

How to Be a Jazz Critic

Thinking about a career in Jazz Journalism? Jazz writing is a lot like jazz playing: You'll need to be talented, hard-working, passionate, self-absorbed, and disdainful of material reward.

If those are your gifts, we're here to ease your burden. Just memorize the handy phrases below and plug them into your stories as needed. You'll save years of training and write just like the real, professional jazz critics! Be sure all your reviews include plenty of references to yourself—readers need to be reminded who they're really reading about.

Sound good? Now repeat after me:

Their music is so much more than the sum of its parts. They think as one, phrase as one, play as one. It's an intimate conversation, a shared secret. They are joined at the hip, of a mind, symbiotic, synergistic, telepathic, transcendent. They don't hit you over the head, they have nothing to prove, they invite you in. They can turn on a dime. Tasty!

Jazz: America's indigenous art form, America's classical music, our national treasure. The sound of surprise, bright moments. It's a gourmet meal in a McDonald's culture. It's a fine wine, a literary masterpiece, gumbo. It's blues, gospel, sadness, and joy. It's unacknowledged, disowned, downplayed, suppressed. An ugly stepsister, bastard child, shoeless orphan. It dies poor, no health insurance, alone in a Brooklyn apartment. The greedy record company releases a compilation of embarrassing outtakes. Tragic!

Young lions, seasoned veterans, a cross-generational assemblage. Harkening back to the tradition, the whole history in a single phrase. Drawing from a long line of, the latest incarnation of, bringing back to life, passing the torch. Long live!

The leader is a double threat, a triple threat, a quadruple threat, multi-talented, multi-faceted, a musician's musician, a true original. Deceptively simple, honest, unpretentious, singular, spiritual, surprisingly mature, an old soul. Her compositions are tomorrow's standards. Here is the next Gershwin, Porter, Kern. She has that rare gift of melody, she sings through her horn. Her sonic explorations, her otherworldly tone, her surgical precision. Her recording is a powerful statement, a tour de force, time suspended, raw emotion, devastating truth, unbridled joy, pure alchemy. She's still in peak form; she's had a long and storied career, she's an unsung shero. Bravo!...

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