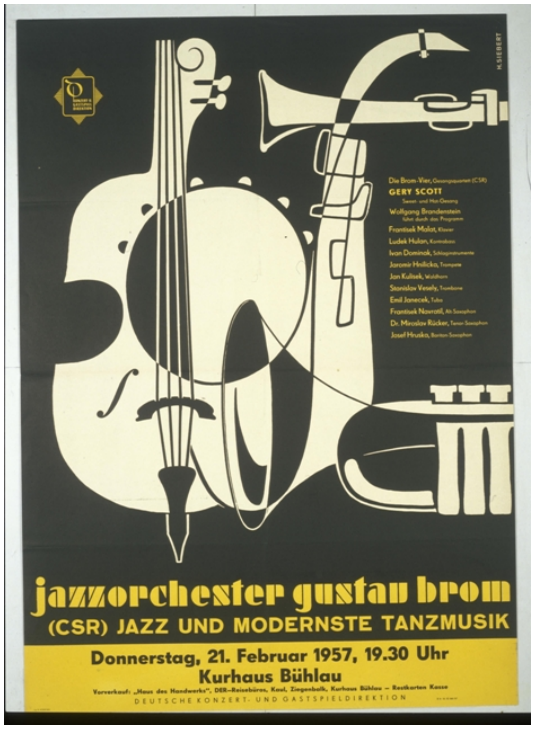
Poster for a Jazz Concert (1957)

Abstract

In East Germany, too, a debate was carried out in the postwar period over the value of jazz, which, as an American cultural import, was deemed undesirable by government officials. In the 1950s, as an increasing number of informal jazz clubs were founded in the East (their records were often smuggled into the country illegally from the West), GDR cultural functionaries discussed whether this American style of music was compatible with socialism. Jazz advocates emphasized that it was the music of the oppressed African-Americans, whose fight for civil rights was supported by the GDR. Critics, on the other hand, portrayed jazz as decadent and commercial. Their criticisms, however, did not focus purely on matters of musical style; rather, they took aim at the manner in which jazz fans danced to the music – a style of dancing that East German functionaries found undignified and immoral. Although jazz club patrons continued to be regarded suspiciously by the GDR regime (and were frequently watched by the Stasi), the Free German Youth tried, starting in the second half of the 1950s, to use jazz as a political tool to garner support among young people. From that point on, jazz was played on the radio and on television and concerts were organized. The poster shown here was an advertisement for a concert by the Czech jazz orchestra led by Gustav Brom. The concert was held in February 1957 in Bühlau, a neighborhood on the outskirts of Dresden. It promised “jazz and the most modern dance music.”

Source

Source: Poster, 1957. Unknown artist. © Bundesarchiv Plak 103-051-021

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