

# SEVEN JAZZ BOOKS

**I**T WAS A significant coincidence that Fats Waller died on December 15, 1943, just when jazz was on the threshold of revolution. The music world could ill afford to lose him, not merely because of his enormous talent as a pianist and a composer, but also because of his spirit and humor. A heavy drinker, he lived a happy, careless life, but he brought abundant happiness to a huge international audience that has never forgotten him.

To many, Waller was the epitome of jazz—boisterous, fun-loving, defiant of authority and convention alike. To others, he was one of the great piano soloists and a real strength in any rhythm section. In grayer times, there were to be those who would seek to diminish the artist by equating his *drôlerie* with vulgarity, but their efforts were unavailing. His songs and records defeated them. *Ain't Misbehavin'* (Dodd, Mead, 248 pp., \$5) is an account of Waller's life as told by Ed Kirkeby, his one-time manager. It is a tale overdue between book covers, and it contains much welcome information about his career. The writing, unfortunately, fails to bring Waller alive as he was—a giant in front of an often tawdry background. The book would have been better had it been written twenty years ago when the legend was fresh in everybody's mind, although there still remain scores of musicians and friends whose anecdotes could have enhanced the picture.

Waller dispensed hospitality with a lordly generosity, and there is a warm story here of how he entertained friends like Duke Ellington and Earl Hines in Chicago. I remember, too, how he used to rehearse his big band. He would sit at a table with two fifths of gin before him, one for himself and guests, and one for the band. When a musician distinguished himself, Waller would signal his valet to reward him from the band's bottle. A flow of ribald banter ensued as the men sought to retain and circulate their portion, but the leader invariably frustrated them, meanwhile refreshing himself and his guests from his own fifth.

It is a pity that the tape recorder came into general use too late for Waller. Just how effective it can be in capturing the thoughts and mores of the jazz musician is shown in the oddly titled *Four Lives in the Bebop Business* by A. B. Spellman (Random House, 241 pp., \$4.95). Although theirs have been relatively more enlightened times, his four subjects—

Cecil Taylor, Ornette Coleman, Jackie McLean, and the late Herbie Nichols—do not appear to have enjoyed their lives as Waller did his, nor have they been accepted to anything like the same extent. This, Spellman tends to argue, is not their fault, but society's. In his opinion, the “managers of record companies and club owners” are villains, “blameless villains, perhaps, but villains nonetheless.”

Ever since the bop revolution of the mid-Forties, when jazz musicians deliberately turned their backs on entertainment values, illogical complaints of this kind have been made. Unfortunately, society never guarantees a living to artists, proved or unproved, and the money the “villains” risk is very often their own. Musicians such as Taylor and Coleman have big reputations as revolutionaries, but they cannot expect, simultaneously, the financial rewards of established artists whom they may ultimately overthrow.

A prime stupidity of the bebop world, as Spellman points out, was heroin addiction. Influenced by Charlie Parker's example, the boppers regarded heroin as “one of the greatest symbols of hipness.” Ira Gitler recognizes the tragic effects of this attitude in a well-balanced picture of ten difficult years entitled *Jazz Masters of the 40's* (Macmillan, 290 pp., \$4.95). He likes the music and is acquainted with many of its makers; he is never blind to its faults and excesses. The “masters” with whom he is concerned are men such as Parker, Bud Powell, J. J. Johnson, and Dizzy Gillespie, all of whom must now presumably be regarded as dated by the “innovations” of the avant-garde. Yesterday's revolutionaries are already adopting their traditional attitude. “I can't find anything in their music that I can appreciate,” Gillespie said recently of the “new-wave guys.” The absence of overstatement and thorough documentation make Gitler's book a valuable reference to the decade when Gillespie began his reign.

John S. Wilson's *Jazz: the Transition Years, 1940-60* (Appleton-Century-Crofts, 185 pp., \$4.95) is a lucid survey of the same decade and the one that followed. The author's lack of bias is extremely rare in jazz criticism, but he is not a dispassionate writer. Added to his dry wit and very evident honesty, his quiet perception in many widely different areas of jazz makes the book reward-

ing to read. “The cool musician's concept of jazz roots” is how he sums up Jimmy Giuffre's experiments in “low-keyed, folk-flavored music.”

*Such Sweet Thunder* (Bobbs-Merrill, 366 pp., \$5.95) contains “forty-nine pieces on jazz,” by Whitney Balliett, from *The New Yorker*. While his two preceding collections consist mostly of writings about jazz concerts or jazz on records, this one benefits from several interviews with the musicians themselves. Balliett does these well, and his encounters with Pee Wee Russell, Cootie Williams, Earl Hines, Mary Lou Williams, and Henry “Red” Allen add variety and life to the book, as does his account of a trip to New Orleans. The



Fats Waller—“a giant.”

story on Hines, incidentally, was to a considerable extent responsible for that great pianist's comeback. Like Wilson's, Balliett's taste is broad and independent, the appreciations here ranging from New Orleans veterans to the formidable Cecil Taylor, with discerning appraisals en route of neglected musicians such as Dicky Wells.

*Where's the Melody?* by Martin Williams (Pantheon, 205 pp., \$4.95) has been assembled from the most part from articles which appeared in *SR* and other magazines. Williams's purpose is “to clear the way, to help listeners discover their own responses by putting them more directly in touch with the music itself.” The analyses of records are interesting and the descriptions of record

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# RECORDINGS REPORTS: JAZZ LPs

TITLE, PERSONNEL, DATA	REPORT
Manny Albam: <i>The Soul of the City</i> . Albam, composer and director, with big band. Solid State 18009, stereo, \$5.79; mono, \$4.79.	The city and the sound effects are something of a gimmick, but they enframe a good musical canvas that has rich color, brightness, and depth. Soloists are listed, but the precise composition of the band is not revealed, Solid State being more meticulous with regard to its electrical equipment than to the men it records. It is a big band, however, and Albam uses a sizable string section from time to time for mood and color contrasts. With excellent solos by Joe Newman (trumpet), Phil Woods (alto saxophone), and Burt Collins (flugelhorn), "Museum Pieces," "View from the Outside," and "View from the Inside" are outstanding.
Hank Crawford: <i>Mr. Blues</i> . Crawford, alto saxophone and piano, with sextets and septets. Atlantic 1470, stereo, \$5.79; mono, \$4.79.	This is Crawford's eighth Atlantic album, made to much the same formula as all the others, and with groups of similar instrumentation. Evidently the records are popular, but unfortunately they seem to be deteriorating. Primarily this is because Crawford, with familiarity, becomes a tedious soloist. He features himself extensively, but he is not imaginative, and his tone doesn't help. The unpretentious ensemble passages and backgrounds he writes have a rough honesty, but he doesn't swing like such comparable predecessors as Eddie Vinson, Pete Brown, Louis Jordan, and Tab Smith. The concessions to teen-age tyranny are tiresome, too.
Sonny Criss: <i>This Is Criss!</i> Criss, alto saxophone; Walter Davis, piano; Paul Chambers, bass; Alan Dawson, drums. Prestige 7511, mono and stereo, \$4.79.	Criss has a light-fingered musical personality that is robbed of some of its effectiveness by a predilection for Charlie Parker figurations. These reminders of another artist often occur as intrusions in the flow of his own conceptions. The well programmed set contains standards and blues, the first side opening with a thoughtful version of "Black Coffee," the second with a happy, shuffle-rhythm blues entitled "Greasy." The accompanying trio gives skillful support and Alan Dawson's wire brushes are worth following on their own. They perform a background dance that is always sensitively complementary to the work of the other musicians.
Duke Ellington: <i>Greatest Hits</i> . Ellington, piano, with fourteen-piece band; Milton Grayson, vocal. Reprise, stereo, S-6234, \$4.98; mono, 9-6234, \$3.98.	This album's release, so close on the tail of RCA Victor's <i>The Popular Duke Ellington</i> (LPM 3576), is ill timed. Apparently recorded during Ellington's 1963 European tour, it duplicates four of the RCA titles, is shorter, and generally not quite so good. Some interest may attach to the Grayson vocals on "Do Nothing Till You Hear from Me" and "The Blues" (from <i>Black, Brown and Beige</i> ), but the most rewarding performance is of "Don't Get Around Much Any More," where the familiar routine is discarded in favor of a string of solos—by Cootie Williams, Johnny Hodges, Lawrence Brown, Harry Carney, Paul Gonsalves, Jimmy Hamilton, and the leader. This was a common practice before Ellington began tailoring whole numbers to fit star soloists. If it bolsters individual egos less, it is arguable that it benefits the listener more.
Bill Harris: <i>Caught in the Act</i> . Harris, guitar. Jazz Guitar JGL-P100, mono only, \$5. (Obtainable from Jazz Guitar, 2021 Hamlin St., Washington, D.C.)	Harris plays unamplified classical guitar in these refreshing excerpts from a 1962 Washington recital. As annotator Tom Scanlan insists, Harris shows himself a better guitarist than when he made his first Emarcy album in 1957. There is a new version of "Stompin' at the Savoy," and he explores "Cherokee" with good results, eschewing the obvious and playing long, single-note lines that hold the attention. His conceptual range is indicated by his interpretations of "Lover," Thelonious Monk's "Well, You Needn't," an original called "Intaglio Monk," and an evocative blues for the old school, "Where Is Big Joe Williams?"
Joe Masters: <i>The Jazz Mass</i> . Masters, musical director; Allan Davies, choral director; Gary Barone, trumpet; Anthony Ortega, alto saxophone; Harold Land, tenor saxophone; Mike Wofford, piano; Bobby West, bass; Johnny Guerin, drums; Jerry Williams, timpani; Loulie Jean Norman, soprano; Clark Burroughs, tenor. Columbia, stereo, CS 9398, \$4.79; mono, CL 2598, \$3.79.	The vocal sections of this mass are well conceived and executed, except for the bop phrases allotted the girls' voices in the "Credo." Hard to sing, these give a contrived and artificial quality to a statement that is otherwise reverent and moving. There is nothing objectionable in the way jazz rhythms are used, but there is the customary misunderstanding of the place of improvisation in a church service. It is appropriate as the congregation assembles and departs, but a drum solo during the "Sanctus" is an unwarrantable distraction from worship. Again, the feverish intensity of the instrumental solos in the "Pater Nostros" [ <i>sic</i> ] are at odds with the dignity of the swinging choral work. But by all means hear this, for the best of it is very good, especially the way the "Agnus Dei" is sung.
Buddy Rich: <i>Swingin' New Big Band</i> . Rich, drums, with 16-piece band. Pacific Jazz PJ 10113, stereo, \$5.79; mono, \$4.79.	The album title is accurate—Rich's band swings, is new, and big. It is an entity built around his electrifying drum skills. All the musicians sound committed, and together they compose the kind of band that creates excitement rather than just nostalgia. In this respect, it resembles some of the better "herds" led by Woody Herman in recent years. The soloists have something to say and are fluent, notably John Bunch (piano), Jay Corre (tenor saxophone), John Boice (trombone), Walter Battagello (trumpet), and Barry Zweig (guitar). Of the arrangements, Phil Wilson's Basie-ish "Basically Blues" and Corre's driving "Sister Sadie" have the most impact.
Various Artists: <i>Collectors' Items, 1922-1930</i> . Harvey Brooks Quality Four; Kansas City Five; Thomas Morris Hot Babies; California Poppies; Five Musical Blackbirds. Historical Records 11, mono only, \$5.00. (Obtainable from Historical Records, Box 4204, Bergen Station, Jersey City, N.J. 07304.)	Like the other heterogeneous collections from Historical Records, this is fascinating to play without prior reference to the notes. One never knows what or who is coming next, and to guess at identities is often to be humbled. Noble characters like Bubber Miley, Fats Waller, Rex Stewart, and Elmer Snowden consort here with others long forgotten. Among the latter is Ernest Coycault, a New Orleans cornetist who went to California in 1914 and made the two sides included here some eight years later. His muted playing over stop-time on "Lou" is further proof of how early a positive New Orleans style existed on his instrument. The same label has a similar collection entitled <i>Rare and Hot</i> on 12, fourteen obscure sides made by Fletcher Henderson in 1923-24 on 13, and fourteen equally obscure female vocals from 1923-26 on 14.
Harold Vick: <i>The Caribbean Suite</i> . Vick, tenor and soprano saxophones and flute; Blue Mitchell, trumpet; Bobby Hutcherson, vibes; Al Dailey, piano; Everett Parksdale, guitar; Walter Booker, bass; Mickey Roker, drums; Montego Joe, conga; Manuel Ramos, bongos. RCA Victor, stereo, LSP 3677, \$4.79; mono, LPM 3677, \$3.79.	Kenny Graham, a British composer and arranger, organized a group called the Afro-Cubists in 1949 and began writing for it in Caribbean musical idioms. His exotic but subtle <i>Caribbean Suite</i> was only a local <i>succès d'estime</i> until it happily occurred to Vick to revive it. The melodic content of Graham's eight themes, and the varied rhythms they required, obviously stimulated the saxophonist, whose playing here is firm and tasteful. The record is best regarded as a successful team effort, however, for all concerned have contributed unselfishly to this intriguing realization of Graham's intentions. —STANLEY DANCE.