



## The Oxford Companion to Jazz (Oxford Companions)

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Jazz and its colorful, expansive history resonate in this unique collection of 60 essays specially-commissioned from today's top jazz performers, writers, and scholars. Contributors include such jazz insiders as Bill Crow, Samuel A. Floyd Jr., Ted Gioia, Gene Lees, Dan Morgenstern, Gunther Schuller, Richard M. Sudhalter, and Patricia Willard. Both a reference book and an engaging read, the Companion surveys the evolution of jazz from its roots in Africa and Europe until the present. Along the way, each distinctive style and period is profiled by an expert in the field. Whether your preference is ragtime, the blues, bebop, or fusion, you will find the chief characteristics and memorable performances illuminated here with a thoroughness found in no other single-volume jazz reference.

*The Oxford Companion to Jazz* features individual biographies of the most memorable characters of this relatively young art form. Sidney Bechet, King Oliver, Jelly Roll Morton, Louis Armstrong, Bix Beiderbecke, Bessie Smith, Duke Ellington, Coleman Hawkins, Lester Young, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Thelonious Monk, Charles Mingus, John Coltrane, and the divas of jazz song--Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday, and Sarah Vaughan--come to life in thoughtful considerations of their influences, often turbulent personal lives, and signature styles. In addition, this book looks at the impact of jazz on American culture--in literature, film, television, and dance--and explores the essential instruments of jazz and their most memorable players.

*The Oxford Companion to Jazz* will provide a quick reference source as well as a dynamic and broad overview for all lovers of jazz, from novices to aficionados.

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### Editorial Review

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This new collection of 60 essays surveys the entire history of jazz and purports to contain "a thoroughness found in no other single jazz reference." The essays, written by 59 current jazz performers, writers, and scholars, are much longer than the typical Oxford Companion entry. The average length is 13 pages, although the range is anywhere from 7 to 22 pages. There is one black-and-white photograph per article. The essays provide overviews of different styles and periods. Other topics include the roots of jazz, biographies of performers, examinations of individual jazz instruments, an analysis of the impact of jazz on American culture, and a discussion of jazz outside the U.S. Arrangement is loosely chronological.

Does this volume rival the 1,358-page *New Grove Dictionary of Jazz* (1988) for the title of "most comprehensive dictionary of jazz ever published"? Possibly. Although the *New Grove Dictionary of Jazz* is arguably more reference-friendly because of its alphabetical arrangement and *see also* references, the Oxford book has an excellent index. However, because of the essay format, it is sometimes difficult to find information on a specific performer or term. For this reason, some libraries may wish to consider putting this volume in the circulating rather than in the reference collection.

The scope of the *New Grove Dictionary of Jazz* and the *Oxford Companion to Jazz* is similar, although Grove offers unique, unparalleled coverage of jazz nightclubs, festivals, and libraries and archives with significant jazz collections. Unlike Grove, which provides bibliographies and selected recordings at the end of individual entries, Oxford only offers a selected bibliography at the back of the book and an "Index of Songs and Recordings" to facilitate finding where a song is discussed in an essay.

Though Grove was reprinted in 1994, it was not updated. The Oxford book includes a greater number of recent jazz artists. In an informal search for 27 current jazz artists, 50 percent of them were mentioned in Oxford, while only 25 percent were found in Grove. For example, Grove appears to exclude drummers Joey Baron and Dennis Chambers, trumpeter Dave Douglas, and more-mainstream musicians like Joshua Redman and Jo Lovano, all of whom are mentioned in Oxford. Some of the current artists also appear in another Oxford publication, *Biographical Encyclopedia of Jazz* (1999).

Libraries with a jazz collection will find this new volume a welcome addition, whether its purpose is to act as a reference resource or provide insightful stack reading. According to Kirchner, the intended audience is everyone, from novices to seasoned jazz aficionados; the book does indeed have a wide range of appeal. Some of the essays are downright scholarly, while others are less erudite in tone (though not in content). Recommended for all university, college, and public libraries with patrons interested in jazz. *RBB*

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#### Review

"Despite the wide range, the focus is clear--the unique American sound of jazz and those giants most closely associated with its creation and production."--Jeff Waggoner, *The New York Times Book Review*

"This book contains a collection of some of the very best writing available concerning jazz."--Lee Bash, *Jazz Educators Journal*

"A milestone among publications dedicated to jazz."--Francesco Martinelli, *Musica Jazz* (Italy)

"More than a treatise on jazz, this book is a compilation of articles on all phases of the music, contributed by musicians and professional writers who speak for the art firsthand. Highly recommended for everyone interested in jazz."--the late Benny Carter

## About the Author

**Bill Kirchner** is a composer-arranger, saxophonist, jazz historian, record and radio producer, educator, and leader of the Bill Kirchner Nonet. He has won both Grammy and NAIRD Indie awards, and he teaches jazz composition and jazz history at the New School University, the Manhattan School of Music, and New Jersey City University.

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