

## As Serious As Your Life

Val Wilmer

Serpent's Tail PB £12.99

VAL WILMER **AS SERIOUS AS YOUR LIFE**  
BLACK MUSIC AND THE FREE JAZZ REVOLUTION, 1957-1977



In recent times, this classic volume has been more often quoted by other writers than readily available for sale. First published in 1977, it represents the distillation of Wilmer's previous

15 years observing, interviewing and interacting with the American 'new music scene', as it was then called. Now boasting a new subtitle, *Black Music and the Free Jazz Revolution, 1957-1977*, and with a new introduction by Richard Williams, it reappears in time to remind us of the ferment, both musical and political, that existed during that period. The author's focus is firmly on the musicians themselves, and a description of the contents hardly does justice to the depth of her coverage. The first part of the book devotes a chapter each to the key figures of Coltrane, Cecil Taylor, Ornette, Sun Ra, Ayler and the AACM. Aspects touched on in passing are then drawn out in the slightly longer second half, such as the background experiences of lesser-known figures; the importance (musical as well as symbolic) of the drum; the influence (if any) of the recording industry; the self-reliance of musician collectives and their attitude to documenting the music, plus – still an innovative

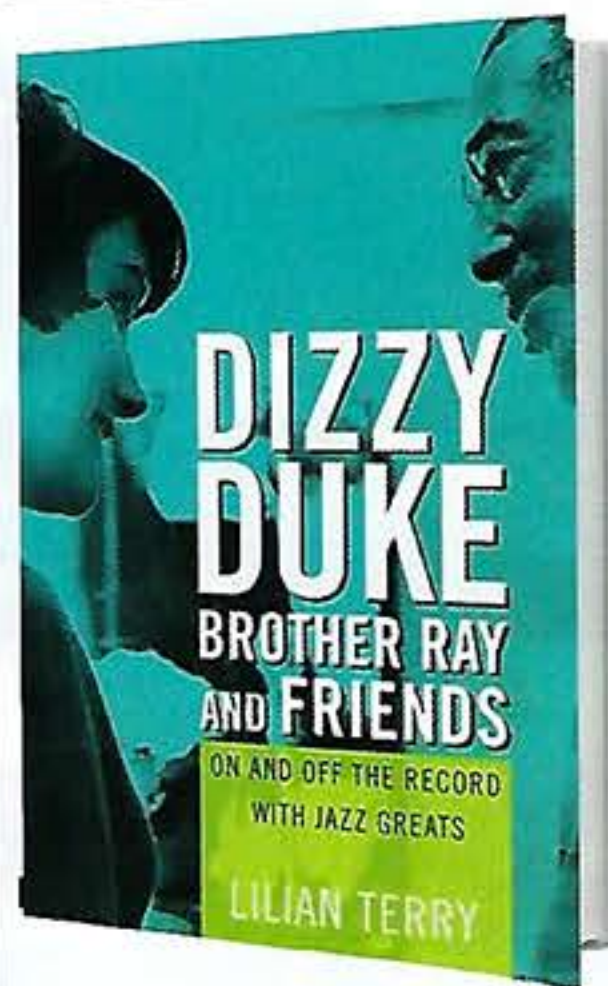
topic – the female partners whose practical support facilitates male performers. Rather than some dry academic approach, Wilmer's writing is passionate, committed and drawing on a wide range of interviewees, quoting for instance Ray Charles sideman Leroy Cooper about rehearsing with Sun Ra, and Ellis Marsalis on his work with Ed Blackwell. Wisely perhaps, Wilmer hasn't attempted to update any of her information or conclusions (not even changing the speculation that Henry Grimes, who reconnected with jazz in the early 2000s, was thought to have died in the 1970s). Strange to recall now that, thanks to the commercial success of fusion music, acoustic jazz itself was thought to be dying in the 1970s. Not only has jazz survived but interest in free-jazz has increased, so it's unsurprising that, just as with certain recordings, you find a book like this even more rewarding than you remembered. And first-time readers have a treat in store for them. **Brian Priestley**

to record broadcast interviews with musicians in and around Europe or in the US. Friends kept on at her to write up these encounters and this she has now done. They make for a pleasing, if unsurprising, read. Ellington was the epitome of graciousness, though not shy of propositioning her when she was younger, and members of his family accorded her and her son generous hospitality whenever she was in New York. Ellington and all the others found in her a safe haven when they visited Italy and often asked her to show them the ropes, as it were, as translator and help-mate. In many cases, the friendships formed in this way endured throughout the years. Indeed, Ms Terry lays out her reminiscences chapter by chapter and decade by decade. Most of the conversations are transcribed verbatim and are not couched in conventional journalistic form; thus, the text is subjective rather than detached, up front and personal, you could say, with a sometimes girlish 'who me?' aspect. When Bill Evans asks her to spend the day with him, she responds: "Speechless, I could barely nod" and adds, "our relationship began at the breakfast table where Bill ate an enormous plate of scrambled eggs" and then reports the engaging and quite open conversation that follows. It's clear that Ms Terry's many musical friends were relaxed in her company, often speaking without caution; as she says of Gillespie, with whom she had some 20 encounters, some domestic, some music-related, each faithfully reported, "you might consider this book gives you a different insight on the private, humorous and thoughtful human being that was John Birks Gillespie as we knew him". What follows is playful, often quite insightful and certainly different from other published interviews. This is Dizzy with his defences down, happy to potter and chat. He describes his enduring relationship with his wife Lorraine in the following way: "She is the anchor and I am the sail", and reveals that they bought a tranche of land on the French Riviera, adjacent to that owned by Kenny Clarke. One wonders what happened to it. Terry's book is conversational, often lively and ultimately quite lightweight, even as it casts a different light on these legendary figures. There are a few photographs, all showing Gillespie in various situations, with Terry alongside. **Peter Vacher**

## Dizzy, Duke, Brother Ray and Friends

Lilian Terry

University of Illinois Press PB £19.99



In any other context, this would be designated a vanity publication. Ms Terry, now 80 and living in France, is Egyptian-born, but British via her Maltese father. She spent most of her life in Italy, where she befriended the figures (and others) indicated in her book's title. As a sometime singer (she recorded with Gillespie) she was around the scene and also worked as a jazz presenter and producer for Italian radio, this giving her backstage access at festivals and special concert events, while allowing her

**RIBBLE VALLEY INTERNATIONAL JAZZ FEST 2018**  
3<sup>rd</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> MAY DAY BANK HOLIDAY WEEKEND  
**TICKETS ON SALE NOW!**  
Featuring over 500 musicians from far and wide + lots of free gigs in pubs, clubs and restaurants.



Clare Teal

SELLING FAST!



Camilla George



Denys Baptiste



Alan Barnes



Bugge Wesseltoft



Renegade Brass Band

See the full line-up at [rvjazzfestival.co.uk](http://rvjazzfestival.co.uk)