

Check out the bassist's underpants!



Jazz Life
By William Claxton
& Joachim E Berendt
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Jazz has always looked as well as sounded special. To each decade its sartorial superlatives: in the 1940s there was Dizzy Gillespie's French beret and cravat; in the 1980s Steve Coleman's Chinese Kung Fu suit and wraparound shades; in the millennium Jason Yarde's Egyptian dreadlocks and Adidas. As for Miles Davis, he had an eye for freaky threads that dazzled as much as his yellow Ferrari. He was born to be a style icon.

American photographer William Claxton and German musicologist Joachim Berendt were well aware of the tremendous visual richness, the priceless "hip" of jazz culture, in 1960. In order to photograph and record anything and everything that captured the style and lifestyle framing the music, they embarked upon an odyssey that took them from the hazy sunshine of California to the bohemian bustle of New York via the French colonial sass of New Orleans. These pictures, along with their annotations, together made up *Jazz Life*: a treasured, and hard to get hold of, collector's item. Now Taschen have re-assembled the original material, long out of print, and added much that has never been seen before, to make a coffee-table book that's for more than decoration.

Claxton and Berendt undertook their mission at a perfect time. In the year before they set out, Miles recorded *Kind Of Blue*, Ornette made *The Shape of Jazz to Come*, and Coltrane, *Giant Steps*. Musicians were making history on a regular basis.

Just about all of the significant figures of those heady days, the likes of Mingus, Ellington, Roach, Cherry, Mulligan, the Montgomerys, Dorham and Gordon - brilliant improvisers who have enshrined labels such as Atlantic, Blue Note, Pacific and Riverside deep in jazz lore - made portraits of tremendous character.

If you've seen the sleeve of a record made by any of the above then you'll know what to expect. Everybody looks effortlessly cool. Everybody has magnetism. Everybody has something individual going on. Even the stock image of a saxophonist swathed in cigarette smoke on a canvas of moody monochrome (Young Zoot Sims) isn't at



The bohemian bustle of New York: drummer Elvin Jones outside the famous Birdland club in Manhattan

WILLIAM CLAXTON

all hackneyed. This is the original template that countless yuppie advertising agencies ripped off in the 1980s.

But, as alluring as these shots are, they're eclipsed by the human interest of the less posed snaps. We're talking Chet Baker in a car park, looking more lowlife mug than matinee idol; Yusef Lateef kneeling in prayer on the green grass of a public park; Thelonious Monk having a coffee with friends.

Most striking of all is a jam session at Terry Gibbs's house featuring the great saxophonist Sonny Stitt. He is immaculately turned out in a white shirt and black tie, while Paul Chambers, bassist of choice for both Miles and Trane, is less formal. He's in his underpants.

There's a sense of innocence, spontaneity and energy which imparts a strong verisimilitude to many of these scenes. And there's an uncontrived chic in others. Glamour, in its can't-be-bought pedigree, oozes from the pages of *Jazz Life*, especially in the sun-kissed tableaux out in decadent-looking California.

A pool party featuring Mel Lewis, Horace Silver, Dave Nelson and Wynton

Kelly is just amazing. With assorted dolls lounging around them, the guys look like Hollywood film stars. The only folk missing are Belafonte and Dandridge.

What increases the sweetness of all of this eye candy is the sheer size of the pages on which it's splashed out. Taschen don't do their art books by halves and *Jazz Life* is a minisuitcase that weighs as much as an old typewriter. All of which means that when you feast your eye on some of the double-page spreads you think you're looking at a gatefold record sleeve that has been upsized.

No spread is more stunning than that of Louis Keppard shopping for groceries in New Orleans. If you've never heard of the banjo player, then that's because nobody has outside his locality. To all intents and purposes Keppard embodies the jazz life in earnest - an existence of obscurity, poverty, adversity.

They may not have ever sold out the Carnegie but minor league players like Keppard are valuable footnotes in musical history. Moreover, many of them, such as the toothless tub bassist in the Beale Street Jug Band, do some-

thing their descendants in mainstream hip-hop don't: they really keep it real.

Same goes for the "jazz postman" who played for poor kids on street corners in Washington or the ageing bandleaders at Crescent City funerals. These are ordinary people with an extraordinary charisma that flows from the lifeblood of their communities and families. That comes across in a truly uplifting shot of the beautiful 100-year-old mother of veteran clarinetist George Lewis. She is another showstopper. She is pictured in bed, smoking a pipe.

It all adds up to a hugely rich slice of Americana, something in which jazz has undeniably played a pivotal role. Today the music has exponents the world over and perhaps the contemporary equivalent of *Jazz Life* might be "Jazz Planet", a global tour as opposed to a national trek. Shots could well include Omar Sosa pulling back his long, flowing white robes as he hunches over a piano in Havana, trumpeter Byron Wallen blowing his conch shells in London or flautist Malik Mezzadri wiping the sweat from his brow in St Lucia. And scores of jazz musicians on both sides of Atlantic gripped by emotion at the benefit concerts for New Orleans post-Katrina.

Kevin Le Gendre

Louis Keppard embodies the jazz life - obscurity, poverty, adversity