



“But Beautiful: A Book About Jazz”

ABOUT THE BOOK

In eight poetically charged vignettes, Geoff Dyer skillfully evokes both modern jazz and the people who shaped it. Drawing from photos, anecdotes, and, most importantly, the way he hears the music, Dyer imaginatively reconstructs scenes from the embattled lives of some of the greats.

ABOUT THE INTERVIEWEE

Dr. Keith Javors is a producer, artist, music educator, speaker and industry consultant. A distinguished graduate of the University of North Texas (B.M., M.M. Jazz Studies) and the first graduate of the University of Illinois Jazz Pedagogy program (Ed.D. Music Education), he has held successful teaching positions at University of North Texas, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Eastern Illinois University, the University of North Florida and the Settlement Music School. Javors is highly sought after as a guest artist and clinician for schools, groups and organizations throughout the United States and abroad. For more information, visit: keithjavors.com.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE Each book guide follows the weekly Connect: 21CM Book Club discussions led by Sylvia Yang on [Facebook @21CMBookClub](https://www.facebook.com/21CMBookClub). Feel free to follow along with other book club members in real time or work at your own pace.

Welcome to the 13th meeting of Connect: 21CM’s Book Club. Join us as we read “But Beautiful: A Book About Jazz” by Geoff Dyer, which has been praised as one of the best books about jazz in recent memory. Jazz pianist Keith Jarrett offers the following: “‘But Beautiful’ is the only book about jazz that I have recommended to my friends. It is a little gem ... If closeness to the material determines a great jazz solo, Mr. Dyer’s book is one.”

BEFORE YOU READ...

“But Beautiful” is masterfully crafted from eight imaginative vignettes that reflect the structured but improvisatory nature of jazz itself. And in that spirit, this month’s Connect: 21CM Book Club is throwing in a twist! Instead of interviewing the author, we’ll be interviewing Dr. Keith Javors, a well-known jazz artist, producer and educator. Keep Dr. Javors in mind when submitting your questions this month.

AS YOU READ...

We offer a few questions for each chapter so you can dive deeper into your reading.

CHAPTER BREAKDOWN:

APRIL 5-11: PAGES 1-58

“Jazz was about making your own sound, finding a way to be different from everybody else, never playing the same thing two nights running.” (p. 10)

In his text, Dyer expertly captures the uniquely personal experience artists have with the music they create. Classical musicians – really, musicians of all genres – have experienced this personal connection.

In the comments, share a moment when your music resonated with you – when you felt that you were perfectly expressing yourself through it.

APRIL 12-18: PAGES 59-128

“He subdued the bass but couldn’t conquer it. Sometimes he draped his arm around it like an old friend. Other times it began to seem a huge instrument and he lugged it around like a sack of rocks, almost too much for him, almost overwhelming him. If he didn’t practice constantly the strings sliced his fingers when he touched them.” (p. 123)

Dyer describes the frustration Charles Mingus often felt in reference to mastering the string bass. In the performance world, we often combat feelings of self-doubt or imposter syndrome: when we are incapable of internalizing our accomplishments or feel that we will be exposed as a “fraud.” Is this something you have struggled with? How do you overcome these feelings of self-doubt?

APRIL 19-25: PAGES 129-178

“No applause. Every second feels like the moment before the first smack of palm on palm is heard; but instead there is this long note of silence, stretched impossibly like a precipice never quite there ... This silence is in appreciation of the music.” (p. 173)

Dyer imaginatively describes the moment before the applause breaks after a performance. Do you agree with his statement on silence? Have you experienced this moment, as a performer or audience member? What was it like? Let us know in the comments.

APRIL 26-MAY 2: PAGES 179-227

“Because jazz has continued evolving in this way, it has remained uniquely in touch with the animating force of its origins. From time to time in his solos a saxophonist may quote from other musicians, but every time he picks up his horn he cannot avoid commenting, automatically and implicitly, even if only through his own inadequacy, on the tradition that has laid this music at his feet.” (p. 185)

In your work as a musician, have you ever studied different interpretations of the same piece? Maybe you’ve made a comparison between Walter Smith III’s version of “Ask Me Now” and Thelonious Monk’s original version. How have those studies affected your own performances? Share your experiences in the comments below!

QUESTIONS FOR THE AUTHOR?

We hope you enjoyed April’s book club selection and the dialogue with colleagues on 21CM.org. In May, we’ll publish an interview with Dr. Keith Javors, who can provide a jazz musician’s perspective on our featured book this month. Do you have a question for Dr. Javors? Send us your question via email at bookclub@21cm.org or message us on [Facebook @Connect 21CMBookClub](https://www.facebook.com/Connect21CMBookClub).