardian* ran a five-part A4 sized special supplement under the title *1000 Albums to Hear Before You Die*. As this was very much a one-off that limited itself to non-classical music from the last eighty years, we chose not to include its jazz entries in the main list of tallies and instead separately analyse how well jazz fared in the list against other forms of contemporary music.

As a way of differentiating this list from the myriad others that have appeared in magazines and television shows over the last few years, *The Guardian* set some new criteria. Firstly, artists could only be chosen once – although musicians with a habit of collaborating or appearing in different line-ups did get multiple entries. Examples of this from the realm of jazz would be guitarists John McLaughlin and Pat Metheny. Both had solo albums nominated but the former also turned up as the Mahavishnu Orchestra while the latter appeared with the avant-garde composer Steve Reich on the *Different Trains/Electric Counterpoint* album.

Compilations were also allowed, which from a jazz point of view was good since it admitted recordings made before the era of the long player. Indeed the oldest recordings nominated were jazz – The Original Dixieland Jazz Band's first recordings from 1917 that featured on a 1994 CD. The compilation rule also allowed collections of various artists to be included – indeed the Various heading stretched over nearly four pages – and this produced some quite

esoteric choices including one of Giles Peterson’s collections of 60s British jazz rarities and a selection of pre-war novelty jazz recordings – *Songs the Bonzo Dog Band Taught Us*.

Landmark jazz albums such as *Kind of Blue* and *A Love Supreme* were also included and jazz had a strong presence with over 10% (114) of the listings. Adding certain world category entries – Fela Kuti for example – would extend this to nearly 20%. The value of the list as a reference point was its highlighting of unusual and neglected music, and its jazz selections were notable for the inclusion of a large number of British and European recordings. And, refreshingly, the jazz choices did not exhaustively mine the seam of music recorded between 1945 and 1975, allowing that great music continues to be made.

2.5 The Sunday Newspapers.

Jazz as a standalone subject is becoming an increasing rarity among all the Sunday ‘broadsheets’. In fact very little difference exists between the four main titles in their relative coverage of classical, jazz and world music.

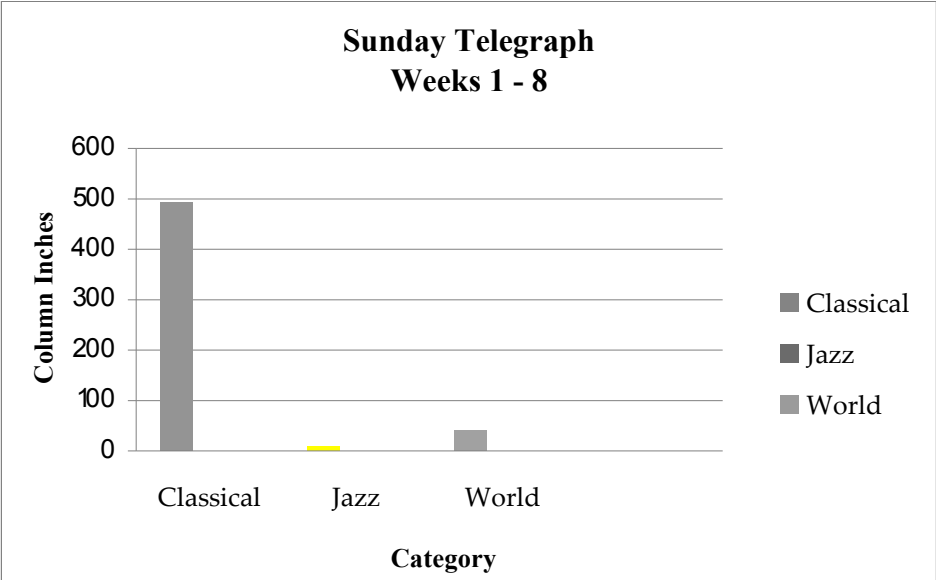


Table 3

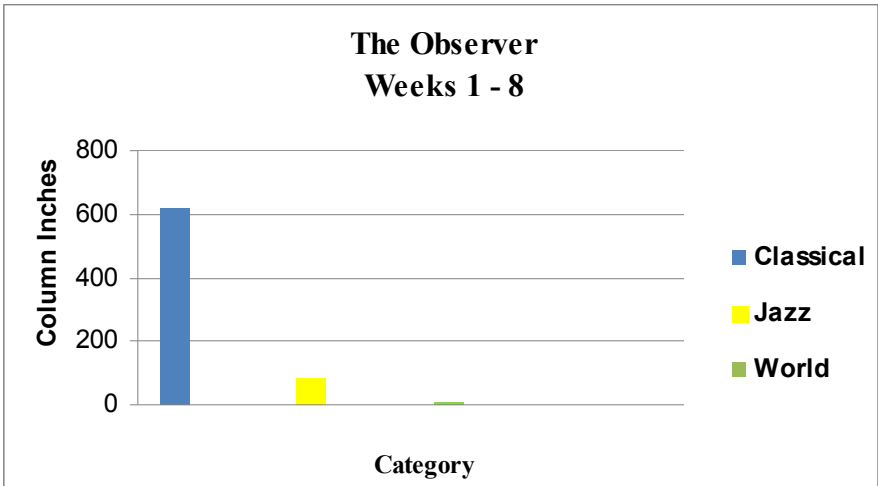


Table 4

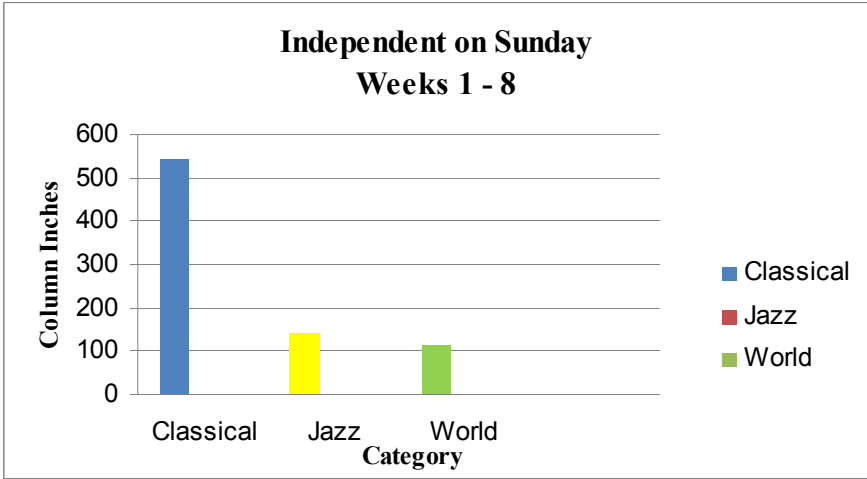


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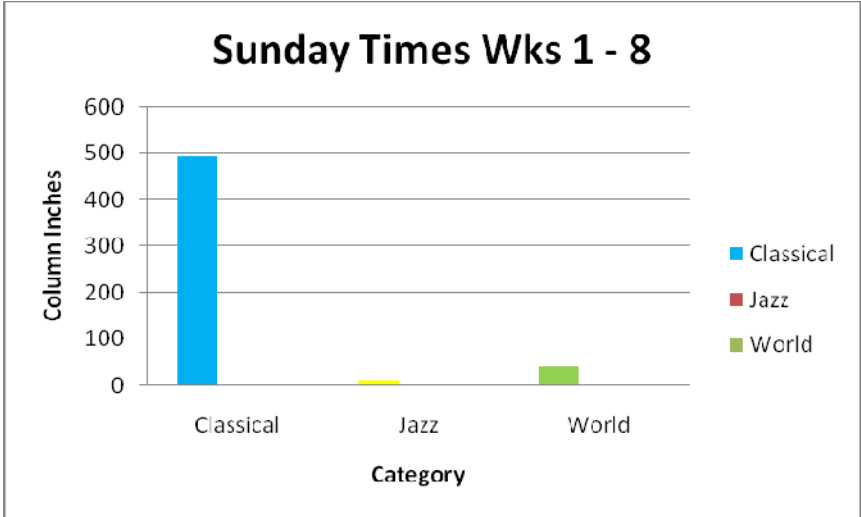


Table 6

Jazz coverage such as it exists is largely confined to CD reviews and live previews in the various listings sections. Over the eight week period, virtually no live reviews were featured in any of the papers and no significant feature articles were run either.

The most disappointing title, given its jazz coverage in the past, is *The Observer* and its *Music Monthly* magazine. In the one issue of that magazine that appeared during the review period, jazz coverage was limited to four rather poor snapshot photographs taken at the London Jazz Festival.

3. Television & Radio

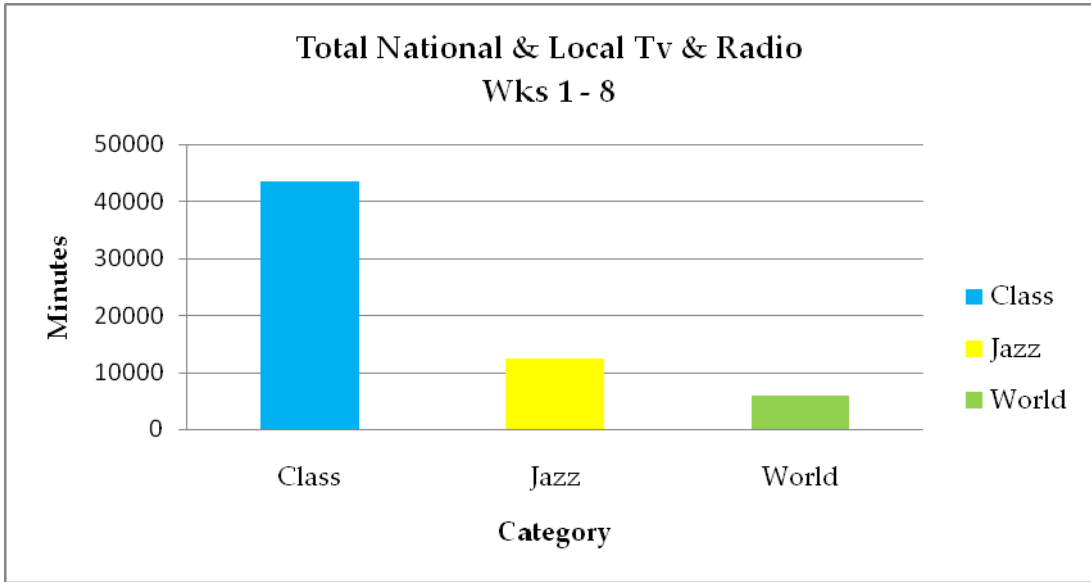


Table 7

3.1 Terrestrial Television

Music programming generally is not going through a golden period on any of the five terrestrial channels. As far as live performance is concerned most effort is given over to 'talent' shows of the *X Factor* variety or to pop oriented programmes aimed at the youth audience. Both BBC 1 and ITV 1 heavily rely on the former, while Channel 4 now seems to devote nearly all its musical resources to the latter. Five has recently made noises suggesting a new commitment to arts programming but the evidence so far is not encouraging (see below). The only regular series with any kind of commitment to live performance of non-mainstream contemporary music is BBC 2's long-running *Later With Jools Holland*. In this context, neither jazz nor classical music is gaining any kind of upper

hand. It is probably fair to point out that over the space of a year, there is a greater amount of classical performance on these television channels as the BBC is still wedded to broadcasting big seasonal events, like The Proms, mainly on BBC 2.

For the most part when jazz or classical music does appear it is in the context of history and the documentary format and these programmes seldom enjoy prominent scheduling. For example, a major two and a half hour documentary on the life of the British composer Ralph Vaughan Williams was produced and broadcast by Channel 5 after the project had been turned down by the BBC. Five scheduled the documentary for New Year's Day but screened it at 9am!

As far as the BBC is concerned, there has been a move to relocate much of the arts and music programming that once would have found a home on BBC 2 to its digital channel BBC 4.

3.2 Digital & Satellite

BBC 4

BBC 4 is now one of the few channels around where serious music programming has any kind of home. However, it has to be said that a large proportion of this programming is dealing with historic themes rather than contemporary performance – the *Legends* series that featured Ella Fitzgerald is not untypical.

Central to the BBC 4 music output is the *Britannia* strand of 'pop' histories. Inaugurated in early 2005 to coincide with the Jazz Britannia event at London's Barbican, BBC 4 has subsequently run series on folk, classical, soul and pop music in the UK, along with series on comics and dance under the same banner. In the period under review, *Pop Britannia* was being featured heavily as the latest incarnation of the strand, although *Classical Britannia* was also being re-run during late November. Given the pattern of frequent repeats that is the *sine qua non* of satellite and cable broadcasting, no doubt *Jazz Britannia* – already recycled several times since its original transmission – will get yet another airing sometime during 2008.

Nevertheless, BBC 4 has shone in other areas. The short series *Brazil, Brazil* was a refreshing look at a relatively unexplored (in television terms) area of global music that enjoyed more press interest than other BBC 4 programming in this period, Ella Fitzgerald excepted. The series was solid on charting the inter-relationships between Brazilian and

African/American music, including jazz. Certainly the BBC is more confident of finding an audience for world music programming these days.

Sky Arts

As a subscription channel Sky Arts is always going to be niche – audiences rarely exceed 250,000 – and consequently it only has a limited budget to generate original programming. Only a small amount of this is dedicated to music.

However, amongst its bought-in programming it has managed to feature a decent amount of jazz series and one-offs. Through the period of review it ran a documentary on Miles Davis' electric phase, as well as featuring re-runs of the Montreux Jazz Festival of 2004, for example. However the bulk of its music programming is admittedly more inclined towards classical performance and rock legends.

As with BBC 4, the emphasis is not so much on the now as the 'what was'

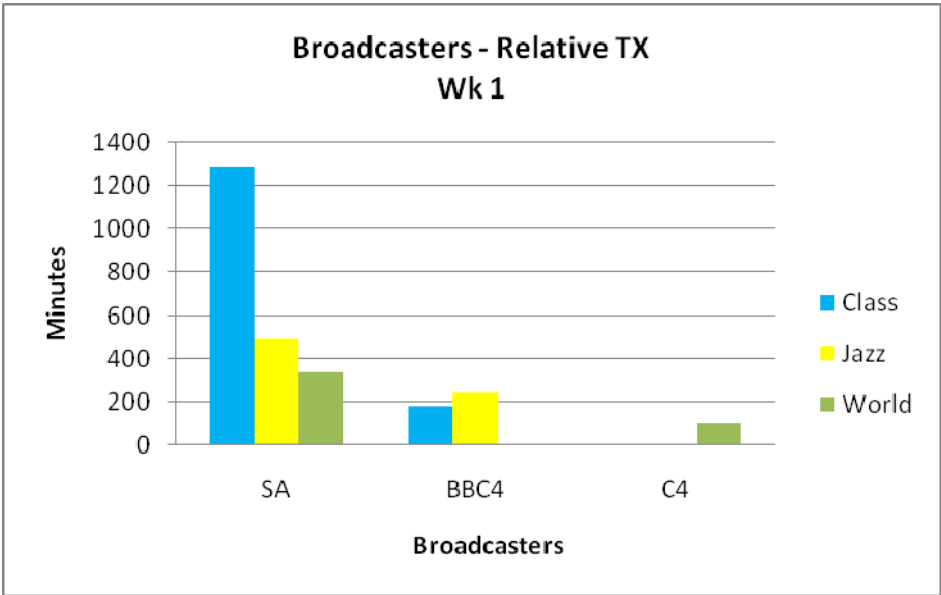


Table 8

The above chart indicates the comparative outputs of the three channels, Sky Arts, BBC 4 and Channel 4 during the week of the London Jazz Festival. No relevant programming was scheduled on BBC 1 & 2, ITV or Five. It is worth pointing out that both Sky Arts and BBC 4's raw figures disguise the fact that the same shows were being broadcast several times.

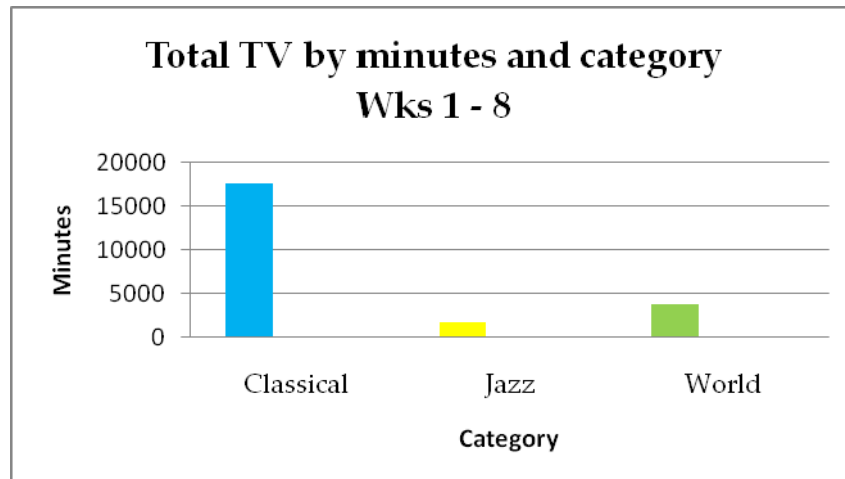


Table 9

3.3 Radio

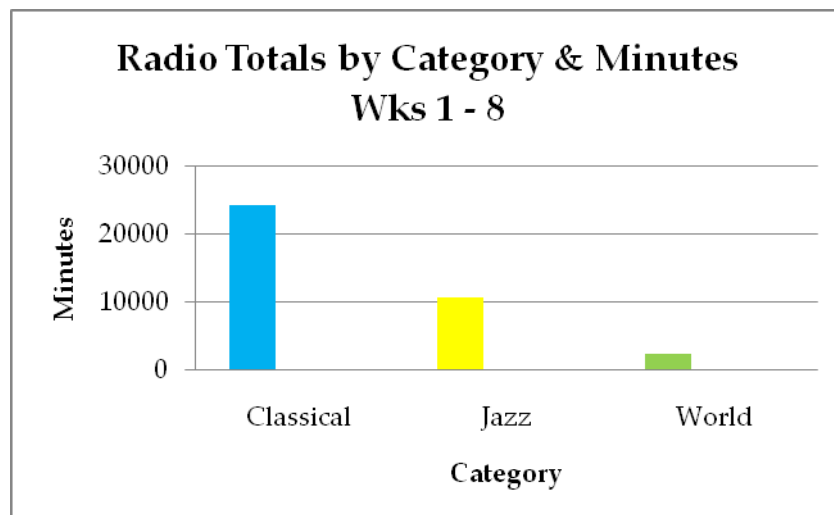


Table 10

National Radio

For the most part BBC radio's jazz output is focused around Radio 2 and Radio 3. The latter has become vigorous in recent years in sponsoring live events for which it can obtain broadcast rights and apart from jazz events – it was a partner for the London Jazz Festival – has supported folk and world music festivals, as well as classical seasons. Nevertheless, while Radio 3's expanding repertoire of genres is welcome, it remains at heart a classical music station.

Both stations have four regular jazz based strands and across these eight shows feature a comprehensive mix of jazz styles both from the archives and new releases, along with a certain amount of live performance.

Radio 3 currently transmits nearly 6 hours a week of regular jazz programming, although this can be augmented – as it was during the LJF period – with jazz sessions being placed in its *Performance On 3* and Lunchtime concert slots. Radio 3's coverage tends towards the more contemporary and eclectic, particularly on the late-night show *Late Junction* that has a very wide-ranging brief embracing jazz, world, new classical and electronica.

In contrast Radio 2, with a more modest 3.5 hours a week, tries to satisfy the more 'traditional' jazz fan, with three of its regular shows, *Best of Jazz*, *Big Band Special* and *Malcolm Laycock* geared towards music from so-called classic periods. Only Courtney Pine's programme focuses on contemporary music.

Outside of these two stations, jazz broadcasts are much more infrequent. Gilles Peterson's two hour weekly late night show on Radio 1, occasionally throws a jazz track into its mix of hip hop, funk, soul and Latin music. But the BBC includes Peterson's show in its own online guide to jazz programming across the radio network. In fact it is arguable that several shows listed in this do not qualify as jazz programmes.

Among these are Michael Parkinson's Sunday morning show on Radio 2, and, on 1Xtra, both *Deviation with Benji B* (an underground soul show) and *The Basement* (a more eclectic vintage music show) are claimed as jazz. On 6 Music *Stuart Maconie's Freak Zone*, another eclectic selection of music, is similarly defined. Most baffling of all, Tony Blackburn's show on BBC London is also slotted into the jazz output.

Commercial Stations

With the demise of Jazz FM, or rather its transformation into Smooth FM, no commercial national AM or FM station remains geared towards jazz music. This is unlike the classical world, where Classic FM continues to thrive.

Smooth FM betrays no evidence whatsoever of being once a jazz station. Its playlist is dominated by 'easy listening' – mainstream pop drawn from the last 50 years. As such it is trying to fit into the Radio 2 mould but without any of that station's forays into non-mainstream music.

Our research survey did not extend to new digital stations (DABs) but it should be mentioned that these included The Jazz. Sadly, at the time of writing this too has gone the way of Jazz FM and its owner had announced its closure at the end of March 2008.

Local Radio

The jazz output of the BBC's local stations adds up to an impressive 1120 minutes a week. However, that is divided up between a number of stations, namely: Hereford & Worcester (2hrs); Derby (2hrs); Leeds (2hrs); Norfolk (3hrs); Nottingham (2hrs); Scotland (2hrs); Stoke (2hrs) and Ulster (2hrs). We have omitted the BBC's claim for Radio Foyle, as the show clearly has no jazz input at all. Of the stations listed only the following monitor jazz performance in their own locality – Derby, Norfolk, Nottingham, Scotland and Ulster.

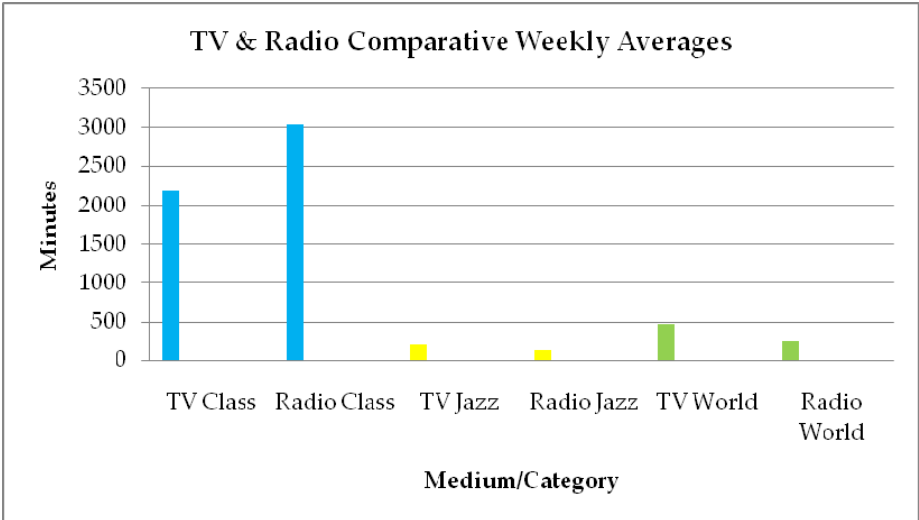


Table 11

4. Conclusions

The two month review threw a number of issues into broad relief.

The principal conclusion is that there have been no significant changes in overall coverage of jazz in the British media since the publication of our first report on the Value of Jazz in Britain at the end of 2006. Despite the growth of interest in jazz, as evidenced by increases in festival and club audiences, the structural position of jazz vis-à-vis classical music in the press and on the air remains an inferior one.

The broadsheets continue for the most part to be London-centric. Few papers employ reviewers from the regions and those that do – *The Guardian*, notably – usually don't use them for jazz performance. Only large regional festivals or major tours that commence outside the capital draw the attention of London-based critics. Otherwise, reference to non-London events is basically confined to previews within the listings sections.

This weighting towards events in the capital continues in broadcasting. BBC 4 will occasionally record a regional music event – shortly after the end of the review period it re-ran 2007's Brecon Jazz Festival – but otherwise large scale outside broadcast facilities are only raised outside London for major pop events like Glastonbury.

The traditional media generally are having problems with the fact that music audiences are becoming increasingly eclectic in their interests. The term 'Pop' now embraces a huge range of styles and is no more of an exact classification than 'World'. This has been true of jazz itself for a long time and, as we have seen, this can lead to inconsistencies and divergences over labelling. While some might see this as a positive development, it does not necessarily increase the profile of jazz in the media – especially when (unlike pop/rock and classical music) it has very few sites of regular coverage outside Radio 2, Radio 3 and *The Guardian* and *Financial Times* newspapers.

What are the practical implications of this situation for the jazz community, particularly promoters and record labels seeking coverage of their events or releases? More than ever, it seems that journalists are susceptible to what they perceive as novelty in music. If something is presented to them as 'jazz plus' another type of music or culture, they are more likely to preview or review it in the general arts pages. And, as this report has shown with examples

such as Hugh Masekela, it is often the case that a publication will cover an event promoted by a jazz-based organisation under a non-jazz heading, especially 'World' music.

These comments refer mainly to the national media, which have been the subject of this report. At local or regional level, however, the same general situation exists. In the past, though, most regional daily or weekly newspapers have had their jazz specialist, often a journalist employed mainly in another capacity or a local enthusiast. There are also jazz programmes on some local BBC radio stations, again presented by jazz specialists.

It is obviously crucial for promoters and those issuing CDs to know about these people and to cultivate them. The best source for information on local and regional journalists and broadcasters will in most cases be the regional jazz organisation or development agency, who should be up-to-date on the key media personnel in their area. In some cases, too, the jazz specialist will be in a position to suggest and get space for feature articles on a jazz theme.