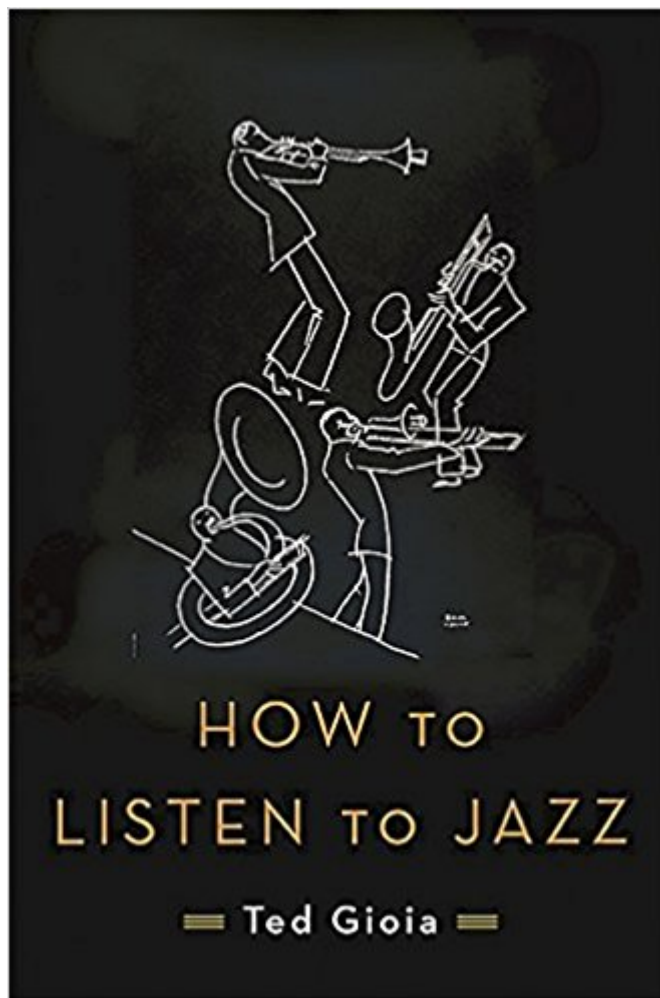


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# How To Listen To Jazz



## Synopsis

Jazz is the great American art form, its very essence is predicated on freedom and creativity. Its sound unequivocally calls forth narratives of past struggles and future dreams. Yet jazz can be as inscrutable as it is mesmerizing, especially to outsiders who don't know what to make of improvisation or unexpected shifts in melody or tempo. How does a casual listener learn to understand and appreciate the nuances between the unapologetic and innovative sounds of Louis Armstrong, the complexity of Coleman Hawkins's saxophone, and the exotic and alluring compositions of Duke Ellington? How does Thelonius Monk fit in alongside Benny Goodman and John Coltrane? In *How to Listen to Jazz*, award-winning music scholar Ted Gioia presents a lively, accessible introduction to the art of listening to jazz. Covering everything from the music's structure and history to the basic building blocks of improvisation, Gioia shows exactly what to listen for in a jazz performance. He shares listening strategies that will help readers understand and appreciate jazz for the rest of their lives, and provides a history of the major movements in jazz right up to the present day. He concludes with a guide to 150 elite musicians who are setting the tone for 21st century jazz. Both an appreciation and an introduction to jazz by a foremost expert, *How to Listen to Jazz* is a must-read for anyone who's ever wanted to understand America's greatest contribution to the world of music.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Wall Street Journal #147;[How to Listen to Jazz is a] satisfying new book.... A radiantly accomplished writer, a busy blogger and a pianist who has recorded several albums, Mr. Gioia

conveys his passion for the music with vivid description and shrewd judgements, concentrating principally on the recordings made by jazz musicians rather than on details of their personal lives.... One of the best features of the book is a set of 'music maps,' as Mr. Gioia calls them, that serve as a guide to individual recordings. •New York Times Book Review• In How to Listen to Jazz, the music critic and historian (and pianist) Ted Gioia confesses: 'I've offered both praise and putdowns to make an artist over the years, but I've never actually outlined in detail the standards I apply in making these evaluations.' His new book is an effort to correct that, and to teach casual listeners how 'careful listening can demystify virtually all of the intricacies and marvels of jazz.' As part of his instruction, Gioia points readers to certain recordings, including inferior ones. 'You can perhaps learn more about swing from listening to the bands that fail to achieve it,' he writes. •The Economist• Mr. Gioia could not have done a better job. Through him, jazz might even find new devotees. •

Ted Gioia is a jazz pianist, award-winning music historian, and the author of ten books, including *The History of Jazz* and *The Jazz Standards*. He previously served on the faculty of Stanford University's Department of Music. Gioia is currently columnist for *The Daily Beast*, and writes regularly on music, books and popular culture.

As a Jazz fan I found this easy to read and full of interesting approaches to jazz listening I had not previously recognized. Highly recommend that you listen with YouTube or Apple Music easily available. So much richer when you hear the music at the same time.

(My apologies if this review is long-winded!) I began listening to jazz almost 27 years ago as the '80s drew to a close and I had become utterly bored and restless with pop. I really had no idea what to listen for in jazz but was starting to feel an increasing affinity for the wistful sounds of horns, cymbals and the double bass that drifted through the radio, especially in the wee small hours (as it were, LOL!). I remember asking a staff at the first HMV store in Toronto for a recommendation and heard the name of Coltrane for probably only the second time in my life. Long story short, I started my exploration with CDs of the Holy Cole Trio (at the time, an up-and-coming Canadian jazz trio), Linda Ronstadt & the Nelson Riddle Orchestra, and Coltrane's "My Favourite Things" album. Since then, more than 95% of my CD purchases have been of this genre. As a person who neither plays nor reads music, all I do is listen and try to appreciate the music for what appealed to me; in other words, enjoy jazz in my own terms. Over time, I've learnt to appreciate the spontaneity of sounds in

the music; to enjoy discerning order or harmony in their apparent chaos/freedom; to try to shadow along the musicians' "detours"/improvisations of familiar tunes; and just immerse in the musicians' seemingly superhuman mastery of their instruments and performance. This, and catching live performances in jazz clubs whenever I could slip some precious little time in to do so in my travels, especially in Europe. After all, how else could a lay listener get guidance on how to appreciate jazz music? It was with this backdrop that when I first stumbled upon a review of Gioia's book, I couldn't pass up the opportunity to discover how seasoned jazz aficionados and musicians listen to the music. Reading the book has been a very satisfying experience, not the least to learn that one's uninformed exploration of the music has been in the right direction, hitting many of the markers identified in the book. Over my own years of listening, the names most bandied about in the media and by the odd acquaintance are well rehearsed ones like Davies, Coltrane, Parker, Armstrong, Monk, Marsalis, Corea, Hancock, etc, etc. I can't recall the exact circumstances in which I came upon my first Coleman Hawkins CD but that one afternoon when I put his CD through my hifi for the first time has remained, to this day, the most memorable revelation (even to someone with moderate hearing impairment like myself). Mainly because I had not heard/read of him before, and that first listening was simply sublime. I understood that musicians and their music can have a way of resonating with particular listeners, yet make no impression on others, and I had thought Hawkins might be such an artist given I hadn't noticed his name before and certainly not in the company of the others I've listed earlier. Imagine my surprise (vindication?) to find him listed among the haloed giants of jazz by Gioia - it was like an affirmation that my years of exploration and discovery hadn't gone astray or been for nought. Gioia has succeeded in keeping jargon to a minimum in this book; although I've had to refer to a dictionary a couple of times to remind myself of the meanings of some of the music terminologies, on the whole the author has kept the book accessible to lay readers with no music background like myself. Gioia has managed to inject a little history and clarity into the birth and evolution of jazz, the infusion of regional influences through the decades, and the artists who spawned or inspired these influences, yet kept the reading apace. The lists of recommended listening not only mixes some fun into the reading, they are immensely useful in illuminating the styles and markers of each musician's artistry. Notably, the author has also included a non-exhaustive list of 150 elite jazz artists active today whom he considers musicians worth looking out for. Some are familiar and commercially viable names among the younger generation such as Esperanza Spalding and Jamie Cullum while many others are relative "unknowns" - so much the better for listeners who aspire to broaden their appreciation of the jazz genre. This book serves as a very accessible primer for listeners new to jazz music, very readable and offers no shortage of tips

and leads for our future listening pleasure. Highly recommended.

Generally a strong introduction to jazz...early to now. It helped me understand some of what is going on now, i.e. Vijay Iyer, Bad Plus, even Ornette. Ted understands jazz, from both a writer's perspective and a musician's. Only thing lacking for me was a better explanation of where jazz has evolved to today, how to make sense of it (even though he talks about it in philosophical terms). But I am glad I read the book and will continue to try to "understand" what's going on.

I was disappointed in this book, the fourth of Ted's that I've read. I was hoping to be able to give it to my wife to read -- she enjoys jazz, but at a very surface level, and I was hoping that it would help her enjoy it more. Sadly, it's aimed at hard core fans, especially those who tend to be critical of the music. I learned some things from it, but I gave up on the thought of passing it along to my wife.

Interesting for those of us who listen just for enjoyment. I am using the book (Kindle) as a reference in building my Jazz Playlist. I would think it would be of interest too for those with more advanced knowledge/ technical expertise. Recommend.. especially for the novice listener.

A pretty good book, but for some reason I expected more, on the scale of his previous works. If you like jazz, this is worth reading, and you can search YouTube for the individual songs mentioned.

I bought this book on pre-publication last year. I was excited to read it: I've read others of Gioia's writings on jazz and found them worthwhile. I got it. I read it. And here, a year later, I've finally gotten around to writing how I felt about it. I didn't like it. It's not that there's nothing of worth in it -- Gioia brings a wealth of experience as performer as well as critic to his writing and many of the comments he makes in this book are right on the mark. He also writes well, by which I mean clearly and in flowing prose. It's not hard to read the book and if you know nothing, literally nothing, about jazz, you will probably find it helpful as well as enlightening. But I'm not that guy. I bought my first jazz record sixty-seven years ago and my listening taste in jazz spans the spectrum, both chronological and stylistic (I make an exception for soft jazz, which I abominate). I expected more from this book and it didn't deliver. For me. Not for everybody, all readers. As to judgment, I agree with Gioia some of the time and some of the time not. He's absolutely right when he recommends that the best way to crack the nut on Louis Armstrong's revolutionary and absolutely stunning recordings with his Hot Five

and Hot Seven is to listen to Louis Armstrong's contemporaries along with listening to him. When you do that, you'll be struck by how fluid Louis Armstrong's playing is, and how virtuosic his melody lines and choice of note and timbre are. You see some of it in Louis Armstrong's playing with King Oliver but with his own group, he breaks loose, and it's glorious. I agree too that the best way to break into Monk's music is on the great late 1950s ensemble (Monk's Music, Brilliant Corners) and solo albums but wish he would expand on what he recommends, perhaps comment on the many brilliant homage albums that have come out since Monk's death. "Hal Wilmer's composite tribute album, Anthony Braxton, Steve Lacy, Fred Hersch, Bill Holman, Anthony Brown's Asian American Orchestra, Giorgio Gaslini, Alexander von Schlippenbach, Eddie Lockjaw Davis and Johnny Griffin. Lastly, I wish he would expound more on jazz in Europe: Django Reinhardt is discussed briefly, and there are listings of single albums by Jan Garbarek, Egberto Gismonti and Enrico Rava, but that's it. Likewise, beyond Ornette Coleman and Cecil Taylor, Gioia has little to say about the avant garde in jazz: his Recommended listening list for Postmodernism and Neoclassical jazz includes single albums by Henry Threadgill (last year's Pulitzer Prize winner), the World Saxophone Quartet (but "Night Train," one of its least modernist pieces), and John Zorn (his Ennio Moricone tribute, The Big Gundown). Where, at least, are Anthony Braxton, Steve Lacy, the Art Ensemble of Chicago? (And I haven't even got to the really out there musicians like Peter Brotzmann, Derek Bailey.) In short, I worry that this book will limit what a novice listener listens to as much as it will open his or her ears. The advice he offers is good but there's not enough of it. And the record lists? Inadequate.

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