

Book Look

JELLY'S BLUES: The Life, Music, and Redemption of Jelly Roll Morton, by **HOWARD REICH** and **WILLIAM GAINES** (Da Capo Press, 288 pages, \$16.95) is a major addition to the literature on the man who claimed to have invented Jazz. With the authors' concentration on de-mystifying Morton the legend, and presenting him as a working, itinerant musician and composer, Morton's claim actually takes on more than simple hues of bravado. For instance, Gaines and Reich point to Morton's "Black Bottom Stomp" as the first manifestation of the importance of improvisation within a composed framework, a concept whose implications are still challenging. Additionally, "Jungle Blues" is both evocative of early Blues, and prescient of modal Jazz. Sociologically, there is much to be learned from Morton's path; musician Danny Barker, a contemporary of Morton's, nails the pianist's first tenure in New York when he is quoted as saying "America is always waiting for the new thingthat's the way America is. They didn't go for bluesy Jazz in New York...[Morton's] best music was a laidback tempo that they loved in the South...[but] New York... don't want nothing laid back." Morton's appalling troubles with ASCAP (which, along with the Melrose and Southern companies, he would later file law suits against) and the pianist's ventures, along with acolyte Roy Carew, into music publishing, show that Morton actually paved the way for better conditions for later generations of musicians. Morton paid more than his share of dues: It took until the year 2000 for his music to generate the kind of royalties he should have received during his lifetime. The authors also include a helpful guide to Morton's recorded legacy as it exists now, as well as a listing of compositions written by the great man.

JAZZ EXPOSE: The New York Jazz Museum and the Power Struggle That Destroyed It, by **HOWARD E. FISCHER** (Sundog Ltd., 134 pages, \$15) is a fairly exhaustive account of the first Jazz museum in the country (discounting, Fischer says, a contemporary museum in New Orleans whose scope was far more limited). The NYJM had its beginnings in the New York Jazz Society, which Fischer, an attorney, incorporated in 1967; their first concert presentation was the Count Basie Alumni Band, in the following year. They also began publishing a monthly newsletter in 1969, and Fischer inserts some of its Jazz-related "News Items" throughout the book (from which we learn that "April 7th to 11th [1969] was Jazz Week on the *Captain Kangaroo* show on CBS-TV," whose

guests included Willie 'The Lion' Smith and the Wilbur DeParis Band!). The actual Museum opened in June 1972 on West 55th street, with Fischer guesting on the *Today Show* the morning of the preview party (interviewed by Joe Garagiola and Frank McGhee), surrounded by media coverage that would be impressive even 30 years later. Fischer even subsequently appeared on *To Tell The Truth*, as the prize bounty to be identified as "the real Howard Fischer, founder and Executive Director of the New York Jazz Museum." Although the Museum would go through several more location changes, and receive grants from The Ford Foundation and The National Endowment for the Arts, serious internal squabbles between board members, and funding difficulties, eventually resulted in Fischer being fired as Executive Director, and the Museum finally closed in 1977. Fischer's story is an eye-opening account of the legal hassles and business strategies endemic to such ventures, but is also full of great Jazz stories involving many major musicians of the early and mid-1900's who were still flourishing at the time.

ELWOOD'S BLUES: Interviews with the Blues Legends & Stars, by **DAN AYKROYD** and **BEN MANILLA** (Backbeat Books, 260 pages, \$17.95) presents, in printed form, 39 interviews originally aired on *The House of Blues Radio Hour*, hosted by Aykroyd under his *Blues Brothers* guise of Elwood Blues. The usual suspects (John Lee Hooker, Bo Diddley, Koko Taylor, Junior Wells, Browns Ruth and Charles) are here, along with some Blues-influenced Rock musicians such as Eric Burdon, Carlos Santana, and Bill Wyman. There's also a section on "Keepers of the Flame," featuring Marcia Ball, Shemekia Copeland, Johnny Winter, and Keb' Mo' among others. Buddy Guy has some good anecdotes about his work at Chess, and, in one of the best interviews, Taj Mahal speaks interestingly on how styles evolve ("Sometimes it's like a guy can't sing a certain kind of way, he hiccups his way through the song and the next thing you know, it's a style. Or over a period of years a bunch of guys keep missing the fourth or fifth change in the blues and it becomes a kind of a surf style... it's a little bit thinner, a little bit washed away.") A typically elegant Robert Plant gives a wonderfully detailed interview that surpasses the recurring "The Blues will live forever" mundanities, while Susan Tedeschi illuminates relationships between Blues, Gospel, and musical theater. While much of the factual material is available elsewhere, there is enough gold to make this a good bet for Blues fans.

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