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Jazz: A History Of America's Music



Synopsis

The companion volume to the ten-part PBS TV series by the team responsible for *The Civil War* and *Baseball*. Continuing in the tradition of their critically acclaimed works, Geoffrey C. Ward and Ken Burns vividly bring to life the story of the quintessential American music—jazz. Born in the black community of turn-of-the-century New Orleans but played from the beginning by musicians of every color, jazz celebrates all Americans at their best. Here are the stories of the extraordinary men and women who made the music: Louis Armstrong, the fatherless waif whose unrivaled genius helped turn jazz into a soloist's art and influenced every singer, every instrumentalist who came after him; Duke Ellington, the pampered son of middle-class parents who turned a whole orchestra into his personal instrument, wrote nearly two thousand pieces for it, and captured more of American life than any other composer. Bix Beiderbecke, the doomed cornet prodigy who showed white musicians that they too could make an important contribution to the music; Benny Goodman, the immigrants' son who learned the clarinet to help feed his family, but who grew up to teach a whole country how to dance; Billie Holiday, whose distinctive style routinely transformed mediocre music into great art; Charlie Parker, who helped lead a musical revolution, only to destroy himself at thirty-four; and Miles Davis, whose search for fresh ways to sound made him the most influential jazz musician of his generation, and then led him to abandon jazz altogether. Buddy Bolden, Jelly Roll Morton, Dizzy Gillespie, Art Tatum, Count Basie, Dave Brubeck, Artie Shaw, and Ella Fitzgerald are all here; so are Sidney Bechet, Coleman Hawkins, Lester Young, John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, and a host of others. But Jazz is more than mere biography. The history of the music echoes the history of twentieth-century America. Jazz provided the background for the giddy era that F. Scott Fitzgerald called the Jazz Age. The irresistible pulse of big-band swing lifted the spirits and boosted American morale during the Great Depression and World War II. The virtuosic, demanding style called bebop mirrored the stepped-up pace and dislocation that came with peace. During the Cold War era, jazz served as a propaganda weapon—and forged links with the burgeoning counterculture. The story of jazz encompasses the story of American courtship and show business; the epic growth of great cities—New Orleans and Chicago, Kansas City and New York—and the struggle for civil rights and simple justice that continues into the new millennium. Visually stunning, with more than five hundred photographs, some never before published, this book, like the music it chronicles, is an exploration—and a celebration—of the American experiment.

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Customer Reviews

First off, let's get the kudos down: Geoffrey C. Ward and Ken Burns deserve far more than simple gratitude for bringing jazz to the limelight with this lavishly illustrated volume. The book features among its 500-plus pictures many of the previously unseen shots of musicians and venues glimpsed in Burns's 10-part documentary, *Jazz*. (See our [Ken Burns Jazz Store](#) for the lowdown on the series.) *Jazz: An Illustrated History* follows the film episode by episode, and it's filled with rich historical detail in the early chapters. Like the series, however, the book trails off after a certain point in chronicling jazz's history. It gives background aplenty on early New Orleans music, the migration of jazz up the Mississippi to major urban centers, and the developments of swing and bebop. After bebop, the history gets a bit perfunctory. Dozens of major figures get mere sidebar coverage. Little is said of substance on Latin or Brazilian jazz, European contributions to the music, fusion, or umpteen smaller deviations from the mainstream. There are wonderful essays that highlight elements of jazz culture, particularly Gerald Early's consideration of race and white musicians in jazz and Gary Giddins's five-page essay on avant jazz. And there are fine sidebars as well. But developments during and after the 1960s are dealt with primarily in impressionistic guest essays rather than detail-oriented historical narrative. It is, of course, difficult to capture all jazz history in any single volume. So perhaps this ought to have been called *Jazz: A Historical Appreciation*, since the hundreds of images certainly create an intense sense of the music's milieu. --Andrew Bartlett

A companion volume to the new Burns and Ward documentaryDa 19-hour, 10-episode series set to air on PBS in January, 2001Dthis lavishly illustrated history describes the evolution of jazz during

the 20th century, focusing on the careers of a key players like Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis and Benny Goodman. In his introduction to the massive volume, Burns writes that his decision to make Jazz was inspired by a comment made by Gerald Early, a writer he interviewed for the authors' last documentary, Baseball. "Two thousand years from now," Early said, "there will only be three things that Americans will be known for: The Constitution, baseball and jazz music." Burns admits he knew next to nothing about jazz before deciding to create "the most comprehensive treatment of jazz ever committed to film," and there lies the work's Achilles' heel. Burns has his conclusion that jazz is a metaphor for the United States firmly in hand before he begins to know his subject. This smugness translates into a rather tepid, conservative view of jazz. Not every subject or musician can be touched upon in one book; however, it does seem strange that such a sweepingly titled volume does not touch upon the musical roots of jazz, e.g. Africa's talking drums, or mention the Lockbourne Airforce Base, where many noted black jazz musicians received training. The entire 40-year period from 1960 forward is relegated to a single chapter, a rather pronounced statement about how the authors feel about more recent achievements. More than 500 illustrations and photos. (Nov. 6) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.

This is an amazing book about New Orleans and the history of jazz. I am mesmerized by reading about the truly American art form. I recommend this book for its story of the roots of jazz and the great musicians who make Jazz all that Great.

I came across a copy in a fantastic 3rd wave coffee shop in Portsmouth NH. Flipping thru a few pages and I knew "I just had to have it". I was fortunate to get a used one in great shape. Beautifully produced, highly informative. No, I didn't get a chance to see the film.

Arrived Early--Arrived as described, or perhaps better than described__Book Appears like new. I have this item on CD-Rom but there is nothing like a nice warm book at bedtime....

This book completes the circle of Ken Burns' research and the filming of Jazz. If you love Jazz, or are just learning about it; I find this tome an essential piece of American musicana. It was most useful for me when I used it as I watched the Jazz series yet again after receiving this gift. I could stop the disc, look up something in the book, and then move forward with the film. Another 5-star effort from Ken Burns and the staff that works with him.

Book pages were yellow and smelled of mildew. All in all, hippo books generally sells good books and offers good service. I suppose a disappointing purchase once in a blue moon is to be expected.

So glad i got a used one. Its basically in perfect condition and soooo much cheaper than brand new. Its a gift for my bf. Cant wait to give it to him. Thank you!!!

It is a very comprehensive and resourceful reference about jazz.

Great companion to DVD set.

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