

Viewfinder

Funeral Procession, 1960, by William Claxton

In the old New Orleans funerals, sad music was played on the way to the cemetery and happy music was played on the way home, with that much more swing and exuberance." So writes Joachim E Berendt in *Jazz Life*, a blissful, back-breaking door-step of a book, brimming with the German musicologists's lyrical musings and the wonderfully spontaneous photographs of William Claxton.

In 1960, the two men set out on a rambling Kerouacian odyssey

across the States - from New York and Memphis to San Francisco and Hollywood - in an attempt to reach a complete understanding of "America's great art - jazz".

Judging by the book's contents, their journey took them through every smoky, jazz-filled bar in the country, where they encountered, and photographed, many of the great musicians of their age: Thelonious Monk, Cannonball Adderley and Ella Fitzgerald among them.

Music seems to leap from Claxton's silent images - the

rasping trumpet of Chet Baker, John Coltrane's grizzly tenor, the shimmering cymbals of Art Blakey - but it is joy, above all, that serves as the book's keynote. The infectious, unfettered delight that illuminates the face of the dancing boy at the front of the above picture is typical; proof that jazz's inspirational power can make even a funeral a happy day. "Most books of jazz photographs are far too sad," says Claxton. *Jazz Life* is anything but.

Benjamin Secher

William Claxton will be talking about his work at Ray's Jazz Café, Foyles, London W1 (020 7437 5660) on Tues at 6pm. 'Jazz Life' (Taschen, £100) will be published at the end of the month.

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