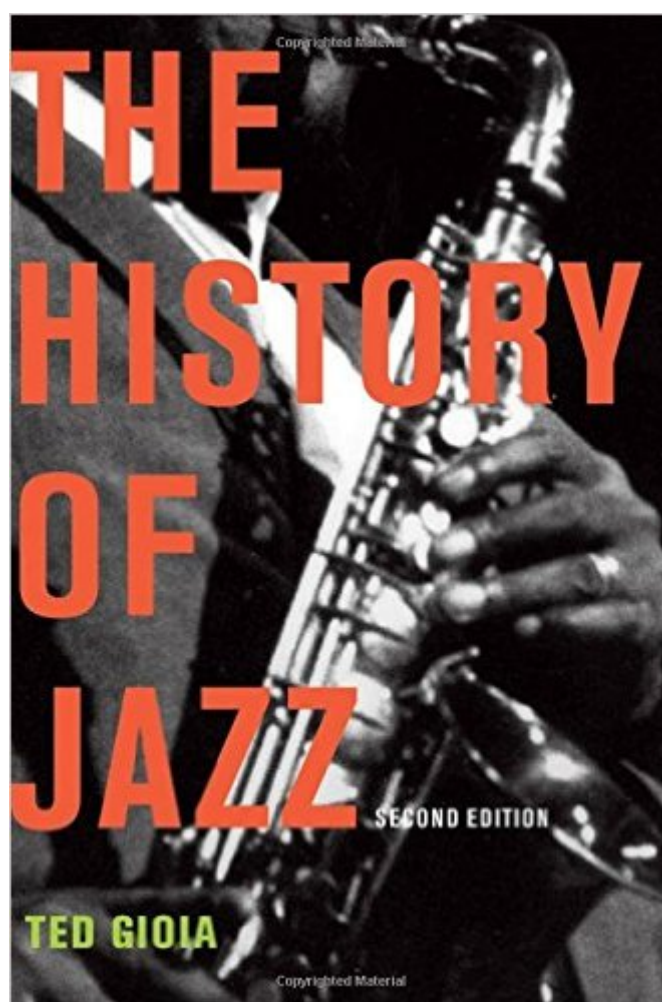


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The History Of Jazz



Synopsis

Ted Gioia's *History of Jazz* has been universally hailed as a classic--acclaimed by jazz critics and fans around the world. Now Gioia brings his magnificent work completely up-to-date, drawing on the latest research and revisiting virtually every aspect of the music, past and present. Gioia tells the story of jazz as it had never been told before, in a book that brilliantly portrays the legendary jazz players, the breakthrough styles, and the world in which it evolved. Here are the giants of jazz and the great moments of jazz history--Jelly Roll Morton, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington at the Cotton Club, cool jazz greats such as Gerry Mulligan, Stan Getz, and Lester Young, Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie's advocacy of modern jazz in the 1940s, Miles Davis's 1955 performance at the Newport Jazz Festival, Ornette Coleman's experiments with atonality, Pat Metheny's visionary extension of jazz-rock fusion, the contemporary sounds of Wynton Marsalis, and the post-modernists of the current day. Gioia provides the reader with lively portraits of these and many other great musicians, intertwined with vibrant commentary on the music they created. He also evokes the many worlds of jazz, taking the reader to the swamp lands of the Mississippi Delta, the bawdy houses of New Orleans, the rent parties of Harlem, the speakeasies of Chicago during the Jazz Age, the after hours spots of corrupt Kansas city, the Cotton Club, the Savoy, and the other locales where the history of jazz was made. And as he traces the spread of this protean form, Gioia provides much insight into the social context in which the music was born.

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Customer Reviews

A fantastic read. Ted Gioia gives an accurate and unbiased history of jazz. Unlike most other histories (and much of Ken Burns documentary), this book avoids many of the "myth" elements of jazz history. I really appreciated the importance he placed on the West Coast movement, which has had a long history of being ignored. You can tell he is passionate about this issue, and I plan on reading his history of west coast jazz next. He also does a great job at giving credit to many overlooked musicians, and does his best to judge controversial figures like Paul Whiteman or Dave Brubeck on their music, rather than what every other jazz historian has written about them. I would not recommend this book if you don't have a basic understanding of jazz history. You should already know all about Miles, Trane, Bird, Diz before starting this book or it will seem like a barrage of unfamiliar names. Also - as a warning, Gioia has a tendency to get on scholarly tangents - i.e. mention someone as being "falstaffian" or "Dionysian". I personally didn't mind it - but be warned that this book reads very much like a lecture from a grad school professor. One more thing I would highly recommend: it takes some extra time, but I kept a pair of headphones and Spotify nearby while reading and made sure to listen to every musical example he cited throughout the book. Sure you can talk about a Louis Armstrong trumpet break that changed the course of jazz, but it's much easier to listen in order to understand....

Having taken up jazz as a hobby in my early forties, I've had a lot of catching up to do, not only from the standpoint of learning jazz and how to play it, but understanding what it is, where it came from, and where it is going so that I can make my jazz performances work within the context of the art form. This is not easy at my age (over 50 now) and meager talent level. I'm happy to say, though, that Ted Gioia's book, *The History of Jazz*, has really helped me fill in some gaps in my jazz education, so that I am once again inspired to continue my musical education, both as a player and a jazz writer. Mr. Gioia's history is thorough and well thought through. Like any good history book, it follows the chronology of its subject matter faithfully, but what the author excels at is giving a taste of where the present or past will lead, as well as why and how it will get there. Then, when you reach the new material, the new artists, the new performers and the new types of jazz, you have a very real understanding of what happened, what had to happen, and who made it happen. I've often thought that a timeline showing the various artists' relationships to one another - who played with who, when, and for how long - would be one of the most constructive tools to understanding jazz (I even went so far as to begin constructing my own), and Mr. Gioia's book comes quite close to being a literal (if not visual) timeline very much along those lines. That's what really makes this book worth reading, but it doesn't stop there. Of course, this book is about recorded music, and you can't

understand any history of music without knowing the players, the songs, the albums, the performances, the venues, even minutiae like the producers and the hall owners, not to mention the life and culture of the times, to gain a full understanding of the music. Again, Mr. Gioia excels in this area and he gives the reader plenty of guidance on the recordings that will make the music, and its history, come to life. (One of the best guides in this department is the *The Penguin Guide to Jazz Recordings: Eighth Edition*, but that isn't a book you can just sit down and read.) If you're like me, however, and have assembled a modicum of historic jazz recordings, you will appreciate Mr. Gioia's guidance on what to listen to, given the historical context that he provides. Some of this is provided in liner notes of the actual recordings, and other publications, but in this increasingly digital age, serious students of jazz will appreciate the author's listening suggestions and background information. He even provides a unique "Discography" as an appendix, which more concisely outlines the most historic recordings, and the book's index provides enough insight and references to make it also workable as a "highlight guide". And finally, there is the music. I couldn't think of a single musician that he may have excluded or a major story that may have been edited out. The good the bad and the ugly are covered with enough philosophical awareness to make the history real without overplaying the sordid aspects that many "poor us" jazz aficionados are wont to exaggerate. Sure the history of jazz is full of racism, drug use, and burn-brightly-and-burn-out-quickly musicians, but those aren't the things that define jazz to its practitioners and fans. This book is about understanding the music, not just its history, but what it meant as it developed, what it means now, and how it impacts the future of the genre. Even as I was reaching the end of the book, no sooner would I think of an artist or contributor whose name I hadn't read in the book yet, than Mr. Gioia would eventually touch on them. Even on the second last page, I was thinking "well, still no mention of African jazz" than Mr. Gioia covered Abdullah Ibrahim and his work. Truly, this is as thorough a history of jazz, right up to modern times, that any reader could want. Mr. Gioia has written an exceptional book. If you were to force a complaint out of me, it would be that the author's sections and chapters are excessively long, leaving very little "rest" spaces between chapters and headings, forcing a casual reader (and even a less casual reader) to read through long sections to get to a logical break point, but when you are writing as thorough and detailed a work as this, it is a small price to pay for completeness and accuracy. Also, Mr. Gioia's writing is very high quality and his vocabulary extensive, and he uses both with precision and grace, or with audacity and spunk, as the narrative demands. There is always something interesting to find on the next page or in the next paragraph, making this a reading pleasure. I can't say enough about this five star book other than, I wish I had come across it earlier in my education.

Some people take on projects that, while possible to accomplish, are impossible to accomplish perfectly. Ted Gioia, a veteran musician and scholar, released this "second edition" of his jazz history about a year ago, updating his original work from a decade earlier. Look what he took on: "Present a history of an American musical form that is a century old, complicated by prejudice and poverty and wide variations of creativity, commercialism and rebellion, involving dozens of instruments, thousands of artists, and in many cases songs that can be performed at various lengths with one to 30 musicians and recorded between the 1920's and the turn of the 21st century. And by the way, do it in less than 400 pages of narrative." How the hell does one organize such a project in a way that will not just enlighten most interested readers, but keep from boring them if they only care about the music and artists most prevalent in only one or two of the ten decades examined? Well, Mr. Gioia is not universally successful, of course. For me, a casual jazz fan for the past 50 years, I have a fair amount of interest in the early years of the form, a huge interest in the way it went between 1946 and '66, and very little interest in the state of jazz over the past 30 years. Other readers will approach the book with opposite enthusiasms or indifferences. I would give his ten chapters "star" ratings of one to five for readability, based on my life experience with the music, while for the purposes of teaching readers how jazz came to be, and what it once was, and what it became, and where it seems to be heading, all his chapters deserve a high ranking. How would YOU organize such a task? You cannot stay strictly chronologic, since Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong and some others had careers of five to six decades. You cannot give each of the 100 years of jazz only four pages. Some years likely deserve a few paragraphs, some ten pages. Mr. Gioia is roughly chronological, except for following the big stars into their full careers once he first mentions them. Therefore, this book is one you will read more for knowledge than for pleasure. I am totally non-musical, only a diehard fan, and some of the musical references were beyond my understanding. I bought this at a bookstore, and paid the cover price, and I don't regret it. Having finished it, however, I see no reason to keep it in my personal collection. Instead, I'll continue listening to favorites like Miles, Monk, 'Trane, Modern Jazz Quartet, Ella, Brubeck, Bill Evans, Tal Farlow, Armstrong, Ellington, Mingus, Glenn Miller, Goodman, Jimmy Giuffre, Charlie Haden, Peggy Lee, Diana Krall, Gene Ammons, George Shearing, Art Pepper, Sonny Rollins, Herbie Mann, and others. Each is at least mentioned in the big book under discussion. And as I listen, I'll know just a bit more how each fits into the hundred years of jazz.

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