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The 101 Best Jazz Albums: A History Of Jazz On Records



Synopsis

Book by Lyons, Leonard

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Book by Lyons, Leonard

This book is a little different than most books about jazz. For someone new to jazz, it is very useful, just as long as one keeps in mind that it was published in 1980, so there is nothing about jazz from the last thirty years, which includes not only a plethora of big jazz names, but tons of works by names that made it big prior to that. Just the same, the approach of looking at jazz as a series of eras defined by that era's recordings is not only original, but it is easy to follow and makes understanding each era's jazz development a little easier. I like that the list is written out in several places, and I like that the author offers up a selection of similar or equally good albums that didn't make the list. (Somewhere I read that over 500 albums were mentioned in the book.) Since I've only been interested in jazz for about two years and I started with a jazz recording collection that contained literally zero recordings, it has been very convenient to use this in tandem with *The Penguin Guide to Jazz Recordings: Eighth Edition* to learn about artists and styles and choose recordings to buy. Now that this book is out of print, it might be a little harder to get your hands on one, but if the opportunity to obtain one at reasonable cost presents itself, I highly recommend grabbing up a copy of this useful, insightful book. (Also, note that Penguin just released the new edition of their jazz guide, *The Penguin Guide to Jazz Recordings: Ninth Edition*, which will

probably be more attractive to those who don't own an earlier edition.)

An okay read, no surprises!

I bought this book back in the early 1990s when I was just starting to learn about jazz. As an overview of jazz history, this review covers all of the basics (i.e. Kind of Blue, Giant Steps, etc), and has some eclectic choices for the 70s and 80s (this is the book that introduced me to Oregon and that was worth the price alone). The only critique is that some of the records recommended never made it to disk and are long out of print (even at the time of the publication I couldn't find about half of them); however, with the help of allmusic.com and a thorough music program with a deep jazz collection such as Rhapsody one can piece together the albums. Overall highly recommended.

A terrific history book as well as a guide to the best records of that period.

This is a review of "The 101 Best Jazz Albums: A History Of Jazz On Records," by Len Lyons which was published in 1980 by Morrow as a paperback original. Even though "101 Best Jazz Albums" was published for LP buyers, I can't think of a handier or more concise reference work that covers the first sixty years of jazz recordings. And, even though the title proclaims reviews of 101 best albums, in fact well over 500 LPs are given critical mention, all in chronological order. The book is organized in chapters covering the very first recordings from New Orleans artists recorded after WWI right up to the jazz artists of the late seventies and early eighties. After each chapter there is a fairly extensive discography covering the important recordings of that era. Len Lyons writes clearly and concisely about the history and evolution of jazz, explaining how at times it truly was a popular music and how its influence is felt even in non-jazz recordings of both 'serious' and pop music. All the big names and stars of jazz are well covered with special emphasis given to not only their best recordings, but also the recordings that made them notable in their early days. And besides the big names, there is plenty of information about the lesser known artists who while not commercially successful, succeeded artistically and influenced musicians and writers while remaining somewhat obscure, especially to the general public. This book is a treasure trove of handily organized information, suitable for the newcomer and veteran listener alike. Now that's a lot to ask for a book that's less than 500 pages but I believe that "The 101 Best Jazz Albums" succeeds in all of the above remarkably well. And it's very well written, telling the story of early, recorded jazz in easily digestible sections. "The 101 Best Jazz Albums" by Len Lyons also makes it relatively easy to

convert the LP albums that are listed into modern day compact discs, giving recording dates as well as labels which should be quite useful for the CD buyer. I'm writing this review only because over the last thirty years or so I have found "The 101 Best Jazz Albums" by Len Lyons to be of immense help as a reference work but even better, a really entertaining book on the history of early recorded jazz. I rate "The 101 Best Jazz albums " five stars.

This is the book that started me on the road to a formal appreciation of Jazz. I had been listening to fusion, rock, easy listening, funk, R&B, and straight ahead jazz since i was 12. I bought this book at 19 or when I was a sophomore in college in New Hampshire. I hadn't played saxophone or trumpet in a while and was moving away from playing when i bought the book. Many of the LP's from the 50's on I heard at my fathers house. Some, like Charlie Parker, I had never heard before. Lyons was correct: Once you hear Parker your notions about music will never be the same!! My ideas towards music certainly changed. Get this book but pair it with Ken Burns's Documentary Jazz and the Penguin guide to Jazz to obtain a more up to date and thorough exploration of the art form.

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