

I love music, from dub to punk rock to rock 'n roll's countless iterations. I'm also nuts for jazz. My dad raised me on big band jazz, and I fell for mid-century be bop, hard bop, and soul jazz later in life.

Every time fall arrives, I fall back into jazz mode. The chilly air, yellowing leaves—it feels like Miles Davis's muted trumpet to me, and Jimmy Smith's organ. For a while, I wrote about jazz so often that I filled a small book with jazz essays. It's called *This Is: Essays on Jazz*. Even after that book came out in 2017, even as I started writing more about nature and environmental issues, I kept writing about jazz.

During the first year of my daughter's life, I wrote a short series of historical fiction about a few mid-century musicians who I loved but who I didn't see written about enough. I was very sleep-deprived. Something about that hazy state lent itself to inventing narratives. Maybe exhaustion freed my nonfiction-writing brain from facts in a way I couldn't before. But as I played jazz around my daughter during her first year, I started writing these impulsive stories about overlooked jazz figures like pianist Carl Perkins, guitarist Billy Bauer, and composer Gigi Gryce. I often want to get to know the musicians who make the music that moves me. With mid-century jazz, there just isn't always much information about certain musicians, or what info there is in a cold historical mix of biographical details, album titles, and recording session info—nothing that brings musicians' personalities, achievement, or struggles to life. So I would create a fictionalized narrative in order to create a profile of their lives built from the historical record. As an essayist, I initially thought of them as hybrid jazz essays, because they were designed to convey the truth of the musicians' realities, despite certain made-up narrative details, but the term historical fiction seemed more accurate.

For instance, to tell the triumphant story of saxophonist Ike Quebec's return to music, I invented a single night in his life as a taxi driver. In order to explore guitarist Billy Bauer's preference for the background, rather than the foreground, I put him in a Manhattan record store where he found his only full-length album as a leader for sale. And I invented a moment with a fan to bring pianist Dodo Marmarosa's brilliant short career to life. I thought I was filling in the gaps in the historical record, but really I was just humanizing while staying true to the historic record. I finished four of these stories and sketched others. There are so many of these musicians were visionary talents, but time has dimmed their presence, and I wanted to celebrate their artistic contributions and their humanity. To do that, I needed to bring them to life. Geoff Dyer's book *But Beautiful* does this much better than me, but I enjoyed the experiment. Michael Cuscuna provided some fact-checking and details for Ike's story, which was generous. The literary journal *Brilliant Corners* published the story about Quebec, titled "The Comeback," and guitarist Billy Bauer, titled "Happy in the Background." The magazine *Moss* published another one in their fifth issue, about pianist Dodo Marmosa.

After that I thought I had finished writing about jazz. Then I wrote a whole essay about Grant Green's searing, ten-minute guitar solo in the song "Ain't Necessarily So," and an essay about the intersection of jazz guitarist Johnny Smith and the surf instrumental band The Ventures, for *Fretboard Journal*. And when I was browsing records at one of my local record stores, I found this Teddy Wilson record that I hadn't heard of before. My curiosity about *Teddy Wilson Meets Eiji Kitamura* birthed the essay in this issue of *Notre Dame Review*. For me, essays come

from questions. When I want to know about something, or keep turning something over in my mind, the process can take the form of an essay. That's what happened here. Music + curiosity = meaning. The story of these two musicians collaborating on this one record became a story about the way people share culture across language barriers. It became a story about music truly being the universal language, about master and apprentice, imitation and innovation, Black art and American identity, and the place of jazz in Japan, specifically. It was also the story of this later chapter in Teddy Wilson's life, after the peak of his fame in America, and about Eiji Kitamura's rising popularity. I guess I'll never finish writing about jazz, because I'll never stop listening to music, never stop sharing new music with my daughter, and never stop discovering new things. To me, music, curiosity, and sharing your enthusiasm is the only way to live. Writing essays about it? That can get a little exhausting, but I guess I'm just wired to do sometimes, too, when time allows.