

Kansas City Jazz: From Ragtime to Bebop--A History: From Ragtime to Bebop--A History, Frank Driggs, Chuck Haddix, 2005, 320 pages

There were but four major galaxies in the early jazz universe, and three of them--New Orleans, Chicago, and New York--have been well documented in print. But there has never been a serious history of the fourth, Kansas City, until now. In this colorful history, Frank Driggs and Chuck Haddix range from ragtime to bebop and from Bennie Moten to Charlie Parker to capture the golden age of Kansas City jazz. Readers will find a colorful portrait of old Kaycee itself, back then a neon riot of bars, gambling dens and taxi dance halls, all ruled over by Boss Tom Pendergast, who had transformed a dusty cowtown into the Paris of the Plains. We see how this wide-open, gin-soaked town gave birth to a music that was more basic and more viscerally exciting than other styles of jazz, its singers belting out a rough-and-tumble urban style of blues, its piano players pounding out a style later known as "boogie-woogie." We visit the great landmarks, like the Reno Club, the "Biggest Little Club in the World," where Lester Young and Count Basie made jazz history, and Charlie Parker began his musical education in the alley out back. And of course the authors illuminate the lives of the great musicians who made Kansas City swing, with colorful profiles of jazz figures such as Mary Lou Williams, Big Joe Turner, Jimmy Rushing, and Andy Kirk and his "Clouds of Joy." Here is the definitive account of the raw, hard-driving style that put Kansas City on the musical map. It is a must read for everyone who loves jazz or American music history.

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