

JAZZ SPOTLIGHT

Snapshots of a great era's road trip

By DON HECKMAN
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THE years 1959 and 1960 were watershed one for jazz. Miles Davis recorded "Kind of Blue," the bestselling jazz album of all time, as well as his remarkable Gil Evans collaboration, "Sketches of Spain"; Ornette Coleman made his breakthrough debut in New York City; John Coltrane recorded "Giant Steps"; Dave Brubeck recorded "Take Five"; and the first bossa nova album, João Gilberto's "Chega de Saudade," was released.

Despite the growing presence of rock 'n' roll, it would be three more years before Beatlemania would kick off the tsunami of British rock. The transition from the '50s to the '60s was a time, in other words, when jazz, overflowing with talent young and old, was reaching a peak of musical creativity and public interest.

Germany's Joachim Berendt — Europe's best-known jazz journalist and author — wanted to chronicle the moment in words and pictures. So he contacted a young but already well-regarded photographer named William Claxton, proposing a four- to five-month tour across the U.S. in search of jazz. The result of this extended automotive journey — with its timely, Kerouac-like "On the Road" resonance — was a book called "Jazz Life." Originally published in the early '60s, it has long been an out-of-print collectors' item.

Now Taschen, the German publisher known for its heterodoxal book projects, has revived it in spectacular fashion, again with the title "Jazz Life," by Claxton and Berendt (Taschen, \$200), adding new material and a CD, and assembling it in a gallery-size book 696 pages long. Three inches thick, it weighs 17 pounds and measures nearly 13 by 19 inches. That's a handful of jazz by any standards.

Fortunately, it's also a very impressive handful — or, more accurately, armful.

What Claxton and Berendt found in their cross-country odyssey was a music being played — in virtually every location — by an extraordinary array of gifted young (and photogenic) musicians.

But it is Claxton's photos — particularly impressive in the

book's large format — that recall the era in mesmerizing fashion. Shot mostly in black and white, they take the reader through the music, the players and the places from inside and out: the Count Basie and Duke Ellington bands in rehearsal; atmospheric shots of musicians — Evans, Benny Carter, Art Pepper, Louis Armstrong, Thelonious Monk and Art Blakey, among hundreds of others; and a stunning array of singers — including Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday and Mahalia Jackson — all captured on film in the prime of their music making.

Add to that the many pages devoted to the blues and gospel music, and "Jazz Life" becomes an extraordinarily valuable jazz document.