

Books



Scenes
George Nelson
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Jazz has long had its chroniclers. William Gottlieb captured the public and private likes of Armstrong and Ellington in the Golden Era clubs of 52nd Street; Val Wilmer turned her

lens on Langston Hughes and Sun Ra, eschewing mystique for reality, romanticism for fact.

A similarly gritty – but rather beautiful – authenticity informs this tome by the writer and photographer George Nelson, whose knack for capturing unguarded moments is showcased in photos taken

over several months in London in 2018.

Theon Cross sits on a plastic chair in a car park, idly blowing his tuba. Pianist Sarah Tandy looks up, shielding her face from the glare. Vibes maestro Orphy Robinson jokes around in a workshop. Alice Zawadski has her face painted for the (Nelson-shot) cover of her current album. Steve Williamson, sax hanging free, stands in post-solo triumph.

There's more than meets the eye. Chapter headings titled after iconic American compositions – 'Excursions', 'Deep in the Shed', 'New Place, Old Place' – serve to honour the black roots of jazz while offering loose categories within which to explore themes including travel, experimentation, youth and experience.

Cassie Kinoshi lugs bags across asphalt as Rio Kai, atop a skateboard, pushes his bass.

A young diverse crowd is caught mid-holler at Steam Down. Visiting tenor elder Billy Harper beams at the love he's shown by Church of Sound.

Each chapter opens with a split-screen, black-and-white capture of a drummer: Winston Clifford, Moses Boyd, Ayo Salawu. It's a paean to the timekeepers of jazz, to the subtle cinematography that inspires this photographer's aesthetic, and to the drummers who play an especially crucial role in British jazz history.

The book's pluralised title sets out its stall. Fed up with the clichés around the 'young British jazz scene', Nelson deftly exemplifies the evolutionary (and indeed, revolutionary) nature of jazz. "It's all music. It's either hip or it ain't," says Lee Morgan, quoted. A book for our times, then, laced with toil, energy and truth.

Jane Cornwell

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