

JAZZ

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A CRITICAL HISTORY

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JAZZ

ISSUES

A CRITICAL HISTORY



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ISSUES

Preface

Jazz *Issues* offers a comprehensive look at the critical issues that have shaped the jazz tradition. The text offers both a chronological survey of jazz with guided listening examples, as well as more involved topical chapters. The first part of the text is designed to provide readers not familiar with jazz history with an appropriate overview before the following historical topics are explored. Readers who feel the overview is unnecessary may opt to skip to the topics themselves. Because the topics are self-contained historical threads, readers can take them in any order they wish or follow the general chronology presented in the text itself.

The historical topics follow ongoing evolutionary lines that reveal the musical and cultural forces that emerge and recede and the influence they exert on the developing jazz tradition. The text is meant to be provocative. Open-ended questions are posed that encourage the reader to explore the many crosscurrents that have both shaped jazz and placed it firmly in American culture. *Jazz Issues* approaches jazz from the context of historical criticism. The macro-issues of a developing art form are central concerns for this study. It is the intent of this text to present critically the context in which the creators and listeners of jazz operate. Although the history of jazz has not always been predictable, it still has a continuity that is best understood at the largest historical level. The topical chapters in this text are situated at that topmost level.

Jazz is a uniquely American experience. This text explores influences that ushered jazz from its cross-cultural roots to the canonized art form we have today. Jazz was forged from cultural and musical interactions blended in shifting proportions. The topical chapters track these uniquely American interactions from their origins to the final emergent jazz art form they ultimately shaped.

The listening guides in the first part of the text are drawn predominantly from the *Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz* which has useful notes on the particular recordings.

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PART 1

An Overview of Jazz

INTRODUCTION

Toward a Definition of Jazz

CHAPTER 1

Early Influences, Prejazz, Early Jazz

CHAPTER 2

Early New Orleans Dixieland to Swing

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Bop to the Present

CHAPTER 4

An Overview of Theoretical Concerns



INTRODUCTION

Toward a Definition of Jazz

Jazz has a relatively short history. Although its sources are quite old, jazz has only been in existence since the turn of the twentieth century. Its recognition as an art form has had an even shorter life span. A critical study of jazz leads to a series of questions. In the pursuit of answers, a history of interwoven forces is revealed. As we begin our study of jazz as a developing art form, we must ask ourselves questions that will lead us in our study. Not all the questions in this introduction have neat answers, yet their provocative nature will lead us along very interesting and revealing lines of inquiry. The chapters that follow this introduction pursue particular lines of study, which help us better understand the process that shaped jazz into one of America's indigenous art forms.

Art forms in general must have some common attributes; therefore, jazz must share some characteristics with other art forms in our culture, such as literature, theater, visual arts, and classical music. What are those characteristics? How does a musical development become an art form? Must the music first be popular and only later mature into an art form? At what point in a musical form's development does a culture grant it art form status? Must the art form be characterized by a smooth transition in style as it evolves—even before its art form status is recognized? If so, what are the commonalities that keep its development intact?

Jazz, by definition, must rest on some public consensus if it is to operate as an art form in our culture. How large must that consensus remain to sustain further development of the music? What is the relationship of an art form to its culture? Is it a passive reflector of current cultural values and events; is it a predictor of future trends? How much of the culture must it serve? Can there be subcultural art forms? What are the characteristics of mature art forms; are they incomplete without critics, historians, and academic acceptance? How do these accoutrements affect the future evolution of an art form? Must evolving art forms be responsible to their traditions?

AN EMERGING ART FORM