

Capturing the soul of jazz on a cross-country odyssey

"Jazzlife"

William Claxton, Joachim E. Berendt
Taschen, \$200

BOOK REVIEW

REVIEWED BY PAUL DE BARROS
Seattle Times jazz critic

Just when you thought the Jelly Roll Morton box set was this year's Ultimate Jazz Gift, along comes the most humongous, amazing, sumptuous jazz photography book ever printed, to usurp the title.

Or should I say heavyweight title? Weighing in at 15 pounds, thick as a world atlas, with 696 glorious, glossy 11-by-16-inch pages, Bill Claxton's cinematic documentary of a four-month research trip around America in the summer of 1960, with the late German jazz critic, Joachim Berendt, is a lifetime resource of renewable pleasure.

Claxton, a photographer for Life, Paris Match and Vogue, is the guy who took all those sexy black and white pictures of Chet Baker back in the '50s. But you'll also recognize umpteen other images here, many of them classic album covers: The overhead shot of the Lighthouse All-Stars, standing on the beach, their name scratched in the sand; the Montgomery Brothers, with the Golden Gate Bridge looming behind them; Art Pepper, trudging up a neighborhood hillside in Los Angeles. Claxton and Berendt — whose text is a bit stiff, but always smart — started out in New York, traveled south to the Georgia Sea Islands and New Orleans, then continued through Memphis, Kansas City, St. Louis, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Boston. They also caught the festivals in Newport and Monterey.

Shooting in color and black and white, with a Leica M3 and Nikon F, Claxton turned his gaze to churches, backyards, streets, restaurants, cafés, green rooms, and, of course, stages. A master of dramatic, panoramic composition, he spreads many shots across two pages, including his famous portrait of trumpeter Kenny Dorham, at Newport, which is mostly sky, and a long study of a New Orleans funeral parade.



WILLIAM CLAXTON / FROM "JAZZLIFE"

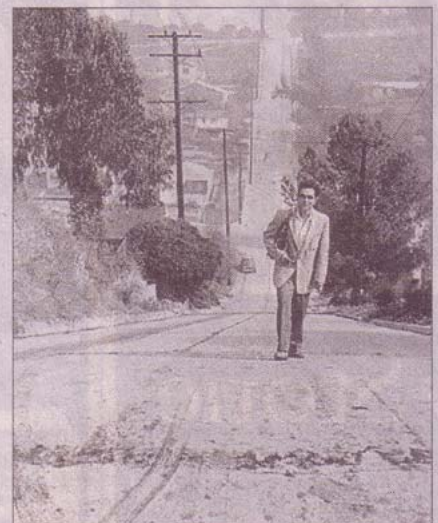
Photographer William Claxton snapped this image of drummers Philly Joe Jones, left, and Larance Marable at the Falcon Lair in Beverly Hills during the summer of 1960.

But there is intimacy, too: a close-up of singer Joe Williams, fingers at his temples, warming up backstage; Ernestine Anderson, pertly seated in a fancy black dress with flared sleeves, Coca Cola at her side; James P. Johnson, chewing on a cigar, standing backstage next to his wife.

There are some cool surprises: a sunny pool party in L.A., with a bare-legged Paul Chambers playing bass at a jam session; a portrait of an "international band" in front of the old Berklee School, picturing student Gabor Szabo; and drummer Shelly Manne, in full regalia, riding at his stable. Our own Julian Priester's in there, too, at the Newport "alternative festival."

"Jazzlife" was printed once before, in German only. Snap up this tri-lingual edition, which also includes a CD of field recordings made during the trip, before it goes out of print. It's a must-have for the jazz collector.

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Sax man Art Pepper climbing Fargo Street near his home in Los Angeles.