

## Toward Jazz's "Official" History: The Debates and Discourses of Jazz History Textbooks

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### Abstract

In the late 1970s, jazz studies in American higher education had grown to the point that jazz history courses were becoming an increasingly important part of the curriculum. This article critically examines the emergence of textbooks intended to meet the needs of jazz history teachers, from the late 1970s to the present. Of particular importance is the manner in which such works position themselves in relation to the prevailing canonical frameworks of jazz history, which was largely the result of the pioneering historical work of Marshall Stearns in the 1950s. I suggest that authors of textbooks have positioned themselves in relation to the canons of jazz history in various ways. While almost every text ultimately presents a canonically-based narrative, authors frequently express varying degrees of unease with those same frameworks. The result is a body of work which simultaneously reflects an attraction to and repulsion from the canon. Of central importance in this article will be an assessment of major jazz history texts published over the course of the last three decades, beginning with Frank Tirro's *Jazz: A History*, and ending with the recently published *Jazz* by Scott DeVeaux and Gary Giddins. These texts are examined both with respect to their own individual narratives and structures, as well as their reception within the scholarly community.

### Author Biography

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Kenneth E. Prouty is an Assistant Professor of musicology and jazz studies in the College of Music at Michigan State University. He holds a Ph.D. in ethnomusicology from the University of Pittsburgh, and an M.M. in jazz studies from the University of North Texas. His forthcoming book from the University Press of Mississippi is entitled *Knowing Jazz: Canon, Pedagogy and Community in the Information Age* .

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But leaving jazz history aside for a moment, there is little doubt, as Gary Edgerton (2001) has argued in his book-length study of Burns and his work, that Jazz fits readily into Burns's liberal, pluralistic – and highly romantic – vision of American cultural history, as expressed in his previous documentary series, including *The Civil War* (1990), *Baseball* (1994), and the biographies which. A significant early 'moment' in the history of jazz was the period in the early decades of the twentieth century when the understanding of the music began to shift from that of popular entertainment to that of art music: a shift in which the discourses of jazz criticism played a major part.<sup>6</sup> The debate here was between an essentialized notion of jazz. *History of Jazz*. (Encyclopaedia Britannica). Archibald Motley. The Casa Lomans' role in the history of jazz remains controversial, but it is clear that they were, at the very least, the first white orchestra to try to swing, though their rhythms were more often peppy than swinging. The Casa Loma Orchestra was also the first white band to feature jazz instrumentals consistently, rather than playing politely arranged dance tunes with an occasional hot solo.