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The Biographical Encyclopedia Of Jazz



Synopsis

Do you want to know when Duke Ellington was king of The Cotton Club? Have you ever wondered how old Miles Davis was when he got his first trumpet? From birth dates to gig dates and from recordings to television specials, Leonard Feather and Ira Gitler have left no stone unturned in their quest for accurate, detailed information on the careers of 3,300 jazz musicians from around the world. We learn that Duke Ellington worked his magic at The Cotton Club from 1927 to 1931, and that on Miles Davis's thirteenth birthday, his father gave him his first trumpet. Jazz is fast moving, and this edition clearly and concisely maps out an often dizzying web of professional associations. We find, for instance, that when Miles Davis was a St. Louis teenager he encountered Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie for the first time. This meeting proved fateful, and by 1945 a nineteen-year-old Davis had left Juilliard to play with Parker on 52nd Street. Knowledge of these professional alliances, along with the countless others chronicled in this book, are central to tracing the development of significant jazz movements, such as the "cool jazz" that became one of Miles Davis's hallmarks. Arranged alphabetically according to last name, each entry of this book chronologically lists the highlights of every jazz musician's career. Highly accessible and vigorously researched, The Biographical Encyclopedia of Jazz is, quite simply, the most comprehensive jazz encyclopedia available.

Book Information

Hardcover: 744 pages

Publisher: Oxford University Press; Subsequent edition (November 18, 1999)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0195074181

ISBN-13: 978-0195074185

Product Dimensions: 10.2 x 2 x 7.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 3.6 pounds

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars 5 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,014,448 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #105 in [Books > Reference > Writing, Research & Publishing Guides > Publishing & Books > Bibliographies & Indexes > Music](#) #1177 in [Books > Reference > Encyclopedias & Subject Guides > Music](#) #1301 in [Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Musical Genres > Jazz](#)

Customer Reviews

The Biographical Encyclopedia of Jazz series was Leonard Feather's franchise for decades,

providing fans with large-format books that featured photos of jazzers and short bios detailing their background and recordings. When Feather passed away in 1994, though, his editorial partner Ira Gitler was left with the task of completing this new edition, then four years in development. It's much different from Feather's earlier volumes--The Encyclopedia of Jazz in the 60s, for example--opting for an all-text coverage and a standard-size hardcover, emphasizing perhaps the book's inarguable value as a reference. For historical purposes, the book is vastly important, giving extremely concise rundowns of musicians' lives--so concise, in fact, that most multisyllabic words are abbreviated. For contemporary players, though, especially Europeans, the volume is spotty. Trumpeter Joe Morris, who wrote "Punch & Judy" and played throughout the 1940s and '50s with Johnny Griffin, Elmo Hope, and others is certainly important. But what of the living Joe Morris, who's not a mainstream player but who nonetheless possesses amazing skills that reach at least as far as his predecessor? And while trumpet virtuoso Michael Philip Mossman is here, where is John Zorn? This isn't nitpicking on the mainstream so much as it is recognizing that books like Jazz: The Rough Guide have stepped up to address the skimpy coverage of living, thriving musicians. Having said all that, it's vital to note Gitler and Feather's strengths: they've canvassed the past thoroughly, reaching to Italy to include reed dynamo Gianluigi Trovesi and pianist Giorgio Gaslini (but not trumpeter Pino Minafra or saxophonist Carlo Actis Dato). They've also caught key players from the early 20th century and from the peak bebop and hard bop eras, as well as the 1970s, when the avant-garde and fusion reigned in an oddly shaped jazz world. But these biographies were always Feather's and Gitler's strengths, making earlier by-decade editions of the Encyclopedia so important. --Andrew Bartlett

This updated version comes 23 years after Feather and Gitler's Encyclopedia of Jazz in the Seventies, itself a follow-up to the Encyclopedia of Jazz (published in the 1950s) and the Encyclopedia of Jazz in the Sixties. The older encyclopedias were heavily consulted standard reference tools, and this publication is sure to follow suit. Beware of two drawbacks, however: the editors neglect many musicians, often still active, who have worked in the field over the past 30-plus years, and many foreign musicians. For example, one misses multi-instrumentalist Milo Fine, who has been recording since 1969; most of his recordings are easily available, and he continues performing to this day. Musicians as varied as Richard Tabnik, Myra Melford, Matt Turner, Ahmed Abdullah, and Don Messina are also ignored. Including a few foreign musicians doesn't do justice to the hundreds of others left out. The Italian jazz scene alone could easily support 100 entries. There are no excuses for these failings, although many other works, e.g., All Music Guide to Jazz (Miller

Freeman, 1998. 3d ed.) has the same frustrating problems. In addition, CDs are listed by label, and over 400 abbreviations allow the text to be condensed at the expense of a smooth narrative (users of the older Encyclopedias are familiar with this scheme). Still, what is included in this book is very useful. The citations give accurate basic background on musicians from the 1920s onward. Recommended, despite its shortcomings, for public and academic libraries, especially those supporting strong music collections; readers looking for a more complete listing of jazz musicians should see "The European Free Improvisation Pages" (www.shef.ac.uk/misc/rec/ps/efi/ehome.html). A William Kenz, Moorhead State Univ. Lib., MN Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

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Factual and loaded with historical information...Recommended!

great info source!

Back in the mid-1960s, as a high schooler just discovering jazz, I found a copy of Feather's "Encyclopedia of Jazz (1960)

As a librarian, I can't begin to explain the value of this volume for use by students and other patrons wanting concise but informative biographical information on jazz musicians -- a very popular topic for school reports. The entries may be short, but they are complete, and can serve as a starting point for further research.

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