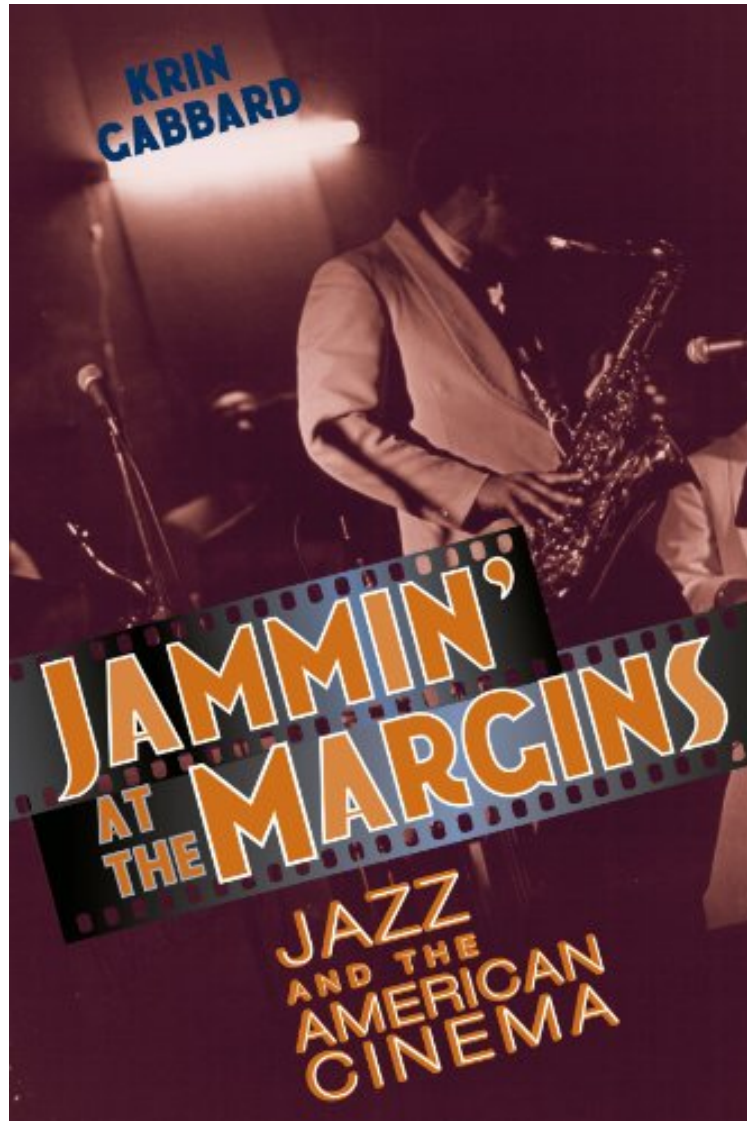


Jammin' at the Margins: Jazz and the American Cinema

Krin Gabbard

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Krin Gabbard : Jammin' at the Margins: Jazz and the American Cinema before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Jammin' at the Margins: Jazz and the American Cinema:

American cinema has long been fascinated by jazz and jazz musicians. Yet most jazz films aren't really about jazz. Rather, as Krin Gabbard shows, they create images of racial and sexual identity, many of which have become inseparable from popular notions of the music itself. In Jammin' at the Margins, Gabbard scrutinizes these films,

exploring the fundamental obsessions that American culture has brought to jazz in the cinema. Gabbard's close look at jazz film biographies, from *The Jazz Singer* to *Bird*, reveals Hollywood's reluctance to acknowledge black subjectivity. Black and even white jazz artists have become vehicles for familiar Hollywood conceptions of race, gender, and sexuality. Even Scorsese's *New York, New York* and Spike Lee's *Mo' Better Blues* have failed to disentangle themselves from entrenched stereotypes and conventions. Gabbard also examines Hollywood's confrontation with jazz as an elite art form, and the role of the jazz trumpet as a crucial signifier of masculinity. Finally, he considers the acting careers of Louis Armstrong, Nat King Cole, and Hoagy Carmichael; Duke Ellington's extraordinary work in films from 1929 until the late 1960s; and the forgotten career of Kay Kyser, star of nine Hollywood films and leader of a popular swing band. This insightful look at the marriage of jazz and film is a major contribution to film, jazz, and cultural studies.

From *Library Journal* Jazz, one of the few uniquely American musical forms, is thoroughly analyzed in this absorbing and thought-provoking work. Gabbard (comparative literature, SUNY, Stony Brook) examines the treatment of jazz music and musicians in the American cinema, with emphasis on Hollywood's appalling annexation of jazz-related trappings and resultant perpetuation of racial and sexual stereotypes. His thesis points out the intriguing contradiction between pure jazz and the requirements of the silver screen, concluding that the solitary, intense nature of jazz precludes any accurate visual narrative. Gabbard clearly knows his topic and continually provides fresh insights and fascinating bits of minutiae. Painstakingly researched and liberally illustrated, this book is an invaluable addition to a topic about which too little has been written. Recommended for academic and larger public collections. Cynthia Ward Cooper, Carrollton Libs., Tex. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. About the Author Krin Gabbard is professor of comparative literature and English at the State University of New York at Stony Brook and an amateur trumpet player.