

BOOK REVIEW

Black Music, White Business

Illuminating the History and Political Economy of Jazz

BY FRANK KOFSKY

Reviewed by: Travis Fristoe

As the title suggests, this book offers "an exploration of the principal contradiction in jazz- that between music created by black artists on the one hand and controlled by white businessmen on the other." At a terse 165 pages, this single volume can't illuminate all the treacherous questions of jazz economics, but Kofsky's work demands answers to questions that pitifully few other jazz critics ever dare to ask, like how the controlling economic power (record labels, club memberships, union cards, venue bookings) lies overwhelmingly with the white businessmen, but the music has been creatively fueled and maintained by African-American artists since its inception.

Too black and white a breakdown? Sadly, no. Music does not exist in a vacuum of pure art, and to ignore the power relations is a dangerous proposition. Pathfinder Press is an unabashedly communist press, and Kofsky's arguments can be suitably belligerent, sometimes preferring a snide retort to a footnoted rebuttal. But his prose is passionate, his intentions true, and the subject compelling. The Marxist critiques of means of production, division of labor, and economic bottom lines suit the topic well. Combine this book with its pithier companion piece, *John Coltrane and the Jazz Revolution of the 1960 's*, for criticisms still valid in our new millennium. Recommended for larger jazz collections and readers willing to overlook the occasional over-baked passage