

# INTRODUCTION

The book in your hands is the first of its kind. There are various books that explain how the record industry, music publishing, non-profit corporations, and all of the other various aspects of the music business work. There are even more books that provide “how-to” recommendations for everything from selling your music to the film and television industries, to making millions selling your own music through the Internet, to building a state-of-the-art recording studio out of aluminum cans and packing tape.

This book is not a step-by-step guide to fame and fortune or jazz immortality. Its purpose is to shed light on the path to achieving both. Pursuing them simultaneously is an incredibly challenging quest. A proper understanding of how the business functions will allow an emerging artist to form a plan of action to accommodate artistic goals as well as economic ones. No one better exemplifies the combination of popular success and artistic integrity than the magnificent John Coltrane. As a devotee of that glorious Messenger, and a believer in the principles that he embraced so profoundly, I’ve approached this book with those ideals firmly implanted. The intention of this book is to both prepare the artist for the real world they are about to enter *and* inspire them to create their art within those same ideals that make jazz such a profoundly important art form.

In my 35 years as a jazz professional, I’ve been asked three questions over and over again. The two most common are: 1) “Can you get me some gigs?” and 2) “Can you get me a record deal?” But the third one “Is there a book that will tell me what I need to know about the jazz business?” has always been answered with a simple “No.”

In writing this book I’ve attempted to take more than 35 years of direct participation and keen observation on the jazz and fine arts scene and put it on the table for your reference. This is not an exposé, pep talk, gig/label guide, gossip or rant (well...maybe an occasional rant, but *always* with an intended purpose). It’s simply everything I’ve learned during those 35 years on the job and an additional five years before that as a devoted fan.

This book:

- explains and de-mystifies everything involved in the business of recording and performing
  - defines and clarifies the various roles and responsibilities of everyone with whom the artist will be dealing
  - offers specific advice on making the most out of every relationship and opportunity
  - describes specific methods and concepts that are productive, cost-effective and proven to be viable
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- comprehensively details all aspects of the 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation that is the backbone of the arts industry

- provides samples of contracts, agreements, releases, stage plots and other useful materials.

The information contained here comes through my direct involvement as manager, producer (of records, concerts and festivals), agent, stage and production manager, advocate, activist, consultant, strategist, non-profit expert, writer (not critic) and even three years failing to succeed as a professional musician. With the exception of that final entry, the specific credentials can be found at the end of this book.

I've also been called upon by many musicians and other professionals for advice or a viewpoint on particular business matters. In many of these cases, certain sensitivity, trust and discretion have been necessary. That experience has allowed me to observe all types of business situations from many different perspectives outside of my own.

This direct experience in nearly every facet of the industry has shown me what works, what doesn't work and what *never* works. More importantly, it's taught me *how* the business works, from every viewpoint -- from the stone cold real to the startlingly uninformed. Hopefully this allows for a more objective perspective on my part. Some might take issue with that objectivity.

To be completely honest, I will admit to a bias. That bias exists because in every endeavor in which I've participated in this business, I've been on the artist's side. Even on the rare occasion when I've been hired as a concert or record producer, I've only worked for flat fees in order to avoid any conflicts that could interfere with my commitment to represent the artists' best interests in that endeavor.

This book is written for the benefit of the musicians. It's intended to help those who are fortunate enough to be able to pursue a career directly involved in creating music. But it's also intended as a guide to those who fail in that pursuit and choose to participate on the business side. The information contained here will be very helpful to you in whatever path you decide to take. Hopefully it will also help new professionals remember the long-established inequities that will become advantageous *to them* in their newfound roles. As I said, this book is written for the benefit of musicians – and thereby, the music.

In nearly 30 years as a musician representative and advocate, I've dealt with most of the major promoters and execs and many, many of the smaller ones. I've even helped launch the careers of a number of professionals you may eventually be trying to get hold of in your own career. *All* of them initially displayed the desire to be non-exploitative and make a positive difference. Few of them stayed on that path. Watching those various individuals change (and some *mutate*), and hearing the various explanations, excuses and defenses as to why, has also provided me with a clearer understanding of this business.

The artists I represented were my teachers. These included men and women who emerged in the '40s through the '70s. Some of them were the living embodiment of how *not* to conduct business. Others had crystal-clear perceptions and fully formed business philosophies that demanded acceptance and adherence on my part, with elasticity varying from case to case. But one thing was always eminently clear -- they all had clear-cut and specific reasons for their points of view. Sometimes they were flawed;

other times brilliant. Some were quite reasonable and viable; others were totally off the hook. And *all* of their business reasoning was inextricably interwoven with their *music*. There is no other way in jazz.

My job was to find the common ground between each artist's philosophy and the realities of the business, without compromising either. It's from that same position that I've written this book. It's also *why* I've written this book. The passion, commitment, sacrifice and integrity that all of these individuals placed squarely on the table deserves a proper representation, especially to those who continue to enter this artistic realm. These individuals include George Russell, Lester Bowie, Makanda Ken McIntyre, Sam Rivers, Bill Barron, Larry Ridley, Sonny Fortune, Oliver Lake, Randy Weston, Betty Carter and so many, many more.

Some of these individuals have been labeled arrogant, unreasonable, difficult, ignorant, and various other adjectives that are simply not appropriate. All of them have always been and continue to be victimized by an inequitable and abusive business that can only change when musicians and future professionals make the commitment to change that reality. This can only happen through knowledge and understanding of the business and those who control it.

Please understand that this book is not designed to force that change, nor is it based on unrealistic Utopian principles. Rather, it is designed to guide and assist you in the development of your career goals *within the structure as it exists* and has existed since the inception of jazz.

There are two ways to deal with the business as it exists. One is to complain of its inequities and demand what *should* be instead of what *is*. The other is to accept it on its own terms and find a way to work within it.

The first approach nearly always leads to bitterness, frustration and failure. The latter can lead to something even worse – the gnawing self-contempt that comes from too much surrender, dishonesty and compromise. Or equally as bad, an insulation of numbness that permanently separates one from their most personal and vital hopes and aspirations. So this leaves the somewhat perilous high-wire balancing act between necessary compromise and innate truth.

Therefore, it is often necessary to expose the harsh realities and often-treacherous terrain through which you'll be forced to travel. But don't confuse the passion in what I say with a lack of objectivity on the subject matter at hand. A person can be angry *and* right! I expect a certain amount of criticism will be directed at that anger, more specifically, speculation on *why* the anger exists. I'd like to explain that briefly here, and in doing so illustrate why there is a harsh and cynical tone in certain parts of this book.

This music is my life, plain and simple. It's the sun around which I revolve as a tiny particle, drawing nourishment from its heat and light. A failed musician (like the vast majority of jazz business folk), I permanently abandoned any musical goals to place my abilities entirely on the business side of jazz. We nearly all do so with the bright-eyed and noble intentions of making things better for jazz musicians. Our love and commitment to the music makes us anxious to make our own little contributions. The exploitation and abuses that so outraged us initially would *never* be part of *our* methods. Nosirree!

Well, intentions become excuses and ideology becomes pragmatism. Sometimes honor mutates into greed. Whatever the reason, it's clear that the jazz business of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has not evolved through generation after generation of committed individuals dedicated to making things better for jazz musicians.

- **Fact:** The average life of the jazz musician is 58 years, substantially less than the national average.
- **Fact:** Jazz professionals, including such minor participants as receptionists, assistants, secretaries and various hangers-on make more money than many of jazz' most respected and important artists.
- **Fact:** Although it's considered America's Greatest Indigenous Art Form, jazz has been so trivialized and marginalized in the cultural mainstream that it is rarely even mentioned along with other "pure" genres like blues, folk, bluegrass, etc.
- **Fact:** The public perception of jazz, and especially those who play it, is vastly different from reality.
- **Fact:** As this is being completed in the fall of 2003, the recording and performing opportunities for jazz musicians are *worse than any time in the 40 years I've been on the scene*. This is despite the fact that tens of millions of dollars have changed hands over the past 15 years, supposedly for the purpose of creating *more opportunities* for jazz musicians.

I've watched far too many friends die ten, twenty, thirty years before they should. I've seen far too many musicians lied to, lied about, manipulated, hurt, exploited and smeared by those who benefit by doing so. I'm weary of ignorant critics and ersatz journalists who couldn't play a simple C-scale with any conviction, damage reputations and mislead the audience just to call attention to themselves. I'm tired of seeing mediocre musicians whose talent should relegate them to anonymous sideman work be anointed as "greats" by industry hacks rather than rising organically to those positions, as has always been the music's legacy. I'm dismayed by how often musicians damage themselves and lose opportunities or valuable relationships out of frustration, misperception and the simple lack of business understanding. Finally, I'm weary of seeing dedicated professionals mutate into exploiters, or be prevented from contributing to improving the environment by those who claim to pursue the same goals, but who are really just part of the problem.

So yes, there *is* anger here. But the anger is *objective*, and used to illustrate the realities. As you read this book, you'll see that *Straight Ahead* is designed to uplift, energize and inspire the artist and professional. For every cynical viewpoint there are dozens of positive suggestions, recommendations and perceptions that can give you the proper protection and methods for a rewarding, successful career in spite of the negative circumstances you'll encounter.