



## Reading Jazz: A Gathering of Autobiography, Reportage, and Criticism from 1919 to Now

By Robert Gottlieb

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Displaying keen intellectual discernment and great passion, Robert Gottlieb, former president of Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., and former editor of *The New Yorker*, brings together more than 150 excerpts from books, journals, magazines, and newspapers, creating a monumental anthology of essays about jazz--the life and the music--and rescuing many an important but neglected writer from oblivion.

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### Editorial Review

#### Amazon.com Review

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.

#### From Publishers Weekly

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.

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#### From Library Journal

Edited by Robert Gottlieb, former *New Yorker* editor, this amazing anthology on jazz music and musicians collects over 150 excerpts from monographic and serial publications, including several pieces long out of print or otherwise unavailable. It provides a broad and varied look at the history of this indigenous American art form, from the heights of artistic achievement to the sad realities of struggles with drug abuse and racism. There are fascinating autobiographical essays from such significant figures as Louis Armstrong, Mary Lou Williams, and Miles Davis and reportage and criticism sections featuring insightful and challenging work from noted jazz writers like Gene Lees, Gary Giddins, and Dan Morgenstern. An essential purchase for every music collection.

*Michael Colby, Univ. of California, Davis*

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