

**E. Taylor Atkins. *Blue Nippon: Authenticating Jazz in Japan*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001. xiv, 366 pp.**

*Reviewed by Ian Condry*

“Thank God for Japan! It’s turning out to be a second Nevada” (209). These words of an American booking agent in the 1960s capture some of the paradoxes of jazz in Japan. On one hand, it is a jazz paradise—where else can one find jazz coffee shops (*jazu kissa*) that prohibit talking, but offer patrons the opportunity to listen to extensive record collections over state-of-the-art speakers? And the Japanese are not only fans. Some of Japan’s jazz musicians have achieved success in the international jazz world, notably pianist Akiyoshi Toshiko, who in 1980 received three top awards from *Down Beat* magazine. But still, for many musicians and commentators in the West (and for some in Japan as well) there persists the enduring image that Japanese jazzers, both the fans and the musicians alike, are somewhat akin to the faux Venetian canals in Las Vegas. Aren’t they trying to be something they cannot be?

Even for E. Taylor Atkins, an Assistant Professor of History at Northern Illinois University, part of the attraction to the topic was the “superficially oxymoronic quality of ‘jazz in Japan’ ” (3). What becomes clear through the course of this book, however, is that delving beyond surface impressions into the depths of jazz in Japan reveals a dynamic musical world that teaches us about transnational flows of music, cultural identity, and above all, the meaning and sources of musical creativity. This is a gem of a book.

*Blue Nippon* is a profound achievement for providing an engaging, readable, and incisive analysis of jazz in Japan. (“Nippon” is the Japanese pronunciation of “Japan.”) The work is historical, yet rather than offering merely a chronological accounting of jazz artists, albums, and shows, Atkins presents a multi-faceted look at the ways jazz artists and music have been caught up in the rapid changes that shaped Japan during the twentieth century. He covers 1920–1995 and explores the ways that in succeeding decades jazz has been associated with the cultural politics of modernism, militant nationalism, postwar reconstruction, and national self-assertion. Each of these eras is used by Atkins to reflect on the interaction between music, society, and history.

As his overarching theme, Atkins explores the diverse ways that Japanese jazz musicians, and their critics, have struggled to “authenticate” jazz in Japan. In so doing, he challenges one of the more enduring stereotypes of the Japanese people in general, namely, that they are meticulous

imitators, but poor innovators. Atkins takes aim at the racial politics underlying many assertions of authenticity: "There is an obsession with identifying and filtering the 'pure' or 'authentic' core of the music from the eclectic and multiracial contexts in which it was actually created." The irony is that such "racialist conceptualizations of 'authenticity' undermine the pretensions of the music as a 'universal language.'" His method is to "challenge these widespread notions by highlighting the contributions of individual jazz artists to the idiom, and by recounting the historical, racial and commercial obstacles and pressures they have had to surmount to do so" (11). To his credit, Atkins also addresses questions about his own legitimacy as a white researcher studying Asian artists working in an African American genre (17–18). Overall, we get a view of jazz through the words and music of the participants, and Atkins provides the historical context—the cultural and economic trends, the changes in venue, the impact of war and Occupation, and so on—which provide the backdrop for interpreting the jazz of different eras.

Initially, I questioned Atkins's use of "authenticity" as the organizing theme for his project. Simon Frith (1987:137) famously describes authenticity as "the most misleading term in cultural theory," in part because it suggests an unproblematic identification between the artist, songs, and audience. But I came away impressed that Atkins did not let abstract theoretical concerns surrounding authenticity bog down the narrative about the Japanese who live for jazz music. Indeed, for Atkins, defining "authenticity" is not primarily about identifying those artists or works that are most "original," "Japanese," or even "good."

Authenticity in jazz, as in other folk arts, implies that an artist must possess specific qualities—educational background, life experience, ethnic heritage, motivations, or artistic vision—which confer upon the artist the *right* not only to work unchallenged in a particular medium, but to establish the standard by which all others working in that medium will be judged. (24)

It is worth noting that authenticity in this sense is not solely about artistic excellence, but is also concerned with power, specifically the power to set standards, which underscores the concept's social and cultural significance. Atkins adds that most jazz aficionados would agree with a notion of "personal authenticity" (emotive "sincerity," expressiveness, or assertiveness) (23–24). "In the real world, however, preoccupied as it is with issues of race and power, what we might call 'national authenticity' and 'ethnic authenticity' often have more operational power, perhaps because they are easier to determine 'objectively' than personal authenticity" (25). In some ways, Atkins's book can be read as an extended attempt to disabuse

us of our tendency to think in terms of national or ethnic authenticity, as when we assume Japanese musicians are exacting but without much soul.

Atkins's study of jazz relates to my own interests in Japanese hip-hop, which I have been studying since 1994 (Condry 1999). As in the jazz world, what is "authentic" (*honmono*) is hotly contested in Japanese hip-hop, but we can also see how the aesthetics of rap music, especially the emphasis on the rapper's "flow" (rhythmically nuanced vocals), give a particular flavor to the debate. One problem for Japanese rappers is that the Japanese language does not contain stress accents. In the early 1990s, this was seen as an insurmountable deficiency of the language, as rappers tried adding stress accents to make the words "sound like English." In 1994 and 1995, however, several successful albums convinced record executives in Japan, and many magazine writers as well, that there could be such a thing as "authentic Japanese hip-hop." Everyone disagreed, of course, about what constituted "authentic," but there has been little debate about the Japaneseness of the style because it is clearly marked by the use of Japanese words. Japanese hip-hoppers also emphasize the importance of nightclubs as the "actual site" (*genba*) of the hip-hop scene. These all-night venues, in cramped, smoky, sweaty, often (literally) underground bars, provide a space where rappers perform, fans participate, and freestyle battles can rage until four in the morning. The forcefulness of the live show in some ways trumps the theoretical dilemmas of authenticity. As one DJ put it, "We don't care that some people think we are imitators. Our fans understand the music, and that's what matters." Atkins's book made me wonder about how authenticating strategies in Japanese hip-hop will change as more J-rappers attain mainstream success, perhaps even achieving recognition abroad. The history of jazz in Japan suggests that authenticity can only be defined by attending to the specific context of a given era.

Atkins approaches problems of authenticity by focusing on the processes involved in legitimizing and popularizing jazz music in Japan, or as he says, "the reasons for the Japanese fascination with jazz, the dilemmas faced by Japanese artists struggling to liberate themselves from foreign models and working to define individual and collective standards of creativity" (10). Japanese find themselves in a double-bind that nicely captures the paradox of being innovative on one hand, yet working within genre conventions (and a canon of standards) that provide the measures and contexts for evaluation: track too closely to the "original," and you are imitative; stray too far, and you are no longer a jazz musician. This is something all musicians must deal with, of course, but one wonders if the dynamic changes according to how ethnicity is marked in both musical production and reception. We can see this in the various approaches Atkins identifies for authenticating jazz in Japan:

- interpreting and attempting to replicate the exact sounds of American jazz as well as the social and cultural contexts (e.g., the hipster scene) in which it was produced;
- asserting the basic affinity of the “colored races” (the Japanese as “yellow Negro”);
- sojourning to America, or in the interwar years to Shanghai, as a rite of authentication; and
- efforts to “indigenize” or “nationalize” jazz by incorporating textures, instruments, or aesthetic principles from traditional musics, thereby creating what some believed to be a national style of “Japanese jazz.” (12)

Significantly, these approaches emphasize different aspects of creativity and different links between music and identity. They also contradict one another and point to the fluidity of the discourse of authenticity. Hold too tightly to one definition, and the others slip through your fingers. What becomes interesting in Atkins’s study is how different historical periods bring out different approaches (and different successes and failures) in these authentication strategies. Atkins finds that the most fertile eras for experimentation in jazz were times when musicians turned inward: during the war and during a period of national self-assertion in the 1960s and 1970s.

Because Atkins’s strategy is to clarify what each era offers to our understanding of jazz creativity, what the book does and does not do varies dramatically depending on the chapter. Some generalizations, however, may help the reader position the book. There is relatively little discussion of the development of Japan’s recording industry, though the industry issues are discussed with great insight when they do appear. We learn little about recording studios, copyright issues, or the business of music publishing. Although we get descriptions of key songs and albums, there is little musicological analysis (no musical transcriptions, for instance). The reception of American artists and albums is generally discussed to explain how Japanese artists developed their styles, but if one is seeking an explanation of how a certain American jazz artist was received in Japan, this may not be the place to go (Paul Whiteman, however, is discussed at length). The character of the “average Japanese fan” is little discussed, because Atkins focuses on the challenges faced by jazz musicians. He also warns readers that there is little information provided about some well-known and important artists, including guitarist Watanabe Kazumi, pianist Ozone Makoto, trumpeter Tiger Okoshi, clarinetist Kitamura Eiji, saxophonist Abe Kaoru, and “countless others” (16–17). For some artists, Atkins provides biographical information, but the bulk of his efforts are in placing

musicians in their historical contexts. For me, these absences were more than compensated for by the rich stories that Atkins tells.

In chapter 1 of *Blue Nippon*, “The Japanese Jazz Artist and the Authenticity Complex,” Atkins gives an overview of the book’s argument. Here “complex” refers to the Japanese usage of the term *konpurekkusu* to mean “inferiority complex.” Atkins does a nice job of characterizing some of the different ways authenticity has been conceptualized as a dynamic relationship between performer, audience, setting, and music. Some American jazzers after touring in Japan challenged the authenticity of both Japanese jazz performers and audiences. For example, Branford Marsalis claimed that “Unlike many other people, they [the Japanese] have identified jazz as part of the American experience. But I don’t think they understand it most times, especially at my shows. They just stare at us, like, ‘What the hell are they playing?’” The owner of a jazz coffeehouse in Tokyo responded angrily, “The reason that audiences are cheerless at your [Marsalis’s] concerts is because they know ‘this guy’s not putting himself into it’” (20–21).

This points to some of the subtleties of Japanese understandings, which appear not only in assessing the quality of jazz performances, but also in recognizing racial politics involved in the music. Atkins discusses in detail the various debates about how jazz is defined both as black music and as American music, attending both to U.S. scholarship and writings in Japan. The racial undertones of jazz are discussed and developed as a theme throughout the book, and offer an interesting comparison to a recent study of jazz in China (Jones 2001; see the review by Dale Wilson in this issue, pp. 524–32). The ways in which Japanese jazz musicians moved between identifying as authentically “Japanese” (more or less) and authentically “jazz” (more or less) is precisely the dynamic that gives Atkins’s narrative momentum. He does not limit himself only to the music that can be identified as “Japanese jazz,” that is, music which explicitly marks itself off as a national idiom. Instead, he explores “jazz in Japan,” noting that the diversity of styles over the years and among different artists militates against identifying a core Japanese essence that can be heard in the music.

But why are the Japanese consistently characterized as “imitators,” both at home and abroad? Even Japan’s most accomplished jazz artists are identified as the Japanese version of someone else: “Japan’s Satchmo” (Nanri Fumio), “Japan’s Sonny Rollins” (Miyazawa Akira), and “Japan’s Gene Krupa” (George Kawaguchi). Atkins notes that there are social and historical realities implicit in the assertion that Japan is a “nation of imitators.” He quotes from Christine Yano, who has a newly published book on *enka*, a style of popular music that echoes traditional folk music vocals. According to Yano, *enka* musicians rely on certain *kata* (forms) in music,

text, and gesture that make the expression “culturally safe and understandable” (33). Others explain the “imitation” label by highlighting the system of “schools” (*iemoto*) of training that dominate some artistic expressions, such as flower arranging, which encourage, even demand, close attention to the master’s style. In other words, exact imitation is a culturally valued style of learning in Japan. On the other hand, Atkins sees more parallels with the West than differences in this particular characterization of Japaneseness. Don’t all jazz musicians train by imitating respected predecessors? Doesn’t apprenticeship with Art Blakey’s Jazz Messengers confer legitimacy in the same way that Japanese *iemoto* (schools of art) do (35–36)? The book’s argument is that there are historically and culturally specific means of establishing and conveying authenticity. Race, nationalism, and consumerism all figure in the history of jazz, but not always to the same degree.

The remainder of the book is organized around different eras of Japan’s history. Chapter 2, “The Soundtrack of Modern Life: Japan’s Jazz Revolution,” begins in the 1920s and explores Japan’s Jazz Age. One wonders, in this context, “what is jazz?” Instead of applying today’s common musicological criteria for jazz as a style exhibiting the characteristics of “swing,” improvisation, and so on, Atkins argues that we should either conform to contemporary definition(s) or rely on sociocultural analysis of jazz. Such an approach is important because in the interwar period, “jazz” could and did refer to “popular music, social dance, and other forms of American popular culture,” while also connoting “a new set of social mores, fashions, gender relations, and consumer practices otherwise known as ‘modernism’ ” (47).

Jazz, above all, represented the West, and specifically America. Although Japanese musicians perceived jazz as black music, the central dynamics in the interwar years concerned modernization and the uncertain fate of Japanese culture. “Japan’s Jazz Age coincided with a time of political, cultural, and economic volatility, which fed a gnawing uneasiness over the perceived erosions of traditions and the rising prominence of America in Japanese cultural life” (48). Even so, appropriations of foreign culture by the Japanese are nothing new, and Atkins traces some key examples, including court music from imperial China in the 700s and the rapid imports during the Meiji era after 1868, notably driven in the early days by the needs of the military (51–53). In the 1920s, ocean liner bands, dance halls, and the rise of Osaka jazz (especially after the Tokyo earthquake of 1923) form some of the focal points for Atkins’s enchanting stories of these early days of jazz, when authentication often revolved around foreignness. Being abroad—whether traveling, living, or being raised outside of Japan—is a key marker for authenticity during this phase. Atkins de-

scribes the efforts of Kikuchi Shigeya, a college student and son of a Japanese parliament member, who was the first to bring jazz records back to Japan (from Chicago) in 1920. Interestingly, Japanese American jazz singers, such as Alice Fumiko Kawabata and Rickey Miyagawa, who were frustrated by racial barriers in the American entertainment industry found a welcome audience in Japan, and outshone homegrown vocalists such as Dick Mine and Awaya Noriko. We also learn of the important role of Ida Ichirō and his Cherryland Dance Orchestra in bringing about the professionalization of jazz in Japan, and about the fledgling recording industry of the day. Some Japanese musicians raised their status by playing in Shanghai.

One of the strengths of Atkins's work is his evocative descriptions of these locales for musical performance, for it is too easy to locate the authenticity of music in particular virtuoso performers and performances without considering in detail the settings which provide the crucible for such productions. In the interwar years, live jazz band performances were limited almost exclusively to commercial dance halls. Public outcries against the "scandalous behavior" in dance halls, in which male patrons bought tickets, each good for one dance with a professional female dancer (so-called "taxi dancers"), meant that the public tended to regard the music with suspicion and even antipathy (68). This performance environment also influenced the style of the music. Since tickets were good for "one dance," musicians were encouraged to keep songs short, often lasting no more than two or three minutes, which discouraged extended jamming and improvisation.

Chapter 3, "Talkin' Jazz: Music, Modernism, and Interwar Japan's Culture Wars," opens with a description of the risqué scandals surrounding jazz music and dance halls. Here the focus shifts to the 1930s. In the years between the two world wars, Atkins observes, Japan was torn between cosmopolitan and nativist impulses:

On the one hand, the period of "Taishō Democracy"<sup>1</sup> was characterized by electoral party politics, "cooperative diplomacy," leftist activism and public ideological debate, and a burgeoning entertainment culture conspicuously based on foreign models; on the other hand, the same era witnessed the flowering of a politicized cultural traditionalism and militancy among "agricultural fundamentalists," and artists, writers, the military, and the state. (95)

The popularity of jazz in the interwar period was caught up in the cosmopolitan impulse, but was increasingly contested as Japan drifted into a militant, nativist, imperialist mode. At the time, jazz represented the

conspicuous emergence of an Americanized global culture. The classical music establishment rejected jazz on aesthetic grounds, while others defended the music by holding up Paul Whiteman as an example of “artistic songs done in the jazz style” (104). Atkins argues that Whiteman’s music and writings were “the single greatest influence on the first generation of Japanese jazzmen,” and notes the conspicuous absence of “race records” amidst the ubiquity of Whiteman’s recordings.

Atkins discusses the complicated racial politics (white/black/yellow) that permeated the ideological discourses surrounding jazz, and the important role of music critic Horiuchi Keizô as an outspoken defender of Whiteman’s jazz style. Although the debate about the aesthetic shortcomings of jazz were restricted to specialized music periodicals, wider debates about the sociocultural degradations of the Jazz Age spread into the mainstream press. In both discourses, however, the key underlying assumption was the association between jazz and modernism, whereby the music could “represent in musical terms either the transformations that created and defined modern society, or the revolt against those changes” (107). Jazz in Japan thus became a touchstone for a celebratory “sociology of the streets,” and alternatively a sign of modern degradation at the heart of contemporary “culture wars” (106–21). Yet this modernism in Japan held its own particular character as well. Atkins argues that the lack of a Japanese analogue to the *negrophilie* that was a defining element of jazz in Europe (e.g., the Parisians’ fascination with the *sauvage* Josephine Baker) might be explained by Japan’s status as “a non-Western nation that had spent the last half-century trying to demonstrate its ‘modernity’” (123). In contrast, European society was questioning its “civilized” values in the wake of World War I. For Japan, the equation of blackness with authentic jazz expression came later.

Chapter 4, “‘Jazz for the Country’s Sake’: Toward a New Cultural Order in Wartime Japan,” identifies a variety of ways that jazz artists maneuvered in the shadow of militant nationalism. Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Home Ministry issued a series of official proclamations aimed at eradicating jazz from Japanese soil (147). This “total jazz ban,” however, was far from total. Atkins argues that in contrast to Nazi Germany and the USSR, where attempts to “nationalize” jazz were state-directed, in Japan “endeavors to create a ‘national music’ (*kokumin ongaku*) were often made as responsive yet autonomous creative decisions of the artists themselves” (131). He shows how jazz could remain in Japanese society, and even promote the war effort, when it was made “authentically Japanese.” Saxophonist and composer Hattori Ryoichi, for example, worked to create a “Japanese blues,” one inspired not by Mississippi fields and juke joints, but rather an “Oriental blues” which drew inspiration from indigenous folk



songs and Chinese themes in an effort to promote the idea of a pan-Asian brotherhood. Here Atkins offers an interesting discussion of the pressure of signing with record companies and its influence on Japanese jazz styles (130–39). But with government slogans like “luxury is the enemy,” jazz musicians found themselves increasingly without a stage. Dance halls were banned by November 1940, as merely one part of a multi-pronged campaign to mobilize the populace. In response, many musicians began playing what was termed “light music,” namely, “an acceptable form of primarily instrumental music that was, in actuality, not so different from the dance music, ‘symphonic jazz,’ and nativized jazz of the previous decade” (144). Atkins also analyzes a police report of 1941 discussing the challenge of identifying acceptable music. One can only be amazed at the morphic quality of jazz.

Looking back at the devastation of World War II, many Japanese writers interpret the efforts of Japan’s musicians’ efforts to create a national music as a strategy to deceive the authorities. Atkins disagrees, arguing that “there is no evidence that the artists were cajoled by record companies or by the authorities” into using this material (135). Moreover, the efforts to create a wartime jazz by Hattori, Sano Tasaku, Taira Shigeo, and others, Atkins argues, can be put in a more positive, if paradoxical, light.

[T]he crisis mentality of the authoritarian state and the flowering of cultural nationalism in the late thirties and early forties challenged Japanese musicians for the first time to authenticate their jazz without reference to American standards. In so doing, they not only served the national purpose, but also remained true to the jazz aesthetic’s insistence on innovation. (161)

This is only one example among many of the ways Atkins uses the idea of authentication to engage related issues of originality and creativity, and to show the complexity of the relationship between censorship and freedom.

In chapter 5, “Bop, Funk, Junk, and that Old Democracy Boogie: the Jazz Tribes of Postwar Japan,” Atkins discusses the sharp shift in focus among jazzers in the postwar period, a shift partly related to Japan’s status. “With defeat at American hands,” Atkins notes, “came a much deeper sense of Japanese inadequacy in the realms of politics, economics, and culture, a feeling that was not conducive to creative self-assertion” (162). Numerous jazz musicians were hired to entertain American troops during the Allied Occupation (1945–52), and this required the Japanese to master American models to gain employment. Some efforts were made to create a cultural lifestyle analogous to the bebop hipster in Japan, but this introduced a new irony. Despite the democracy and new social freedoms of the postwar years, Japanese jazz musicians were not really free to be

creative. Atkins argues that contrary to popular opinion among Japanese jazz musicians that the war was a “dark age” (many of their musical biographies leave this period blank), in some ways these years held more creative promise than the so-called “golden age” that followed (163). During the Occupation, Japanese jazz musicians had ample, and often lucrative, opportunities to play, but their audience of American G.I.s demanded fidelity to standards played the way the Americans expected to hear them. This historical contrast in authenticity is striking.

One of the delights of Atkins’s book is his ability to shift registers in each chapter. From the question of the nature of creativity and accommodation during wartime, the author moves to explore “how the production and consumption of jazz—both as a mass cultural commodity and as sub-cultural ethos—were decisively shaped in the first two postwar decades by institutional, psychological, and sociocultural impulses set in motion by the Occupation” (167). By relating production and consumption, Atkins offers a nuanced portrait of one of the pressing theoretical debates of the day, namely, the place of entertainment industries in the transformations of Japanese culture. Atkins shows how the explosive growth of mass entertainment in Japan in the late 1950s and 1960s resulted not only in new audiences for Japanese jazz musicians, but also in a splitting of the jazz scene into different “tribes.” At one extreme, the charismatic and flamboyant drummer George Kawaguchi was “a genuine teen idol, a movie star and a major concert draw” and thus was a major player in the jazz boom of the 1950s (195). But for jazz writer Dr. Uchida Osamu, Kawaguchi “simply imitated jazz” while pianist Moriyasu Shōtarō was “aiming for the real thing” (195). Atkins also offers an intriguing discussion of the ways bebop—or “modern jazz,” as it was often called in Japan—“perplexed Japanese musicians”: “Having won the freedom to play their beloved jazz openly in less circumscribed contexts than ever before, they were truly bewildered to discover that the music had passed them by” (197). But this was only one dimension of an increasingly diversified jazz scene (hence, the “tribes” in the chapter’s title) in which some of the leading musicians of the day, such as saxophonist Sleepy Matsumoto and Watanabe Sadao, struggled anew with questions of how “funky,” “black,” or “modern” their music should be.

Chapter 6, “Our Thing: Defining ‘Japanese Jazz,’” is one of the most powerful of the book. Atkins identifies the sixties and seventies as “Japan’s most prodigious flowering of domestic creativity to date in the jazz idiom” (226). A number of jazz musicians demonstrated a “new-found and hard won confidence” which was related to the “coincidence of a resurgent cultural nationalism and an unprecedented willingness to stretch the jazz idiom” (226). It is ironic, however, that some of the new international atten-

tion to Japanese jazz resulted from what might be called a self-orientalizing approach to the music, adding *shakuhachi* (Japanese flute) frills and appropriating Japanese *min'yō* (folk song) melodies. Atkins asks, "Did jazz musicians necessarily have to incorporate musical elements or themes from an essentialized 'Japanese cultural heritage' to be original? In other words, was the construction of 'Japanese jazz' the only way that Japanese could create original and authentic jazz and be true to the jazz aesthetic?" (226). Yes and no. Yes, in the sense that these transformations often drew the most enthusiastic responses when Japanese played overseas. No, in the sense that such orientalizing was only part of a larger story. We also hear, for example, how important new settings were for a jazz avant-garde to share ideas and to perform. Unlike Occupation-era musicians who had ample opportunities to take the stage, the younger generation had to scrap for performance sites, and often played for free, thus "circumventing the established customs and venues that sustained more established jazz stars" (228). Atkins discusses the activities of some of these young visionaries, including guitarist Takayanagi Masayuki and bassist Kanai Hideto. Their "New Century Music Workshop" held Friday afternoon "happenings" at a tiny Ginza coffeehouse that attracted college students, artists, and bohemians to the free-for-all jazz experiments. The Workshop was finally barred from performing there after a woman, enthralled by the music, added to the performance an impromptu nude dance.

In trying to develop "Japanese jazz," musicians engaged in a wide range of musical experiments and acrobatic leaps of theory. Percussionist Togashi Masahiko highlighted the Japanese sense of space (*ma*), or rhythm. Others sought inspiration from Japanese folk songs and vocal styles. The eminent poet Terayama Shûji argued for the affinity of the "yellow Negro" to the suffering and marginality of all great blues-founded musics. We also learn of an intense engagement with the racial undercurrents of jazz by Japanese music critics like Yui Shôichi. Atkins notes that black nationalist discourse was more likely to appear in music periodicals than in the mainstream press. What is interesting, however, is how the struggle of black Americans was interpreted to highlight the importance of Japanese respect for their own colored background. Musically, there were a wide variety of experiments in merging traditional Japanese musics into the jazz idiom. Two of the most successful Japanese artists in this vein were percussionist Togashi and pianist Akiyoshi Toshiko. In 1980, Akiyoshi became the first woman and the first non-American to win in three categories (big band, arranger, and composer) in the critics' poll in *Down Beat* magazine. Part of her success arose from her incorporation of Japanese themes, such as references to the mercury poisoning scandal in Minamata, Japan.

But for Atkins, such “neo-nationalist” approaches to jazz generally foster a misinterpretation of what jazz in Japan is all about. On the one hand, the various artists grouped under the heading of “Japanese-style jazz” are so different that the category has little meaning. On the other hand, some of the more striking appropriations of traditional Japanese musical styles are by Americans, such as John Zorn or Dave Brubeck (e.g., Brubeck’s 1964 LP *Jazz Impressions of Japan*). The deeper problem is that the movement towards a new explicitly Japanese aesthetic standard was unsuccessful in changing how Japan’s jazzers are evaluated. “If the idea of Japanese jazz failed ultimately to subsume the individual artistic visions of such talented musicians, it also failed to alter the aesthetic standards by which Japanese judged themselves . . . the historical propensity to try to ‘measure up’ to an external American referent remained firmly entrenched” (263). Atkins’s disappointment here is palpable, and it suggests a way to understand his project as a whole.

In the end, Atkins has two missions. He wants readers to be sensitive to “the unequal power relations that determine and confer authenticity,” but he also wants us to entertain the possibility that at least some Japanese musicians “have got it,” that is, that they can swing with the best of them (17). I went away convinced, and also with a list of albums that I hope someday to find. Like other important monographs, such as Erlmann (1996) and Walser (1993), Atkins demonstrates how much insight can be gained from an extended focus on a single genre of music in a particular context. In addition, he has created a reading of history and of jazz that enriches both. His description of the joys of a jazz club in Japan in many ways offers a metaphor for the world he has created in his book.

Beyond these walls is a jaded, materialistic society in advanced stages of moral decline. But if you come up in here you better love and believe in something. The outer realm is pensive and plastic, a place where people speak of the livelihoods and wellbeing bursting in a bubble. Here you sit around the table with your jazz family and dig into heapings of spontaneity, soul, ecstasy, and fun. (2)

Readers will have the opportunity to see Japan’s twentieth-century history not only in terms of political and economic transformations, but also through the diverse music and musicians who constitute an important stream in the global rivers of jazz. What is clear from this book is that where the stream will flow depends fundamentally on both Japanese and Westerners seeing beyond ethnic and national prejudices to truly hear the music.

## Notes

1. In Japan, eras are commonly named after the emperor. The Taishô era (1912–26) followed the Meiji era (1868–1912) and preceded the Showa era (1926–89).

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