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Urban Jazz: International Style

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Chris Collins and Emanuele Cisi are converging American and European Jazz and Art to bring together two cultures musically, visually and educationally.



O'Connor Urban Jazz

Urban Jazz

by Julie O'Connor

One may not think of Torino, Italy, and Detroit as having much in common. But according to Chris Collins, director of Wayne State's Jazz Studies in the College of Fine, Performing and Communication Arts, they have enormous connections and he is at the forefront of creating a new one.

"Torino is often called the Detroit of Europe," said Collins. "It's an industrial city much like Detroit. It blends a very diverse culture of residents, industries, large and small businesses, clubs and entertainment – all molded with many people living in one area."

Not only is Torino an urban environment with the auto industry at its heart, it also has a rich music history much like Detroit and the United States. "America is the birthplace of jazz. The European jazz scene, and in fact the global jazz scene, grew from the foundations laid by American jazz luminaries of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries," said Collins. "Torino started playing jazz on the radio very early on and had one of the earliest jazz radio stations in Europe."

Collins, who has performed around the world, devoted his travels to performing, networking and researching jazz music. One of these travels led him to a Torino connection, which is now playing a major role in his career and is the center of an international collaborative project initiated by WSU.

Synaesthesia

While in New York City, Collins met a musician, Emanuele Cisi, from Torino. Collins and Cisi, a saxophone player like Collins, discovered they were very much alike. Both grew up during the same era



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in an urban setting that largely influenced their music. "When we met, we were amazed at how many similarities we shared despite growing up in two different countries, and how much the urban culture impacted our music and the foundation of what we love about jazz."

That meeting sparked new ideas, and a collaboration was formed. In 2006, Wayne State's Presidential Research Enhancement Program funded the *Detroit/Torino Urban Jazz Project (DTUJP)*. The project began as an artistic exploration of two cities bound by their parallel post-industrialized urban histories, but has evolved into a significant and artistic entity that has brought together two cultures musically, visually and educationally.

Collins and Cisi set off to create a message that was synaesthesia, "the union of the senses or the interchangeability of sensory perceptions," according to Collins. "In the art world, it typically refers to a type of multimedia performance presentation, which aural and visual art forms are blended."

The first generation of the project artistically captured the common cultural, financial and political challenges and successes of the people and places within Detroit and Torino through music and imagery performances. Now enjoying additional corporate sponsorship, the second phase of the project will create new works for string orchestra and jazz quartet commissioned from composers James Hartway, distinguished professor of music at Wayne State University, and Carlo Boccadora, noted composer from Torino, Italy. The world premiere of the two unique commissions will take place in

May 2011 at one of the premiere orchestral venues in Europe, the 1,800-seat Teatro Regio (The Royal Theatre) in Torino, Italy. This event will take place during Italy's country-wide celebration of 150 years of unification.

The pieces will feature Collins and Cisi with the Symphony Orchestra of the Teatro Regio, a double-saxophone jazz quartet representing Detroit and Torino and projected comparative images of both cities from the project's photographers, Piero Ottaviano (Turin) and Geoff George (Detroit). There will be installations of the photographs and performances by the jazz quartet in various European cities in the weeks leading up to the world premiere. The performance will be the result of the highest level of jazz, composition and visual arts combined into a stunning multimedia performance that represents true collaboration and makes a powerfully positive statement about cultural unity and the potential of global cooperation and cultural respect. The project plans to repeat the premiere in Detroit.

In addition, an international student collaboration is being formed to engage a new stratum of the cultures. Select jazz students from Wayne State and the Torino Conservatory will work with artists from the DTUJP to develop collaborative ensembles and compositions to be performed at various venues including jazz festivals, educational institutions and other venues in the two cities.

The DTUJP collaboration is a unique representation of international challenges and opportunities through a variety of artistic disciplines. "This project is a stunning combination



About Mr. Christopher Collins:

Mr. Collins received a Bachelor of Music from Wayne State University and a Master of Music from Northern Illinois University. He joined Wayne State University's faculty in 1994.

of technology and artistry, bringing two cities with unique similarities including the homes of Fiat and Chrysler, to the forefront," said Gloria Heppner, associate vice president for research at Wayne State. "Collins and Cisi have truly formed a celebration of globalization by providing us an opportunity to enlighten and inspire through an internationally dynamic and inspiring artistic venue."

"This project unites two cultures through art with jazz and the urban experience as the common threads," said Collins. "In addition, through comparative visual arts, we are able to showcase the diversity, architecture, and community of urban life in Detroit and Torino, showcasing the similarities and celebrating the differences in our cultures. Ultimately, the project aims to build networks for other artists and collaborative interests, engage both populations, inspire the next generation of artists in both communities and demonstrate the power of honest international collaboration. The end result will be a sum larger than its parts and a product that truly belongs to both urban cultures."

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