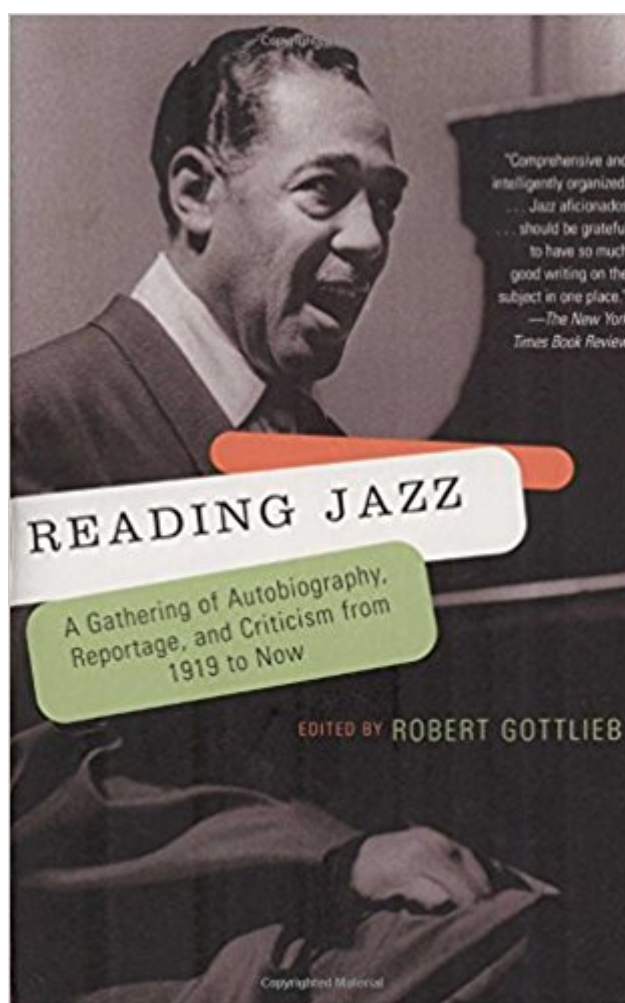


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# Reading Jazz: A Gathering Of Autobiography, Reportage, And Criticism From 1919 To Now



## Synopsis

"Comprehensive and intelligently organized. . . . Jazz aficionados . . . should be grateful to have so much good writing on the subject in one place."--The New York Times Book Review  
"Alluring. . . . Capture[s] much of the breadth of the music, as well as the passionate debates it has stirred, more vividly than any other jazz anthology to date."--Chicago Tribune  
No musical idiom has inspired more fine writing than jazz, and nowhere has that writing been presented with greater comprehensiveness and taste than in this glorious collection. In *Reading Jazz*, editor Robert Gottlieb combs through eighty years of autobiography, reportage, and criticism by the music's greatest players, commentators, and fans to create what is at once a monumental tapestry of jazz history and testimony to the elegance, vigor, and variety of jazz writing.  
Here are Jelly Roll Morton, recalling the whorehouse piano players of New Orleans in 1902; Whitney Balliett, profiling clarinetist Pee Wee Russell; poet Philip Larkin, with an eloquently dyspeptic jeremiad against bop. Here, too, are the voices of Billie Holiday and Charles Mingus, Albert Murray and Leonard Bernstein, Stanley Crouch and LeRoi Jones, reminiscing, analyzing, celebrating, and settling scores. For anyone who loves the music--or the music of great prose--*Reading Jazz* is indispensable.  
"The ideal gift for jazzniks and boppers everywhere. . . . It gathers the best and most varied jazz writing of more than a century."--Sunday Times (London)

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Anthologies of jazz writing tend to be mixed bags, combining reviews, profiles, and usually a couple

of short stories in which the protagonist happens to play the tenor saxophone. This collection from former New Yorker editor Robert Gottlieb is indeed such a miscellany, but it has been assembled with rare taste and discrimination. The emphasis on autobiographical writing is particularly welcome, reminding us that, in prose as in jazz, voice is the ultimate artistic thumbprint. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

The former Knopf and New Yorker chief was a late but vastly enthusiastic convert to the joys of jazz, as he explains in his introduction, and this vast compendium is certainly a labor of great love. It is also, at this size, unwieldy and, it would seem, priced rather high for the market it deserves. There are more than 100 pieces here, most of them culled from out-of-print books, as well as magazines both prominent and obscure. The effort to pull together so large a collection of such pieces, on a subject that in general has defied analysis, has clearly been prodigious, and jazz buffs owe a great deal to Gottlieb for rescuing so much of this material from obscurity. There are plenty of dashing portraits, autobiographical and otherwise, of jazz greats ranging from Louis Armstrong to Charlie Parker (rightly seen as the twin pillars in jazz history to date), such curios as an early essay by the Swiss classical conductor Ernst Ansermet on the impact of jazz in Europe right after WWI and many fine accounts of memorable nights on the bandstands of the '30s and '40s. The reportage section reminds us again of how sterling a stylist the New Yorker's Whitney Balliett is, and there is a definitive piece on the essential differences between classical and jazz criticism by Winthrop Sargeant. Almost everything is worth its weight, including the reminders of the great debate that used to rage over the merits of bop versus classical New Orleans style, exemplified here in pieces by the French critic Hugues Pannassie and English poet Philip Larkin (himself a noted buff). It's a feast that also enshrines a great deal of American social history; but perhaps a Best of Reading Jazz selection, at a third of the size and about half the price, would be more realistic. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

The best thing about the book is how much of it there is and how comprehensively it covers the considerably wide world of jazz. From historic figures of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to commentators and performers all the way up to the late 1980s, this book looks at the entire history of jazz, from field calls, swing and ragtime, to free jazz, bop, post bop, and everything in between. Conveniently divided into three types of literature -- autobiography, reportage, and criticism -- the book attempts to take an unbiased view of the events, people, and of course the music that makes up jazz history.

It's a clever approach that largely succeeds. Because there is so much here, I feel that most readers will want to already have a firm grounding in jazz history, or at least a "better than a beginner's" knowledge of jazz music in general. Which is not to say that such a reader wouldn't understand the essays contained herein, but that a working knowledge makes some of the more esoteric works more approachable. Especially the autobiography portions, which are necessarily just short snippets from much longer works, if the reader doesn't at least know who the artist is and a little bit about their life history, it can be difficult to get much out of such small samples. The criticism works, which were written to stand alone in the first place, probably work the best, however, some of the writers do bring their own agenda and slant to their writing, which again, gives the reader pause and requires him to pass judgment independently of the written word. Still, the information and viewpoints shared are usually very cogent and well presented, and the editorial remarks provide enough context that pieces can be approached individually although I found that the way the pieces are arranged, they do often build on one another. That was another editorial insight that makes this book just that much better. My one great disappointment with this book is the lack of an index, which makes finding specific references, artists, songs, and other jazz tidbits an epic endeavor. True enough that an index probably would have added another hundred pages to this thousand-page-plus work, but it still would have been a welcome addition. Just the same, I drew great pleasure over a very long period of time indulging in this book, and it is one work that while being added to my jazz library, will also not spend much time on the shelf as I pull it down again and again to peruse some of the stories and histories. Any fan of jazz will, like me, find more than a few things to like about this five star work.

This voluminous book really brings the early days of jazz alive and continues through modern day events. Even "died in the wool" jazz fans may be exposed to unheralded jazz artists and obscure but important events. Highly recommended and entertaining reading. These are autobiographical writings and many of these jazz artists were really "characters". Their open and direct recounting of events paints a vivid contrast with our current politically correct society.

This by far has been a pleasure to read, I've had many a wonderful hours delving into much of the past regarding many who I always admired. Great read...every page...every bit is a blessing that someone put this large book together with a great selection in every phase of jazz. I'm picking my way through many wonderful chapters...Glad I discovered this book by Mr. Gottlieb. Nice touch of

jazz history!

Terrific book. A great source of information for anyone seriously interested in early jazz. Some of the best articles of all time by some of the best writers gathered here in one volume.

Since most of the articles deal with reportage and narrative, it rather lacks some articles especially about theory of jazz as the title suggests. But in general, the book is awesome.

Everything as described. I had a good time reading it.

I bought this book for my uncle as an afterthought to the gift I bought his wife. She plays piano, and I'm trying to coax her into playing some jazz by providing her with Mark Levine's Jazz Piano book and a Fake Book. My uncle doesn't play, but he loves jazz and reading. I gave them both their books and set to work playing piano with my aunt. Within an hour, my uncle was excitedly telling me what Miles Davis had to say about playing with Charlie Parker. He loved the fact that this book had some first hand accounts, and he appeared to enjoy the writing. This is definitely a weighty tome, but a great gift for those brainy folks who need to pass the hours whilst their loved ones bash away at the great standards!

A great comilation. Led me on a search for some of the sources, many of which are hard to find!  
Recommended!

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