John Gennari. 2006. *Blowin' Hot and Cool: Jazz and Its Critics.* Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Reviewed by Paul Steinbeck

John Gennari's *Blowin' Hot and Cool: Jazz and Its Critics* is a comprehensive history of American jazz criticism since the 1930s, centered on the foremost cultural achievement of the jazz critical field: "jazz's canonization as an art" (15). The conceptual and historical framework of *Blowin' Hot and Cool* originated in Gennari's 1991 article "Jazz Criticism: Its Development and Ideologies," which was written at a time when the jazz canonization process still seemed incomplete: "Even though jazz has found a place in such respectable institutions as the Ivy League university, the *New Yorker*, and, just recently, Lincoln Center, it continues to struggle for the recognition and the critical understanding that it deserves" (1991:452). In the fifteen years or so since Gennari's assessment, the canonization of jazz has been assured, largely because of the Jazz at Lincoln Center juggernaut and its affiliated critics and cultural output—the 2001 Ken Burns documentary for PBS, for example—but also through the intellectual work of what Gennari calls the "new interdisciplinary 'jazz studies,'" a field comprised of scholars from various disciplines including American studies, history, literature, and to a lesser extent ("new") musicology (John Gennari is an associate professor of English and the director of the ALANA US ethnic studies program at the University of Vermont). According to Gennari, the new jazz studies "considers how jazz as an experience of sounds, movements, and states of feeling has always been mediated and complicated by peculiarly American cultural patterns."[1] In *Blowin' Hot and Cool*, Gennari explains how "critics have been among the most important jazz mediators" between musicians and audiences (13).

For Gennari, the jazz critical discourse was and is central to jazz history and its meaning in American culture: "When we talk about jazz . . . we're talking in a language and through conceptual categories that have been established by critics"—in record reviews, jazz-press writings, liner notes, radio broadcasts, university classes, and books (3–4). Jazz critics' words are so powerful, that "even when we occupy the same space as performing musicians, our perceptions of what we are hearing are indelibly, if invisibly, mediated by what we have heard before, including critical discourse" (4). *Blowin' Hot and Cool* is devoted to the writings of a number of elite critics—Whitney Balliett, Amiri Baraka, Stanley Crouch, Leonard Feather, Gary Giddins, Ralph Gleason, John Hammond, Nat Hentoff, Marshall

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Stearns, and Martin Williams—who have been particularly influential in shaping the history and cultural meaning of jazz. In an effort to create a "less static model of jazz," Gennari "shift[s] the focus from the musicians to the jazz superstructure," exploring the stories critics have told about jazz, their reactions to a continuously evolving musical/cultural practice, and their often oppositional versions of the jazz canon (4). In doing so, Gennari convincingly traces intellectual continuities in jazz criticism from the New Deal to the twenty-first century, creating a compelling historical narrative that is an indisputably significant contribution to the scholarly literature on jazz, a field that owes much to the contributions of twentieth-century jazz critics who worked outside of academia.

It is less clear, however, how Gennari "grant[s] more agency and power to jazz musicians" by concentrating on critics as mediators, interpreters, filters, and canonizers (4). Gennari describes numerous interactions between high-profile critics and famous musicians, including a 1961 publicity stunt at Miles Davis's apartment during which Cannonball Adderley, Horace Silver, and other musicians in Davis's circle ambushed the prominent New York critics in attendance. Still, in *Blowin' Hot and Cool* jazz musicians rarely speak except when mediated or filtered through critics and jazz journalists; Gennari formally interviewed several critics for the book but apparently only spoke with one musician, Jon Hendricks. In the introduction, Gennari asserts that "every musician I know habitually . . . dismiss[es] critics out of hand" but remembers "sometimes almost word for word, what a particular critic has said about them" (5). There's truth in this anecdote—I just had the same conversation with drummer Alvin Fielder, comparing critical reviews of our latest CDs—and it would have been fascinating if Gennari had explored in greater detail jazz musicians' perspectives on jazz criticism, to determine whether critics have affected musicians to the extent that they have framed (the non-musician subset of) the jazz audience's experiences of the music.[2] Nevertheless, this omission is relatively minor, given the book's stated mission and impressive scope, and *Blowin' Hot and Cool* is easily one of the best new-jazz-studies histories of the past ten years.[3]

The first chapter of *Blowin' Hot and Cool* covers the 1930s work of Leonard Feather and John Hammond, two "young white men without dates" who thought of jazz "not just as something pleasurable, but as something on which to build a career, something to which they could devote their lives. This music was not *just* fun, they insisted: it was serious, it had deep cultural and historical significance that had to be understood and honored, and it was an important force for social change" (27). In his capacity as a record producer, talent scout, and publicist, Hammond brought his favorite artists greater success and recognition while bolstering his own credibility as an

advocate of authentic, swinging jazz. Hammond's critical perspective was inseparable from his progressive politics, and he was responsible for racially integrating some of the bands he recorded and the concerts he promoted. Yet it was apparent that for Hammond, "the vitality of jazz was necessarily connected to both a specific political program and an exacting definition of 'negroid' aesthetics" (51). This philosophy of jazz separated Hammond from his "colorblind" friend and colleague Feather, who throughout his career as a writer, tunesmith, and broadcaster remained convinced that anyone could play good jazz—as he demonstrated again and again in his "blindfold test" columns for *Metronome* and *Down Beat*—and that racial integration was best for jazz (and America generally). The questions that divided Hammond and Feather persisted for decades in the discourse around jazz music, but their shared commitment to anti-racist politics and celebrations of African American creativity decisively influenced the future course of jazz criticism.

In chapter 2, Gennari contrasts the passionate discourse of jazz "fan" culture and the anti-commercial, intellectual discourse favored by certain Swing Era record collectors destined to become important mid-twentieth century jazz critics. These Ivy League collectors—Ralph Gleason, Nat Hentoff, Marshall Stearns, Ralph de Toledano, Barry Ulanov, Eugene Williams, and Martin Williams—would go on to propose "a formal and aestheticized paradigm of jazz history" intended to prove that jazz "belonged in the cultural pantheon that a sound liberal arts education . . . ought to represent" (66). Chapter 3 tackles the competing histories of jazz published beginning in the late 1930s and their relationships to the "trad" versus swing versus "modern" debates: Rudi Blesh's *Shining Trumpets*, Sidney Finkelstein's *Jazz: A People's Music*, Frederick Ramsey Jr. and Charles Edward Smith's *Jazzmen*, Marshall Stearns's *The Story of Jazz*, and Barry Ulanov's *History of Jazz in America*. Blesh's *Shining Trumpets* claimed that authentic jazz was played only by New Orleans African Americans, and that the style fell into serious decline after Armstrong's 1925 Hot Five sides and Jelly Roll Morton's 1926 Victor small-group recordings. Blesh, like many other New Orleans revivalists, reveled in "'the virtuosity of the group'"—a Marx-tinged perspective, according to Gennari, in which early jazz was an "authentic folk expression of the US proletariat," while swing amounted to a "homogenized cultural product of the US bourgeois culture industry" (132). *Shining Trumpets* was also the first jazz history to draw upon the anthropological work of Africanists Melville Herskovits and Richard Waterman, an influence that shaped Blesh's belief in the innate rhythmic/musical superiority of Africans and African Americans, and his rejection of supposedly European-influenced post-1926 jazz, from Duke Ellington to Benny Goodman. In contrast to

Ramsey/Smith and Blesh, the modernists Finkelstein and Ulanov "believed that change *itself* was one of jazz's essential properties and that the music had yet to reach its full potential" (140). Finally, *The Story of Jazz*—written on a Guggenheim fellowship by Marshall Stearns, a professor of medieval English who "became a public icon of jazz's canonization" (146)—positioned jazz as a Cold War–era "triumph of American interracial democracy" (150). Stearns's transdisciplinary, "liberal consensus view of jazz history . . . [attenuated] ideological differences within the music" and portrayed jazz as a "symbol of freedom, democracy, and interracial communication" (152).

The fourth chapter of *Blowin' Hot and Cool* covers the mid-century cohort of jazz critics—Whitney Balliett, Ira Gitler, Ralph Gleason, Nat Hentoff, Gene Lees, Dan Morgenstern, and Martin Williams—who wrote for a variety of mainstream and specialty publications, founded new jazz magazines, taught university courses, and worked for radio, television, record labels, and jazz festivals. In the fifth chapter, essentially a continuation of the preceding chapter, Gennari focuses on "jazz's new mainstream respectability" (209) in education and elite entertainment in the 1950s, represented by Marshall Stearns's "Jazz Roundtables," concert series, and School of Jazz in Lenox, Massachusetts, George Wein's Newport Jazz Festival, and various jazz-based diplomatic initiatives including the Newport-based State Department tours and the Voice of America jazz broadcasts. Gennari skillfully interprets the 1960 Newport riots and the concurrent musician-led counter-festival as jazz-scene foreshadowings of "both the purposeful grass-roots organizing work and the terrifying disorder that would compete for attention in the national imagination during the most turbulent decade of the century" (248).

In chapter 6, Gennari discusses the reactions of mainstream critics to the music and cultural politics of the 1960s jazz avant-garde, as well as the fresh critical voices that championed the New Thing: Frank Kofsky and Amiri Baraka. Kofsky used a regular platform in the Dan Morgenstern–edited magazine *Jazz* to savage the liberal critical consensus achieved in the 1950s, "exposing" a "reactionary bourgeois conspiracy against black nationalist influence in jazz" and the "racist political economy of jazz" (258), aided and abetted by a mob of greedy, white supremacist jazz critics—everyone but Kofsky. Gennari explains the intensity of the avant-garde era critical disputes by invoking the "complexity of the relationship between music, race, and social positioning, and how especially difficult it was in the heat of the 1960s jazz wars for commentators to see more broadly than the lens of their ideologies would permit" (262). The bulk of the chapter is dedicated to Amiri Baraka, the onetime downtown bohemian and eventual uptown leader of the Black Aesthetic movement. Baraka, a poet and dramatist, "turned jazz writing into a performance, an intense drama of sound, feeling,

and movement" (269). His book *Blues People* updated Herskovits's African-retentions theory of black American culture, classifying jazz, blues, and pop music by the practitioners' race and class in a search for sounds reflecting the "authenticity" and "attitude" of the black working class. At the end of the decade, however, the black nationalist and white liberal schools of jazz criticism were tentatively united in an "anxiety about rock's commercial success, technological, and sonic encroachment on jazz" (291).

Chapter 7 steps outside of the book's principal historical narrative to explore Dial Records founder, jazz critic, and pulp-fiction writer Ross Russell's portrayals of Charlie Parker in his novel *The Sound* and his Parker biography *Bird Lives!* Gennari situates Russell's work in the context of contemporaneous pop-culture representations of Parker and the postwar jazz life, and he uses Russell's correspondence with writer Albert Goldman to illustrate the seductive appeal of depicting Parker as an existentialist, gluttonous, violent anti-hero of the African American underclass.

Gennari returns to the contentious world of jazz criticism in chapter 8, discussing the work of Stanley Crouch and Gary Giddins, from their loft-jazz writings to their involvement with the Ken Burns *Jazz* documentary. Gennari details Crouch's and Giddins's intellectual indebtedness to Albert Murray, who in *The Omni-Americans* and in his eloquent, mythic text *Stomping the Blues* outlined a "way to affirm jazz's black cultural roots while steering clear of 1960s radical ideology" (351). Gennari also introduces a still younger generation of critics including Greg Tate, whose "kaleidoscopic view of jazz" is "fluid and open-ended, disturbing orderly notions of a jazz canon and a jazz tradition" (357)—the Murray/Crouch/Wynton Marsalis jazz canon at Lincoln Center, and anyone else's jazz canon too. Gennari observes that in the music's second century, "jazz has been canonized in many of the ways that several generations of jazz critics hoped it would be"—in high-culture institutions, universities, and to a certain extent in the popular imagination—but jazz criticism "remains marked . . . by as much or more dissension than ever" (370). The "gloriously messy" state of jazz, jazz criticism, and academic jazz studies at the beginning of the twenty-first century is, for Gennari, the best indication that canonization and institutionalization have not yet suffocated the music that he loves so well (371). Certainly some of the most innovative and interesting recent jazz-studies research has engaged creative practices and artistic communities that fall outside the jazz canon, such as experimental and improvised music, popular styles, "world" and intercultural music, and performances that incorporate multimedia and other art forms. *Blowin' Hot and Cool*, in contrast, proves the continuing relevance of insightful scholarship situated within the bounds of the jazz canon.

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Notes

1. Three good appraisals of the jazz-studies field and the state of jazz criticism at the beginning of the new century can be found in the special "jazz studies" issue of *Current Musicology* (DeVeaux 2001–2, Tucker 2001–2, and Washburne 2001–2).

2. In a book review for *Current Musicology*, Niko Higgins points out how many "new jazz studies" texts risk "overemphasi[zing] contextual meaning at the expense of actual musicians' experiences," and recommends ethnography as a corrective (2004:168).

3. The short list of excellent jazz-historical publications since 1997 includes: Scott DeVeaux's *The Birth of Bebop* (1997), William Howland Kenney's *Jazz on the River* (2005), George E. Lewis's *A Power Stronger Than Itself* (forthcoming), Paul Lopes's *The Rise of a Jazz Art World* (2002), Eric Porter's *What Is This Thing Called Jazz?* (2002), Sherrie Tucker's *Swing Shift* (2000), and now *Blowin' Hot and Cool*.