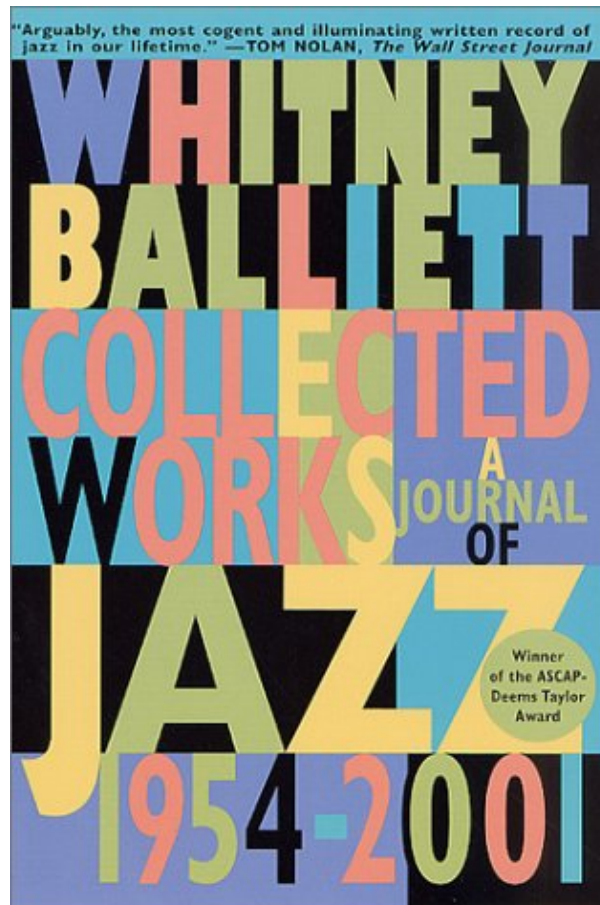
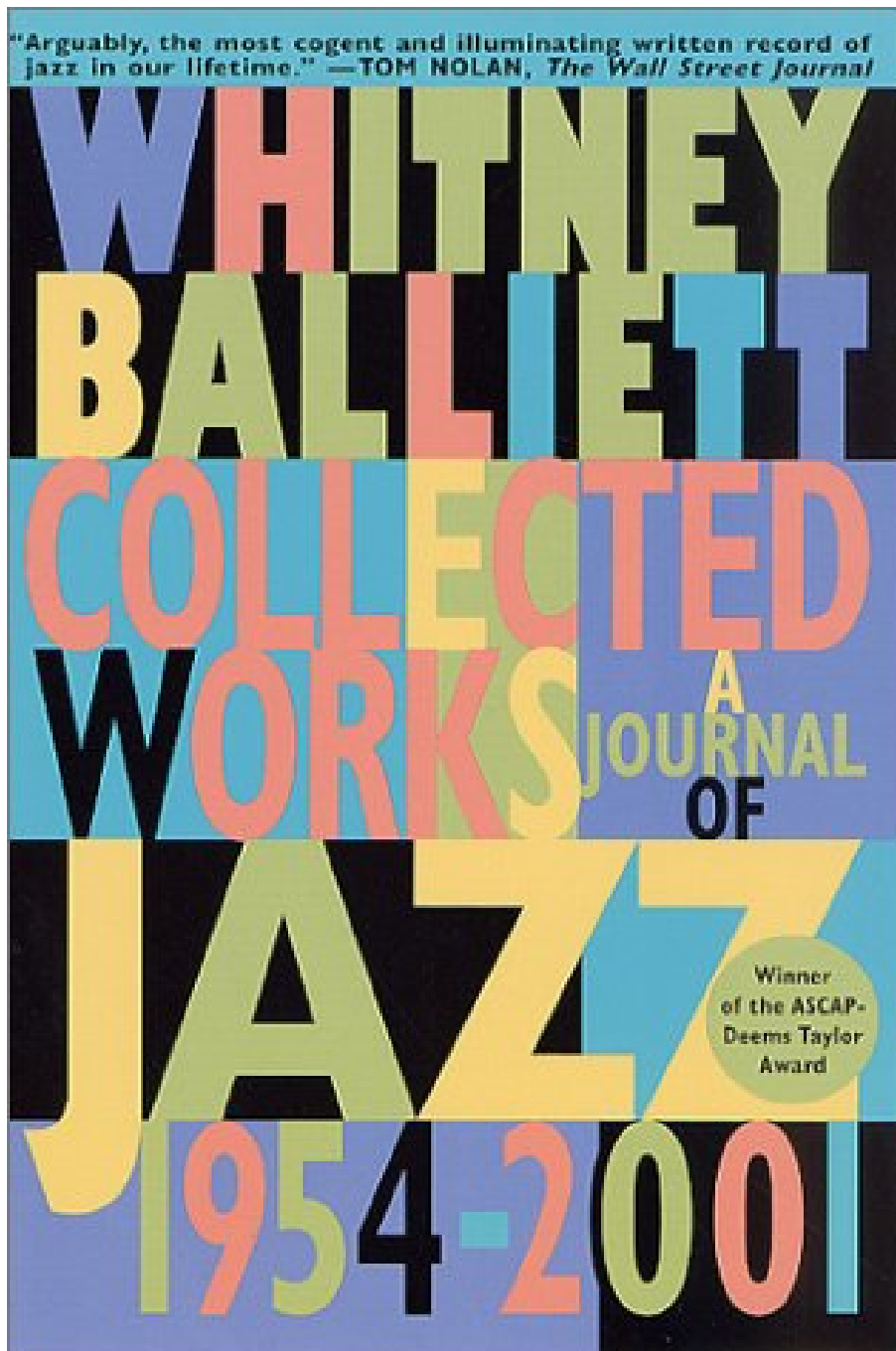


COLLECTED WORKS: A JOURNAL OF JAZZ 1954-2001 BY WHITNEY BALLIETT



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Jazz critic for *The New Yorker* since 1957 and the author of some fifteen books, Whitney Balliett has spent a lifetime listening to and writing about jazz. "All first-rate criticism," he once wrote in a review, "first defines what we are confronting." He could as easily have been describing his own work. For nearly half a century, Balliett has been telling us, in his widely acclaimed pitch-perfect prose, what we are confronting when we listen to America's greatest—and perhaps only original—musical form.

Collected Works: A Journal of Jazz 1954-2001 is a monumental achievement, capturing the full range and register of the jazz scene, from the very first Newport Jazz Festival to recent performances (in clubs and on CDs) by a rising generation of musicians. Here are definitive portraits of such major figures as Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie, Django Reinhardt, Martha Raye, Buddy Rich, Charles Mingus, Louis Armstrong, Billie Holliday, Art Tatum, Bessie Smith, and Earl Hines—a list that barely scratches the surface. Generations of readers have learned to listen to the music with Balliett's graceful guidance. For five decades he has captured those moments during which jazz history is made.

Though Balliett's knowledge is an encyclopedic treasure, he has always written as if he were listening for the first time. Since its beginnings in New Orleans at the turn of the century, jazz has been restlessly and relentlessly evolving. This is an art form based on improvising, experimenting, shapeshifting—a constant work in progress of sounds and tonal shades, from swing and Dixieland, through boogie-woogie, bebop, and hard bop, to the "new thing," free jazz, abstract jazz, and atonal jazz. Yet, in all its forms, the music is forever sustained by what Balliett calls a "secret emotional center," an "aural elixir" that "reveals itself when an improvised phrase or an entire solo or even a complete number catches you by surprise." Balliett's celebrated essays invariably capture the so-called "sound of surprise"—and then share this sound with general readers, music students, jazz lovers, and popular American culture buffs everywhere. As *The Los Angeles Times Book Review* has observed, "Few people can write as well about anything as Balliett writes about jazz."

- Sales Rank: #1391185 in Books
- Published on: 2002-04-15
- Released on: 2002-04-15
- Ingredients: Example Ingredients
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.28" h x 2.03" w x 6.00" l,
- Binding: Paperback
- 880 pages

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Most helpful customer reviews

13 of 13 people found the following review helpful.

Unfortunate title to essential jazz journalism

By Bomojaz

Whitney Balliett is one of my favorite jazz writers (along with Dan Morgenstern and Ira Gitler), and I've enjoyed reading his pieces in The New Yorker since the 1960s. In the introduction to this book Balliett says he chose the title COLLECTED WORKS because "I like its ring"; that's a bit unfortunate because it gives the wrong impression. These are not his "collected works" but rather, as he again says in the introduction, "a distillation of many of the reviews and critical pieces that I have written about jazz." If you saved most of the original articles as I did, you would have a fairly decent sized pile of pieces that are not included here; perhaps even worse, you would notice that many of the articles appear in the book in truncated form (perhaps that's where the "distillation" comes in). One of the reasons I bought the book was because from its title and

size (almost 900 pages) I thought I could take the Collected part literally, and I'd be able to free up some file cabinet space by discarding the original magazine articles. No way. I know this is a personal issue (mainly), but buyers should be aware of what they're getting (or not getting) here.

That being said, what you do get is absolutely worth having. Balliett knows the music as well as anyone and describes what he hears clearly and directly. He writes about the entire spectrum of jazz, from the earliest years of the music up into the avant-garde. Besides being deeply appreciative of the jazz masters (Armstrong, Morton, Ellington, Basie, Parker, Rollins, Coleman, to name just a handful) he writes about hundreds of musicians, good, bad, indifferent (but mainly good) who made it onto the jazz scene. He is particularly fond of good drummers (being a drummer himself). Reading *The New Yorker* you could be almost assured of getting Balliett's perspective on important jazz happenings in (particularly) the NYC area every couple of weeks or so. It was a wonderful steady diet of superb jazz journalism and criticism. It's great to have what's been included between book covers now, and hopefully what's missing gets published in book form some day, too. I really could use that file space.

2 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

A brilliant Jazz journalist

By Wagner F. Sacco

The man definitely has got style. His colorful articles on Jazz musicians can be considered literary works. Sometimes you feel his lack of musical background. But with such a charming style, who cares...

1 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Balliett writes of one of the all-time great jazz singers

By Jeffrey Giles

In this collection of jazz criticism, Balliett writes of one of the all-time great jazz singers, Mildred Bailey, that she "rarely indulged in blue notes" and that "she was not emotional."

I admire Mildred Bailey precisely because of the bluesy and highly emotional quality of her singing, which has often brought tears to my eyes.

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