

BOOKS & DVDS //

BOOK
At The Jazz Band Ball
 Nat Hentoff

University of California Press £19.95

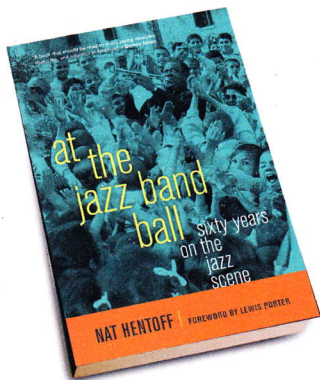
Hentoff is such an iconic jazz writer that non-Americans tend to forget his busy life as a commentator on politics ("checking the pulse of the Constitution", as he puts it). Recently ending 50 years of political columns for the *Village Voice*, he's now assembled his last five years of jazz pieces from the *Wall Street Journal* and *Jazz Times*, with a couple of extras. All of them are typical examples of incisive journalism, covering each subject from a number of angles, and in a few hundred well-chosen words that put most other writers to shame.

His typical approach is often from a slight tangent, with an eye for similarities and inter-generational connections, and an ear for relevant quotations – including comments by musicians on other musicians. He clearly has a file-card memory for such mentions and a huge library of fellow authors' books, being unafraid of referencing everyone from Gene Lees to Dave Gelly or the late Richard Cook.

And his tastes are wide, running from the great pioneers such as Armstrong, Hawkins and Ellington (each of whom he knew personally) to Ornette, Trane and Cecil (Nat produced several albums by the latter) to youngsters who are furthering the tradition.

Hentoff's politics surface when retelling Max Roach's or Mingus' comments on American society – but we also hear of Armstrong's charitable works and the FBI's file on him. The main disadvantage of grouping 60 short pieces together is that the author repeats himself from time to time, making for better browsing than reading straight off. There are also longer interviews with Ron Carter, Jon Faddis and Monk (from 1956, when he was on the cusp of breaking through), plus a detailed discussion of the many women instrumentalists in jazz – none of them employed by Jazz At Lincoln Center, whose educational work Hentoff nevertheless approves.

Brian Priestley



BOOK
Birds Of Fire: Jazz, Rock, Funk and the Creation of Fusion

Kevin Fellezs

Duke, £15.99

Fellezs is a music professor at the University of California and writes with an academic rigour that some may find incongruent with the subject matter:

the rise of fusion as expressed through the work of four artists: Tony Williams, John McLaughlin, Herbie Hancock and, most intriguingly, Joni Mitchell. Fellezs' style won't seduce all: sentences nine lines long chocker with riffs around "agentive empowerment" won't have 'em whooping in the aisles. But it's worth the slog, if only because Fellezs leads an intellectual clout to a loose tribe of different

musics that have stupidly been the butt of prejudice, ignorance and, as far as much press is concerned, utter laziness.

His basic tenet takes some grasping, that fusion filled a "broken middle" between a sagging rock and uninspired jazz scene. But Fellezs' enthusiasm, knowledge and sympathy for the struggles of Williams and Mitchell in particular to rise above

issues of race and gender deserves serious attention – as indeed does the music. There are omissions – Return To Forever are invisible and the British/European jazz-rock scene unrecognised despite McLaughlin's centrality to the book. And the lack of an index is boggling. But if fusion can be both jazz and rock, so Fellezs succeeds in being both academic and

a fan. He succeeds in bringing these four artists in from the margins while recognising their cross-cultural capital lies in their non-belonging to any mainstream discourse. Or, to put it another way, none of them want to belong to a club that would have them as a member. **Andy Robson**



DVD
Oscar Peterson Trio At Ronnie Scott's 1974

JazzShots | ★★ ★

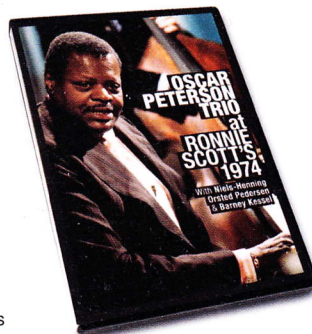
Ah, yes, that for one-night-only experience when Oscar dropped a



Mimi Fox

tab with Hawkwind in a bus shelter in Willesden resulting in that Ayler-inspired 27-minute version of 'Purple Haze'... nah, that would be too silly: book Oscar and you know exactly what you're getting: fleet fingered fills, lustrous melodicism and a straight ahead panache that always seduces. This parson's egg of a dvd features Peterson in numerous formats, solo (at Montreux as well as Ronnie's), in duet with Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen, with the latter and Barney Kessel at Ronnie's, and finally with his classic trio of Ed Thigpen and Ray Brown for a 1965 BBC broadcast, replete with the statutory, condescending intro from Steve Race.

And in all of them Peterson's phenomenal, marbled technique and showmanship shine through. The Beeb gig, though black and white and woolliest in sound is the most intriguing with Thigpen and Brown swinging furiously, and includes a take on Bill Evans' 'Waltz For Debby', a pianist who couldn't have been further from Peterson's style (though he may have turned up at that mythical bus shelter). Otherwise the only way of telling the difference between the gigs is the hair (1974 is easily identified by the lambchop sideburns and 9" jacket lapels) as Peterson, galleon-like and imperturbable sails beloved and unchanging through the decades. **Andy Robson**



DVD
Mimi Fox Live At The Palladium

FavoredNations | ★★ ★

In a world of effects and distortion, Fox's fulsome, pure guitar sound is an oasis of joy. Her secret is never to never stroll far from the blues and to keep it simple even while exuding sheer class: there aren't many contemporaries who could get away with an un-ashamedly un-ironic take on 'Stella By Starlight'. To add to her palette, she's rhythmically compelling, as on the pulsing 'Blues For 2' or a

splendidly vivid 'Caravan'. Mind you it helps to have the masterful Akira Tana on drums: catch the simple perfection of his entry to a sensual take on Jobim's 'Triste'. There are of course acres of Jim Hall and Joe Pass underwriting Fox, but she also has a vulnerability that is all her own, as on the solo yet multiple voiced 'Polka Dots And Moonbeams' or the

heart tugging 'My Romance'. For good measure there's an articulate but all too brief interview. All modestly shot with a minimum of movement and appropriately blue-filled lighting, this DVD should be on most guitarist's shelves if only as an exemplar of an outstanding technique which anyone can acquire after several gazillion hours of practice. **Andy Robson**