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Making the Leap
New York Musicians and the
Transatlantic Jazz Network

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Last fall, the pianist Anat Fort made a big decision. She quit her day jobs. She realized that teaching, accompanying vocal students and playing at synagogue ceremonies were beginning to stand in the way of her career as a composer and jazz improviser. Fort became aware that she had reached a crisis point when she was sitting at the piano in a synagogue week after week, backing up a singer who was frequently off-key. “It was just a depressing thing. A depressing thing that pays you so much money that you almost feel irresponsible not to take it, and yet you sit there, doing it, thinking: This is wrong,” Fort said. Relying on these gigs to make ends meet didn’t just eat into her time. It affected her sense of herself as a musician. “I feel like when I trust other sources that I don’t enjoy doing, it’s like I don’t trust my art enough, I don’t give it enough space,” she said.

On a gray day in mid-November, Fort frankly expressed her doubts about the leap she was about to make. Two of her recent songs, which she had played a couple of weeks earlier at the Cornelia Street Café in Greenwich Village, where she has been appearing frequently with her trio, referred to her feeling as though she was bouncing anxiously on the end of a diving board. One was called “Meditation for a New Year,” the other, “Jumping In.”

Jazz artists who make the jump nowadays can't count on a safety net. Instead, they land in a fragile, intricate web that spreads out all over the world. Fort’s insecurity was, in part, a result of her move from a familiar niche on the New York scene into a wider, unknown arena. No stereotype of the “struggling artist,” Fort had achieved solid local success in the 10 years she’d been living in New York since graduating in 1996, at the age of 26, from the jazz program at William Paterson University, a small school in

Wayne, New Jersey. Fort had moved from her native Israel in 1992 to pursue jazz in the United States. She had been playing regular gigs in New York, impressing audiences and critics alike with her inventiveness as a composer and her improvisations, which are typically built of wide dramatic arches rather than on short outbursts of technical dexterity. She keeps a beguiling sense of surprise in her music, jumping from slow tempos and solemn moods to states of unrest and excitement.

Now Fort's career was about to move into a transatlantic phase: An album she had recorded in 2004 with the drummer Paul Motian, one of her long-time idols, had been picked up by the reputable German label ECM. The record, entitled "A Long Story," was to be released in early 2007, accompanied by a weeklong club tour in Europe. Fort would now have to learn to find her way in a global environment in which artists of all different statures share uncertain prospects.

Jazz may have been a global music from the start, but the circumstances under which artists work have changed considerably since the 1960s and 1970s. The scarcity of performance opportunities and meager record sales leave some musicians no choice other than to make connections across continents and cultures. At the same time, connections are encouraged by new technologies and an artistic mindset that doesn't care too much about narrow genre definitions and strict notions of the "right way to play." Numerous regional adaptations of the jazz tradition have questioned the dominance of American styles and of artists emanating from a center like New York. The economy of jazz remains sandwiched between the marketplace and the system of public and private patronage, and the people who support artists by buying performance tickets and records are mostly highly committed individuals who do not constitute a mass audience. With a

global industry of educational institutions producing more highly trained jazz artists every year, musicians have to find ever new ways to access limited resources and to appeal to a dispersed and often highly specialized audience.

New York has been affected by the changes in the global arena, but the city still retains its status as the world's jazz capital, and it had come to feel like home to Fort. While the city's numerous jazz venues can easily be charted on a map, they provide only a hint at the immaterial structure that supports New York's jazz world: The clubs, studios and rehearsal spaces are intersection points for musicians of the most diverse backgrounds. They are marketplaces in which recognition, inspiration and a sense of connectedness often replace the dollar as a currency. "I can wake up some morning and decide that I want to play a session with some incredible players from whatever country, and just call them up, and hopefully they're free, and that's my education for the week," Fort said.

A study commissioned by the National Endowment of the Arts estimated that there were 33,003 jazz musicians active in New York in 2000. The researchers used a chain-referral system to reach out to the city's jazz community and interviewed artists about their connections to other musicians. On average, a New York jazz musician was linked to a network of 223.8 other jazz artists, compared to an average network size of only 65.8 in San Francisco. The study authors remarked that the overall structure of the jazz communities resembled a tree: Certain members were better connected – they constituted the "trunk." Less well-connected artists – the "leaves" – rarely developed direct links to the trunk, but rather formed affiliations with "branches," colleagues who had medium-size networks. The connectedness marks a status hierarchy in the

community; it is the number of possible relationships that makes New York such a compelling place in the jazz world.

Fort began to build a network when she came to the city a decade ago. A 2000 session with the drummer Lou Grassi, a musician known for his work in free-jazz improvisation as well as in more traditional jazz settings, introduced her to the clarinetist Perry Robinson, an equally versatile musician who had been playing and traveling with such diverse artists as the saxophonist Archie Shepp and the pianist Dave Brubeck since the 1950s. Robinson went on to play duo concerts with Fort, appeared as a guest at her trio's gigs and contributed to the 2004 session that became the album "A Long Story." The bass player Ed Schuller, another jam partner of Fort's and Robinson's, had been a collaborator of the drummer Paul Motian through many years. Schuller facilitated Fort's contact with the veteran musician and played alongside him and Robinson on the recording. Probably the strongest connection that Fort built, however, was to two younger musicians, both of whom she now counts among her best friends: The German-born drummer Roland Schneider and the American bassist Gary Wang have been Fort's trio partners since 1999. Over these years, the group has developed into a finely tuned band. When performing together, Schneider and Wang sometimes play while listening with closed eyes, as if receiving directions from an invisible source. Their playing expresses respect for a shared idea rather than individual virtuosity – the two follow Fort's playing closely and recognize stops and changes of mood and tempo without any effort and delay. Frequently, the musicians give each other a knowing smile during a piece and a hug after the performance.

Raised as a classical pianist from age five, Fort kept a penchant for classical and

romantic music as a jazz player. The pianists Keith Jarrett, Bill Evans and Paul Bley have been major influences on her work. She sought out Bley for lessons when she came to New York after her graduation. She also studied composition with Harold Seletsky, an artist working in the field of contemporary opera as well as in the klezmer tradition. Though Fort does not necessarily try to evoke her Israeli heritage consciously, it has repeatedly sprung up in her music; some of her work as a composer has been dedicated to the re-arrangement and re-interpretation of traditional Israeli tunes.

Despite all her connections in New York, Fort never considered herself to be part of a particular “scene.” “I had to carve my own path for a long time, and I think to a degree everybody has to do that,” she said. “There’s even the whole scene of Israeli people in the city that I could have been a part of, and I didn’t feel that this was what I wanted to do. I also did not want to be categorized in any way.” But like any other musician, Fort acted within a social framework and had to earn respect from different groups within the music world.

Like secret societies, musicians’ circles inspire a romantic fascination. To unaffiliated listeners and fans, the artists’ networks sometimes appear impenetrable, since they are founded on musical rituals that follow their own rules and codes. Musicians often communicate without words and use their own language when they do speak. In scholarly literature, jazz “scenes” were long described as outsider communities, with record company executives, club owners, audience members and media representatives as their “ancillary orbit.” The scholar Travis Jackson, who researched the New York jazz scene for his 1998 dissertation at Columbia University, challenged that notion and, following the sociologist of art, Howard Becker, proposed to regard the “scene” as an “art

world” in which both players and other participants assumed equally important roles in making jazz performance possible. Jackson observed that the jazz communities were constantly negotiating their boundaries, breaking into smaller sub-groups, forming new connections and reaching different conclusions as to who belongs to a particular scene.

Jazz musicians often first build alliances with others who come from the same city or country, share a musical style, or attended the same school. While some communities are tightly knit, many remain open to new members. In jam sessions and performances, musicians challenge each other to “take the music to the next level” and reward those who can impress them with respect. The word about a new face on the scene can spread easily through group connections and pave the way for gigs, recording sessions and new relationships between artists. “I wish I had been a little bit smarter about that when I came here – I spent a lot of time practicing and not enough time networking,” said Roland Schneider, the drummer of Anat Fort’s trio who came from the German town of Heidelberg to New York to study jazz. After he graduated from the New School of Jazz and Contemporary Music in 1996, Schneider wanted to plunge into a life as a freelance musician and was frustrated that he did not make a living. He had enough contacts to earn some money playing jazz standards at corporate functions, at parties or in restaurants, and he also accepted some odd jobs to make ends meet. In 1997, he took a part-time position at Parsons School of Design, helping to organize and coordinate pre-enrollment programs the school offers. “You either do it all the way and make money by just making music, or you make money doing something else, and that’s what I do,” he said.

Schneider works in a small space next to a student’s atelier in an old office

building on lower Fifth Avenue in Greenwich Village, not far from his own former school. A tall, grey-haired man in his late 30s, Schneider organizes a summer school program in Paris, which requires him to spend the month of July in the French capital. As the main coordinator, he gets to talk a lot to pre-college kids with artistic ambitions, their parents, and a young staff recruited from Parsons' student body. Sitting in a café on Sixth Avenue after work in October, Schneider said that he became content with his double life soon after he took the job, happy that he was able to support himself without having to play music he didn't like.

In some ways, Schneider has grown tired of the "scene" and the constant interaction with high-profile musicians that many of the artists who come to New York find so inspiring. "The thing that keeps people here," he said, "is the thought that once you leave New York, you are doing a step backwards, you're losing exposure, you're losing the ability to grow and you are not at the cutting edge anymore. There is some truth to that – but there comes a time when people have to let go of it. Because once you're in New York, you really look around yourself all the time, you look at other musicians and compare yourself. It can have a negative effect on you, it can make you feel inferior and make you look too much at others, instead of looking inside yourself to see what kind of music you have."

Schneider felt that after 15 years in the city, he'd have to decide either to stay in New York for the rest of his life or to go back to his native Germany. He said he was considering moving to Berlin, though he had not yet made any exact plans. "I still feel rooted in Europe: I go there regularly, and I feel that the culture is still closer to my heart," Schneider said. He explained he had plenty of contacts to other musicians in the

German capital and was less concerned about his musical career than about finding a fulfilling day job. Schneider did not expect to live off music alone, but with living costs in Berlin much lower than in New York, it would be easier to make ends meet.

Fort has also repeatedly considered making Israel her base again. She said she did not want to disconnect from New York entirely, but she sometimes longed for the more quiet and communal life in her home country. Though she could not expect a vibrant jazz scene in Israel, the country would be a better place from which to fly into Western and Central Europe, where Fort expected to appear more frequently in the future. “Especially with the kind of stuff I play, the best venues for it are in Europe, they’re not even here,” she said in a Brooklyn café in mid-November, as plans for her February tour were beginning to take shape. “If you left it up to me to plan it, I would live in Israel, do a tour here and there or even hop on the plane, do a concert and come back the next day. And I’d hopefully be able to live for a while off that and not have to worry so much about making a living.”

The scenes within the New York jazz world, with their ever-shifting consensus as to who belongs to the club or not, can be as restricting for an individual artist as they can be enhancing for his or her development. They are certainly exhausting to deal with. Fort has had her share of confrontations with the stylistic orthodoxy of some clubs and communities in the city; she also encountered belittlement because of her gender. “Not only am I white, but I’m a woman. And I’m from another place,” she said, adding that she still sometimes has a hard time being recognized as a jazz pianist – when she is introduced as a musician, most people automatically assume she is either a jazz singer or a classical pianist. Besides learning to steel herself against such forms of discrimination,

Fort has had to assert herself and insist on the value of her own style: She remembers vividly how she tried to arrange the first gigs for her trio in 2000, sending copies of her first CD “Peel,” which she had recorded in 1999, to the Knitting Factory, the venue that was known as the city’s avant-garde hub at the time. Waiting to get a response, she decided to send the booker an e-mail every day for two weeks in a row. “After two weeks, he wrote me back and said: I finally listened to it, and I think it’s too straight for our twisted ears,” Fort recalled. “But I didn’t give up and said: ‘That’s nice, but with the trio that I have now, we sound very different and I think it’s gonna work just fine.’ Immediately, he gave me a date, and I started playing there a lot. It was the place where I played the most in New York, for a couple of years.”

The feeling of “not quite fitting in” has accompanied Fort throughout much of her musical education and well into the early phases of her career. With her compositions and her free-flowing improvisations, which often take unexpected turns, but rarely move away completely from an established harmonic architecture, Fort did not dovetail with what was considered “avant-garde” improvisation, nor did she fit neatly into a jazz tradition more firmly planted in the African-American blues aesthetic. Having been educated at a music school known for a traditional approach to jazz, she often felt she simply wasn’t doing things right. “For instance, the typical piano playing, even in classical music, except for maybe Bach and baroque music, is that the right hand has melody, the left hand has the accompaniment – chords, normally,” she explained. “But I don’t really hear music like that. I hear linear stuff. Chords are sometimes part of it, but a lot of times, my left hand just does similar stuff to what my right hand does. I hadn’t heard too many people do that when I was in school, but I never thought to myself: Oh, I

have something unique, this is it. I thought: Shit, I'm not doing it how I'm supposed to." It took a long time for Fort to mitigate her self-doubt. A key moment that helped to resolve her inner conflict happened late during the mixing process of Fort's album, when ECM's founder and chief producer Manfred Eicher remarked that what Fort considered her problem was exactly what he liked. "I remember going home after that, thinking: He doesn't even know what he just said to me, how much that means to me," Fort recalled.

Fort said she had finally reached a place where she was "okay" with her playing. "I can only deal with myself and with who I am, with my roots and my branches at the moment, and I deal with that a lot in my music," she said. Fort had grown up in a culture that was very much a hybrid from the start. In Israel, Middle Eastern and North African styles of music and art had mixed with influences brought by Jewish immigrants from all over the world. Fort's grandparents had come from Russia and Poland; growing up, she was exposed to music by composers such as Yedidya Admon and Sasha Argov and listened to contemporary Israeli pop. In a way, Fort's own cultural background provided a model for her eclectic use of styles and influences in the jazz world.

Although Fort doesn't like having her music interpreted as being specifically "about" something, she uses musical references and evocative motives quite purposefully in an effort to build connections between art and life. One of Fort's compositions, called "As Two/Something about Camels," starts out with a plaintive, slow clarinet melody, played on the recording by Robinson with a yearning tone slightly reminiscent of klezmer tunes. The clarinet then becomes more poignant and excited as it engages in a sort of musical sparring with Fort's piano lines. After the "fight," the piano takes off with another slow-moving melody that evokes Arabic airs, supported by the forlorn whistle of

Robinson's okarina. Fort had written the piece with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in mind, but she said it could reflect any two clashing things that find a way to exist side by side – different characters, people, or traditions.

Fort immersed herself in the jazz tradition in college, and she still likes occasionally to hammer out some of the bluesy lines and swinging tunes that her teachers – among them, the pianists Norman Simmons and Harold Mabern – had taught her. But she did not believe that she constantly had to refer to the blues and the music of the swing and bebop era to call herself a jazz player. “If it's a club and that's all they book, or if it's a school and that's all they teach, or if it's a group of musicians and it's what they believe and that's how they refer to things, you know – then I go out and find my people,” she said. “I think the world is big enough for me to find my audience.”

Battles over notions of purity have been raging since the dawn of jazz. They became more visible in the jazz press and in scholarly circles in the second half of the 20th century, as different factions within the jazz world were trying to assert the status of the art form as something worth protecting, teaching, and researching. Roughly, the highly charged debate can be boiled down to a conflict between two views: Proponents of a more “traditionalist” view define jazz as an African-American art form that originated in special places under special circumstances. Every re-interpretation, according to this view, has to refer to these origins and traditions. Artists and scholars on the other end of the spectrum see jazz primarily as a vehicle for individual expression and regard the African American roots of the music more as a historical fact and as only one possible influence on contemporary jazz performance.

In the late 1980s and the 1990s, the debate largely revolved around the trumpeter

Wynton Marsalis, influential both as a musician and as the artistic director of Jazz at Lincoln Center. In essays, concert series and educational programs, Marsalis worked toward establishing a “jazz canon,” claiming that the work of masters like Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington and Charlie Parker was something every jazz artist had to study before he or she could develop her/his own voice. Musicians and critics accused Marsalis and his followers of advocating a narrow view of jazz that was oriented more toward the past than the present and the future. Some white musicians felt that the paradigm Marsalis stood for excluded them from the jazz world because it identified jazz strongly as the music of the African-American community and didn’t accept jazz outside that cultural sphere as “authentic.”

The notion of a classical jazz canon has come under the scrutiny of scores of authors since the 1990s. Writing in the 2002 “Cambridge Companion to Jazz,” the Australian scholar Bruce Johnson remarked that “reactive narratives” were employed early on to exclude influential jazz activity that did not fit neatly into an agreed-upon notion of what real jazz was – such narratives conveyed the idea that the trumpeter Bix Beiderbecke had to “endure” his job in the popular orchestra of the bandleader Paul Whiteman in the 1920s, that Louis Armstrong was “selling out” in the 1920s, or, most pervasively, that whites couldn’t play “real jazz.” Johnson also questioned the focus that jazz history had traditionally laid on centers like New Orleans, Kansas City, St. Louis, Chicago, and New York. Rather than being invented and then exported, jazz was “invented in the process of being disseminated,” Johnson wrote. He listed examples of jazz bands that toured Britain and the European continent early in the 20th century – Louis Mitchell’s Jazz Kings (1917), the Original Dixieland Jazz Band (1918), Will

Marion Cook's Southern Syncopated Orchestra with Sidney Bechet (1919) and the groups of Sam Wooding (1924). According to Johnson, Wooding also visited Tunis and South America, and Josephine Baker and a sixteen-piece orchestra visited Finland in 1933. In 1917, James Reese Europe's 60-piece black band of the 369th US Infantry ("The Hellfighters") presented jazz and ragtime repertoire to Allied soldiers in France. Two Australian servicemen who heard the Original Dixieland Jazz band in London returned home and started a jazz band.

Jazz has been traveling from the time of its inception; the distribution of the music in the form of recordings, along with explanatory sleeve notes and books, did its part to establish a model of "real jazz" that many foreign musicians sought to emulate. The US State department further supported the export of jazz in the 1950s by sponsoring tours of American jazz musicians throughout the world: Benny Goodman, Louis Armstrong, and Dizzy Gillespie were among the stars to showcase a uniquely American culture abroad. The music proved to be a vehicle of "Americanization," Johnson wrote: It disseminated a certain sense of phrasing, certain narratives and vocal styles, thereby erasing local accents in singing and paving the way for the accent-free voices of global pop music.

Despite the dominance of American models, musicians were also developing their own versions of the music that informed the larger jazz world. This feedback loop, though always a part of jazz history, has been acknowledged only recently, Johnson argued: Musicians now travel to such a diverse variety of places and cooperate in so many ways that it becomes almost impossible to distinguish between a "center" and a "periphery" of the jazz world. Musicians like Fort or Schneider, who were attracted by the allure of New York early in their careers, also feel the pull from other cities and

places. “The original lines of migrations have thickened and criss-crossed into a worldwide web, mapping a polyspora,” Johnson wrote. He pointed out that the cities that are still perceived as “jazz wellsprings” – such as New York or New Orleans – are increasingly becoming pilgrims’ destinations.

The globalization of the jazz world did not just evolve out of sheer cultural curiosity. It followed the money. Jazz audiences declined in the 1960s, as jazz artists developed less easily accessible styles and rock and soul replaced jazz as the dominant popular music. While some artists tried to accommodate the new trends, others were consciously rejecting the role of the entertainer, moving jazz into the realm of high art. Some stars of the swing and bebop era, however, continued to command large audiences at outdoor jazz festivals, which became a popular international phenomenon and a major source of income for musicians. But the events depended heavily on “big name” artists, and as many great jazz stars died or stopped touring in the 1980s and 1990s, promoters either had to enlist well-known pop and rock acts or were forced to scale back. George Wein, the jazz impresario who founded the Newport jazz festival in 1954, had to get used to the fact that his business could not survive on jazz alone.

“In Newport I mostly go strictly jazz, but I used to draw 20,000 people with just jazz. Now I draw six to seven thousand people,” Wein said in a December interview in his Upper East Side apartment. At 81, the concert producer can sound grumpy and pessimistic in one moment and humorous and hopeful in the next. His face lights up when he talks about swing, rhythm, and great jazz artists he has worked with. With his company “Festival Productions,” Wein exported large-scale events like the JVC jazz festivals, which also featured pop artists, into many countries. He also pioneered

corporate sponsorship for jazz events. As great jazz stars were becoming sparse, he had to sell “the image of jazz” to sponsors, Wein said. With the help of remastered recordings and photos of smoky jazz clubs, elegant singers and shining horns, Wein explained, jazz could represent “high quality.” This image can brush off on a sponsor’s name even though Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis, or Duke Ellington are no longer around.

Though the allure of jazz still attracted corporate supporters, Wein found it was becoming harder and harder to survive as a promoter. “I don’t mean to sound discouraged, because there is a jazz world out there, but not on the level that I brought it to,” the entrepreneur said. He sold his company in January 2007, remaining in charge as the chairman of what is now a division of the parent company, The Festival Network.

In 1992, jazz accounted for 3.8% of all US record sales, according to the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA); the share was down to 3.4% in 2002, and to 1.8% in 2005, though there were stronger and weaker years in between. The overall volume of the recording industry went from \$9.024 million in 1992 to \$12.614 million in 2002, with record sales declining since 1999. Jazz concert attendance in the United States has risen slightly between 2002 and 1982, according to a comparative study of data gathered in the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA). In 2002, 11 percent of American men and women said they attended jazz performances, with every person attending on average 3.1 events per year. The overall numbers, however, tend to blur the difference between casual listeners and devoted fans. In his analysis of the data from the 1992 survey, the scholar Scott DeVaux stressed that “a large majority of those attending jazz events did so less frequently than this average: 44 percent attended only

once, while an additional 26 percent attended only twice. Thus, a small percentage of the jazz audience forms a disproportionately large share of the total number of attendees.”

Jazz fans have gotten used to seeing their favorite artist play in a wide range of lineups. While jazz stars of the past often toured as a group, showcasing music they had developed over a period of time, few bands now get to play together often enough to allow members to rely on the band as their main source of employment. “This is the difference from when John Coltrane’s quartet could play fifteen weeks out of the year in New York at one club, and then another five weeks out of the year at a club in Chicago, and three weeks in San Francisco,” said Ben Ratliff, a music critic for The New York Times who has been writing about the New York jazz scene for fifteen years. Ratliff stressed that the lack of lucrative performance opportunities and the resulting scarcity of “working bands” has affected the development of jazz in profound ways. “Bands make great jazz, not just individual geniuses, composers, soloists,” he said. “It’s truly bands, and bands that work a lot. And that’s the problem. If they don’t get enough work, they don’t create a sound.”

Wein pointed out that American jazz musicians still have the opportunity to play at community concerts and universities in the United States. Those concert dates, however, tend to be isolated and scattered all across the country, making travel expensive and time-consuming. While many artists of the older generation are doing well on the club circuit, the infrastructure for lesser-known jazz musicians in the United States remains weak. “America used to have a really robust jazz culture. All those little towns had jazz bars. Now that doesn’t exist anymore, you have to be here in New York. Some people can make a living in Chicago, but at that point the options start to drop

drastically,” The New York Times’ Ratliff said. “You can never really stay in one city and make a living there, you have to spread yourself really thin. Many jazz musicians don’t live in the center of a metropolis, but they live conveniently near to an airport – that’s what you need, because you need to go all over the place.”

Even if musicians don’t travel far beyond the city where they live, they have to move around a lot to play in ever-changing constellations at a wide array of venues. Gary Wang, the bassist in Anat Fort’s trio, rolls his bulky instrument around New York City subway stations almost every day to get to a different gig or rehearsal. Wang he said he is regularly involved with seven or eight different bands. A young, lively Asian-American who graduated as a computer science major from Columbia University before becoming a full-time musician, Wang toured with the singer Madeleine Peyroux, an artist heavily promoted by Universal Music. In New York, Wang tries to play one or two gigs at restaurants every week – he said these jobs pay from \$75 to \$150 a night. Sometimes, he is booked for performances at corporate functions, weddings or bar mitzvahs, which pay from \$200 to \$400 and provide some financial security. “The general rule, or the joke, is that the more creative and fun the gig is, the less it pays, which is generally kind of true,” Wang said. “It’s like, all these clubs, Barbès or Cornelia Street, there’s not a lot of money in it, unless the leader will pay you out of their own pocket.”

The Cornelia Street Café, named after the small Greenwich Village street on which it is located, has been a regular venue for Anat Fort since the mid-1990s. It became her trio’s main performance space around 2002 when the Knitting Factory shifted its focus from improvised music to independent rock. The narrow, dimly lit performance space, which is located in the basement of a restaurant, holds about 50 people at each set,

of which there are usually two on a given night. As in other New York jazz venues, the restaurant generates most of the income, so that the performances do not have to be profitable, said Poul Weis, a lean, bald-headed man who works as the music curator at Cornelia Street. A jazz trumpeter himself, the Danish-born Weis originally took “just another waiter job” at the café before he became its artistic gatekeeper. He said he had to cut back the number of Fort’s regular appearances last year due to the onslaught of other deserving artists.

Lesser-known bandleaders who want to perform their own music with their own group often have a hard time getting more than one gig per month in New York City. Weekly and long-run engagements are rare for these musicians. At the Cornelia Street Café, the artists get to keep the cover charge, which they can determine themselves. Fort has kept ticket prices at a low \$10 per set; she now splits the revenues with her band mates. When she used to pay them a fixed fee, she often ended up spending money on her concerts instead of earning something from them.

On January 27, the Cornelia Street Café was overrun with people who wanted to see Fort play before she embarked on her European tour. Some visitors had to be sent away because they could not be squeezed into the room. Those who got in celebrated the band, which now featured Ed Schuller on bass and Perry Robinson on clarinet to better mirror the lineup heard on the ECM album (Motian had stopped touring in 2003, so Schneider played drums.) The record had already been released in Europe and sent to US critics, who expressed enthusiasm for it – Nat Hentoff, one of America’s longest-serving and most influential jazz critics, called ECM’s New York office after hearing the record, saying it was “singular.” The label, eager to establish Fort on the market, put a great deal

of energy into promoting the album, setting up numerous interviews and running a full-page advertisement in *Down Beat* magazine. During her European tour, Fort realized how news about the record had also spread online into territories where the album had not even been officially released: At a concert in Paris, she was approached by two Brazilian listeners who said that their boss back home had urged them to see her play.

The tour began on February 10. In seven days, Fort, Schneider, Robinson and Schuller traveled together to six European cities and played six concerts. After an initial gig in Berlin, they flew to Vienna, took trains to the southern German cities of Munich and Heidelberg, then to Zurich. From there they flew to Paris. Audiences in some venues, like the “A-Trane” club in Berlin, embraced the group immediately: Fort and Schneider said they felt a special energy from the moment they went on stage. In other places, like the Vienna club “Porgy & Bess,” the musicians needed some time to get a rather distant group of listeners excited and to find their own groove.

Robinson and Schuller had been a part of the transatlantic exchange in the jazz world for many years. They had formed a band together with the German drummer Ernst Bier and Russian-born pianist Simon Nabatov in 1984 and played one or two European tours every year during the 1980s. The group formally still exists, though Robinson said it had not performed in recent years.

Robinson, a small, curly-haired and well-humored man, had been on the vanguard of the transatlantic collaborations that seem commonplace now. In the 1960s and 1970s, Robinson and other avant-garde improvisers did not fit in with the commercial club scene in New York, and they often played in private loft spaces where they faced no restrictions on the length of their sets and the style of their music. Apart from the fact that Europe

provided performance opportunities, collaborations with musicians overseas grew naturally out of the artists' mindset: The idea that free improvisation was a deeply collaborative effort helped the players to connect to like-minded – and often equally marginalized – colleagues elsewhere. Robinson started to play with German vibraphonist Gunter Hampel in 1971; four years earlier, Hampel had been one of the first Europeans to interact with the American free-jazz avant-garde when he worked with the African-American drummer Steve McCall, a member of the Chicago-based Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) who had moved to Paris.

Although a small group of artists saw France, Germany, or the Netherlands as a place for interaction early on, it is more common in the U.S. to think of Europe primarily as a place where American musicians could find work. American jazz bands have indeed flourished in Europe throughout much of the 20th century. They brought a music that sounded modern and different, and audiences, who by and large tended to be sympathetic toward all things American, loved it. For African-American artists, who faced racial oppression and discrimination at home, Europe provided a stark contrast to their everyday experience. Artists told others about the warm welcome they received and furthered the idea that Europe was a “haven” for jazz. As a consequence, many jazz greats – Bud Powell, Dexter Gordon, Kenny Clarke, to name only a few – took up residence in Europe after World War II.

The scholar Scott Cashman noticed that the situation had changed when he conducted research for his dissertation in the community of musicians who continued to hunt for gigs in the jazz clubs of Paris in the late 1990s. Many of the long-term residents told him that the climate had become less receptive toward American artists in recent

years. The myth of Paris – and most probably other European cities – as a “jazz haven” was, well, a myth. “The assumptions are that people in the States do not appreciate their own music and that Europeans appreciate it more so that musicians do better there as a result,” Cashman wrote. “Perhaps for some American-based musicians this is true. Those who get festival and concert gigs and travel to Europe to fulfill them are doing well there. They are also, probably, not living in Europe.” Cashman found that nightclub bookers and record companies were not interested in Americans simply because they were American. Without support by major labels or agents, expatriate musicians in Paris had to struggle just as much as in the United States.

The pianist Jason Moran is among those American artists who still profit from the European live music business. An inspired and virtuoso player who has developed a contemporary voice by including hip hop elements and samples as well as traditional styles into his playing, Moran was signed to Blue Note Records shortly after he graduated from the Manhattan School of Music; he released his debut album in 1999. In the past five years, Moran has regularly been playing in Europe to growing audiences. He said that he derives 60 to 70 percent of his income from performances on the continent. Moran, who is African-American, perceives European audiences to be much more receptive and diverse than concertgoers in the United States, but he acknowledges a strong competition between American and European artists for salaries and gigs at major festivals. “You’re quite simply coming and taking money from their table,” Moran said. “I’d be angry too.”

The European festival season grabs and squeezes large parts of the jazz world every summer and changes the shape of the entire network. Heinz Krassnitzer, a chief promoter for the annual Jazz Festival in Vienna, Austria, estimated that about 150

American jazz groups come to Europe every year in June and July alone. Many U.S. artists who tour the festival circuit also perform at discount rates at clubs during the week, Krassnitzer said. Since festival gigs usually take place only on weekends, artists seek compensation for hotel and travel costs in order to make their trip, which can last multiple weeks, pay off. This way, they occupy performance spaces beyond the festival stages, which would otherwise host local players.

The growth of the European jazz scene, fueled in part by the emergence of jazz conservatories all over the continent, has made Europe a more contested market, said Arndt Weidler, a research associate at the Jazz Institute in Darmstadt, Germany. According to Weidler, the willingness of European audiences to embrace American musicians varies depending on the style of the music: While audiences in the world of contemporary and avant-garde improvised music were more likely to disregard the origin of the artists, there was still a tendency in mainstream jazz venues to prefer “the original” – American players. Generally, Weidler said, “big American names” have become less prevalent on the bills of major European festivals during the past decade. The general tendency in many European countries to cut back public funding for culture has narrowed the field further and made concert and festival organizers review their booking policies.

Agents today are faced with the task of selling their American artists as special – something that did not require much effort when there was still a strong consensus about the superiority of American jazz. “The fact that an artist is from New York is certainly not the kind of unique selling point it once may have been,” said Andy Scherrer, an agent who organizes tours in Europe for a small roster of artists, the saxophonist Archie Shepp being the most prominent among them. “I’m not saying to my clients that they need to

book a New York musician. I'm saying that they need this particular artist because he is good, and he's good because he has lived here and has been through this whole artistic exchange."

But nowadays, Europe is relying much more on its home-grown players. In recent years, European jazz musicians have not only been able to find a clearer identity. They have also become more effective in marketing themselves to the wider jazz world. Artists like the Swedish pianist Esbjörn Svensson have become veritable stars, and the music that European players developed in response to local folk traditions, concert music and new electronic sounds has inspired new genre definitions. Among the prominent developments was a phenomenon called the "Nordic Tone," a soothing-sounding rubric for Scandinavian players who favored a lyrical style, embraced clear, airy and slowly moving pieces and emphasized the atmospheric qualities of their music. As the British critic Stuart Nicholson pointed out, many Nordic jazz players ceased making references to earlier jazz masters and rejected the competitive spirit prevalent in the African-American tradition in favor of an introverted, pensive approach. This focus on inner feelings, Nicholson wrote, was also found in other Scandinavian art, such as the paintings of Asger Jorn or the films of Ingmar Bergman. Probably, he suggested, it was linked to the experience of awe in the face of the serene natural beauty of the North.

The ECM label, which released the work of the Norwegian saxophonist Jan Garbarek early on in the 1970s, became such a major platform for Scandinavian players that the term "ECM sound" is today sometimes used synonymously with the "Nordic Tone." However, the Scandinavian jazz world extended far beyond the ECM orbit and produced players like the Norwegian pianist Bugge Wesseltoft, who fused his melodic

style with the rhythms of house and Drum'n'Bass culture.

Some critics embraced the development of a “European” jazz language. In his recent book “Is Jazz Dead? (Or has it moved to a different address),” Stuart Nicholson celebrated not only the “Nordic Tone,” but more generally championed the regional dialects of jazz in which the African-American blues spirit had been supplanted or complemented by sensibilities that were more intrinsic to local cultures. Nicholson called these musical forms “glocalized” styles. “In an era of political turmoil and complex negotiations of personal and cultural identity, jazz, more than ever in its history, is being used as a means of asserting cultural identity,” he wrote. “Historically, jazz has always been a means of asserting black cultural identity. Wynton Marsalis’ legacy for an idealized representation of jazz from its golden years is simply a means of asserting black cultural identity within the predominantly white cultural mainstream of the United States. Today, in the broader forum of the global cultural economy, globalized jazz styles from outside the United States are now providing a means for musicians around the world to assert their cultural identity within the music.”

For all the national pride that went along with the celebration of European and, more specifically, Scandinavian jazz, the idea of seeking a national identity within the music hardly reflects the complex reality of artists who are entangled in a network that spreads out all over the world. Anat Fort, who navigated through a number of musical traditions in an effort to shape her own voice, could not link her identity as an artist to a single place. “For me it’s a bunch of things, it’s the Israeli thing, a lot of European influences – whether the classical music when I was growing up or pop music later on – the American influence with jazz, and then the whole exposure to European jazz, and to

world music,” she said. She stressed that her influences often show up in her playing without her even noticing; other times, though, she consciously conjures them. “Just Now,” a piece that appears on her album in three different versions and constitutes something like the “leitmotif” of the record, was a case in point: Fort wrote the tune two days before the recording, trying to emulate what she thought of as the “Nordic Tone” heard on some ECM records. The slowly moving, remarkably catchy theme, which is set into a dance-like motion when the piano jumps from the basic note to three punctuated fifths, has an atmospheric openness as well as a folk-song simplicity. In his liner notes to the record, the writer Steve Lake remarked that Fort was offering “a mythic ‘Norway’ viewed, so to speak, from a Tel Aviv perspective.” Yet Fort had written and recorded the piece in New York with American musicians. The feeling and reflective mood of the song could not so easily be linked to a regional tradition.

Among the many factors that helped to spread the worldwide jazz network, the growth of jazz education has probably contributed more than anything else to the evolution of both global and national jazz styles. Jazz programs are now offered in universities and conservatories around the world, bringing jazz to areas far from centers like New York. Bill Farlin, the executive director of the International Association for Jazz Education, estimated in a January 2007 New York Times interview that the global jazz education industry had quadrupled in the past 20 years. The effects of the boom are at times contradictory: While some schools manage to build a strong community of players with a distinctive sound around them, scores of critics and musicians have complained that jazz education imposes on its students a uniform sound, modeled on the American mainstream, thereby stunting innovation and drowning out local diversity.

“Every time you have an institutionalization or standardization of practice, it’s going to have a huge conforming effect,” said Martin Mueller, the executive director of the New School for Jazz and Contemporary Music in Manhattan’s Greenwich Village. “I would agree that we have to be very careful.” Mueller said that it was generally easier for educational institutions to insist on a canon than to try to prepare students for the rapidly changing environment of today’s music world. While a small elite group of players trained in the canon could go on to successful careers, the majority would have to adapt to a very diverse set of challenges. Mueller explained that The New School was trying to avoid homogenization by giving students a maximum of choice. Students are paired up with a specific teacher with whom they develop a strong relationship – this way, the school tries to emulate the apprenticeship system in which jazz has traditionally been taught. Yet despite all the efforts to foster individuality, Mueller acknowledged that only a few graduates would end up making their living only from performing and recording.

The impact of the New School’s jazz program, which has close to 300 students and an international student population of about 24 percent, is particularly strong in Greenwich Village clubs like Small’s, where many students hang out and jam. Graduates from numerous other jazz programs in the U.S. and abroad also try their luck in New York, looking for recognition and experience. Typically, most graduates from other countries try to extend their time in New York for as long as they can, Mueller said. Some, like Weis or Schneider, stay for an unlimited time. It is a common pattern that artists try for the first five to ten years after their graduation to grab a foothold in the jazz world before they face the profound decision on how to carry on. “I’m an example – I used to be a performer, but I related more to providing for my family and having more

securities of a regular income, so I made these choices myself,” Mueller said.

“Everybody has to face that, because the life of an artist is just continuously living in that sort of risk zone, where the next gig comes from, and catching that next plane, and getting that next phone call and always thinking ahead to that next opportunity.”

If economic hardship is one major reason why artists spread out and connect to peers all over the world, the support systems that have sheltered jazz artists from the forces of the market have shaped the global jazz network in equally profound ways. The jazz education system has become a major haven for jazz artists, providing not only employment, but also a large network of contacts; in addition to concert tours, many jazz artists travel to conduct workshops and clinics around the world. Public support and private philanthropy have done their part to help artists cross borders. For the Danish pianist Nikolaj Hess, it would not have been possible to set foot in the New York jazz world if he hadn't received outside support.

Hess, a tall, light-skinned man with deep-lying, laughing eyes and rangy hands, applied for grants from various private and public foundations in Denmark to fund a study trip after he graduated from Copenhagen's Rhythmic Conservatory. In 1993, he first went to West Africa for six months and then to New York City for six weeks in an effort to understand both the roots and the more recent developments of jazz. Hess met fellow Dane Poul Weis and played with the drummer Roland Schneider in New York; he returned to the city again and again over the next dozen years, staying for one year between in 1997-98, spending half a year in the city in 2001 and returning for a year from 2005-6, with many shorter trips in between. Calling himself a “Scandinavian jazz player with a strong American and African influence,” Hess keeps traveling back and forth

between New York and Copenhagen on an artist's visa. New York provides him with inspiration and a wide network, but the majority of his work takes place elsewhere.

Hess has lived in the same small, overstuffed and slightly run down railroad apartment on St. Mark's Place in Manhattan's East Village during all of his sojourns in New York. In mid-January, he was back in the city to catch up with his New York colleagues. "Being here so much, it feels like it's been very good for my inspiration and my curiosity, for developing myself towards new subjects in music," Hess said. "When I'm here, I really feel like practicing and getting better. It always seemed like the competition was so much harder here, but it felt like a good competition. But maybe if you have to survive based only on being here, it might be a less positive feeling."

Unlike Fort, Hess never had to make his living in New York, though he said there were times when salaries from club gigs could have supported him. Hess received grants as a composer from government sources and the Danish composer's union of which he is a member; he estimates grants probably constitute a tenth of his income, while other players rely on them much more. Twice, the Danish Bikuben foundation, a subsidiary of a large commercial bank, sponsored his stays in New York through its "artist-in-residence" program. Hess estimated that he plays up to 200 concerts a year, most of them in Denmark, where he is involved with eight different bands. He has also held a part-time teaching position as associate professor at the Rhythmic Conservatory in Copenhagen since 1996. In New York, he has been involved in four regular projects and various free-lance engagements. "In the beginning, these were two worlds that didn't interact at all," he said. "Now, they're coming closer together." Hess has toured Europe with his main New York band "Global Motion," which features the New-York based Dutch

saxophonist Marc Mommaas alongside two American musicians on bass and drums. Usually, Hess uses his network to book gigs in Scandinavia, while Mommaas' contacts in the Netherlands facilitate concerts there. Many of the venues at which he plays in Denmark receive regular subsidies from the government, Hess explained. "They can afford to take a lot more chances with music that might not be popular," he said.

While musical styles can seldom be clearly delineated by national borders, the support structures of Scandinavian countries certainly have done their part to define national jazz cultures. In Norway, a country of 4.5 million inhabitants, support for jazz has increased by an estimated 3 to 5 percent every year since 2003, according to Vidar Bråthen, an administrator at the Norsk JazzForum, an institution that distributes funds to artists. Contrary to the general trend of cutting back cultural funding, Norway has continued to raise its cultural budget in the past few years, building the basis for various institutions that provide support for jazz. That support totaled about \$5.8 million in 2005, according to the Norsk JazzForum. The government agency Rikskonserterne funds free concerts throughout the country and sponsors international tours of musical artists. Between 2004 and 2006, the "Jazz Launch Europe" program, an initiative by Rikskonserterne, the Jazz Forum and another institution called the West Norway Jazz Center, used NOK 900,000 (\$139,741), provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to promote four artists in various European countries.

The access to government support puts some players at an advantage on the European live music market, said Arndt Weidler of the Darmstadt Jazz Institute. "If Scandinavian artists are being reimbursed for their travel expenses by the government, they can play in Germany, the Netherlands or France under conditions that even the local

players there can not keep up with,” he said. “Americans are probably even more at a disadvantage because their travel expenses are higher.”

Andy Scherrer, the agent, has been sending little-known jazz acts from America to Europe for more than five years, and he knows about the risks his enterprise involves. “Air travel is the biggest gamble of them all,” Scherrer explained during a talk in a Morningside Heights café during which he kept checking his cell phone – one of his groups was just about to depart on a tour, and Scherrer was almost expecting last-minute emergencies. “Airlines constantly change their prices, they have seasons, and they’re prone to strikes and delays. Since budgets for musicians in that category are always tight, you can get unpleasant surprises.” In 2006, Scherrer organized a ten-date European tour for the saxophonist Roy Nathanson and his project “Sotto Voce” with a \$28,000 budget. The artists, who went for the second time after a profitless first try, were well received. In such a case, with no extra transport costs skewing the budget, the artists get to keep about 60 percent of this money, Scherrer said; as a manager, he keeps an additional 10 to 15 percent. Despite the increased competition, Europe remains easier to tour than the United States due to the relatively short distances between venues. Once artists have crossed the Atlantic Ocean, they get to play many gigs within a short time. Scherrer sends his musicians to play concerts in Serbia, Poland, and the Baltic States, a territory which he said was “about to save the business.”

Festivals like the Jazz Jamboree in Warsaw, Poland have been around since as early as 1958, but numerous new events sprung up during the late 1980s and early 1990s in places like Tallinn, Estonia and Vilnius, Lithuania. Though these countries already had strong jazz scenes during the Soviet regime, few of their artists received much attention

in the West. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, festival organizers were eager to make connections and to showcase local and international talent. Some events, like the annual festival in the Lithuanian town of Kaunas, have come to rely on well-known US artists like Eddie Palmieri and Al di Meola. Others, like the Vilnius Jazz Fest in the Lithuanian capital, feature less mainstream artists.

Scherrer said the promoters he knew in Eastern Europe showed an unparalleled enthusiasm for new music and were driven by a sense of responsibility to offer something interesting to their audience. “That’s a mindset that has already died down further west,” he said. “In Germany, for example, there are tons of festivals that are terribly boring because people go shopping at the same agency, in the same style, all the time.”

But even promoters who are willing to present new acts face financial constraints, the Vienna Jazz Festival’s Krassnitzer said. He added that travel subsidies are often the only way to enable the festival appearance of an upcoming artist. Though low-cost airlines have made travel within Europe considerably cheaper, airfares continue to vary enormously and can be particularly high during the summer festival season. Even if artists command very low fees, the costs of flying in and hosting a six-piece band from Norway could easily amount to €5-6000 (\$6700-8000), Krassnitzer said; there was no way that young acts could bring in these sums from ticket sales alone.

Anat Fort was lucky to receive support for her tour from her record label and one of its main distributors, Universal Music. As part of their promotion effort, the companies covered the European travel expenses for the quartet during its February tour. While newcomers signed to major labels frequently enjoy such support, most US-based jazz musicians can count on little backing from outside the marketplace in comparison to their

European peers. Grants rarely contribute to the livelihood of American jazz musicians to a large degree: The NEA 2003 study on the work life of jazz musicians found that in more than 90 percent of the cases in which jazz artists were awarded grants or fellowship, they did not receive more than \$5000. Among the musicians the researchers reached through the chain-deferral method, 36.5 percent had received grants or fellowships; only 11 percent of musicians identified through their membership in the American Federation of Musicians (AFM), America's premier musician's union, had done so.

Government support for the arts has traditionally been far lower in the United States than in European countries. The National Endowment for the Arts spent \$2.8 million on jazz funding in 2005, supporting jazz festivals and concert seasons, educational jazz programming on National Public Radio, artists-in-schools programs, and research. Since 1982, the NEA's support has included the Jazz Masters Fellowships, a \$25,000 prize awarded to leaders in the field. The NEA's total budget was \$125.6 million in the fiscal year 2006; that sum again represented less than 1 percent of total arts philanthropy in the U.S. Since not all philanthropy efforts that benefit jazz artists are explicitly reserved for jazz, the portion of private support generally given to jazz in the United States is hard to determine. According to the scholar Dave Laing, subsidy and sponsorship for jazz still remains minuscule compared to the funding for Western classical music.

Anat Fort had already developed a routine of searching and applying for grants at the time she made the decision to rely more fully on her art. She had twice been an artist-in-residence in Minnesota, courtesy of the Jerome Foundation, a private institution dedicated to the support of emerging artists. More recently, Fort had received a grant

from “Meet the Composer,” an organization that distributes funds from private and government sources to enable the creation and presentation of musical work. Fort had applied to support a performance at the Puffin Cultural Forum, a non-profit venue in Teaneck, New Jersey. “I asked for \$900, and that’s what I got,” she said. “There’s so much going on with the release of the record, so it’s probably going to be a Jersey release party.”

Fort has also been turned down for some of the grants she applied for: The “American Composer’s Forum” denied a request in late November, and another application at “Chamber Music America” (CMA) was denied in 2005. Fort said she had a long conversation with a CMA representative after she had gotten the letter of refusal. “He said: I’m looking here at the list of people who got the grant this year, and you have a record coming out on ECM records. None of these people on the list have this happening, and that’s everybody’s dream. So you’re okay.”

Anticipation for the release of Fort’s album had been building up since ECM’s founder and chief producer Manfred Eicher heard “A Long Story” in June 2004 and had promised to put it out. Fort knew about the label’s reputation. ECM has become a strong brand in the world of jazz and contemporary classical music, largely due to the vision of Eicher, a former bassist who is known to oversee every step of a production from the choice of artists to the choice of the cover artwork. With its high-end sound and the solemn, clear aesthetic Eicher favors, ECM is also commercially successful within its market segment. The label released best-sellers such as Keith Jarrett’s “Köln Concert” (1975) and, in 2003, reached sales figures of 60,000 with the debut album of Tord Gustavsen, until then an unknown Norwegian pianist. Fort was aware that the label

would support her record, but she didn't know exactly what to expect.

Fort felt flattered by some of the reviews that appeared after the release of her record in late January. The critic Peter Rüedi, writing in the Swiss weekly *Weltwoche*, praised the album as a godsend, saying that Fort's compositions were like standards – “individual inventions, but appearing as if they had emanated from the collective unconscious. It sounds the way the house smelled when grandma had baked an apple pie.” Fort seemed almost embarrassed by the enthusiasm of some reporters who had interviewed her. Though she hadn't yet gotten much press in the United States when the record came out there in early March, the album was listed on the *Billboard* jazz charts in the first week after its release.

One afternoon in late March, Fort sat in Smooch, a small, cozy neighborhood café in Brooklyn's Fort Greene district. She was trying to adjust to her “new status,” as she called it. After she had wrapped up her tour, visited her family in Tel Aviv and played another concert there, she wanted to catch up with friends in New York. She also looked forward to writing new music. She had often spent days and weeks trying to get into what she called her “creative mode,” sometimes sleeping next to the piano in her Brooklyn living room, waiting for inspiration. Now she had not written any music in months. Fort admitted that she had felt overwhelmed by the “hype” during some days when the media interest peaked. “It's really interesting, because all of a sudden you feel that you're part of many more people's lives, you don't even know whose life you're a part of,” she said. “It can be a very cool feeling – it's certainly very energizing and very fun if you can find your space back with it.”

Since the record's release, Fort's gigs have become more frequent and more

lucrative. Fort is slated to perform at the JVC jazz festival in New York and at festivals in Saratoga Springs and Montreal in June. While these are promising opportunities, she can not rely solely on the income from playing her own music for the time being. Financially, she said, even now her situation is still not secure. “It’s not like money just dropped on me from the sky,” she said. “It takes time. But I think I will be okay eventually. I still do jobs that I don’t necessarily really like from time to time, but at least it’s not on a regular basis.”

In a way, Fort has “made it” in the jazz world. But that world has not allowed her simply to shake off the everyday concerns she dealt with in the past. Her success is just another starting point. However, Fort is convinced that her decision to focus solely on her art has been a good one. She still thinks about moving back to Israel, but she said she could not exactly say when she would do it. “There’s no way for me to know where I’m going to be in the fall, or in the summer, or even tomorrow,” she said. “I have to let the next few months pass, do whatever I need to do and take it from there after things quiet down a little bit.” For now, Fort wanted to clear her mind, sit down at the piano, and write music again.