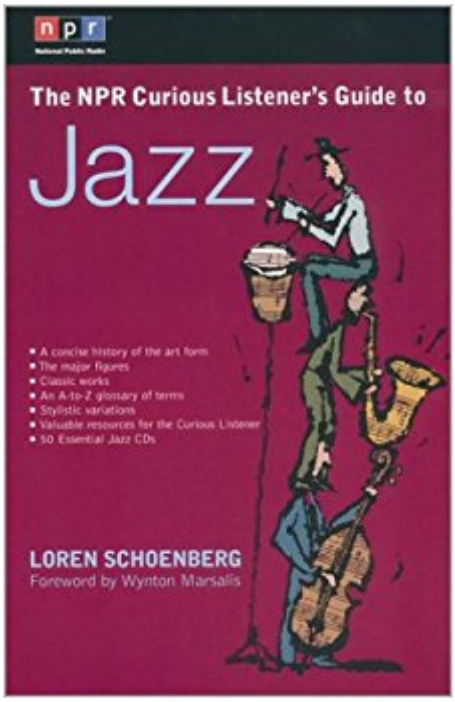
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The NPR Curious Listener's Guide To Jazz



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Synopsis

A concise history of jazzThe noteworthy composers and musicians, from Jelly Roll Morton and Thelonious Monk to Miles Davis and Charles MingusMajor performers from Louis Armstrong and Ella Fitzgerald to Nat King Cole and Duke EllingtonClassic songs and compositionsThe most influential recordings of all timeA complete guide to jazz terminology and lingoValuable resources for the Curious Listener

Book Information

Series: NPR Curious Listener’s Guide To...

Paperback: 304 pages

Publisher: TarcherPerigee; 1 edition (August 6, 2002)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 039952794X

ISBN-13: 978-0399527944

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.8 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 2.4 out of 5 stars 4 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #943,918 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #13 inÃ Â Books > Humor & Entertainment > Sheet Music & Scores > Composers > Schoenberg #127 inÃ Â Books > Humor & Entertainment > Sheet Music & Scores > Historical Period > Modern & 20th Century #1096 inÃ Â Books > Reference > Encyclopedias & Subject Guides > Music

Customer Reviews

These final entries in NPR’s "Curious Listener’s" series maintain the fresh spirit and informative stance of the first two, which address opera and popular standards. Smith, music critic for the Baltimore Sun, and Schoenberg, a tenor saxophonist and jazz educator, provide basic introductions geared to lay readers, focusing on the essentials of their respective musical genres, including a history of the form, a description of genres, brief biographies of featured composers and performers, glossaries, and recommended pieces and recordings (50 CDs for each). The charm of this series is the manner in which the authors cover the important points in their own casual yet expert tone, pointing up details along the way with intriguing sidebars (concert etiquette for classical and various historical figures for jazz) or turns of phrase while presenting thought-provoking artist or repertoire selections that will encourage spirited debate. The jazz volume suffers from a few minor editorial glitches (e.g., incorrect alphabetizing and typos), but both books are well crafted and logically

organized. Smith's book is reminiscent of Michael Walsh's Who's Afraid of Classical Music? with updated scholarship and some different perspectives, while Schoenberg's complements Gene Seymour's Jazz: The Great American Art. Highly recommended for their combination of reliable information and accessible style, these are real bargains for public libraries. (Indexes not seen.) Barry Zaslow, Miami Univ. Libs., Oxford, OH Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Loren Schoenberg has been a featured tenor saxophone soloist with the big bands of Benny Carter, Benny Goodman, Jimmy Health, and Buck Clayton. A faculty member at the Essentially Ellington Band Director's Academy in Snowmass, Colorado, he was recently named the program director of Jazz Aspen Snowmass Jazz Colony summer program. He was advisor to Ken Burns's Jazz Project.

This guide to jazz would probably be helpful to someone new to the subject, but might be even better for someone who already has a bit of familiarity with jazz history. I say this because, although the book is not an encyclopedia of jazz, individual chapters are internally organized alphabetically, rather than chronologically. This produces some potentially confusing results for the newcomer. For instance, in the chapter on styles or genres of jazz, it means that Bebop is discussed before New Orleans jazz. Even Dixieland revival is discussed before New Orleans jazz. And they are all discussed before Swing. How lucky for the reader then that, in the chapter on jazz greats, so many early pioneers just happen to have surnames beginning with letters early in the alphabet (Armstrong, Bechet, Beiderbecke...). Imagine the potential confusion if Charlie Parker had been named Charlie Barker! Still, as a long-time jazz fan, I learned something useful in every chapter.

This book will certainly help the absolute noob know more than he/she did before reading it, but it is poorly balanced. How on earth do you put forth 304 pages of jazz including whole chapters on artists and great recordings, and give just one mention (to tell the reader you're not going to say anything about) of Cannonball Adderly--and not even that, not so much as a footnote, for Wes Montgomery?

This book would have been a good primer for a curious listener, however this book comes with an agenda. This book is full of contradictions, back-handed compliments and outright insults towards other jazz artists/groups i.e. The Preservation Hall Jazz Band (p.66) This is all done in an effort to pigeonhole jazz into the limited world view of the Marsalis/Crouch/Murray camp which basically dismisses all jazz music that does not uphold their standards. Expectedly, the book attacks

sub-genres such as Fusion, Third Stream and Free/Out Jazz all the while overemphasizing the contributions of Wynton Marsalis. NPR should be embarrassed to be associated with this text. For an unbiased introduction tryÃ Â Jazz For Dummies, 2nd Edition.

This is a compact, reader-friendly guide -- a good entry point into what is becoming a dauntingly large literature of jazz. Some sections are set up like a reference book, with alphabetized entries, making this a keeper for looking things up in future. Others provide good topical overviews. I recommend this book to students in my introductory "Evolution of Jazz" course. One quibble: no entry for "mainstream jazz."

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