



The name says it all...

Just Jazz

April 2017

Hi Friends —

I just finished reading a book I hated and I want to tell you about it — and why. The book is *But Beautiful* by Geoff Dyer, published in 1996, a collection of stories about eminent jazz artists, fiction based on fact with, as the author notes, “invented dialogue and action.” That itself is not a bad literary concept. And it's not as if the book is poorly written. Dyer's prose is vivid and, at times, elegant, even if, at other times, needlessly vulgar. But that's mere form. My issue is with the content.

According to its subtitle, *But Beautiful* is ostensibly “a book about jazz.” But it's not so much about this music that we love, as it is about the problems that can infect and do inflict it — alcoholism, drug addiction, mental illness, incarceration. And while there is nothing wrong with writing about them, Dyer never asks why these sicknesses, all too often, have invaded the jazz world. Instead, he tends to revel in the seediness, treating it as endemic, as if it actually contributes to the jazz's greatness.

For example, to Art Pepper he ascribes the absurd thought “that he didn't squander his talent by getting as fucked up as he did, that as an artist his weakness was essential to him; in his playing it was a source of his strength.” Nothing was squandered in all the years Pepper was weakened by heroin, and all the years he spent behind bars because of it? Of Chet Baker he claims, “Those who saw in his life the tragedy of broken promise and wasted talent were also wrong.” Why? Because “real talent ensures it is not wasted.” Nothing was wasted as Baker lay broken on the sidewalk, having fallen from an Amsterdam hotel window?

It's distressing how Dyer romanticizes the demise and destruction of the young and the gifted. Citing Shelley and Keats and Schubert he muses how “premature death is a condition of creativity.” This is not an uncommon fantasy. I've often suspected that Bix Beiderbecke is glorified as much for his self-destructive life and — in the Hollywood sense — “tragic” death as for his modest contribution to jazz. And now a new book by some hack is pushing the obnoxious fairytale that the drug addiction that doomed Charlie Parker “coincided with such a quantum leap in his musical abilities.” You can see how wrong that is, can't you?

Yes, these ills have been part of the “jazz life” — whatever the hell that is — but because of the failures and flaws of our society, notably the low regard in which it holds creative people of all types. Oh, and then there is racism, which Dyer barely touches, and only as a personal problem, not a systemic evil. Jazz has been and will remain a vital and thriving art despite the conditions under which it was, and is, created. Jazz is, in the words of saxophonist Archie Shepp, “a lily in spite of the swamp.”

Stay cool, and keep list'nin',
Bob

Special Shows and Segments

2017 marks the 100th birthday anniversary of the great Ella Fitzgerald. I am celebrating Ella and her music all year long on *Just Jazz featuring The Sinatra Hour*. And on April 23th — the Sunday before Ella's birthday — *The Sinatra Hour* will become, for that day, *The Ella Hour*.



Two Giants: Ella and Willie

Now don't get me wrong: I'm not sorry I read *But Beautiful*. And you should read it, too, and form your own conclusions about it — if your local library has a copy. But if you want to spend actual money on a truly good book, I recommend *When Broadway Went to Hollywood*, a lively examination of the triumphs and trials of Broadway songwriters in movieland by the brilliant and prolific musical theater historian, Ethan Mordden.

Just Jazz featuring The Sinatra Hour is heard every Sunday from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 a.m. Eastern Time (US) over WRNJ 104.7 & 92.7 FM and 1510 AM and streaming worldwide at tunein.com/radio/WRNJ

Quotes of the Month

I never knew how good our songs were until I heard Ella Fitzgerald sing them.

— Ira Gershwin

Ella Fitzgerald, who as a kid had to escape from the mean streets, became the definitive interpreter of this sophisticated, complicated, intricate, and involving music that come to define a Golden Age of American Music.

— Tony Bennett

Ella Fitzgerald is the only performer with whom I've ever worked who made me nervous. Because I try to work up to what she does. You know, to pull myself up to that height because I believe she is the greatest popular singer in the world. Barring none — male or female.

— Frank Sinatra

RECOMMENDED INTERNET JAZZ RADIO

wemu.org: Linda Yohn starts your day right with three and a half hours of jazz and blues. Mon.-Fri. 9:00-12:30 ET.

[Late Night Jazz with Rusty Hassan](http://www.late-night-jazz.com): a Hall of Fame jazz broadcaster. Thurs. 10:00-midnight ET wfpwfm.org.

[Café Latino](http://www.cafelatinoradio.com): Singer-songwriter [Laura Fernandez](http://www.laurafernandez.com) features two hours of Latin music. Sat. 4:00-6:00 p.m. ET on Toronto's Jazz FM91.

[The Jazz Club](http://www.thejazzclub.com): Hosted by bassist-bandleader [Dave Post](http://www.davepost.com). Wed. 1:00-3:00 p.m. ET [wfdh-d2](http://wfdh-d2.com).

[Good Vibes](http://www.goodvibesradio.com): Gloria Krolak hosts the world's only radio show dedicated to the vibraphone. First Sun. of every month 8:00-10:00 p.m. ET.

[Jazz Spotlight on Sinatra](http://www.jazzspotlight.com): Nancy Barell presents Frank Sinatra's music through the decades, along with jazz instrumentalists and singers performing songs he recorded plus other beloved standards on [PureJazzRadio.org](http://www.purejazzradio.com) (Sun. 8:00-10:00 p.m. and Mon. 9:00-11:00 a.m.).

And every Sunday after *Just Jazz* stay tuned to WRNJ and [wrnrjradio.com](http://www.wrnrjradio.com) for [Value This with Brian and Leon](http://www.value-this.com) at 1:00, followed by [The Tail-Finned Turntable](http://www.tail-finned.com) from 2:00 to 3:00 and [Still Rockin'](http://www.still-rockin.com) from 3:00 to 4:00, both hosted by “the Golden Gup,” Gup Gascoigne.

NEW & RECOMMENDED CDS

[Joe Fiedler](http://www.joefiedler.com): *Like, Strange* (Multiphonics Music): Joe Fiedler is a gifted trombonist who has a great deal to say, and this time he says it in a quintet format. Fiedler improvises as much with sound and timbre as he does with notes and phrases, and his sonic skills are displayed here alongside the equally formidable big-toned tenor saxophonist Jed Lederer. This is music that manages to work simultaneously on the levels of intellect and emotion.

[Nick Finzer](http://www.nickfinzer.com): *Hear & Now* (Outside in Music): His two previous CD's revealed trombonist Nick Finzer as an important, emerging young player and composer. Joined by Lucas Pino (tenor saxophone and bass clarinet), Alex Wintz (guitar), Glenn Zaleski (piano), Dave Baron (bass), and Jimmy McBride (drums), Finzer delivers eight hip original pieces, plus a haunting interpretation of Duke Ellington's “Single Petal of a Rose.” Good news: The future of the trombone and the future of jazz are in very good hands.

[Billy Mintz](http://www.billymintz.com): *Ugly Beautiful* (Thirteenth Note): This stunning two-CD set from drummer-composer Billy Mintz declares that, yes, there is a place in jazz today for music that is free and uninhibited, yet thoughtful and inspired. As an ensemble, Mintz, saxophonists John Gross and Tony Malaby, Robert Piket on keyboards, and bassist Hilliard Greene at times seem to evoke Tadd Dameron, at other times appear to channel Albert Ayler, and at all times carry their listeners on journeys unexpected, yet most gratifying.

UPCOMING AREA JAZZ EVENTS

Mon., April 3, 7:30: [The Two Sides of Scott Joplin](http://www.scottjoplin.com) with pianists [Richard Dowling](http://www.richarddowling.com) and [Jeff Barnhart](http://www.jeffbarnhart.com)
\$17 advance / \$20 at the door
The Morris Museum's Bickford Theatre, 6 Normandy Heights Road, Morristown, NJ; 973—971-3706

Sun., April 23, 3:00: singer-pianist [Tony DeSare](http://www.tonydesare.com)
\$25 advance / \$30 at the door; Rutherford Hall, 1686 Rt.517, Allamuchy, NJ
908-852-1894 ext. 138 or 908-637-6455

Sun., April 30, 7:00: Music in the Moonlight Jazz Series: [Earth, Wind and Wonder: R&B Goes Jazz](http://www.earthwindandwonder.com) tenor saxophonist [Don Braden Quartet](http://www.donbraden.com)
\$18 advance / \$20 at the door; Luna Stage, 555 Valley Road, West Orange, NJ; 973-395-5551

The [New Brunswick Jazz Project](http://www.newbrunswickjazzproject.com) — “bringing great Jazz to Central Jersey” — regularly offers jazz events at numerous venues throughout New Brunswick, NJ. Click [HERE](http://www.newbrunswickjazzproject.com) to see their monthly schedule.

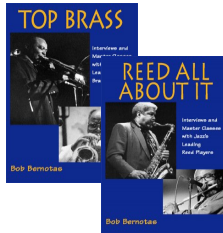
Acclaimed Jazz Books by Bob

Top Brass: Interviews and Master Classes with Jazz's Leading Brass Players

[temporarily out of print]

Reed All About It: Interviews and Master Classes with Jazz's Leading Reed Players

\$20, plus shipping
[jazzbob.com](http://www.jazzbob.com)



Bob Bernotas • host of *Just Jazz featuring The Sinatra Hour*
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