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Organización
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para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
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联合国教育、
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**Message from Ms Audrey Azoulay,
Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of International Jazz Day**

30 April 2020

"Jazz is made by and for people who have chosen to feel good in spite of conditions", observed tenor saxophonist Johnny Griffin. In the peculiar circumstances of this International Jazz Day, as the world faces the COVID-19 pandemic, music is bringing people together and helping to keep hope alive.

Jazz is being listened to in homes all over the world during lockdown. Jazz standards are being revisited, jam sessions are being organized via Internet platforms, and the biggest names in jazz are offering their arrangements and improvisations online. If jazz is proving to be a companion in hardship for many, it is probably because it enables us to make the most of the present moment.

Through jazz we find a closeness that is being made particularly difficult by social distancing measures, because jazz music is a continuous dialogue among the musicians of the band, and also with the listener. This dialogue, gaining from multiple influences and bringing together musical traditions from different continents, thus resonates in all cultures and brings us closer to each other.

Through jazz, we also reaffirm the virtues of improvisation, because reinterpreting and rendering in a different way what we thought we knew is at the same time paying homage and affirming that, in spite of the circumstances, we still have freedom of creation.

This Day is therefore an opportunity for UNESCO to celebrate the power of jazz, which accompanies the day to day of those who must stay at home and those who cannot. It is also an opportunity for our Organization to pay tribute to the great

saxophonist Manu Dibango, UNESCO Artist for Peace since 2004, who died on 24 March 2020 as a result of COVID-19. Our Organization salutes a man who has demonstrated that jazz is an instrument of hope, of dialogue between cultures, and of peace.

Manu Dibango believed deeply in the power of music to bring peoples and cultures together because, as he said in a UNESCO Courier article in March 1991, music is *“the most spontaneous, natural form of contact between one person and another”*.

It is the magic of jazz that we need now, at a time when we are all reminded of the cardinal importance of music – and indeed, of all the arts – in our lives. This is particularly true of jazz, which has accompanied the trials of slavery and oppression to finally become a symbol of freedom and blending of cultures.

This year, the health crisis has forced the cancellation of concerts and festivals that were scheduled to take place. Through this message, UNESCO wishes to reaffirm its support to artists, jazz clubs and concert halls, whose activity has been interrupted, as well as to the city of Cape Town, which was to host this year’s International Jazz Day. We are saddened by these cancellations, but the creativity that jazz lovers and musicians are demonstrating in these times of social isolation gives us hope.

Thus, to ensure that jazz music continues to resound and carry us along, UNESCO, together with its partner, the Herbie Hancock Institute of Jazz, will today ensure the dissemination of jazz courses and performances, with the participation of great names in the genre. We invite you all to join us online, so that Jazz will continue to move us, now and always.

Indeed, Herbie Hancock, pianist and UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador, urges us to *“keep playing, keep innovating, and keep one another in your hearts. Music brings us together even when we are apart”*.