



TRIO: Jimmy Archey, Earl Hines, Pops Foster

## JAZZ

## Pictures That Swing

**I**N 1960 WILLIAM CLAXTON took the road trip of his dreams. A West Coast photographer already well known for his photos of jazz musicians, Claxton was asked by German writer Joachim Berendt to document a cross-country search for American jazz artists. Like the men and women they were searching out, Claxton and Berendt were great improvisers. So, while they knew generally where they wanted to go—New Orleans, Chicago, the West Coast—they made room for happy accidents. “Most all of the trip was unscripted,” says Claxton, now 78. As a result, besides the usual shots of Ellington, Basie, Ella and Miles, there are arresting shots of

Georgia Sea Island gospel choirs, bluesmen in Louisiana’s Angola Penitentiary and a carnival outside St. Louis. In Memphis, they discovered that no one was still playing traditional jazz. “It was all hard bop by then,” Claxton remembers.

The results of that far-flung expedition were published as “Jazz Life” in Germany but never in this country, and the book has long been out of print. Now Taschen, a publisher known for luxurious coffee-table books, has brought “Jazz Life” to an American audience. Claxton reckons that Taschen’s

version is “about 35 percent bigger than the original.” Many photos were added, and for the first time Claxton’s arresting color work is included. But while the size of the project—the book is heavier than, well, not a piano but certainly a piano *bench*—is impressive, what you’re really paying your \$200 for is Claxton’s discerning eye. “Jazz Life” is surely the most thorough and imaginative visual record of American jazz life at midcentury that we’ll ever see. Just don’t think of it as a valedictory for a fading art form, at least not in front of Claxton.

“There’s still a lot of jazz in the country,” he insists, pointing out that even most middle-size cities still have a club or two devoted to jazz. “The other day, I counted something like 70 clubs in southern California featuring jazz. Jazz is surviving.”

—MALCOLM JONES



JAMMING: A blues party in 1960