

Jazz is African American

Jazz is African American, but in a much deeper sense than the ludicrous belief that only a single ethnic group can play it authentically. What makes it so profoundly African American is the social and philosophical agenda implicit in this music. The bandstand is the place where the members of a jazz group can explore the possibilities, limits and consequences of freedom, and by so doing also help liberate those in their audience. These children and grandchildren of slaves burned with an obsession for freedom, and for many years the bandstand was the only place in America where black people could be truly free. When playing jazz, for a few hours a musician could spread his wings and soar, be defiantly himself and ecstatically free. So in this very profound sense, jazz is African American music: More than any other group, African Americans understand know how the impingement of individual freedom is crippling to the soul, and in jazz they devised a music in which that freedom was at the heart, a music whose power could humanize those who may have taken such freedom for granted.

Eric Nisenson, **Blue, the murder of jazz**, Da Capo Press, 1997

Impingement: encroachment. Something that impinges you has an effect on you, often by restricting the way that you can behave (COBUILD dictionary)

Crippling: has a serious damaging effect on

*A fascinating, provocative and highly controversial book **Blue, the murder of jazz** postulates that jazz is no longer the innovative music it used to be but a slowly dying art form.*

According to Nisenson, since John Coltrane's death, "jazz which was once one of the most consistently progressive and visionary cultural wellsprings in American life is increasingly becoming a suffocatingly arid and reactionary desert."

It goes without saying that such a point of view is not shared by the majority of jazz critics and enthusiasts, but the arguments put forward by Eric Nisenson should give everyone food for thoughts as they are well documented and testify to a great knowledge and understanding of this music.