

Remembering Dan Morgenstern (1929-2024)

Vincent Pelote

Sadly, 2024 saw the *Journal of Jazz Studies*, and the jazz community, lose one of its own. Dan Morgenstern, a long-time editor of the *Journal of Jazz Studies*, revered jazz writer/scholar and historian, and Director of the Institute of Jazz Studies (from 1976 to 2011) died on September 7 at the age of 94.

Dan was unique among those who wrote about jazz in that he was so universally embraced by the musicians who played jazz.

His incisive liner-note essays won eight Grammy Awards. He was named a National Endowment for the Arts Jazz Master in 2007 and received three Deems Taylor Awards for excellence in music writing from the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers, two of them for his books *Jazz People* (1976) and *Living with Jazz* (2004). He was involved—as a writer, adviser, music consultant and occasional onscreen authority—in more than a dozen jazz documentaries.

Dan Michael Morgenstern was born on October 24, 1929, in Munich, Germany, but grew up in Vienna, Austria. His father was Soma Morgenstern, the son of a Hasidic Jew and a prolific novelist, journalist and playwright, and his mother was Ingeborg (von Klenau) Morgenstern, whose father was the Danish composer and conductor Paul von Klenau.

The Nazi annexation of Austria caused the Morgensterns to escape on one of the last trains out of that country, with Soma making his way to France while young Dan and his mother fled to Denmark. When the Nazis reached Copenhagen, mother and son were smuggled out of Denmark by the Danish resistance, landing in Sweden in mid-October 1943. They remained there until the war ended, then returned to Copenhagen. It was at this time that young Dan became enamored with jazz.

The Morgenstern family was reunited in New York in April 1947. A teenage Dan got a job as a trainee in the mail room at Time-Life then took a job as a copy boy at the *New York Times*. In 1951, he was drafted into the military and stationed in Munich for his tour of duty.

After he was discharged, Dan entered Brandeis University (thanks to the G.I. Bill) where he joined the student newspaper, *The Justice* (which he would eventually edit). While at Brandeis he immersed himself in the quite active

Boston jazz scene where he and a cadre of student jazz fans decided to bring jazz to Brandeis. In fact, Dan's first published piece in *The Justice* was about a Stan Getz Brandeis appearance.

After leaving university, Dan got a job at the *New York Post* working his way up from copy boy to editorial assistant in the drama department, which also covered film and music. While at the *Post* he resumed his nightly excursions to the myriad jazz clubs and hangouts in Manhattan and surrounding boroughs. At the *Post* he contributed one of his first bylined pieces; a review of the Randall's Island Jazz Festival in 1959. His career in jazz took off as he became a preeminent eyewitness to jazz history in the second half of the twentieth century.

When Dan came to Rutgers in 1976 to be the Director of the Institute of Jazz Studies, he had already contributed numerous articles to magazines, newspapers and journals. He served the revered *Metronome* magazine as its last editor-in-chief and *Jazz* magazine (which later became *Jazz & Pop*) as its first. He reviewed live jazz for *The New York Post* and records for *The Chicago Sun-Times*, as well as publishing 148 record reviews while an editor at *DownBeat*, including a stint as the magazine's chief editor from 1967 to 1973.

It was in 1978 that he became one of the editors of the *Journal of Jazz Studies* (initially as the Review Editor). He has universally been praised as an excellent writer, but he was also a skilled editor. Dan was instrumental in the journal's eventual move to an open access online periodical. He and his editorial team helped maintain the *Journal of Jazz Studies*'s reputation as the premier English language jazz journal. Even after he retired and was made an Emeritus Board Member, he was still quite willing to contribute to the journal's publication in any way he could. It is in no way hyperbole to state that today's *Journal of Jazz Studies* owes much to Dan Morgenstern's long and expert stewardship.

With those formalities and lists of accomplishments out of the way, I want to share a bit about the Dan Morgenstern I knew and so greatly respected for nearly half a century.

I worked with Dan for thirty-three years. And I say work with, not work for, because even though he was my boss, and I always called him boss, with Dan it was more like he was a colleague. He was always interested in what I had to say about any major, and sometimes minor decisions that were made at the institute. Dan dubbed me; the late Ed Berger, our associate director for many years; and himself the "ancient jazz trio"—a sort of a play on the modern jazz quartet thing—because we made all these decisions together.

I learned so much working with Dan. I always had big ears when he was talking. I tried to soak up as much as I could, I wanted to get as much out of

him as I could. The books are nice, believe me, jazz books are wonderful, but somebody who was actually there and who actually knew some of these great people that we're talking about and reading about... I mean, Hot Lips Page, Louis Armstrong, I could just go on and on. He hung out with these different musicians and knew things that probably will never make it into the history books, for better or for worse.

I have so many memories of Dan. One of my favorite recurring memories is thinking back to when Ed Berger and I would get out the Institute's "music minus one" records and start playing some of the tunes, actually I should say massacring some of the tunes—Ed on trumpet, playing very badly, me on metal clarinet, playing very badly. I picked up clarinet in college, and I should have left it there. But we tried, we tried to play the stuff. Dan would always come out of his office and join us. He played the comb! A comb and newspaper, like his hero Red Mackenzie, who he loved, and talked about all the time. I also recall, that for some weird reason, the IJS staff formed an impromptu conga line one day, just to be silly, dancing around the institute. Dan came out of his office, and we were convinced he was going to be furious, going to give us hell for making so much noise. Instead, he joined the conga line! We just weaved our way around the institute having a good old time! That was the kind of thing that he would do. He could be serious, believe me. We had meetings where we talked about serious stuff, but he was a fun guy. It was really nice to come to work and have somebody like that there.

For over thirty years the IJS ran a show, *Jazz from the Archives*, on WBGO. Early on, we rotated hosts, so that over the years just about everyone got a turn to host. Dan loved doing the *Jazz from the Archives* shows. At some point, the late Annie Kuebler and I would do the annual Christmas shows. After Annie died, I ended up doing our last Christmas show for the station with Dan. Sitting there in the studio while he was playing the records he chose and talking about them, you know, it was just such a joy. He would talk about the recordings and the artists and all I could think was, "my God, somebody should be getting this all written down." I hope whoever was listening to Dan on the radio that day absorbed even just a bit of Dan's knowledge and passion.

Dan was my teacher, my personal editor, my boss, and most importantly he was my friend. I'm going to miss him.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTOR

Vincent Pelote is Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Jazz Studies* and Senior Archivist and Digital Preservation Strategist at the Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers University-Newark. He has compiled discographies on Billie Holiday,

Lionel Hampton, and a discography on the Commodore Records label. Mr. Pelote is one of the contributors to the *Oxford Companion to Jazz*. He has written a number of album program/liner notes on Lee Konitz, Johnny Smith, Mary Lou Williams, Benny Carter, Curtis Fuller, and others. He has written book and sound recording reviews for the *ARSC Journal* and *Notes: The Quarterly Journal of the Music Library Association*.