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From Jazz to Swing: African-American Jazz Musicians and Their Music, 1890-1935 by Thomas Hennessey
(Book Review)

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From Jazz to Swing: African-American Jazz Musicians and Their Music, 1890–1935. By Thomas Hennessey. Jazz History, Culture, and Criticism Series. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994. ISBN 0-81143-2178-X (cloth); 0-8143-2179-8 (pbk.). Pp. 217. \$39.95 (cloth), \$15.95 (pbk.).

From Jazz to Swing joins several recent efforts that explore the cultural history of jazz (e.g., Burton W. Peretti, *The Creation of Jazz: Music, Race, and Culture in Urban America* [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992]; James Lincoln Collier, *Jazz, an American Theme Song* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1993]; and William Howland Kenny, *Chicago Jazz, a Cultural History, 1904–1930*

[New York: Oxford University Press, 1993]). As in his article "The Black Chicago Establishment, 1919–1930" (*Journal of Jazz Studies* 2 [1974]: 15–45), Hennessey substantiates his book's account by extensive references to the *Chicago Defender*, a distinctive newspaper (still being published) that has chronicled the local as well as the national black entertainment scene. According to Hennessey, the purpose of the present text, an extension of his dissertation, "From Jazz Age to Swing: Black Musicians and Their Music, 1917–1935" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1973), is to trace the interaction between the enormous sociological changes in America and the music of African American musicians from the origin of jazz to the beginning of the swing era. He claims that "the transformation of jazz from a primarily local music rooted in black folk traditions to the tightly managed product of a national industry controlled by white businessmen and aimed at a predominantly white mass market paralleled the changing nature of American society" (p. 11).

Hennessey's survey is divided into four periods: (1) 1890–1914, during which experiments with African American and European American musical traditions resulted in a new form of entertainment; (2) 1914–23, during which the word *jazz* came to designate the new medium; (3) 1923–29, during which regional jazz styles developed; and (4) 1929–35, during which regional styles coalesced into a national style. Hennessey avoids pinpointing an exact date and location for the origin of jazz. Rather, he sees jazz (or protojazz), primed for mass acceptance by the sources of vaudeville and ragtime, arising roughly simultaneously in cities with the largest black populations—notably, New Orleans, New York City, and Chicago—although shaped and influenced by regional differences. Jazz during this early period, undifferentiated and undefined, is thus synonymous with several forms of black popular music that appeared to be thriving throughout most of the United States by 1914.

Chapters 2 and 3 cover the rise of new entertainment forms and the emergence of territory bands between 1914 and 1923 amid the social upheaval of the great migration of rural southern blacks to the urban North. With the word *jazz* coming to designate a musical form, the music acquired an ever more precise definition—most specifically that exemplified by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, whose wildly successful recording of "Livery Stable Blues" in March 1917 legitimized and popularized the term. Hennessey notes how jazz was affected by the commercialization of the phonograph, the rise of the dance hall, the growth of vaudeville, and the advent of movie theaters in three key cities, concluding that "New Orleans exported musicians while Chicago synthesized jazz styles and New York developed the national structure of the black entertainment world of the future" (p. 48). Despite the dominance of New Orleans, Chicago, and New York City, jazz flourished to varying degrees and in a variety of regional styles played by black territory bands on the East and West coasts and in the Midwest, Northwest, and Southwest.

Chapters 4 to 6 are devoted to the years 1923–29, during which first Chicago and then New York City emerged as the primary centers of jazz activity during the heyday of the territory bands. America adopted jazz as its popular music, and its scope was narrowed to eliminate ragtime, brass band music, and other pre-jazz forms. Chicago's jazz scene was split between the "respectables," or establishment musicians who worked in theaters (e.g., Er-

skine Tate) and ballrooms (e.g., Charles Elgar), and the “shadies,” who worked in the cabarets (e.g., King Oliver). Recordings, drawing the best musicians from both camps (like Louis Armstrong’s Hot Five and Jelly Roll Morton’s Red Hot Peppers), often produced superb music that was not necessarily representative of live performances. Racism and a strong white musicians’ union, however, restricted black musicians from jobs in most white theaters and ballrooms.

Fletcher Henderson and his innovative arranger Don Redman personified New York City jazz between 1923 and 1929, which was differentiated from jazz in Chicago by greater opportunities for blacks to play for white audiences, a larger number of ballrooms for dancing, and the growing strength of the music business. Harlem as the largest black community in the United States, Broadway with its burgeoning musical activities, and the record and radio industries headquartered in New York significantly affected the future of jazz. Near the end of this period Duke Ellington emerged as Henderson’s closest rival.

Fueled by the dancing craze, expanded to meet the acoustical demands of bigger ballrooms, enriched by the musical practices of big-city bands heard through media broadcasts, locally touring territory bands between 1923 and 1929 functioned as the musical catalysts between urban and rural cultures. They flourished most abundantly in the Southeast, which witnessed Eddie Heywood Sr.’s band from Atlanta’s 81 Theater and Charlie Williamson’s band from Memphis’s Palace Theater, and in the Southwest, where Walter Page’s Blue Devils and Bennie Moten’s orchestra produced some of the best and most original jazz in the nation.

Chapters 7 and 8 document the rise and impact of the national bands between 1929 and 1935. Ellington replaced Henderson as the premier black jazz band, and Irving Mills, Ellington’s full-time white manager, flooded the media with publicity, establishing the prototype of band management during the swing era. “Talkies” eliminated the need for theater bands, and ballrooms tended to hire New York-based touring bands, gradually forcing territory bands to fold or compelling them to conform to a national musical standard. The Great Depression claimed many small record companies, but radio flourished, enhancing the popularity of black bands, the sole purveyors of hot jazz in the early 1930s. Although racism persisted, standardization of working conditions benefited black players. The 1930s ended with the triumph of a national style—swing—and a “unified national band business pyramid” (p. 155), topped by a few bands with national reputations whose ranks the best territory musicians aspired to join.

Hennessey’s book is clearly written and logically organized. Each chapter concludes with a summary that readers should find helpful after the lengthy and somewhat repetitive recountings of characteristics, names, and statistical data. Well researched, the book contains few questionable facts. The author’s dry and objective style, dictated to a degree by the nature of his approach (i.e., an extensive survey that precludes prolonged discussion of individual topics) is intensified by his avoidance of any but the most highly qualified or heavily documented opinions. Little of Hennessey’s material is new, and much can be found more engagingly presented elsewhere (e.g., in

Samuel B. Charters and Leonard Kunstadt's *Jazz: A History of the New York Scene* [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1962] and James Lincoln Collier's *Rise of Selfishness in America* [New York: Oxford University, 1991]).

The most valuable chapters in *From Jazz to Swing*—those on territory bands—are to my knowledge the most comprehensive treatment of the subject yet. For musicians, however, this particular strength is compromised, as is the entire text, by the total lack of musical examples or technical analysis. In keeping with the author's nonspecialist approach, it therefore is hardly surprising to find no detailed investigation into the specific recipe of American, European, and African ingredients that defined jazz as a "new form of entertainment," and one is likely to be puzzled by Hennessey's ignoring altogether the issue of New Orleans as the "cradle of jazz," which has been argued so persuasively by James Lincoln Collier and others. One slight omission is the treatment of black jazz bands in vaudeville: the Bruce and Bruce Stock Company traveled with a three-piece jazz band, possibly the first of its kind, featuring Sidney Bechet in late 1917 (*Indianapolis Freeman*, Oct. 27, 1917), and Mack's Merrymakers had Johnny Dodds and Mutt Carey in a four-piece jazz band on tour in the latter half of 1918 (*Chicago Defender*, Sept. 14, 1918).

From Jazz to Swing should have wide appeal. Its chief value for jazz historians will be an articulation of the "big picture"—the broad movements, general trends, and defining characteristics of jazz. Although there are few revelations, the book's unique context encourages reconsideration and possibly reappraisal of traditional notions (such as the role of territory bands). Approachable by the general reader, and not without interest for the music specialist, Hennessey's ultimate audience is the cultural anthropologist.

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