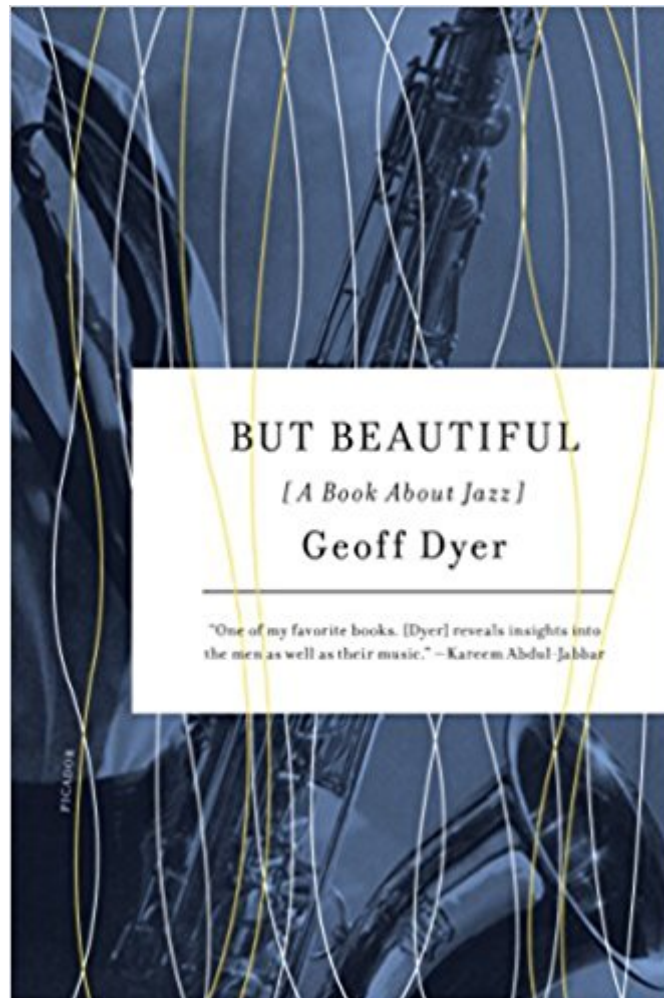




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But Beautiful: A Book About Jazz



Synopsis

"May be the best book ever written about jazz." •David Thomson, Los Angeles Times
In eight poetically charged vignettes, Geoff Dyer skillfully evokes the music and the men who shaped modern jazz. Drawing on photos, anecdotes, and, most important, the way he hears the music, Dyer imaginatively reconstructs scenes from the embattled lives of some of the greats: Lester Young fading away in a hotel room; Charles Mingus storming down the streets of New York on a too-small bicycle; Thelonious Monk creating his own private language on the piano. However, music is the driving force of *But Beautiful*, and wildly metaphoric prose that mirrors the quirks, eccentricity, and brilliance of each musician's style.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Besides colorful and expressive music, jazz greats such as Lester Young, Thelonius Monk and Duke Ellington led equally colorful, albeit self-destructive, lives. Through this collection of essays, Geoff Dyer recounts some of the more vivid episodes and events these personalities engaged in and illuminates unique aspects of their character that contributed to their music. He also sheds light on the oppression of working within an atmosphere of race-alienation, a hardship that led many to abuse alcohol and drugs, and find solace only in their incredible music. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

Dyer (*Ways of Telling*) here weaves impressionistic fantasies around the lives of eight jazz legends. Though he calls this "imaginative criticism," the vignettes, inspired by photos and writings about the

artists, have little to do with music. Rather, he muses about the musicians' personalities and certain episodes in their lives?Lester Young's disastrous stint in the army, Thelonious Monk's inability to communicate with anyone but his wife, Bud Powell's mental breakdown, Chet Baker's drug-induced deterioration, Duke Ellington's endless travels. The colorful essays are sometimes excessively fanciful, and they capture the atmosphere of alienation that surrounded these men who, often wasted by drug and alcohol abuse and worn out from days and nights on the road, seemed to function only when making music. The pretentious "afterword" is irrelevant. Photos not seen by PW. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

This is an usual book in that it is written as something best described as journalistic but is explicitly not bound by fact. It aims at the essence of a jazz world and has been applauded by a number of jazz luminaries as giving the clearest account of the jazz life around. Much of this might be explained by its romanticism. Rather like Diane Arbus' photographs it relishes its knowledge of the underworld, the beat, the alcohol, the lonely hotel rooms and this is as much a one-sided view as any. I found myself doubting the credentials of the writer and wondering how much we are being asked to take on trust. It seems to me to be about the hipness of the author as anything.

This book is a tour-de-force of imagination. The author places his imaginative consciousness into the lives of numerous reknown jazz greats and brings the era and the force of their creativity onto the page. A feat of unusual power. A book to savor for jazz lovers and lovers of lyrical, expressive prose.

I bought this book (digital) intending to gift it to a friend who is a Jazzman. It is quite a lovely and interesting book for that purpose & I subsequently purchased the book in hard cover for my friend. I think he will enjoy it as well.

This work, along with James Baldwin's short story, "Sonny's Blues," is as good as any I've read about the jazz life, its creators and innovators, and the high cost of such terrible beauty. I had the advantage of being present while Lester was lost on stage in an alcoholic stupor; Monk was dancing around the piano, knocking over cymbals, rather than playing the instrument; Chet Baker, unable to stand, was expending his last breaths on "The Thrill Is Gone

An excellent imagined history of jazz. Dyer's portraits of these musicians are beautifully evocative,

capturing the spirit of their music and lives. It's an excellent entry point into the genre.

I bought this for my husband that loves jazz. He really enjoyed the book! I recommend it

A truly great book exquisitely written with such love and passion that it will break your heart and profoundly change how you hear jazz. Dig it! A must read for jazz aficionados.

A terrific writer takes on a great subject. It will open your eyes and your mind.

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