

The Miller Companion to Jazz in Canada (and Canadians in Jazz). By Mark Miller. Toronto: Mercury Press, 2001. 221 p. ISBN 1-55128-093-0 \$24.95

Distinguished critic Mark Miller's new book is a valuable guide to Canadian jazz. The 221-page *Miller Companion to Jazz in Canada (and Canadians in Jazz)* has a twofold goal. Miller describes Canadian musicians' contribution to the performance, composition, and recording of jazz. At the same time, he situates their legacies in national, North American, and international contexts. In 370 alphabetical entries, Miller focuses on musicians and their bands but also includes information on awards, clubs, record labels, publications, and historical periods.

The 300 biographies that make up the bulk of the *Miller Companion* follow a consistent format. Miller provides basic biographical information but concentrates on the educational influences, professional associations, and recorded output of each musician's career. Miller is at his most impressive when he is taking the reader through the labyrinth of a typical Canadian jazz career that might include residencies in any of the three big centres (Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver), temporary or more permanent forays to the U.S. and Europe, and a dizzying array of performing and recording experiences.

Each entry also contains an assessment of the musician's performance style and characteristics. Miller uses a tried-and-true combination of stylistic terms (swing, bebop, etc.), comparisons to other, usually more famous, and most often American musicians ("sounds like" Bill Evans, Billie Holiday, et al.), and non-technical language to describe a musician's mode of expression.

Most of the time, this approach works fairly well. For instance, in his description of Kate Hammett-Vaughan's singing of the standard jazz repertoire, Miller refers to her as

having "increasingly drawn on extended vocal techniques and a widening vocabulary of utterances to colour a more traditional and naturally sultry singing style in the tradition of Sheila Jordan." He also has a seemingly endless supply of poetic language for the jazz idiom. For example, the Lonely Universe band of Michel Lambert and Michael White has a "suitably forlorn sound, swept by a chill wind of sonic and electroacoustic effects but animated by Lambert's characteristically restless and at times abrupt drumming." This gives the reader a real sense of the aural experience of the ensemble.

Sometimes, however, the entries might benefit from the use of a more specific musical vocabulary. In his characterization of Kevin Turcotte's range beyond his original influences as a bop and post-bop trumpeter, Miller describes Turcotte as nevertheless "maintaining melodic fluency, tonal expressivity, and brassy intensity." While these terms accurately define some of the characteristics of bop brass playing, they might also be applied to almost any trumpet player and therefore are not particularly helpful in identifying the specific elements of Turcotte's style.

This may not be a significant dilemma with musicians as young as Turcotte. But the problem becomes more acute when dealing with players whose careers span decades and whose performance and recorded output requires and deserves a more sophisticated approach. Miller struggles to define the musical reasons for Oscar Peterson's greatness or to explain Paul Bley's status as a musician's musician, leaving the reader with somewhat ambivalent assessments of both performers.

Beyond the entries for musicians and groups, Miller does provide valuable information on Canadian jazz awards and their winners, the location and histories of clubs, background on Canadian record labels, and brief descriptions of some of the most important historical periods in Canadian jazz. The listing of jazz clubs, complete with addresses, is very useful and will be even more important over time as memories dim, buildings disappear, and neighborhoods change.

Less satisfying are the entries on historical periods (ragtime, classic jazz, swing, bebop, fusion, and avant-garde). While Miller does a good job of providing references to the main Canadian artists who represent a given style, he does not always consistently or adequately define the term itself. For instance, Miller describes ragtime as "a melding of African-based syncopation and European-derived harmony in formal through-composed music," but he does not name the specific musical characteristics that define swing, bebop or fusion as musical styles. In the category classic jazz, Miller combines traditional, "trad," dixieland, and early jazz, but does not provide "see" references from these terms to the alphabetical listing and also fails to explain fully their musical differences. This is particularly frustrating in the case of traditional and "trad," terms which the uninitiated user might assume are equivalent. It should also be noted there are two other key musical styles, smooth jazz and *musique actuelle*, that are used throughout the book but left undefined except through inference.

Given Miller's obvious interest in educating and informing his audience, it is appropriate to improve this component in a future edition.

The editorial and production values of *The Miller Companion to Jazz in Canada (and Canadians in Jazz)* are generally high. In a section entitled "Using the MCJC," Miller explains cross references, name and vocation entries, dates, discographical references, and abbreviations. Only one thing seemed problematic when using the book. Names at the head of each entry and throughout the entry are all in boldface, capital letters. Sometimes, this made looking for the beginning of the entry difficult. In two cases (once at Fusion and again at Dave Young), because there was also a missing line before the entry, it was hard to find where it began. This might be remedied by keeping the main entry in boldface, upper-case letters, and the name and group references within the entry in boldface, smaller-case letters.

With the publication of this authoritative reference work, Mark Miller has performed a truly admirable task. He has synthesized his knowledge and transformed the vast body of archival, print, and recorded material at his disposal into a resource for all to share. This companion will be an essential tool for jazz lovers, musicians, educators, and scholars well into the second century of Canadian jazz.

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