

Jazz Archiveology

- The Shape of Jazz (History) to Come

20th Darmstädter Jazzforum, 22–26 September 2027, Jazzinstitut Darmstadt

In archives, jazz – a music fundamentally shaped by live performance – survives only through traces: sound recordings, photographs, sheet music, posters, letters, interviews, reviews, production materials, magazines, social media posts. Improvisation, interaction and the situational dimensions of musical performance cannot be preserved in their entirety; a gap remains between the event itself and what is subsequently transmitted and documented. At the same time, these traces can generate new forms of knowledge, research and artistic practice.

For its 20th edition, the Darmstadt Jazzforum will explore this tension between jazz and the archive. For decades, a whole community has been collecting and documenting jazz in both analogue and digital forms – often without sufficient resources for preserving this cultural heritage. Archives within the jazz community are not neutral repositories, but forms of organisation shaped by people and their interests: they collect, select, arrange, describe and provide access. In doing so, they help shape what will later be available as knowledge about jazz and which stories can be told. At a time of growing information overload, disinformation and digital content that can easily be altered or disappear, original materials held in archives – and the work of archivists – take on renewed importance.

At the same time, archives are caught between abundance and limited resources: ever-growing quantities of emails, websites, social media, music files, videos and digital estates potentially need to be preserved, while archives are struggling for funding and musicians and other actors in the music scene are often faced with the question of what should happen to their materials. Much of what is being created today may already have disappeared tomorrow. How do we decide what is worth preserving? Who can afford to preserve their materials, and who is responsible for the cultural heritage of jazz, which has a history of around 100 years in Germany?

The Darmstadt Jazzforum 2027 aims to bring these perspectives together and explore the relationship between jazz and the archive. We invite contributions from anyone exploring how jazz is collected, preserved, researched, communicated and carried forward – in archives, in academic research, in artistic practice and beyond.

Suggestions for possible contributions

1. The Present of Jazz as the Archive of the Future

What do archives need from musicians, promoters, labels, media organisations and other actors in the jazz community in order to document the diversity of contemporary jazz for the future?

2. The Origins and Histories of Jazz Archives

How did jazz archives emerge? Which interests and actors shaped their establishment, and how have their functions, organisational structures and understandings of themselves changed over time?

3. Private Collections, Estates and Living Memory

What role do personal collections, estates and other forms of collecting outside institutional archives play? What do they preserve, what remains overlooked, and what is at risk of being lost?

4. Gaps and Forgotten Stories

Which stories of jazz are missing from existing archives? Which perspectives and voices remain underrepresented or invisible, and what other forms of remembering can help make these gaps visible?

5. Archives as a Foundation for Jazz Knowledge and Histories

How do archives, their holdings and their systems of organisation shape our knowledge of jazz? What role do they play in canon formation, historical narratives and the question of whose jazz history gets told? How do factors such as gender and social and cultural backgrounds shape what is collected, transmitted and canonised?

6. Archives in the Digital Age

How are digitisation, AI and new forms of access changing what we find in archives and how we tell the history of jazz?

7. The Archive as a Cabinet of Curiosities

What does it mean to consider archives not only as sources, but also as objects of research and artistic engagement in their own right?

8. Archives and Artistic Practice

What forms emerge at the intersection of archives, performance, composition, exhibition-making and other artistic practices?

Call for Papers – Contributing to the Darmstädter Jazzforum 2027

We invite musicians, scholars, promoters, journalists, curators, music educators and others interested in these questions to contribute to the 2027 Jazzforum.

The conference will take place from Thursday, 23rd to Saturday 25th of September, 2027, as part of the Darmstadt Jazzforum.

Alongside conventional papers and panel discussions, we explicitly welcome proposals for other formats. Lecture performances, participatory and discussion-based formats, World Cafés, Fishbowls and similar approaches are all welcome, as are new ideas for interdisciplinary formats, both artistic and theoretical. Historical as well as contemporary perspectives and approaches are equally welcome.

Submission: Formats & Deadline

Proposals may be submitted either as written concepts or as audio or video files. Proposals should clearly explain how the proposed contribution relates to the theme of the Jazzforum.

Written proposals should be no longer than one A4 page. Audio and video submissions should not exceed five minutes.

The Jazzforum has an international focus, and English will therefore be the main language of the conference. We also warmly welcome contributions in German and will provide translation between German and English wherever possible.

Please send proposals to jazzforum@jazzinstitut.de by **15 December 2026**. If you have questions before submitting, please feel free to contact us by phone or email.

Contact:

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Your contributions as a part of a publication

We plan to publish the papers presented at the 2027 Jazzforum in a conference proceedings volume. The Darmstadt Contributions to Jazz Research (Darmstädter Beiträge zur Jazzforschung) have been published since 1989 and now comprise 19 volumes. The volume is scheduled for publication in 2028.

The Jazzforum as Part of University Courses

We encourage universities and other higher education institutions to include the Jazzforum as a credited course in their semester programmes. By arrangement, we are happy to provide opportunities for students to actively contribute to the Jazzforum and to support instructors in preparing courses within our means.

Journalism Camp

A Journalism Camp will once again take place alongside the 20th Darmstädter Jazzforum for people who want to learn how to report on jazz and improvised music. There will be a separate call for applications for the camp.

Diversity and Accessibility

We particularly want to support people who are underrepresented in the jazz and improvised music scene as a result of marginalisation and discrimination. We warmly encourage you to submit proposals; such proposals will be given particular consideration.

We will make every effort to ensure that the venues are as accessible as possible. Please get in touch if you require support with submitting a proposal or with participating in the event.