



[Home](#) > Jazz A.B.Z

Jazz A.B.Z

Books Reviewed:

[Jazz A.B.Z](#) [1]

Issue:

[156](#) [2]

Reviewer:

[Ted Percy](#) [3]

Editor's Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

3

Is there anything else left for Wynton Marsalis to excel at? The (arguably) finest jazz trumpeter, bandleader, music-ambassador and dynasty-daddy has now turned his hand to poetic authorship. Yes, this is a book of what Nigel Molesworth would call 'peoms'. Polymath Wynton takes 26 leading jazz musicians, dexterously places them in alphabetical order (sometimes he cheats a bit, X for BiX Beiderbecke, for example) and does a poem for each of them. Nice idea and it should be enough for most of us, but for Marsalis ? oh no. Ever the sophisticat, he casts each offering in a different verse-form, so Gerry Mulligan gets limericks, Sonny Rollins a rondeau, Beiderbecke a ballad, Parker a (flavour of the month) pantoum and Thelonious Monk a haiku. Nice idea, and it should be enough for most of us, but for Marsalis, oh no. He adds to each ode, sonnet or tanka an array of agonisingly agile but annoying alliteration. Thus the poet gives himself flight after flight of fancy hurdles to jump. And, at many, he comes a crashing cropper, so that even the avidest jazzer (and yes, folks, I am that man) cries 'Hold, enough!' before reaching I (Abdullah Ibn Buhaina, better known to most of us as Art Blakey and inventor of 'segs'). Only Monk's haiku and Bix's ballad seem well matched to their subjects. The rest is artful but not, alas, artistic. Oh, McGonagall, thou shouldst be living at this hour!

But, hold, enough! (there. I told you) that's only the half of it. The book is gloriously illustrated by Paul Rogers. Opposite each of the poet's compositions, Rogers contributes a magnificent poster-style portrait. And these are accurate ? many are based on familiar photographs ? tasteful and hugely inspiring ? worth the price of the book on their own and worthy of translation to LP covers ? if only we had such things nowadays. And there are catchy little decorations too, all adding to that understanding of the music Marsalis' versifying obfuscates. Further understanding is added by Phil Schaap's excellent and level-headed biographettes ? again right on the spot, no messin'. And the back endpaper carries a faultless 26-discography to amplify Rogers and Schaap's excellent contributions. The front endpaper is pretty special too, in an endearing 78 r.p.m. double-act with the title page.

So there's a lot of good stuff between these foot-square covers but, to return to the thorts of the great Molesworth, the peotry is sissy stuff. Stick to the sounds, Wynton, and the sense'll look after itself. TP

Running Order:

48

Links:

[1] <http://savfkn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/jazz-abz>

[2] <http://savfkn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/156>

[3] <http://savfkn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/ted-percy>