Photo: Daniel Wetzel

Annual Report 2025

Jazzinstitut Darmstadt

Jazzinstitut Darmstadt

Wissenschaftsstadt
Darmstadt

Foreword by Hanno Benz, Lord Mayor of the City of Science Darmstadt, for the Annual Report of the Jazzinstitut Darmstadt

Dear Sir or Madam,

For many years, the Jazzinstitut Darmstadt has been an integral part of the cultural landscape of the City of Science Darmstadt. Once again, this annual report demonstrates the wide-ranging and sustained contribution the institute makes to the research and communication of jazz.

With its extensive collection and its scholarly work, the Jazzinstitut, as Europe's largest public jazz collection, has earned a recognized place in national and international jazz research.

The development of the institute is rooted in key cultural policy decisions: the acquisition of the collection of jazz critic and producer Joachim Ernst Berendt, as well as the exhibition "That's Jazz: The Sound of the 20th Century" by the Institut Mathildenhöhe Darmstadt, provided decisive impetus. On this basis, the Jazzinstitut was founded in 1990 as a municipal cultural institution.

As Lord Mayor and Head of Cultural Affairs of the City of Science Darmstadt, it is important to me to emphasize that we will continue to support the Jazzinstitut reliably in the future and to further strengthen its work.

I wish all readers an informative reading of this annual report. My sincere thanks go to Director Dr. Bettina Bohle and the entire team of the Jazzinstitut for their commitment and their excellent work. I wish them continued success in the tasks ahead.

Yours sincerely,
Hanno Benz
Lord Mayor of the City of Science Darmstadt

Hanno Benz, Lord Mayor of the City of Science Darmstadt. Photo: Sandra Kühnapfel

Introduction

UNO & Jazz Residency, final concert with resident Maximilian Shaikh-Yousef (sax) and fellow musicians (l. to r.): Samuel Mastorakis (vib), Robert Lucaciu (b), Alistair Payne (tp). Photo: Wilfried Heckmann

Bettina Bohle at the 19th Darmstadt Jazz Forum. Photo: Wilfried Heckmann

Kathrin Prize awarded to Steffi Narr (with Cultural Officer Dr. Philipp Gutbrod on the right). Photo: Wilfried Heckmann

In 2025, the Jazzinstitut had already been in existence for 35 years – 35 years of continuous work as a documentation and research centre for jazz and improvised music, unique in Germany and home to Europe's largest public jazz collection, with outstanding cultural and political significance. The building that has housed the institute since 1997 also marked its 300th anniversary. Clearly, there was plenty to celebrate.

With the Jazzforum – a conference bringing together lectures, panels, workshops, concerts, exhibitions and more – one of the Jazzinstitut Darmstadt's key events with a broader reach beyond the region took place for the 19th time in 2025.

An accompanying exhibition on the institute's history, opened as part of the 19th Darmstadt Jazzforum, traced key milestones and underlined the extent to which the Jazzinstitut sees itself as an open space for research, mediation, and encounter.

It was the first Jazzforum under the leadership of Bettina Bohle and the newly formed team with Arndt Weidler and Marie Härtling. In fact, 2025 marked the first full year in this new configuration, following the retirement of founding director Prof. Dr. Knauer at the end of January 2024.

With a small team of just three, the Jazzinstitut achieves an extraordinary amount year after year: ranging from numerous research, media, and public enquiries to events at the institute and in cooperation with local partners, as well as networking activities both regionally and across Germany. The 2025 annual report of the Jazzinstitut offers a brief insight into the year's projects and initiatives, and invites readers to discover the Jazzinstitut's many facets again in 2026.

Team and Infrastructure

Artist talk as part of the dazz Festival 2025: Marie Härtling and William Ellis (right). Photo: Bettina Bohle (Jazzinstitut)

Preparations for the UNO & Jazz final concert: Maximilian Shaikh-Yousef, Dr. Ekkehard Grieb, Dr. Stella Lorenz, Arndt Weidler (l. to r.). Photo: Bettina Bohle (Jazzinstitut)

Annual excursion with the volunteer staff at the Kunstdepot Darmstadt (l. to r.): Michael Telega, Alexander von Leliwa, Arndt Weidler, Marie Härtling, Thomas John, Kathrin Schapka, Günter Schapka (partially obscured), Bernd Wehking-Berges. Photo: Bettina Bohle (Jazzinstitut)

The Jazzinstitut Darmstadt can continue to rely on a committed team. Arndt Weidler, who has been part of the Jazzinstitut since 1998, and Marie Härtling, who joined in 2022, make a decisive contribution through their expertise to the institute's ongoing work in the archive, event organisation, and regional networking and committee work. Together with Dr. Bettina Bohle as the new head, they are actively involved in further developing and rethinking the Jazzinstitut and its various fields of activity.

The institute has for many years also been supported by a circle of reliable and dedicated volunteers, particularly in the archive. New volunteers joined during the course of the year, strengthening the systematic cataloguing of holdings both at the Kavaliershaus and at the external archive in the Kunstdepot.

Interns also accompanied projects in public relations, event organisation, and research, especially during the Jazzforum.

As a municipal institution, the Jazzinstitut is supported by the City's Cultural Office in Darmstadt and other departments, which take on a significant share of administrative tasks.

Close collaboration with Darmstadt's cultural institutions and organisations – including the Bessunger Knabenschule, the so-called Förderverein (Verein zur Förderung des zeitgenössischen Jazz in Darmstadt), the Centralstation, the HoffArt Theatre Darmstadt, the Internationales Musikinstitut Darmstadt (IMD), the Akademie für Tonkunst, the Institute for New Music and Music Education (INMM), the Jazzclub Darmstadt, and many others – remains an essential part of the institute's work. Cooperative events with other partners such as the Schader Foundation and the University of Music and Performing Arts Frankfurt (HfMDK Frankfurt) further enrich the Jazzinstitut's work in the region. At the federal level, the Jazzinstitut is a partner in various projects of the German Jazz Union.

As a small institution with limited resources, it remains crucial to make use of synergies and to strengthen cooperation – both locally and beyond the region.

Projects and Highlights

The year 2025 was marked by a wide range of projects that made the broad scope of the Jazzinstitut's work visible.

19th Darmstadt Jazz Forum on jazz & spirituality

From 24 to 28 September 2025, the 19th Darmstadt Jazz Forum took place under the title "Universal Consciousness – Jazz, Spirituality and the Blues of the Good Life." Lectures, lecture performances, discussion formats, films, and concerts combined scholarly reflection with artistic practice and journalistic contributions. International guests met regional actors, musicians encountered scholars and journalists, and established voices came together with students.

Lecture by Michael Wollny at the conference "Universal Consciousness" at the HoffArt Theatre Darmstadt. Photo: Wilfried Heckmann

Panel talk on curatorial perspectives on spirituality, (l. to r.) Aida Baghernejad, Klaus Gasteiger, Sophie Emilie Beha, Jacobien Vlasman. Photo: Wilfried Heckmann

Percussionist and composer Laura Robles on the topic "Anti-groove – Discrimination and Cultural Appropriation in Rhythm." Photo: Wilfried Heckmann

Conversation on creativity under strained conditions between Aida Baghernejad and Alexandra Lehmler. Photo: Wilfried Heckmann

Opening of the 19th Darmstadt Jazz Forum at the new Stage Club next to the Jazzinstitut. Photo: Wilfried Heckmann

The theme was complex – historical perspectives and panels on the religious and spiritual practices of jazz musicians such as Alice Coltrane and Sun Ra, as well as contemporary approaches, were presented alongside reflections on current concepts such as mindfulness and mental health. Curatorial responsibility for atmosphere and the aims of artistic events as spaces for human interaction was also addressed, as were socio-political topics such as care work. The three concerts – Kathrin Pechlof Trio, Duo Wollny/Parisien, and Yarns Ensemble – reflected these themes in artistic form.

The Jazz Forum once again confirmed its role as a space for exchange between practice and theory, between research, artists, and the public – open to diverse perspectives on jazz and improvised music.

Film scholar and director Teoman Yüzer (left) in a film discussion at programmkino rex with Arndt Weidler. Photo: Moritz Schmidt (Jazzinstitut)

Lukas Adeolu Akintaya performed on the third concert evening with his Yarns Ensemble at the Bessunger Knabenschule. Photo: Wilfried Heckmann

Listening session “Spiritual Jazz” with DJ and curator Hermes Villena at the Centralstation. Photo: Moritz Schmidt (Jazzinstitut)

European top duo at the Centralstation Darmstadt: Michael Wollny on piano and saxophonist Émile Parisien at the Darmstadt Jazz Forum. Photo: Wilfried Heckmann

Visitors at the opening of the exhibition “35 1/5 Revolutions” in the Jazzinstitut gallery. Photo: Wilfried Heckmann

Closing event of the Kathrin Prize residency at Galerie Kurzweil with Narr/Steidle and Saou TV. Photo: Wilfried Heckmann

UNO & Jazz roundtable discussion: Arndt Weidler (left), Julia Hülsmann, Maximilian Shaikh-Yousef (right). Photo: Bettina Bohle (Jazzinstitut)

Kathrin Prize

Leipzig-based guitarist Steffi Narr was the recipient of the Kathrin Prize, awarded for the fourth time in June 2025. The prize includes a residency phase for a self-chosen project and a prize-winner's concert. Together with her collaborators Saou Tanaka (video art) and Oliver Steidle (drums), Narr focused on the theme of death and grief.

Since 2016, the Jazzinstitut has awarded the prize jointly with the online portal jazzpages.com and the magazine Jazzthetik. It was established through a donation by the mother of saxophonist Kathrin Lemke, who died at the age of 44. Her mother, Irene Lemke-Stein, and the DESTAG Foundation in Bensheim have so far funded the prize in equal parts.

UN & jazz – The sound of dialogue

What do jazz and diplomacy have in common? In a cooperation between the Jazzinstitut, the Schader Foundation in Darmstadt, and the German Society for the United Nations, the project "UN & Jazz – The Sound of Dialogue" in May 2025 explored questions about the role of art and the challenges, forms and conditions of successful communication in four roundtable discussions, a reading, and a closing concert, combining discursive and artistic approaches. Saxophonist Maximilian Shaikh-Yousef, selected by a jury of the participating organisations, developed an artistic project as resident, inviting trumpeter Alistair Payne, vibraphonist Samuel Mastorakis, and double bassist Robert Lucaciu as fellow musicians. Together, they made musical improvisation tangible as a form of listening and collective development, based on newly composed pieces by Shaik-Yousef

Almut Schlichting during her archival residency on the work of Jürgen Wuchner at Schlosskeller, with fellow musicians Jörg Fischer (dr) and Uli Partheil (p). Photo: Wilfried Heckmann

Poster for the exhibition (design: Roland Stein)

Pilot archival residency with baritone saxophonist Almut Schlichting

Archives do not only preserve; they also act as counterparts to contemporary discourse – both in scholarly and artistic contexts. In 2025, the Jazzinstitut launched a new format: artistic archival residencies. These residencies offer artists, and particularly improvising musicians, the opportunity to engage directly with the institute's holdings over a period of several days. The results are then presented to the public in a format chosen by the resident in consultation with the Jazzinstitut.

Baritone saxophonist Almut Schlichting engaged during her residency with the work of bassist Jürgen Wuchner, a highly influential figure both for Darmstadt and the Jazzinstitut. Together with her fellow musicians Jörg Fischer (drums) and Uli Partheil (piano), she presented the results of her research in three concerts. In addition, the trio held a workshop at the Ludwig-Schwamb-Schule in Darmstadt-Eberstadt, in which they applied Wuchner's musical approach to an asteroid named after Eberstadt, creating a collective improvisation with the students to the music of the stars.

35 years of the Jazzinstitut: exhibition on its history

The history of the Jazzinstitut begins even before its founding in 1990, with the acquisition of the collection of jazz journalist and promoter Joachim Ernst Berendt. The exhibition "35 1/5" (a reference both to the speed of vinyl records and the five permanently employed staff members since the institute's founding) traced the conceptual ideas and visions developed at the time, the interim phase within the holdings of the International Music Institute (IMD), and the major 1988 exhibition "That's Jazz – The Sound of the 20th Century" at Mathildenhöhe, which presented Berendt's collection as well as additional materials partly left in Darmstadt. From there, it follows the stages of the Jazzinstitut at the Amerika-Haus, where founding director Prof. Dr. Wolfram Knauer initially worked alone, up to the present day, highlighting key projects and initiatives developed over time.

The exhibition was curated by Jazzinstitut staff member Marie Härtling, who spent months reviewing documents, conducting interviews, and researching historical details.

34th Darmstadt Jazz Conceptions, final concert by the teaching staff in the courtyard of the Bessunger Knabenschule: Uli Partheil, Corinna Danzer, Athina Kontou, Rudi Fischerlehner, Jon Sass, Martin Lejeune (l. to r.). Photo: Wilfried Heckmann

Established formats

Established series were also continued:

- at dazz – Jazz Winter Darmstadt, 12 organisations and associations presented 23 events ranging from concerts and film screenings to a dance workshop, an exhibition, a vinyl evening, and a DJ session
- the spring conference of the Institute for New Music and Music Education with a late-night concert
- the Darmstadt Jazz Conceptions, a summer improvisation workshop, took place for the 34th time
- concerts and sessions of the Förderverein in the vaulted cellar
- rehearsals and concerts by regional musicians

These formats continue to play a key role in strengthening the regional scene while also bringing international impulses to Darmstadt.

At the open day with an accompanying outdoor concert in August, numerous visitors took the opportunity to explore the archive, vaulted cellar, and working spaces. Once again, it became apparent that the Jazzinstitut is not a closed repository of knowledge, but a cultural space in dialogue with the city's society.

(Images from the open day and the outdoor concert on the first and last pages of this annual report)

Ayşe Cansu Tanrıkulu and Nick Dunston in concert as part of the spring conference of the Institute for New Music and Music Education (INMM) at the Jazzinstitut. Photo: Bettina Bohle

Thomas Meinecke DJ set in the vaulted cellar of the Jazzinstitut as part of dazz – Jazz Winter Darmstadt. Photo: Bettina Bohle

Archive, research & teaching

The library and archive remain the core and starting point of many of the institute's activities. Behind the scenes, numerous research inquiries (more than 500) from Germany and abroad were processed – frequently from the United States, Italy, and France, but also from Canada and Australia. Researchers, journalists, musicians, and students used the Jazzinstitut's holdings for publications, projects, and artistic work.

New collections further expanded the holdings. In particular, the Marko Paysan collection, focusing on the 1920s and 1930s, dance and film music, and big bands of the period through photographs and documents, generated many inquiries.

The preservation and cataloguing of holdings remained an ongoing concern, although due to limited resources it is still not among the top-priority projects. In two seminars on "Jazz and the Archive," Bettina Bohle brought together musicians from the HfMDK Frankfurt big band master's programme and cultural studies students from the University of Hildesheim to reflect on the challenges of archiving a music form fundamentally grounded in live performance. They worked (already in January 2026) on the indexing of books from the Amerika-Haus collection and the associated questions of compatibility with the Jazzinstitut's existing indexing system, as well as the broader implications of classification systems – their possibilities for access, visibility and concealment, and their inherent inclusions and exclusions.

Bettina Bohle with selected materials from the Marko Paysan collection. Photo: Marie Härtling (Jazzinstitut)

Excursion with students from the University of Music and Performing Arts Frankfurt (HfMDK) at the Archive of Women in Music. Photo: Bettina Bohle

Students from the HfMDK Frankfurt and the University of Hildesheim in front of the bookshelf containing the books from the Amerika-Haus. Photo: Bettina Bohle

Students from the HfMDK Frankfurt and the University of Hildesheim in the library of the Jazzinstitut Darmstadt. Photo: Bettina Bohle

Students from the HfMDK Frankfurt and the University of Hildesheim during the block seminar at the Jazzinstitut Darmstadt. Photo: Bettina Bohle

Committees and networking

A central task of the Jazzinstitut is to contribute its expertise to cultural policy and professional contexts. In 2025, the team was active in various committees, advisory boards, and juries – including the Federal Jazz Conference (Bundeskonferenz Jazz), the Jazz Association of Hesse, the advisory board of the German Jazz Prize, "Jugend jazzt" of the State Music Council Hesse, the project "Jazz and Improvised Music in Schools," and the jury for music project funding in Hesse. New responsibilities included participation in the society of friends and patrons of hr Big Band and the expert committee on cultural heritage of the German Cultural Council (Deutscher Kulturrat).

Beyond this ongoing committee work, the team also participated in conferences, festivals, and professional events. In January 2025, Marie Härtling and Bettina Bohle visited the Lippmann+Rau Music Archive in Eisenach: Härtling presented her research on jazz publicist Werner Wunderlich as part of the Jazzinstitut archive, while Bohle took part in a panel on realities and visions of popular music archives. Arndt Weidler participated in a panel discussion on perspectives and challenges of jazz at the 50th anniversary of the Jazz Club Ilmenau. The same topic was discussed by Bettina Bohle at the 20th edition of the Women in Jazz Festival in Halle, together with Robert Lucaciu, Julia Hülsmann, and festival director Ulf Herden.
Through these networks, the institute's work extends beyond Darmstadt while remaining closely connected to current developments in the scene.

Bettina Bohle and Marie Härtling at the conference "Collecting, Researching, Publishing: Archives of Popular Music. Realities and Visions" in Eisenach. Photo: Bettina Bohle

Ilmenau: Arndt Weidler in discussion on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Jazz Club Ilmenau with (l. to r.) Peter Ehwald, Marie Blobel, René Theska. Photo: Klaus-Dieter Fritz

Marie Härtling giving a lecture in Eisenach. Photo: Bettina Bohle

Bettina Bohle in a panel discussion as part of "Women in Jazz" in Halle. Photo: Bettina Bohle

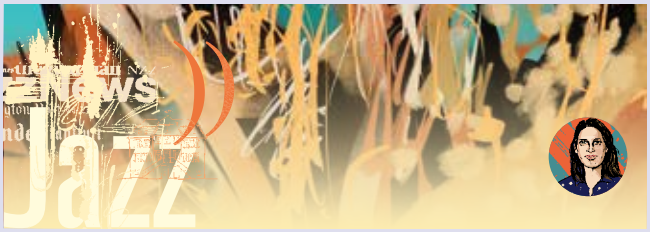
Radio feature on SWR Kultur by Konrad Bott marking 35 years of the Jazzinstitut Darmstadt

Marie Härtling in P Magazin on the exhibition marking 35 years of the Jazzinstitut

Radio programme "Who determines the future of jazz?" featuring the panel discussion on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the "Women in Jazz" festival in Halle

Podcast by the Schader Foundation with Bettina Bohle on the topic "What jazz can contribute to society"

Bettina Bohle with journalist Odilo Clausnitzer during the recording of Jazz Facts Kopfhörer (Deutschlandfunk). Photo: Bettina Bohle



Header image for the redesigned "Jazz News" newsletter of the Jazzinstitut Darmstadt by illustrator Nicole Schneider

Report on the 19th Darmstadt Jazz Forum in Jazzthetik

Public relations and communications

The newsletter "Jazz News" has been conceptually and visually redesigned. It now reports on completed projects and upcoming initiatives of the Jazzinstitut on a monthly basis and, in its "Find of the Month" feature, highlights selected holdings from the institute's collection. The selection is always made by the respective team member responsible for writing the newsletter, with the three staff members of the Jazzinstitut taking turns in this role.

The further development of the corporate design is part of a broader process aimed at making the institute's communication more contemporary and accessible.

With a journalist camp held as part of the Jazz Forum, a new outreach format was tested in 2025. Writers accompanied the forum in a journalistic capacity and, in workshops led by journalist Sophie Emilie Beha, gained insights into research, criticism, and cultural journalism practice, as well as into the specificities of reporting on jazz and improvised music.

Media coverage, profiles, and radio features accompanied in particular the anniversary year (35 years of the Jazzinstitut, 300 years of the Kavaliershaus) and the Jazz Forum, making the institute's work visible to a broad public.

Sustainability and professional development

Several professional development activities on issues of digitalisation, archival practice, and cultural management – for example through Bettina Bohle's participation in the mentoring programme for women in culture and media run by the German Cultural Council (Deutscher Kulturrat) – supported the ongoing professionalisation of the institute's work.

The Jazzinstitut was awarded certification as a tap-water-friendly institution and implemented further measures in the field of environmental sustainability. Within the framework of municipal regulations, the staff participated in a fire safety training course and are now all certified fire safety assistants. This role is primarily focused on preventive measures and, in the event of a fire, on providing precise information to the fire service.

Bettina Bohle at the kick-off meeting of the German Cultural Council's Mentoring Programme for Women in Culture and Media. Photo: Franziska Sinn

AUSZEICHNUNG
LEITUNGSWASSERFREUNDLICH

Wir zeichnen hiermit

das Jazzinstitut Darmstadt

als leitungswasserfreundliche Organisation aus.

Eure Organisation wird durch die Auszeichnung zu einem Vorbild für den Genuss von Leitungswasser. Hierdurch wird Verpackungsmüll und CO_2 eingespart.

Berlin, 20.01.2015
Ort, Datum

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Frau Dr. Bettina Bohle

Ausbildungsveranstaltung

„Brandschutzhelfer"

teilgenommen.

Acknowledgements, outlook & conclusion

The Jazzinstitut Darmstadt would like to express its sincere thanks to the City of Science Darmstadt, which provides its core funding, as well as to all cooperation partners, funders, volunteers, and supporters for their excellent collaboration.

With the anniversary year 2025, not only was 35 years of continuous work reflected upon, but the foundation was also laid for future developments: in 2026, work will continue with the continuation of the archival residencies (including with New York-based trumpeter Peter Evans), the further processing and cataloguing of the collections, the conceptual development of spatial and usage structures, the transparent and sustainable evolution of the Jazzinstitut, as well as the testing of new discursive and artistic formats. The anniversary year 2025 once again made clear how the Jazzinstitut strengthens local culture, brings international impulses to Darmstadt, and serves as a space for exchange between society and the scene – supported by its funders and partners. It continues to understand itself as a place where history is preserved, the present is reflected upon, and future perspectives are explored – in dialogue with all those interested in jazz and improvised music.

Opening concert of the 19th Darmstadt Jazz Forum with the Kathrin Pechlof Trio in the vaulted cellar of the Jazzinstitut. Photo: Moritz Schmidt

Portraits of all permanent staff members of the Jazzinstitut over the years, by Nicole Schneider

Photo: Daniel Wetzel

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Disclaimer: The annual report was translated from German into English and partially reviewed with the assistance of ChatGPT. All content originates from Jazzinstitut Darmstadt/ Bettina Bohle and has been finally approved by her.