

The Jazz LifeWilliam Claxton/
Joachim E. Berendt

Taschen £100

This is really the big band, the Centipede if you will of illustrated jazz books. The sheer dramatic size of the thing hits you in much the same way that a well-arranged brass section would in the front row of a small auditorium.

An all-action shot of hard bop legend Art Blakey, his head tilted back in rapture, dazzles. An off the cuff snap of a less than glamorous Chet Baker surprises. A graceful portrait of Yusef Lateef kneeling in prayer on the green grass of a public park tantalises.

These images were gathered by photographer Claxton during a 1960s road trip across America with German musicologist Joachim Berendt. Working on the principle that jazz was not just an art form confined to concert halls and institutions but an organic entity to be found in all manner of situations poetic and prosaic, the duo sought to capture the lifestyles and culture underpinning the music. They succeeded.

What shows their discovery and understanding of the jazz life is indeed all of the minor league happenings, the fringe events, the street scenes as well as the star turns. *The Jazz Life* thus provides a very vivid insight into the music at grass roots level as well as the place of African-American culture in '60s Americana. Claxton recorded the down at heel realities as well as the freeform chic of America's greatest gift to the world. **Kevin Le Gendre**