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# Keeping Time: Readings In Jazz History



## Synopsis

Drawing from contemporary journalism, reviews, program notes, memoirs, interviews, and other sources, *Keeping Time: Readings in Jazz History* brings to life the controversies and critical issues that have accompanied every moment of jazz history. Highlighting the significance of jazz as a complex and consequential social practice as well as an art form, this book presents a multitude of ways in which people have understood and cared about jazz. It records a history not of style changes but of values, meanings, and sensibilities. Featuring sixty-two thought-provoking chapters, this unique volume gives voice to a wide range of perspectives, stressing different reactions to and uses of jazz, both within and across communities. It offers contributions from well-known figures including Jelly Roll Morton, Billie Holiday, Charles Mingus, Wynton Marsalis, Louis Armstrong, Dizzy Gillespie, and Miles Davis; from renowned writers such as Langston Hughes, Norman Mailer, and Ralph Ellison; and from critics including Leonard Feather and Gunther Schuller. Walser has selected writings that capture the passionate reactions of people who have loved, hated, supported, and argued about jazz. Organized chronologically, *Keeping Time* covers nearly 100 years of jazz history. Filled with insightful writing, it aims to increase historical awareness, to provoke critical thinking, and to encourage lively classroom discussion as students relive the tangled and conflicted story of jazz. It enables readers to see that jazz is not just about names, dates, and chords, but rather about issues and ideas, cultural activities, and experiences that have affected people deeply in a great variety of ways. Concise headnotes provide historical context for each selection and point out issues for thinking and discussion. An excellent text for a variety of jazz courses, *Keeping Time* can serve as supplementary reading in popular music, American Studies, African American studies, history, and sociology courses, and will also appeal to anyone interested in jazz.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

These two compilations take very different approaches to understanding jazz. *Keeping Time* is a fairly traditional documentary history, using newspaper and magazine articles, interviews, and excerpts from autobiographies and secondary accounts. After explaining the early years of the music, Walser, chair of musicology at UCLA, provides fascinating material dealing with the jazz age in the 1920s, swing in the Thirties, and bebop in the Forties. The book is less convincing on the hard-bop 1950s, provides very little information on the avant-garde in the next decade, and largely ignores Seventies fusion. It ends with an excellent outline of the Wynton Marsalis-led return to traditionalism in the 1980s and a more general, less satisfying examination of jazz today. *The Jazz Cadence of America* attempts to show the reciprocal effects of jazz and American culture on each other. After dealing with definitions of "jazz," O'Meally (*American literature*, Columbia; *Lady Day: The Many Faces of Billie Holiday*, LJ 11/1/91) traces the place of jazz in American society; the influence of the music on painting, architecture, photography, film, and dance; jazz history from different perspectives; and the impact of jazz on literature. Some sections provide fascinating insights into the relationship of jazz to the other arts, especially painting and literature. However, the book seldom shows the connection between jazz and American society or the effect of other aspects of American culture on jazz. Despite obvious flaws, *The Jazz Cadence* offers an innovative approach to understanding jazz within a larger social context. Complementing each other with little overlap, these two compilations are recommended as classroom texts. ?David P. Szatmary, Univ. of Washington, Seattle Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

"An impressive achievement. The introductions to the excerpts alone provide a fascinating mini-history of jazz that ranges through a wider variety of topics than many full-scale histories."--Gary Tomlinson, Professor of Music, University of Pennsylvania "What a terrific collection. I hadn't realized how desperately I needed it until I started to read it. I used it in a jazz intro survey class and found it invaluable, as did the students."-- James McCalla, Professor of Music, Bowdoin College "Excellent and sometimes provocative readings in jazz history; an important addition to the curriculum." --Brian Torff, Fairfield University "My students love this book. It puts them

in touch with the time period like no other book I've seen. It's an excellent discussion starter for jazz history and American music classes."--Reed Gratz, University of La Verne, CA"A fascinating look at how critics, writers and musicians wrote about jazz from its earliest years through the '90s."--Newark Star-Ledger"Walser provides fascinating material dealing with the jazz age in the 1920's, swing in the Thirties, and bebop in the Forties."--David P. Szatmary,Library Journal"An informative collection of primary source material. From quotations to important essays, [it] will aid the study of jazz history."--Brian Fitzpatrick, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts"Very informed, well written reading."--Bill Stanford Pincheon, Washington State University"Superb collection. As a jazz historian who has worked his way through quantities of interesting documents, I appreciate the care and range that Walser demonstrates."--David W. Stone, Michigan State University

I bought this for a jazz history class at Columbia University. I really appreciated this book because it had the original writings of and interviews with the people we were studying in class, giving us a rare look at the things they thought about and went through at the time. I even enjoyed reading this outside of the assigned chapters. If you're interested in jazz history at all, you might be interested in reading this book.

A big thank you to Robert Walser for including my chapter on The Nordic Tone in Jazz to what is an indispensable reference book for fans and scholars alike

This book is a collection of various writings by different authors (some musicians, some musical/industry professionals) on all different musicians and the evolution of Jazz. Not just a history of Jazz. Good reading and lots of information.

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An excellent supplement to narrative or recorded jazz histories. Organized chronologically, the collection of readings is quite easy to read and offers a variety of viewpoints (musicians, interviews, critical essays, reviews, etc.) that highlight major attitudes and trends in jazz history. Walser begins each article with a brief but excellent introduction that locates each reading historically and elucidates the important critical questions that the reading poses, all without ever sounding preachy. (I only give 4 stars simply because it's a collection of older writings; for what it is, it's great.)

This is a useful book in the college classroom and a rewarding read for the jazz lover. Why only 3 stars? Well, for all its scholarly rigor, it has some frustrating qualities too. It seems clear now that bebop was the pivotal development in jazz history -- not quite erasing everything that came before, but more or less defining jazz aesthetics on an institutional level from then on. But search this book for contemporary accounts of bop in the 1940s and you'll come up short. Ross Russell, bop's propagandist-in-chief, looms over the proceedings like a ghost: his own constantly-quoted writings are absent. The controversy over the "new thing" in the 1960s is even more sketchily registered. Just three entries cover the whole period. We get Amiri Baraka's "Jazz and the White Critic," but no strong sense of its context -- no Philip Larkin, no John Tynan on Coltrane and Dolphy's "anti-jazz." We also get the fascinating Playboy "Jazz Summit Meeting," which sets George Russell and Charles Mingus next to Stan Kenton and Dave Brubeck, and this rare piece somewhat makes up for the missing material. One thing I find frustrating about the book is the way it tries to paper over gaps with later reconstructions. This may be OK when it's excerpts from Sidney Bechet's autobiography covering the pre-recordings era in New Orleans, but to me it's less OK when a \*very\* 1980s-style "reading" of women's blues lyrics is stuck in the middle of a chapter on the 1920s as if it's a contemporary account. Since the chapters on "The Nineties" and "The Second Century" are full of pieces on jazz from the past (including one by the editor on Miles Davis), why does this article -- and a later (very interesting) one by Sherrie Tucker -- get treated like it transcends its historical moment? That don't sound like "keeping time" to me. These kinds of inconsistencies of editorial treatment pop up throughout the book. Sometimes the editor wants to fight with his sources in footnotes, sometimes he leaves dubious statements standing. It doesn't suggest any particular politics, really (there's no "bias" here), just...well...inconsistency. If this book were a drummer, you'd complain that it keeps missing the beat.

While a student in Professor Walser's Jazz class at UCLA, I was one of several students lucky enough to have read every chapter before it made it to press. Every chapter was like a time machine, transporting us back in time to an era where racism and sexism took a toll on some musicians while only strengthening the resolve of others. This book was, at the time, one of the best readings I had done in a long time. In reading direct quotes from the greats of music, you couldn't help but feel a bit inspired. "Keeping in Time" is a gem and should be assigned reading to anyone studying jazz or just wanting to learn more about the many performers who played or sang that one song you liked differently. Professor Walser certainly knows his subject matter well. And in my case, he certainly excelled in the one thing he likes to do: teach.

We used this book in our graduate seminar on jazz. It was so interesting that even before class started I had finished reading the book. Many topics are discussed (roots of jazz, definitions of jazz, hip vs square, future of jazz), many important historical articles are reprinted, many major musicians are interviewed and quoted, and each writing is preceded by a clear explanation by the author of the issues discussed. The selection of topics, the breadth of knowledge given, and the flow of the book, are what make it great.

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