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Cult books

You own the music and we make it...*

1946. Charlie Parker lives in Los Angeles, trapped in drugs, alcohol, and nervous depression. By court order he is committed to the Camarillo State Hospital for six months. In the hospital psychiatric ward the saxophonist becomes increasingly restive and threatens to escape – a situation that worries Ross Russell, the boss of Dial Records, the record company whose *raison d'être* is precisely to record Parker's albums. Russell starts digging through the California mental hygiene code. He finds the solution – with the approval of a special judicial commission, a committed patient may be released into the custody of an approved state resident. Russell will be this person, enabling him to get the musician discharged... in exchange for a few contractual guarantees: the renewal of Parker's completely exclusive contract with Dial. Russell has cleverly taken advantage of the situation. Parker's hands are tied...

This is one of the numerous and quite instructive tales scattered through *Black Music, White Business*, the book by Frank Kofsky published by Pathfinder in 1998. Along with *John Coltrane and the Jazz Revolution of the 1960s*, this book in fact constitutes the revised new edition of the famous *Black Nationalism and the Revolution in Music*, published by the same Kofsky in 1970. The author, who died in 1997, had long planned to bring the book up to date. This wasn't done until 1996, but in the form of two books. That made it possible for this partisan American specialist to take up both the political economy of jazz and the appearance of Black vanguard jazz in the social context of the sixties. In this manner, Kofsky resolutely takes a different view from most critics, who are capable of recognizing the talent of Black jazzmen, but are suddenly blind when the question of the economic and social realities of these same musicians in the postwar period arises.

Black Music, White Business is based on the slogan of Archie Shepp, "You" (that is, the whites – editor) "own the music and we" (the Blacks – editor) "make it." In order to complete his picture of a commercial sphere wholly in the hands of whites (producers, distributors, theater and club directors and... critics), the author uses a framework of analysis of Marxist inspiration that divides the work into four chapters, whose titles require no explanation: "Alienation," "Underemployment and contempt," "Powerlessness and exploitation," and "Ideological mystification." Each of these very well documented chapters shows how for more than twenty years the fate of a definitely revolutionary music was largely out of the hands of those who created it.

In *John Coltrane and the Jazz Revolution* Frank Kofsky goes farther in his analysis, convinced that strong convictions and objectivity are not mutually exclusive. Both may be used simultaneously in order to complete an investigation. Doubtlessly a delicate relationship, but one that is responsible for the strength of this book. The author defends the thesis that the new Black music of the sixties expresses all the resentment of the ghettos and is in fact the resonant illustration of the life of Blacks in an urban environment. The jazz vanguard of the time is therefore not purely esthetic. Unconsciously, it is also a form of artistic transformation, which finds its roots in this social reality.

* In English in the original

Finally, it should be noted that this book contains the famous interview of John Coltrane done by Kofsky in the back seat of a car, one year before the saxophonist's death, as well as interviews of McCoy Tyner and Elvin Jones.

KOFSKY Frank, *Black Music, White Business – Illuminating the History and Political Economy of Jazz*, Pathfinder Press, New York, 1998, 165 pages plus 8 pages of photos. Around 17.90 euros (ISBN 0-87348-859-8)

KOFSKY Frank, *John Coltrane and the Jazz Revolution of the 1960s*, Pathfinder Press, New York, 1998, 500 pages plus 16 pages of photos. Around 25.90 euros (ISBN 0-87348-857-1) Available in bookstores.

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