



Waiting for Dizzy

Gene Lees

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Dizzy Gillespie. Joe Venuti and Eddie Lang. Benny Carter, the true "Gentleman of Jazz." And Bix Beiderbecke, the F. Scott Fitzgerald of players. The story of jazz is a story of individuals--enormously gifted, dedicated, sometimes driven, yet often gentle people.

In this volume, Gene Lees continues his richly entertaining and informative chronicle of the lives and times of jazz with a new collection of fourteen memorable essays drawn from his renowned *Jazzletter*. *Waiting for Dizzy* adds to the insights of his two previous collections, *Meet Me at Jim & Andy's* and *Singers and the Song*, both highly acclaimed. *Meet Me at Jim and Andy's* won the ASCAP-Deems Taylor Award.

Lyricist, essayist, and music historian, Gene Lees draws on a lifetime of experience--and in many cases friendships--in the jazz world to bring fresh insights to the lives and work of these magnificent artists, whether he is discussing why any guitarists have unsteady time or the complex role of race in jazz history. He is a repository of the humor of the jazz musician, recounting their wit and practical jokes: Ray Brown and Herb Ellis dying their hair as a gag on Oscar Peterson, or Joe Venuti trying to nail a foot-tapping tenor player's shoe to the floor. And as a perceptive cultural historian, he questions the jazz myth that no white musician ever made a significant contribution to jazz.

But the heart of *Waiting for Dizzy* is its exquisitely crafted character studies, warm pictures of the men (and women) who created and continue to create this music. He begins in the era of its first great flowering, the 1920s. He then presents a gallery of vivid portraits of a diverse group of musicians, including the seminal arranger Bill Challis, Joe Venuti, Herb Ellis, Benny Carter, Lenny Breau, and Edmund Thigpen. The theme of discrimination against black Americans turns up frequently, as in the portraits of Al Grey and Hank Jones. Readers meet Spiggle Wilcox, the 87-year-old trombonist who played in the legendary Jean Goldkette band of the mid-20s, and left the music world only to return to playing 50 years later; Emily Remler, the tragic, determined, gifted guitarist who sought to break the sex barrier and her own drug habit, only to die all too young in a far-away place; and Bud Shank, the fine alto saxophonist who disappeared into the numbing atmosphere of studio work, and at last rebelled to return to jazz. The book's final essay is its pinnacle: a day spent in the recording studio with Dizzy Gillespie, surrounded by brilliant younger musicians who are his spiritual children, among them Art Farmer and Phil Woods. It is a lyrical, affectionate, and affecting portrait of one of the three or four most important figures--and the most loved-- in jazz history.

From Bix to Dizzy, from swing to be-bop, from the 1920s to the 1990s, *Waiting for Dizzy* is an exhilarating collection by the author *The Washington Post Book World* calls "not only an extraordinarily perceptive reporter and analyst of jazz performance, jazz history, and jazz people, but also one of those writers who's a joy to read on any subject at all."

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David McMillian:

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