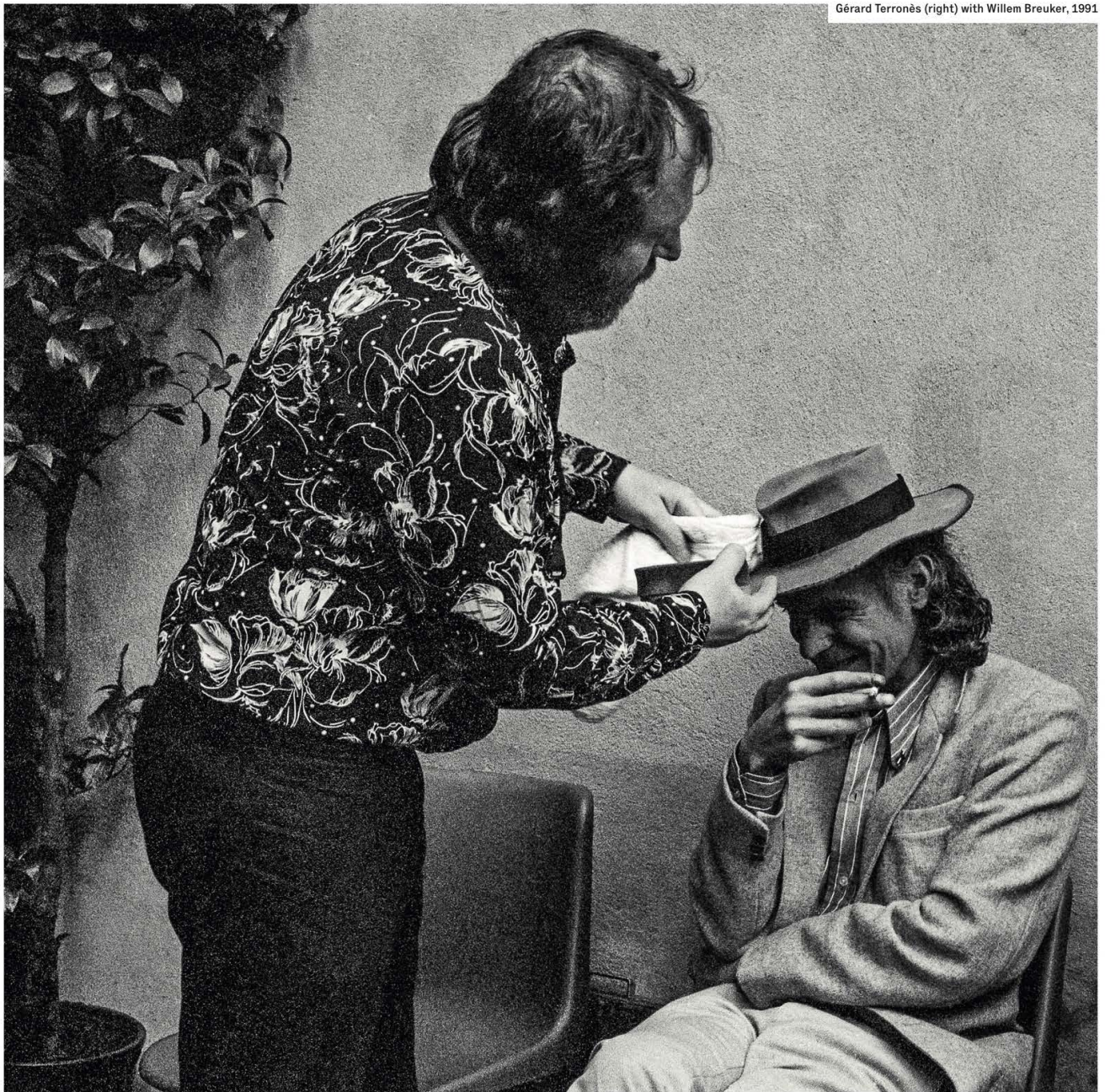


Once Upon A



Gérard Terronès (right) with Willem Breuker, 1991

Gérard Ruy

Time In Paris

In 1960s and 70s France, the tireless efforts of

Gérard & Odile Terronès

helped jazz's new thing move into new territory through a succession of shoestring clubs and the Futura and Marge labels.

By **Pierre Crépon**

In early March 1981, with the ministerial pomp demanded by such an event, a massive mall was inaugurated in La Défense, the business district in the Western outskirts of Paris. The building, an enormous rectangle of glass, totalled twice as much commercial space as the Champs-Élysées. The project had been devised as a means of developing a new kind of economic activity in an area that was almost desolate once the tens of thousands of office workers vacated the nearby towers every day, leaving behind only empty corridors and parking lots.

In order to inject life into this empty shell, the promoters conceived an extensive "cultural animation" arm, to operate alongside the restaurants and cinemas hosted by the structure. Three spaces in particular would serve as magnets for artists: a space for theatre, a dance school and a "jazz centre".

Scaled to the structure that hosted it, Jazz Unité was itself a complex inside a complex. It featured a bar-discotheque, an "American style" restaurant, a record shop, a rehearsal studio and a concert space seating 300 in front of a Steinway piano, all in ultra modern design style. "One had to be brave when arriving by car in the underground parking lots at night," remembers flautist Michel Edelin. "With the security, the dog handlers, the atmosphere was peculiar. But once you had gone up the elevator, it was fantastic."

Remarkably, its opening night featured music quite unlike the tepid sounds one might associate with a lavish mall setting: an Archie Shepp quartet, and Togolese trombonist Adolf Winkler's group in an "invitation to dancing". The next musicians to unpack in the high class dressing rooms were members of an AACM quartet and Willem Breuker's ten-piece Kollektief. Billy Harper, Curtis Clark and Sonny Grey's big band rounded out the schedule of the first month of operations.

The range of styles was a trademark of the venue's director Gérard Terronès. He had already worn many hats during his 15 years in the jazz business – club manager, record producer, touring agent, festival organiser, record shop operator, jazz writer – although he was famous for only one kind: a wide-brimmed cordobés which he wore everywhere and was rarely photographed without. At Jazz Unité, his project was to connect all aspects of jazz's diffusion.

In May, while France watched the candidates debate in the final days of the presidential election, Hal Singer, the man behind the late 1940s R&B hit "Corn Bread", led a group at Jazz Unité. The Frank Wright Quartet and singer La Velle's trio were on the bill when power shifted to the victorious Socialist candidate François Mitterrand, and as 1981 unfolded, big bands, free jazz groups and blues singers continued to travel to La Défense, underlying the

club's vision of jazz as an intrinsically diverse music made up of tightly interconnected components.

But while advertising pointed out that Jazz Unité was only ten minutes away from the major Paris hub of Les Halles, countering the perception of La Défense as a remote area and maintaining the steady audience necessary to pay the salaries of the numerous employees was a big challenge. Soon after a week devoted to an exchange with Amsterdam's well-established improvisation venue Bimhuis, a press release announced the cancellation of concerts scheduled for March 1982. The rationale was that the experiment of Jazz Unité had proved improvised music could not self-finance itself in France, and the statement announced the creation of an associative structure aimed at obtaining public subsidies.

Terronès used Jazz Unité one last time to record Sonny Sharrock's trio. The session proved to be the last release on Marge, a record label the Frenchman founded in 1975. The grand project was over but, typically for Terronès, he would bounce back.

The son of a police inspector and an employee of the fiscal administration, Gérard Terronès was born in 1940 in a colonial Morocco about to join collaborationist France in the early days of the Second World War. Before he'd reached his teens, he discovered jazz in the form of a Sidney Bechet release by Vogue, France's first jazz label. He quickly started tuning his radio to the frequency of Voice Of America to hear Willis Conover's broadcasts.

Like many in his generation, he discovered the Hot Club de France, the jazz advocacy society founded by critic Hugues Panassié. Surviving the war and an ideological rift over the advent of bebop, the Hot Club evolved into a starkly purist group prone to invective and anathema, clinging to what they saw as true traditional early styles. When Morocco gained its independence in 1956, Terronès's family moved to France. Now a student and amateur New Orleans-style drummer, he discovered bebop, acquired Norman Granz's JATP productions, read *Jazz Hot*, and got acquainted with the other major figure of French jazz culture, Charles Delaunay, a former Panassié associate before the Hot Club rift. Meanwhile, a family move brought Terronès closer to Paris and to the village where Django Reinhardt had spent his final years. It began a longlasting relationship with members of the Reinhardt family.

Where his path diverged from most of the jazz fans of his generation was the intensity of his fervour for the clubs of the thriving Saint-Germain-des-Près scene in Paris. After leaving school at 17 and now working in a bank, he was free to frequent The Blue Note, The Chat Qui Pêche and The Club Saint-Germain, where he witnessed historical stints by Miles Davis

and Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers. In 1960 the Algerian War diverted Terronès back to France's colonial territories – he patrolled the Casbah in Algiers during a period of heightened activity from the anti-independence terrorist group OAS. In the two years he was there, Terronès learned to play blues guitar, and his wife Odile – a lifelong nickname bestowed by saxophonist Don Byas – gave birth to their son Eric, named in honour of Eric Dolphy, underlining Terronès's interest in the most modern currents of jazz.

The closing of Jazz Unité in 1982 marked the end of a major chapter in Gérard Terronès's life. From this point on he only produced events in spaces he didn't manage. But an important "ricochet" – a term he adopted to describe some of the unforeseen events of his life trajectory – resulted from the time at La Défense. A visit to the Jazz Unité by members of Radio Libertaire, the recently legalised broadcasting operation of the Fédération Anarchiste, led to a close relationship, and to the anarchist label Terronès was strongly associated with in the collective consciousness of the French jazz scene. For the next 26 years, he was a regular voice on the airwaves of the volunteer run station, talking about blues, jazz and his more private passion for flamenco. The radio's logo featured on a poster for a 1986 festival organised by Terronès, next to names like Alan Silva and Last Exit, and underground rock artists like Annie Anxiety and Blurt. But the event left him heavily in debt, forcing him to keep a low profile and stay as far away as possible from the fiscal authorities.

At other times his parallel lives as political militant and jazz professional overlapped. Such was the case at Trou Noir, a former drinking spot frequented by workers at the factories that once dominated this southeastern part of Paris. The place had been turned back into a bar by anarchist militants with the help of salvaged furniture; drinks were served, without a licence, at an old solid oak bar. In line with the music of the milieu, Trou Noir at first hosted chanson à texte, before presenting nights of poetry, Brazilian music and experimental cinema, as well as jazz courtesy of Terronès.

An unusual detail was the uncommon situation of the bathroom behind the bandstand – not a perfect layout for a place selling beer, and a far cry from the high class of Jazz Unité. But, notwithstanding the limited seating capacity and its location firmly outside of the main jazz circuit, Steve Lacy, Archie Shepp, Mal Waldron and Sam Rivers all played at Trou Noir during its short run from 1984–85. But the presence of such established musicians was a clear indication of Terronès's status.

Terronès saw the Trou Noir experience as his career coming full circle, because it marked a return to the intimacy of The Blues Jazz Museum, the first space he and his wife had run 20 years earlier in a cellar under a neighbourhood bar on the medieval Île St-Louis near Notre-Dame. Here was where the young couple learned the ropes of the trade, receiving help from employees of a world-famous gastronomic restaurant nearby. Signalling its opening, a small insert placed in *Jazz Hot* described The Blues Jazz Museum as a discotheque where patrons could "listen until dawn to jazz's masterpieces, selected by a true connoisseur".

Gérard's extensive record collection was put to good use, both for listening and dancing, something key to his formative years.

A regular club patron was a young salesman named Jean-Pierre Patillot. A follower of the most modern trends in jazz, Patillot introduced them to the freshly imported records of ESP-Disk'. At Patillot's suggestion, the club started to feature live music, beginning with a session from the barely documented Eric Dolphy devotee Charlie Paris. While Gérard was hauling the piano for live sessions down to the cellar, he perforated his lung. During a subsequent hospital visit, Odile told him that an American musician named Mal Waldron was currently playing the instrument. It marked the beginning of a crucial relationship.

Every country has its lost heroes of jazz, obscure musicians whose memory lives on in oral histories passed down by fans of the music. One was Alain Tabar-Nouval, a saxophonist active for a handful of years on the Parisian scene before his death in a remote area in the north of Denmark, where he had gone to seek out John Tchicai and Don Cherry. In those days, Cherry constituted an almost magical presence, deeply impacting on the French scene through his work at The Chat Qui Pêche, which in turn became the birthplace of the music on Cherry's first Blue Note album *Complete Communion* (1966). Bassist Henri Texier and Tabar-Nouval's quintet were among the first groups to attempt to play the music of Cherry and Ornette Coleman, and The Blues Jazz Museum was where these landmark moments happened.

Cherry and singer Colette Magny were brought to the club by pianist François Tusques, who would go on to become France's leading avant garde player. The place lost something when Cherry left, taking an old beat-up cornet Gérard had bought at the flea market with him. Meanwhile, weekly gypsy jazz nights featured members of the Reinhardt family, and on weekends, traditional jazz styles were a constant. Hal Singer, fresh off a transatlantic crossing on the Queen Elizabeth, numbered among the notable soloists. Despite the club's meagre means, the seeds of Terronès's wide-ranging programming style – simultaneously open and rigorous – were sown.

The couple's next venture came in 1967, when they began to manage The Gill's Club. "It was in the Marais, in a small, quite low profile street. It was in a basement, with narrow stairs. Stone walls, quite small," remembers bass player Barre Phillips. "It had no tables, but about 40 wooden stools, like milking stools. There was a bar on the far side of the room, and there was an elevated bandstand with an old upright piano... At least all the keys worked."

Phillips first came to Paris in May 1968, to play with François Tusques. "Obviously, the concert didn't happen," he continues. "In the following days I followed François to the Odéon theatre where there were demonstrations. Gérard was there." As events unfolded, the general strike shaking the country spread to the music business, ultimately leading Mal Waldron away from Gill's, where he was scheduled to play, to the piano in the occupied courtyard of the Sorbonne.

Phillips played at Gill's the next year, with the club's pianist mainstay Siegfried Kessler and AACM drummer Steve McCall. "Gérard was curious to me," says Phillips. "He wasn't your normal club owner or record producer. He was totally dedicated to the

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and
behind
his
cigarette
watching
his
musical
life
develop”

Barre Phillips

Signing contracts with Archie Shepp (left) and translator, 1975



With Sam Rivers (right) and his wife Beatrice in Nimes, 1979

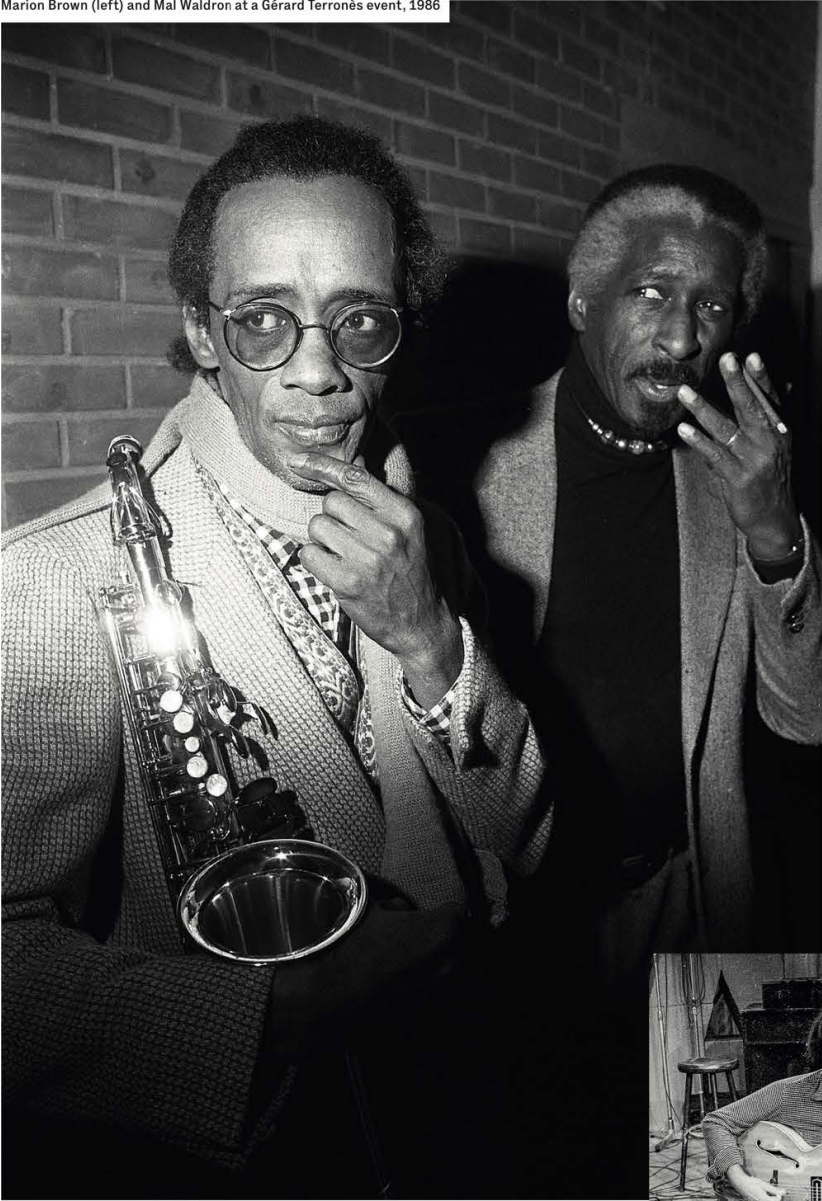


Guy Le Querrec (Tabar-Nouval); Christian Ducasse (Rivers); Gérard Rouy (Shepp)

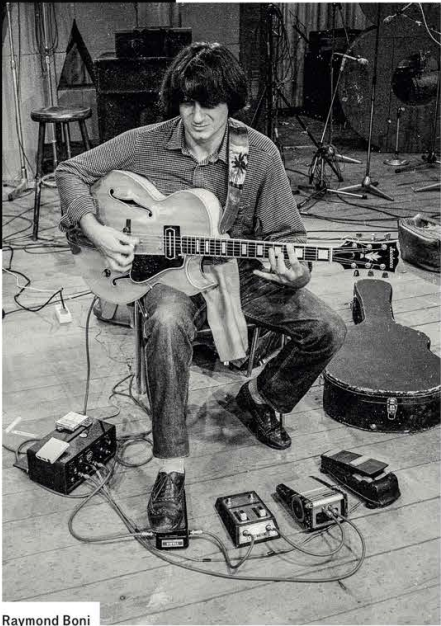


Alain Tabar-Nouval (left) and Henri Texier, 1967

Marion Brown (left) and Mal Waldron at a Gérard Terronès event, 1986



François Tusques



Raymond Boni

Christian Ducasse (Brown and Waldron); Gérard Rouy (Boni, Tusques)

music, a mélomane [music lover]. He was quite timid, a big smoker of Gauloise and with time, when his hat came into being, he sort of hid from the world, under his hat and behind his cigarette, watching his musical life develop."

Gérard's first ventures in releasing records sprung from this space; a tape of the Phillips trio inaugurated his Futura label. He had learned the basics of record production from an unlikely source: someone who went by the name of Georges Mark and lived a nomadic existence. He had just returned from Algeria, where he had put together a small label, Timgad. Mark, Terronès's elder by 20 years, had been involved in the Hot Clubs, played piano with American musicians, and seemed to have lived many lives. He insisted on the need to document the unique scene emerging at Gill's.

When Phillips later returned with John Surman, the club was undergoing a mutation. Previously, it had operated in the rather conventional way, featuring soloists such as Singer, Waldron, Jamaican trumpeter Dizzy Reece, or former Blue Note regular Hank Mobley, then in the doldrums because of drug and contractual problems. Backing was provided by local rhythm sections, most importantly the trios of Georges Arvanitas and Kessler; French hard bop musicians like Alain Hatot and Michel Roques were also booked. But in 1970, Gill's began to provide club work to important free jazz musicians such as Pierre Favre, Joachim Kühn, Tusques and Steve Lacy. For a while, Mondays were dedicated to Claude Cagnasso's big band, after the example set by New York's Village Vanguard.

The Terronès' management of Gill's ended later that same year, amid disagreements with the owner over low turnouts. By this time the basis for the Futura ricochet was already firmly in place. Indeed the label formed one of the most extreme examples of Gérard's eclecticism, its 40-plus titles recorded between 1970–73 evading easy categorisation. Yet their mostly black and white album covers – with hazy pictures or drawings – confer a common air of mystery.

As with his later Marge label, Gérard believed in producing records that served a purpose, rather than the pursuit of masterpieces; these records would help the young musicians featured on them to get bookings. Or they captured something of value that no other microphones would have ever picked up. Collectively, with a rare consistency, the records on Futura document a flurry of under the radar activity from the fascinating interstices of the Parisian scene.

Music can take strange detours on the road to posterity. Two series of records on Futura stand in stark contrast to the rest of the catalogue: those filed under the label's RED and SON catalogue numbers, reserved for rock and experimental music. The former included French underground group Red Noise, featuring Patrick Vian, son of the writer Boris Vian, as well as the notoriously obscure Fille Qui Mousse. No group or musician in French underground music was ever far away from Futura. Some 40 years, this strand would form the basis of a later reissue programme by the label and record shop Souffle Continu.

Futura formed part of an informal international network of independent labels then emerging across Europe. In the UK, Evan Parker and Derek Bailey were documenting their work on Incus. "For a few years I ran a parallel operation which I called Incus Imports,"

recalls Parker. "In addition to Futura, I also imported ICP, JCOA, FMP, Open Sky and other musician owned and controlled labels."

Tellingly, Futura is often mentioned in the same sentence as musician-run operations. Meanwhile Gérard was starting to import like-minded labels himself. In the racks of The Jazz & Pop Center, a shop he ran between 1972–75, you would find early ECM, Calig and Strata-East titles, as well as self-produced material from musicians such as Gunter Hampel, Clifford Thornton, or Ted Daniel.

The most important thing about Futura perhaps sounds like a tautology: it was and continued to be a jazz label. At the time, certain elements of jazz were being shunted from their previously central position, but however free it became, Futura music remained anchored to its historical jazz and blues lineage.

By the late 70s Gérard had a new venture. "Stuck between a small pool supplied with hot water and uninterrupted background music, a bowling alley, a plastic skating rink... The Totem... is the chic bar – thick wall to wall carpet – without which the Parisian complex pompously called The Stadium would be seriously incomplete." This is how a jazz magazine of the era greeted this new club. Successful concerts, notably by Archie Shepp, had led to an offer to use the deserted bar area of The Stadium, a sports and leisure complex embedded beneath newly erected housing towers. This was close to where Trou Noir existed a few years later, and "close to where the Panhard car factories had been located", recalls Michel Edelin. "My father had been a worker there, as had been bassist Beb Guérin's father. As parts of the factories had been demolished to build The Stadium, Beb and I imagined that it was where our fathers used to work, and every time we met at Totem, we drank to them."

Starting in late 1977, Gérard took over the 200 seat bar overlooking the rink. As the strange case of Jazz Unité made clear, whatever the context, he was not a man to compromise on the music he presented. One of the first notable gigs was the Parisian premiere of David Murray, then a 22 year old tenor player with a reputation as a remarkable loft player.

To make a music business viable, club managers have to fine-tune a wide range of variables. Here, Gérard adopted a new programming policy. Rather than following the traditional model of booking musicians for weeklong stints, he presented different ensembles on a nightly basis, a formula that's become standard practice today. He now had a wellspring of independent music to choose from, and the music largely reflected the multidirectional legacy of early free jazz. But what remained was his openness toward a large variety of styles, ranging from the music of gospel based organ player Jerome Van Jones to Sam Rivers's trios. The often economically nonsensical big band format was a regular presence – Raymond Boni's improvisors, Didier Levallet's orchestra – even as the times saw the development of cheaper unconventional line-ups. But these too were present at Totem: John Tchicai's sax duets and quartets, a solo set from Marion Brown, saddened by the empty chairs in the club.

A few months in, former critics such as the writer quoted above started to warm to the place. But mention of low turnouts became a regular feature in concert reviews, a reminder that musical

intransigence and dislike of gimmicky advertising are not a viable combination. Totem's run ended in 1979 – a salutary reminder that failure goes with the territory when promoting the new thing.

There are many more strands to Gérard Terronès's story; his work at an incarnation of *Jazz Hot* whose editor got jailed for political activities; the 1975 Mouffettard and Massy festivals; concerts organised all over Paris; long tours by Max Roach, Roy Haynes, Shepp, and others. And Marge Records, which used his hat as a logo, home to sounds spanning Abdelhaï Bennani's cellar to shouts celebrating Obama's victory on a tribute to Albert Ayler.

Not all of his projects were long-lived. But musical scenes are subject to their own forces of gravity – they have centres and peripheries, but when activity at the margins remains dense for long enough, a critical mass is attained. The history of music at these margins is more a matter of unfinished successes than sustained ascendancy. Most importantly, that density is formed by human interaction. Without a great number of musicians and other figures, some but not all of them named here, there would be no history to be observed.

Everything for Terronès started with clubs, and that's where it ended. During his life, he organised a number of tributes to deceased friends: saxophonist Jo Maka, Jimi Hendrix devotee Dominique Gaumont, Georges Mark, Jean-Pierre Patillot. Shortly after his death from cancer in March 2017, a spontaneous homage took place at La Java, the historic Paris ballroom where Édith Piaf and Django Reinhardt had once played, and the last venue where Terronès had organised concerts. The Futura Experience, a group conceived by Terronès and guitarist Jean-François Pauvros, something of a best kept secret in Paris, convened one more time under the low ceiling, going through the repertoire it had honed there. The event featured Charles Mingus's "Fables Of Faubus", an Abdullah Ibrahim composition, and a version of Ornette Coleman's "Lonely Woman" built around singer Leïla Martial's gripping wordless vocals.

On a cold December Sunday, another tribute, coordinated by trombonist François Lemonnier, unfolded at the Sunset-Sunside, near Les Halles in the centre of Paris. Very quickly, it became clear that even a dual club such as this one wasn't enough to contain all the music that needed to be played that day. More than 70 musicians successively took to the bandstand in various formations. As drummer Noel McGhie – one of the last artists to have recorded for Marge – puts it, "Gérard played a big part in the career of a lot of musicians. Gérard is a monster jazz organiser, and a helper of musicians. The people who were there last night, they were not just anybody. They were people who count in the music business. And Gérard counts a lot for us." Without any notion of a star system, the musicians sat among the audience, listening to their colleagues – Peeter Uuskyla watched François Tusques's introspective piano solo, Tusques listened to François Jeanneau's rendition of "Lush Life." No long speeches – just music of the type that can be heard in a city when there are people prepared to invest the consuming energy necessary to its existence. It was fitting. □ Thanks to Marc Chaloin, Olivier Ledure, Craig A Schiffert, Thierry Trombert and Jason Weiss