

## Media conference, 21 August 2014

### Speech by Prof. Stephan Schmidt, Director of the Musik-Akademie Basel and the FHNW Academy of Music

#### It's always life that writes the best stories

The beginning of our story is all about the imagination and the initiative of a young jazz musician. Someone who is not just looking for ways to develop jazz and to perform as a jazz musician, but also someone looking for the means to pass on this relatively young art form to others.

Unlike the classical conservatories, which were founded in part in a surge of standardization and academization, there was nothing of this in Bernhard Ley's motivation. Instead there was simply a deep enthusiasm for a phenomenon that has had to find, develop and even invent new means of mediation in order to be passed on to future generations.

Jazz has exerted an incredibly significant influence on all forms of music in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Besides its acts of music-making that were collaborative, imitative, innovative and subversive, in the course of time new ways were sought by which this rich, ever-growing treasure trove of material, experience and information might not just be collected and documented, but also declared "traditional" in the best possible sense, and passed on to others. But this was not just a tradition to be preserved and imitated, but a tradition of subversion, transformation and innovation – and above all of the cultivation of the fleeting, irretrievable moment of inspiration, of spontaneous creation and of improvisation. An art that seemed almost to have been lost in Europe.

The beginnings of the *real book* were not unlike the beginnings of the Jazz School. It emerged out of a spontaneous passion. Those loose-leaf collections of jazz compositions, initially held together in plastic-ring binders (either knowingly or unknowingly evasive of all seemingly "irrelevant" copyright considerations) were above all there to be exchanged, so as to share and duplicate a burning enthusiasm.

It was exciting to be able to say one had one's own *real book*.  
And it was cool and exciting to found a jazz school.

What sounds cool and exciting takes the strength of an ox in everyday life. It requires courage and determination, strong nerves, incredible staying power, immense stamina, and an unconditional, inexhaustible love not just for the big tasks at hand but also for the many, tiniest details. It also needs good friends and faithful sponsors.

The Bernhard Ley Story is thus not just a noble tale of getting things off the ground. We must above all imagine in our mind's eye those many years of persistence, of tackling obstacles, of self-belief, and of stubborn tenacity where necessary. Ultimately, it's also a tale of his indomitable trustworthiness.

Whoever succeeds in realizing an idea, and whoever succeeds in converting this idea into a firm structure – often along convoluted, erratic paths involving sponsors with all their own

requirements, the everyday legal details, the developments in educational policy at all levels including tertiary, and the subsidy policies of the authorities; whoever succeeds in convincing, inspiring, enthusing and carrying along everyone involved – from the like-minded to colleagues above and below, musicians, supporters, opponents, *aficionados*, politicians, sponsors, foundations, and personalities impossible to influence or to control; whoever succeeds in winning over all the policymakers, convincing them to guarantee their united, long-term support of both sides of the jazz school (the general music school and its tertiary equivalent) – that very person has in human, social, strategic and tactical terms achieved a veritable masterstroke. Bernhard Ley has succeeded in attaining something that by all logic should have been unattainable!

Fortune favours the bold such as Bernhard Ley, and that fortune is visible today. Thanks to the support of an enthusiastic jazz lover, what was once in his imagination has today been given wings.

The opening of the Jazzcampus allows the creation of a place whose aim is not its own consolidation, but that wishes to offer a basis from which jazz – its heart and mind, its pulsating creativity and its inspiration – may be united with musical and artistic expertise so as to soar up into new, exciting dimensions.

The Jazzcampus is a stroke of good fortune for jazz, for the Musik-Akademie Basel, for the University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland and, above all, for the city of Basel.

And for us all.

### **The story in tabular form**

Bernhard Ley                      Apprenticeship as a precision mechanic  
    Studies music 1978-1985 in Graz (jazz and a little classical)

#### **The beginning**

Year:                                    October 1986  
Place:                                    Sommercasino, Basel  
Name of the school:                JAZZCASINO BASEL  
Organization:                        1 office in the cellar, plus 2 teaching rooms in the cellar  
People 1:                                Who was there:  
    Hans Feigenwinter (piano), Fernando Fontanilles (bass), Thomas  
    Moeckel (trumpet), Viktor Uebelhart (drums), Urs Wiesner  
    (piano/vibraphone), Heiner Althaus (tenor sax) Daniel Blanc (alto sax),  
    Niki Reiser (composition), Noëmi Nadelmann (voice)  
People 2:                                Who supported them: Basler Freizeitaktion (BFA)  
Method of financing:                Only tuition fees and Bernhard Ley's part-time job at Radio DRS (Studio  
    Basel); subsidised lease

### **Support association**

Founded: 1991  
Reason: Addition of a professional-level department  
Name of the school: JAZZSCHULE BASEL  
People: Who was there:  
Daniel Tobler (President), George Gruntz, Roger Cavegn, John Schmid,  
Onorio Mansutti, Markus Ritter, Daniel Brunner  
Recognized by: Schweizerischer Musikpädagogischer Verband, school certification,  
Cantonal Education Agreement

### **On the Reinacherstrasse**

Moved in: 1996  
People: Who was there: John Schmid  
Who supported it: CMS (investment amount CHF 200,000), Fa. Bernardi  
Method of financing: 10-year plan, tuition fees plus the Cantonal Education Agreement

### **Integration phase 1**

of the professional department as the "Jazz Department" in the School of Music of the Musik-Akademie Basel

When: 1999/2000  
Who: Maria Iselin and the Cultural Commission campaign for a positive decision  
by the Great Council (0 votes against)  
Method of financing: Subsidy from the city of Basel

### **Integration**

of the Basel Jazz School in the Music School of the Musik-Akademie Basel

When: 2007  
Who: Decision by the Great Council of the city of Basel  
Financed by: Subsidy from the city of Basel and the Levedo Foundation

### **The goal: the Jazzcampus**

Moved in: 2014  
Method of financing: Musik-Akademie Basel (subsidy from the city of Basel), FHNW Academy  
of Music, the Habitat and Levedo Foundations