Friends Along the Way: A Journey Through Jazz. By Gene Lees. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003. $35.00 U.S. 384 p., ill. ISBN 0-300-09967-3

The history of jazz, like other music histories, has been well chronicled, but Canadian author Gene Lees' book *Friends Along the Way: A Journey Through Jazz* takes a different perspective than others. Lees offers an insider's view as a musician, editor of the *Jazz Newsletter,* and author of over a dozen volumes of jazz history and criticism. He has been called the "Proust of Jazz" (back dust jacket) owing to stylistic similarities with that of Marcel Proust. Indeed, much of Lees' writing contains literary antecedents that recall the French author's personal, evocative style.

Friends Along The Way is a collection of essays or, more specifically, miniature biographies of various people involved in jazz. The subjects range from musicians to arrangers to managers. While editor of the *Jazz Newsletter,* Lees was aware that the elder generation of artists and arrangers that had been his mentors were passing away. To preserve their memory he began writing a series of portraits, sometimes from extended interviews. This latest offering is the eighth in a series which, as the author points out, "makes the *Jazz Newsletter* the most anthologized publication in jazz history" (xvi).

Sixteen essays of varying length are collected together for this anthology, with the final one being a fictional satire titled "The Wombat Chronicle." In the introduction, Lees makes it clear these essays are not criticism, which he perceives as "futile" (xii). Having said that, he proceeds to criticize everything from popular culture to the academic study of Bob Dylan, at the same time alluding to jazz's superiority. He goes on to privilege jazz from other music forms by saying, "you cannot judge the art of jazz by standards that apply, say, to the music of China, nor can you demand the formal structure that is one of the criteria of what we call classical music. ... nor can you expect of a string quartet playing Schubert the same charging spontaneity that you can find in jazz" (xv).

Lees' miniature portraits are very much centred in a musical sensibility, owing to the fact that some of the "conversations" are between two musicians. As a result, they tend to use terminology that is foreign to a reader not familiar with altered major seventh chords or two-five-one progressions. As well, all the subjects of these mini-biographies have (or had) a personal relationship with Lees, and the choice of subjects ranges from the well-known to the obscure. Stanley Turrentine, Bill Evans, and Ray Brown are together with lesser-known people like Hugo Friedhofer and Clause Ogerman. But, in Lees' view, they have all had an impact in some way.

The writing is clear and Lees creates a narrative through each chapter by preluding the interview with a scenario that ties to the subject. The conversational style is from a first-person perspective, and each essay successfully conveys the feeling the author is speaking in person. In many ways these are very personal glimpses into people's lives that could only be gained via friendship or intimate knowledge.

The musicians he focuses on all mention their own influences and how their psychology of musical understanding was formed, and many lapse into discussion about performance practice. In chapter seven, Lou

Levy comments about his role as an accompanist: "I'm always on the lyric. It keeps the melody in mind. I like to improvise off the melody, not just off chords" (137). Classical violinist Yue Deng notes the difference between classical and jazz musical practice in chapter fifteen: "A different sound. Very different from classical. If I played straight what Roger [Kellaway] wrote on the music, it wouldn't sound like jazz at all. You have to make it sing" (298). Comments such as these speak to the basic principles of playing a musical instrument and most times they are overlooked by biographers and journalists. Indeed, the mental and emotional factors that underpin this kind of instrumental performance have not been studied extensively, so getting an inside view such as this helps to understand more about the creative process.

While Lees convincingly lays out a diverse tableau, he does make some comments that speak more to the sense of elitism which many jazz historians and musicians have, namely, that their music truly does exist at the same level as classical music or, more precisely, as an art form. In referring to a recording session with Frank Sinatra that he witnessed, Lees notes, "Sinatra was the greatest singer American popular music has ever known" (188). This is a problematic statement in that it imparts aesthetic value on one object while stripping others completely, and it is wholly subjective. Plus it further degrades Lees' introductory remarks regarding criticism.

Friends Along the Way is an easy book to read, musical specificity notwithstanding, and the essays are engaging and enjoyable. There is a comprehensive index, but given the praise Lees awards to some of his subjects, a discography or essential listening section would have complemented his choices. The book is certainly useful for ancillary information about jazz history and practice, and it is written to be entertaining—the author's original intent.

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