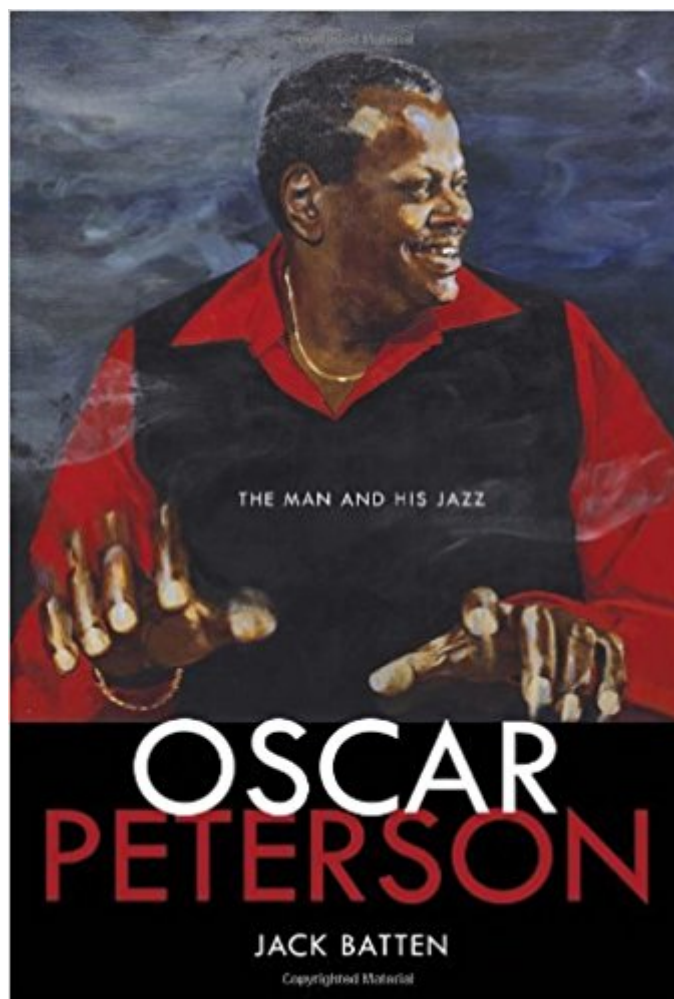


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Oscar Peterson: The Man And His Jazz



Synopsis

Called the "Maharaja of the keyboard" by Duke Ellington, Oscar Peterson released over 200 recordings, won seven Grammy Awards, received the Order of Canada and is considered to have been one of the greatest jazz pianists of all time. This new biography from award-winning author Jack Batten, promises to tell Oscar Peterson's story in a complete, compelling and sympathetic way. This is first biography of Oscar Peterson for young people. This book is the story of a black kid from a Montreal ghetto who reached acclaim in the great music halls of the world.

Book Information

Hardcover: 192 pages

Publisher: Tundra Books; First Edition edition (September 11, 2012)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1770492690

ISBN-13: 978-1770492691

Product Dimensions: 6.9 x 0.7 x 9.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.5 out of 5 stars 2 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #2,179,439 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #91 in Books > Teens > Art, Music & Photography > Music > Biographies #157 in Books > Teens > Social Issues > Prejudice #2051 in Books > Teens > Biographies

Customer Reviews

Batten pays thorough tribute to the prolific and long-reigning king of jazz piano with an account of Peterson's life that focuses largely on his musicianship and on the family members and professional colleagues who influenced it. Typical of jazz biographies, the narrative is well larded with references to other musicians, most of whom will be unknown to all but real aficionados of the genre—but as a veteran music journalist, the author describes his subject's career highlights and distinctive techniques both live and on record with particular authority and precision. Despite being illustrated with badly reproduced photographs (including two of the author himself with Peterson), this profile offers serious students of jazz insights aplenty into one of the modern age's greatest performers. The back matter features a highly selective but annotated discography. Grades 6-9. --John Peters

If you are looking for a solid biography for middle schoolers of the man who was arguably the

top jazz pianist for over twenty years and among the best for the rest of his life, then look no further than this book. Though it is only briefly referenced, the author met Peterson back in 1965, and his clear respect for the man, as well as Peterson's formidable jazz skills, shows throughout this book. Still inexorably leading you through Peterson's life, Batten makes the reader unfamiliar with songs run to the web to listen for the first time. • "VOYA Magazine Praise for The War To End All Wars"...Batten's account is a model of lucidity.... Batten's clean, intelligent prose makes this highly readable and comprehensible...." "The Toronto Star" "...a fine introduction, especially for a young reader." "VOYA" Praise for The Man Who Ran Faster Than Everyone: The Story Of Tom Longboat "vividly readable...brilliantly done!" "Norma Fleck Jury" "[T]his book is a superb narrative - and a revelatory one - about a largely unknown if not quite unsung Canadian icon." "The Globe and Mail" "...a wonderful book. Jack Batten has written a riveting sports story...an intriguing slice of social and economic life in the early decades of the 20th century, raising some provocative questions..." "Books in Canada

Jack Batten's fine tribute to OSCAR PETERSON, a musician he so obviously admires, will also make a great primer on jazz music for the young reader who might be just beginning to form his or her own particular musical tastes and preferences. There are many lightly documented references to the origins of jazz in the American south, particularly in the New Orleans area, as well as to its early pioneers, people like Louis Armstrong, Charlie Christian, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Charlie 'Bird' Parker, Art Tatum and countless others. Batten takes the time in his narrative of Oscar's life and development as a musician, to digress just enough to give useful thumbnail biographies of many of these earlier musicians and contemporaries who influenced Peterson. He also gives well-deserved attention to Oscar's early mentor and nearly life-long manager, the jazz impresario, Norman Granz. Peterson's early life as a poor black kid from the St. Henri ghetto of Montreal is documented too, but with a difference. His father, a railroad porter, always allotted funds from his meager earnings to provide music lessons for all his children. Oscar was the 'natural,' the one with perfect pitch who stood out from his siblings. His father also approved Oscar's dropping out of school at fifteen to pursue his musical career, since Oscar was already making good money as a musician by then in local dance bands. Many years later this gifted high-school dropout was to have countless honorary degrees bestowed on him for his musical contributions to Canada and the world of music. While I realize that OSCAR PETERSON: THE MAN AND HIS JAZZ, is intended for a YA audience, I still found the book's near hagiographic treatment of its subject just a bit too condescending and overly simplistic. Because a man who has multiple wives (4 marriages) and

several children is obviously no saint. And Peterson's occasional tantrums and self-centeredness in his dealings with promoters and other musicians - even with his closest collaborators like Ray Brown and Herb Ellis - were also, I thought, glossed over a little too easily. And the grittier details of life in jazz clubs never come up at all, other than to mention that many very talented jazz musicians' lives were cut short by drug and alcohol use, something Oscar was apparently 'never' involved in, choosing instead more wholesome off-the-job hobbies like photography. (All those wives might also imply an appreciative eye for the ladies too.) From an adult standpoint, Batten's book is really only mildly interesting, but it is an easy read, and could certainly act as a good starting point for young people who are just discovering this wonderful kind of music. I would certainly recommend it for a high school library, or - perhaps better - display it in a prominent place in the band room. (three and a half stars)- Tim Bazzett, author of the memoir, BOOKLOVER

I liked the concept of the book and I love learning about people's lives, especially how they have overcome adversity, but I didn't like the author's writing style. I found his sentences to be choppy and they often broke grammatical rules, such as "Do not start a sentence with 'and' or 'but.'" Things like that bug me. I did like the inclusion of the pictures, bibliography and index. I think all of those things will benefit someone who would like to know more about Oscar's life outside of reading this book.

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