



Herbie Hancock, Goodwill Ambassador for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), performs at the inaugural International Jazz Day Concert at UN Headquarters. 30 April 2011. UN Photo/JC McIlwaine

INTERNATIONAL JAZZ DAY -- 30 APRIL 2021

Reflections on 10 Years of International Jazz Day

About the author

Herbie Hancock

Herbie Hancock is a world-renowned jazz pianist and composer. He also serves as United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Goodwill Ambassador for the promotion of intercultural dialogue.

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I first proposed the idea for what would become International Jazz Day (30 April) in 2011, shortly after being named a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Goodwill Ambassador for the promotion of intercultural dialogue. In the decade since, it has been a truly humbling experience to witness that concept move rapidly from a series of resolutions and declarations on paper to a full-blown global movement celebrating jazz as a vehicle for

building peace, international cooperation and mutual understanding. This 30 April, I am very pleased and proud that we are celebrating the tenth anniversary of this special day.

As a jazz pianist and composer who has been making music for more than six decades, I know intimately well the power of music—and especially jazz—to bring people together and make a positive difference in the world. International Jazz Day is the embodiment of everything I have spent so many years trying to build through music—a movement in which people of all ages, nations, backgrounds, identities and ethnicities can agree that our similarities are stronger than our differences.

Designated in November 2011 by UNESCO and later recognized through a formal vote by the United Nations General Assembly, International Jazz Day is remarkable for both the speed and the unanimity with which stakeholders across the globe embraced it. Within just a few months of our initial proposal, every single UNESCO member State voted to adopt the initiative, signaling the genuine desire for new solutions to generate intercultural exchange, mutual comprehension and tolerance between nations.

Beginning in 2012, the past nine International Jazz Day celebrations were enormous successes. People in more than 190 countries each year have joined forces to celebrate jazz as a universal force for peace, dialogue and unity. Spanning the globe in all directions, each 30 April has brought people together regardless of borders, distance or differences to show their support for the power of jazz, its ethical dimensions, and its potential to galvanize support for freedom, democracy and mutual respect.

Over the years, I have seen firsthand how this music, born in the United States, has truly become the cultural heritage of the world. This is most immediately visible in the spectacular International Jazz Day Global Concerts we have presented in Australia, Cuba, France, Japan, Russia, Turkey and the United States. In recent years, these extraordinary concerts have attracted thousands of attendees and reached tens of millions of viewers worldwide through free live streams. Even more significant are the countless educational, community outreach and performance initiatives organized by our independent partners in every corner of the globe. On International Jazz Day, jazz is celebrated, studied and performed around the world for 24 hours straight. Collaborations abound among jazz icons, scholars, composers, musicians, dancers, writers and thinkers who embrace the beauty, spirit and principles of jazz. This diverse creative network freely shares experiences and performances in our big cities and small towns, all across our seven continents.



Induction Ceremony for UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador Herbie Hancock at UNESCO Headquarters, Paris. 22 July 2011. ©UNESCO/Ania Freindorf

The educational and community service dimensions of International Jazz Day are what set this day apart from the multitude of concerts and jazz festivals taking place every day around the world. International Jazz Day offers meaningful education and outreach opportunities for people of all ages, as well as community service programmes for vulnerable populations, including the homeless, elderly, disabled and critically ill. International Jazz Day carries the unique mandate of

promoting the values of jazz to inspire dialogue and understanding, and this is a message that resonates with people regardless of where they live. By inviting everyone at all levels of society to participate and share their culture with the world through jazz, we recognize and give shape to their inherent dignity and equality. Indeed, from the beginning, Jazz Day has been focused on providing a platform from which to promote diversity, eradicate discrimination, foster gender equality and promote individual expression—all under the umbrella of this unique music.

As we begin the long, slow process of emerging from the pandemic, we can gain inspiration from the ways in which we have collectively related to music over the past year. Under the painful but necessary restrictions of quarantine and social distancing, people the world over have looked to music as a source of solace, healing and connection with their fellow human beings. From pounding pots and pans to show gratitude to hospital workers, to singing from balconies, to elaborate virtual concerts involving hundreds of musicians in separate locations, making music during the pandemic has become an enduring symbol of our resilience and determination to make it through this difficult time. This extends to International Jazz Day as well. With the myriad challenges confronting our organizers, from lockdowns to mounting caseloads to economic and civil strife, we had our doubts about the scale of this tenth anniversary celebration. Yet I am pleased to report that on 30 April 2021, people in over 190 countries will once again celebrate International Jazz Day.

If there is a silver lining to COVID-19, with all of its devastation, it is that many musicians and listeners have been compelled to appreciate and make the most of what we can do, rather than dwell on what we cannot do. I encourage everyone to take a moment this 30 April to engage with music, especially jazz and other improvised music, however you can. Whether practicing solo in your basement, calling up your friends for a virtual or socially distanced jam session, watching a jazz film or concert online, or even just playing your favorite record, you will be connecting with a global family on an incredible scale. You will be amazed at how much better you will feel.

Happy International Jazz Day!

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