

Giving Discographers Their Due

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More Important Than the Music: A History of Jazz Discography. By Bruce D. Epperson. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2013. 284 pp. \$45.00.

While jazz has been almost universally hailed as one of America's greatest gifts to world culture, it spawned a far less heralded, but equally original contribution to the world of research and reference: discography. Bruce Epperson's meticulously researched new work shines a light on the art and science of discography and discographers, a world virtually unknown to the general public and even to all but the most serious jazz fans, scholars, and music librarians. I'm not sure which is more impressive: the thorough research that informs this work, or the fact that a major university press would publish it. In a sense, Epperson does for discography what John Gennari did for jazz writers and critics in *Blowin' Hot and Cool* (also published by the University of Chicago Press).¹ Although arguably the cornerstone of jazz research, discography is often viewed—when it is viewed at all—as an arcane and curious sideline to the music and the musicians. And while he does not neglect the “bookkeeping” aspects of discography—formatting, matrix and catalog numbers, etc.—Epperson also focuses on the more personal side of the topic. As he eloquently notes, compilers of reference works are a special breed:

Given the time, toil, and frustration that go into making reference books (the warnings stretch all the way back to Ecclesiastes), their uncertain financial prospects, and their propensity to swallow up careers and entire lives, it's surprising that we don't hear more about them and the people who dedicate themselves to their production. Their outwardly staid pages are as drenched in pathos as in printer's ink. (pp. xiii – xiv).

Discographers comprise an intriguing cast of characters, who, over the years, have engaged in a surprising number of internecine battles over musical styles, and even race and politics, paralleling similar conflicts among jazz

¹ John Gennari, *Blowin' Hot and Cool: Jazz and Its Critics* (University of Chicago Press, 2006).

writers and critics. In addition, the issue of plagiarism has also added considerable controversy, especially in recent years.

Jazz discography (which was the foundation of discography itself) evolved outside the mainstream of jazz scholarship, which itself entered the academy only relatively recently. Epperson quotes James Patrick, writing in the early 1970s: "There really is no such thing as a body of academic writing about jazz," and "since trained music scholars have largely ignored the field of popular music ... discography enjoys the special obscurity of being viewed as an esoteric bibliographical quirk of a small band of monomaniacal jazz collectors."²

Nevertheless, as Epperson makes clear throughout this compelling work, jazz discographers, mostly amateurs without academic standing, laboring without remuneration and with few if any pre-existing methodologies, created a remarkable body of work that matched or exceeded the standards of professional scholars. Even now, discography is hardly at the core of academic jazz studies, which are built on musicological, historical, and cultural approaches.

As Epperson readily admits, he comes to this project not as a discographer, a jazz historian, or even record collector, but as a "bibliophile." He writes, "For many years I have collected, studied, and compared discographies" (p. xiii). This explains the frequent references to formats, fonts, paper, and other minutiae that may not be of primary interest to those approaching discography purely from the utilitarian perspective of jazz research. It may also account for the fact that the author seems reluctant, himself, to evaluate many of the discographical works he discusses, relying instead on citations from previously published sources or interviews conducted for this book.

Discography has been called a "magnificent obsession" by Jerry Atkins and "the thankless science" by Dan Morgenstern in previous survey articles.³

² In a rare bibliographical lapse, Epperson fails to precisely identify the source of these two statements. The first comes from Patrick's article, "Discography as a Tool for Musical Research and Vice Versa," in the very first issue of this journal: *Journal of Jazz Studies*, Vol. 1, no. 1, October 1973, p. 66; the second comes from his article, "The Uses of Jazz Discography," *Notes*, Vol. 29, no. 1, September 1972, p. 17.

³ Dan Morgenstern, "Discography, the Thankless Science," in *Living with Jazz: A Reader*, by Dan Morgenstern, edited by Sheldon Meyer (New York: Pantheon, 2004), 545-557; Jerry L. Atkins, "Magnificent Obsession," in *Proceedings of NASE Research 1983*, edited by Charles T. Brown, 12-16, Manhattan KS: National Association of Jazz Educators, 1984 [edited version available online:

http://www.jazzdiscography.com/About_Discography/Magnificent_Obsession.php].

“More Important Than the Music,” the title of Epperson’s work, derives from a 1947 *Harper’s Magazine* piece by Ernest Borneman and describes the fixation of jazz collectors on recordings and the details surrounding them to the exclusion of the music itself. Borneman voiced a similar criticism a year earlier when he wrote, “To know who played on what date under what pseudonym for what label has as much to do with music as stamp collecting with the art of photo engraving.”⁴ Indeed, the obsession with collecting and documenting can often result in a loss of perspective. In recounting the terrible consequences of the impending Blitzkrieg for Londoners in 1939, one noted collector/researcher, exclaimed, “*Melody Maker* had to switch from a weekly to a monthly!”

As Epperson notes, in its early days discography and record collecting seemed to go hand in hand. The first attempts at discography were undertaken by collectors to enhance their knowledge of their own records, as well as to inform fellow enthusiasts about other available discs. This tie continued even into recent times. In over three decades at the Institute of Jazz Studies, my colleagues and I have examined dozens (if not hundreds) of collections offered to our archive. In almost every case, the owner had devised his or her personal system of “cataloging,” usually using index cards or loose-leaf notebooks and, later, word processors or, more rarely, spreadsheets. Many of these home catalogs were quite ingenious, often representing a lifetime of work. My father, although not a “collector” in the more monomaniacal sense, over many years compiled an index to his LPs, including artists (sidemen) and song titles. He also used a color-coded rating system consisting of red and blue checkmarks on each jacket, further refined with exclamation points, and an occasional pithy notation, like, “Fats!” In theory, three checks was the maximum, but of course Benny Carter and Louis Armstrong garnered an occasional four, with an exclamation point.

In the Preface, Epperson comments on the reaction of some of the discographers he questioned, or tried to question, during his research for this study, drawing an analogy to the reaction of the musicians themselves when approached by early discographers for information. While most were cooperative, “once in a while there were sharp words. Interestingly, they came not from the discographers themselves but from those who had made part or all of their livelihood reviewing discographies” (p. xv). The notion that there is a “livelihood” of any sort to be had in reviewing discographies is ludicrous.

Before looking at the origins of discography and surveying some of the pioneering efforts, the author thoughtfully analyses the term and offers some

⁴ Ernest Borneman, *A Critic Looks at Jazz* (London: Jazz Music Books, 1946), 13.

possible definitions, drawing an analogy between discography and bibliography:

Yet readers—even the most erudite of scholars and academics—would usually say that a bibliography is a topical, descriptive list of written works, not the process used to prepare them. Similarly, the vast majority of record collectors, musicologists, and musicians think of “discography” not as a method, but as the tangible outcome of that procedure: a product, a document, a thing (p. 5).

He settles on Danish discographer Erik Raben’s definition: “a compilation of information in standardized format about recorded performances and their issue in the form of sound recordings” (p. 6).

Epperson introduces the notion of “session-based” discography—using the recording session, rather than the issued recording, as the basic discographical unit,—which has become the nearly universally accepted format. He credits (through Matthew Snyder) Dave Carey and Albert J. McCarthy’s 1949 *Jazz Directory* as the turning point, before which “comprehensive discographies were lists of *records*; afterward they were compilations of recording sessions” (p. 3). A case could be made that Charles Delaunay, whom Epperson rightly credits with being the first to adopt the matrix number as a primary identifier of recordings, had already arrived at what was essentially a session-based discography a decade earlier with his *Hot Discography*, albeit with some of the elements inconsistently laid out.

Further along in the first chapter, the author gets sidetracked a bit, devoting several pages to the idiosyncratic concepts of discography posited by Krin Gabbard. Indeed, Epperson may have spent more time in analyzing these theories than Gabbard did in formulating them. In attempting to make sense of Gabbard’s shifting use of the term “metadiscography,” the author mischaracterizes W. E. Timmers’s *Ellingtonia* as “primarily a catalog of unreleased material” (p. 10). Although Timmer’s explanation of the scope of his own work is at times confusing, he does clearly state that he attempts to list “all known recordings by Duke Ellington in chronological sequence,” including both issued and unissued items, albeit without specific issue information. As to “metadiscography,” Epperson wisely concludes that the etymology of the term “is so clouded, and the word has become so value-laden, that it would be unwise to use it in this book except in a purely historical context,” opting instead for “general” and “comprehensive” discography (p. 13).

Towards the end of the chapter, Epperson delves into the thorny issue of plagiarism in discography, particularly as it relates to Tom Lord’s *The Jazz*

Discography, and raises ethical questions regarding that work's early connection with *Cadence* magazine. These issues are explored in greater detail in Chapter Five. The opening chapter ends with a cogent discussion of the boundaries set by compilers of comprehensive discographies—what to include/exclude—touching upon musical genres, temporal restrictions, as well as traditional methods of updating discographical works (supplements, loose leaf inserts, etc.).

In Chapter Two, Epperson does a masterful job of tracing the early history of discography and bringing to life some of the pioneers who preceded Charles Delaunay, generally recognized as the forefather of jazz discography. Many of these early researchers wrote for British music and collectors' periodicals, and were not necessarily interested in jazz. One of the compelling characters introduced is Compton Mackenzie, the founder of the British *Gramophone*, whom Epperson credits with the first use of term "discography" in print in 1930. Epperson describes him as a "stage actor, playwright, poet, novelist, magazine publisher, spy, owner of Mediterranean islands, university rector" (p. 19). Surprisingly, his picaresque background was not atypical of some of these early collectors/discographers. In the May 1929 issue of *Phonograph Monthly Review*, perceptive critic R. D. Darrell compiled what Epperson terms "the first *freestanding* discographic article" (p. 21), a listing of Dvorak's recorded works. He also credits Darrell, a great admirer of Duke Ellington, with "probably the first authoritative jazz discography to be published in any language" (p. 22), an appendix to his June 1932 article on Ellington in the June 1932 issue of the Philadelphia journal *disques*. Epperson also discusses another pioneer, Victor Carol Calver, who in 1934 published an Ellington "handlist" (booklet) which was later unearthed by researcher George Hulme. That work contained an announcement of a forthcoming work by Calver on the recordings of British bandleader/bassist Spike Hughes, which was to include matrix numbers, thus preceding Delaunay's *Hot Discography*. Although Hulme has yet to locate a copy of the promised Hughes listing, he states that "it cannot detract from the fact that Victor Carol Calver of Ipswich in England deserves to be recognized as one of the first, if not the very first, discographer."⁵ Before focusing on the life and work of Charles Delaunay and the genesis of his *Hot Discography*, Epperson devotes some deserved attention to another pioneering figure, Hilton Schleman, whom he describes as "naturally friendly and outgoing, a dolphin cavorting among the awkward and suspicious cold fish of the record community," who "freely helped the others

⁵ George Hulme, "The First Discographer?" *Names and Numbers* 25, April 2003, p. 20.

when he could" (p. 28). Schleman's *Rhythm on Record* was published in 1936, but was eclipsed by Delaunay's work which appeared the same year.

One of the strengths of Epperson's work is that he places the development of jazz discography within the broader context of jazz writing and criticism, as many of the early discographers contributed to the burgeoning number of jazz periodicals in Europe and, slightly later, in the U.S. In discussing Delaunay's seminal contribution, he shows how the format of *Hot Discography* evolved as the discographer began to distance himself from the more rigid stylistic views of his colleague Hugues Panassié, whose notions of jazz were reflected in the organization of the first edition of *Hot Discography*. In one of the fascinating side-stories that enliven the book, Epperson gives an account of Delaunay's activities during the German occupation, including the story of Dr. Dietrich Schulz-Koehn, a jazz loving young Luftwaffe Lieutenant who shielded the activities of the Hot Club from the authorities. Several years earlier, Delaunay had served as a member of the French army, during which time he faced obstacles unknown to present day discographers. As Walter E. Schaap, Delaunay's editor and translator for the 1938 edition of *Hot Discography*, wrote in his foreword to the 1943 edition (a "corrected and reprinted" version of the 1940 edition), published in New York by the Commodore Record Company:

[T]he publication of the 1938 Discography was interrupted for several months as its author (Delaunay) was mobilized during those hectic days preceding the Munich pact. With the outbreak of war last September, Delaunay was assigned to an anti-aircraft unit north of Paris. Here, he took advantage of the eight-month's stalemate on the Western front to prepare the corrections for the present volume. But when I last heard from him on June 6th, his unit was being subjected to a merciless bombardment, both day and night.

Speaking of Walter Schaap, on page 43 Epperson manages to completely mangle his name, referring to him as "Dick Schaap" (sportscaster Dick Schaap was Walter's nephew), and on the next line as "Schapp."

Chapter Three opens with a discussion of the work of Orin Blackstone, generally recognized as the first American discographer. In 1945, he produced his *Index to Jazz*, a serious effort that differed from Delaunay's in arrangement and format. Epperson also documents Delaunay's 1946 visit to the U.S. where he carried out research for the *New Hot Discography*. With the help of George Avakian and Milt Gabler, Delaunay was able to gain access to the logs of several record companies, thus greatly enhancing the accuracy of his work. Epperson points out that Delaunay's visit led to a shift in his musical tastes,

causing a rift between him and Hugues Panassié; Delaunay's "newfound tolerance" (p. 57) was anathema to the Panassié's purist notions of what constituted "real jazz." The author points out an interesting early manifestation of political correctness on the part of Criterion Press, publisher of Delaunay's new edition. The new work omitted a flow chart, present in the earlier edition, that mapped its organization: "It had been divided down the middle into two big boxes. The left box was for black musicians (predictably, it was a black box, with white printing), and the white box was for white musicians. Leaving aside the question whether it was good or bad taxonomy, there simply was no way a nationwide American publisher was going to reproduce the thing" (p. 58).

After analyzing the works of Delaunay and Blackstone, Epperson returns to the British discographical scene to tell the story of the next significant effort: *The Directory of Recorded Jazz and Swing Music* by David Carey, Albert McCarthy, and Ralph Venables. Published in several volumes between 1949 and 1955, the series was abandoned before completion (at letter "L")—a fate all too common in the world of comprehensive discography. Again, the author supplies many interesting personal details about the backgrounds and beliefs of the compilers. Epperson continues to stress the connection between discography and jazz writing, and provides much information about the very active British jazz press of the 1940s. The continued philosophical battles among the editors make for rather entertaining reading.

The proliferation of the LP in the 1950s had a profound effect on discography. In addition to the potential for an LP to contain a multitude of unrelated performances, the new format marked the end of the matrix number as a unique and convenient identifier of a specific recording. But most of all, the spate of reissue LPs, referred to as "the Flood" by Alun Morgan (p. 73), exponentially increased the task of jazz discographers.

After quoting Albert McCarthy that, despite occasional dissension, the "discography fraternity, unlike its colleagues in the critical field, usually works together in reasonable amity," Epperson ends this chapter on a rather melodramatic but essentially true note;

[A]fter his [McCarthy's] death, those waters [of comprehensive discography] would grow even more voracious, swallowing up discographers from around the world, discographic projects from three continents, and eventually entire multinational teams of editors. Those who survived and succeeded did so only because they sometimes had to cut corners, take shortcuts, borrow without asking, pass off questionable information as hard facts, and do other things they would, in later years, prefer not to discuss (p. 78).

In Chapter Four, Epperson fleshes out his portrait of Brian Rust, probably the most dominant figure in the history of discography, whose *Jazz Records, A-Z* became the authoritative work for the period up to 1942 and whose format still serves as a model for present day discographers. Epperson reveals some interesting details about Rust's character and discographical methodology, noting that he imperiously relied upon "his own ear" rather than the interviews that Delaunay, for example, conducted to resolve discographical disputes. When other sources yielded conflicting data, "to Rust, presenting such ambiguous or irreconcilable information in public was patently unacceptable. The very purpose of the discographer was to make the critical judgments—*his* judgments—necessary to rectify such imperfections" (p. 82). I have heard from several researchers that Rust was loath to revise his listings even when presented with convincing evidence that raised serious doubts about their accuracy. And, as Epperson points out, he continued to believe, as stated in the introduction to various editions of his *Jazz Records, A-Z, 1897-1931*, that "the ears of reliable collectors ... can sometimes recognize and identify an artist more readily than the musician himself" (p. 96).

While Rust continued to consolidate and refine his pre-1942 works, Danish discographer Jorgen Grunnet Jepsen undertook the gargantuan task of expanding comprehensive discographical coverage into the 1960s. As an example of cooperation among discographers of the time, Rust agreed to expand coverage of his own work from 1931 to 1942, so it would dovetail with Jepsen's. Rust believed that his new work, coupled with Jepsen's (along with Godrich and Dixon's blues and gospel discography), completed "the encyclopedia of all records known of ragtime, jazz, blues, 'hot' dance music and 'swing' music, and the modern idiom" (p. 96).

In Chapter Five, Epperson shows how the "reasonable amity" (as described by Albert McCarthy) among discographers began to unravel with the arrival of Walter Bruyninckx's *50 Years of Recorded Jazz* in 1968. The most serious charge leveled against the Belgian discographer was that his new work amounted to little more than combining Rust's and Jepsen's data. While there was some truth to this early on, later editions of Bruyninckx certainly contained sessions and releases not present in either of his predecessor's works. In any case, the previous, largely benign discographical spats now escalated into personal, near-libelous attacks. Epperson documents some of the hostile exchanges between the discographical "establishment" (Rust, Jepsen, Godrich) and the interloper, Bruyninckx. The greater point made by Epperson (with appropriate quotes from the writings of Barry Kernfeld, Howard Rye, and James Patrick) is that, unlike bibliography, "large-scale" [comprehensive] discography never became institutionalized, largely due to the lack of

acceptance of jazz itself in academia: “Consequently, the unwritten rules and ethics that tightly govern the ritualized scholastic world made little or no impression on jazz discographers” (p. 107). In a particularly valuable section, the author examines copyright law and its application to jazz in general and discography in particular. Though brief, his discussion of what constitutes “original work” with regard to reference sources is enlightening.

While Bruyninckx and, soon afterward, Tom Lord began issuing their controversial comprehensive discographies at a relatively rapid pace, Danish discographer Erik Raben continued to work on his own carefully researched and universally praised “official” update of Jepsen, *Jazz Records, 1942–1980*. Raben’s narrower time frame and painfully slow rate of publication made it difficult to compete, however. Lord’s *The Jazz Discography* eventually delivered the knockout blow, and *Jazz Records* ceased print publication in 1999 with volume 7 (letter F); volume 8 (through letter G) appeared on CD-ROM several years later.

Epperson devotes the remainder of Chapter Five to the emergence of Tom Lord’s *The Jazz Discography*. Beginning with his 26 printed volumes, through the CD-ROM versions, and now with the current online subscription incarnation of his work, Lord has turned jazz discography into an industry and, presumably, a profitable one. Epperson traces the genesis of Lord’s work, beginning with his relationship with *Cadence* magazine,⁶ which marketed the first 25 printed volumes before Lord and *Cadence* publisher Bob Rusch had a parting of the ways. He also surveys the critical response to the Lord juggernaut. Unlike previous generations of discographers, Lord did not enter the field as a collector/fan/unaffiliated scholar, but from the technology side. As Epperson aptly describes it: “The line in the sand was now drawn: Lord was a businessman, a marketer who was peddling a product—the others were either professional academics or amateur scholars undertaking research. From that point forward the name Tom Lord became anathema in the community of music scholars and professional discographers” (p. 126). Nevertheless, Lord was able to take full advantage of database technology in compiling and formatting his discography and equally full advantage of the Internet in marketing it. The sheer convenience of its unprecedented search capabilities, aided by an aggressive advertising campaign, was enough to convince casual

⁶ In pointing out the conflict of interest inherent in *Cadence* reviewing *The Jazz Discography*, in which it had a financial interest, Epperson quotes Kernfeld and Rye’s “Comprehensive Discographies of Jazz, Blues and Gospel, Part 2,” *Notes*, March 1995, p. 879. However, their statement that *Cadence* published “extremely enthusiastic, self-serving reviews of Lord’s project while quietly sweeping improprieties under the rug” is rendered meaningless by a typo in Epperson: “proprieties” for “improprieties.”

jazz fans as well as librarians not experienced in the intricacies of discographical research of its preeminence (even the title *The Jazz Discography* implies that it must be authoritative). Moreover, Lord's ability to constantly update his listings to include new releases reduced the time lag in discographical coverage from years to months or even weeks. On the other hand, Lord's undisguised and extensive appropriation of material from previous sources as well as the apparent lack of verification of data raised the ire of the jazz research community. Many of the concerns were voiced in a definitive two-part critique by Barry Kernfeld and Howard Rye in *Notes*.⁷

Because Lord is now the only game in town and because it is so convenient, my colleagues and I at the Institute of Jazz Studies use it on a daily basis. Yet almost every time one delves more deeply into its entries, one finds errors of many types. For example, during the past week I had occasion to look up Lord's listings for three albums: Duke Ellington's 1957 *Such Sweet Thunder* (Columbia), Michel Legrand's 1984 *After the Rain* (Pablo), and Jimmy McPartland's 1956 *Jimmy McPartland and His Dixieland Band* (Brunswick). All three entries contained errors. Regarding the Ellington, it is well known that when Columbia reissued *Such Sweet Thunder* on CD in 1999, it inadvertently substituted a different take of "Up and Down, Up and Down." This prompted outrage on the part of jazz fans, who wondered what became of Clark Terry's witty ending quote of "Lord, what fools these mortals be," vocalized through his horn, which was present on the take used for the original Columbia LP (CL1033). In searching for a CD containing the originally issued take, I found that, although Lord correctly notes that the 1999 CD (Columbia CK-65568) contains the alternate, all of the other CDs I was able to audition that Lord lists as containing the original LP take in fact also have the alternate. These include the 9-CD box, *The Complete Columbia Studio Albums Collection, 1951-1958* (Columbia Legacy 88697-93888, issued in 2012), as well as the single CD, *Essential Jazz Classics* ECJ55416.

On Legrand's *After the Rain* (Pablo 2320129 [LP]/OJC 803 [CD]), there are three horns (Joe Wilder, Zoot Sims, and Phil Woods), who play in various combinations. All of the notations in Lord about who plays on which tracks are incorrect. In addition, the first tune, the Legrand/Bergman piece "Nobody Knows," is incorrectly listed as "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen." Incidentally, all of these errors appeared originally in Bruyninckx, indicating that Lord simply copied the information with no verification.

⁷ "Comprehensive Discographies of Jazz, Blues and Gospel, Part 1," *Notes*, 51, no. 2, December 1994, p. 501-547; "Comprehensive Discographies of Jazz, Blues and Gospel, Part 2," *Notes*, 51, no. 3, March 1995, p. 865-891.

On the Jimmy McPartland LP (Brunswick BL54018), Marian McPartland is the pianist on three of the four titles recorded on February 2, 1956, but her name does not appear in Lord's personnel listing. Dick Cary, who plays on the remaining title, *is* listed, but for the wrong piece. Again, these errors surfaced in the space of a week and are representative of the types of problems regularly encountered while using Lord's *The Jazz Discography* (online version).

Chapter Six is devoted to the rise of specialized discographies, especially single-artist works and the bio-discography subgenre. Epperson seems to mistakenly conflate these two types. There are plenty of single-artist discographies that contain no biographical data at all. Nor would I consider discographies containing a brief introductory biographical sketch or occasional biographical notes bio-discographies in the same sense as such works as D. Russell Connor's *B.G. on the Record* or Walter C. Allen's *Hendersonia*, pioneers of the genre.

Once again, Epperson traces the origins of the artist discography to discographically oriented articles that appeared as early as the 1920s in such publications as *Gramophone* and *Jazz Hot*, as well as somewhat later pieces by George Hoefer in *Down Beat* and Bill Elliott in *Melody Maker*. These gave rise to "chapbooks," pamphlets devoted to individual artists, that proliferated in Europe in the 1950s. The author also takes the opportunity to discuss some of the specialized discographical periodicals, including *Record Research*, *Matrix*, and *Names & Numbers*, among others.

In his survey of publishers of jazz discographies, I was pleased to note that Epperson names Scarecrow Press as "the most prolific academic publisher of bio-discographies during the past thirty years" (p. 143). Although he does not say so, presumably he is referring to the Institute of Jazz Studies's series *Studies in Jazz*. He also makes some factual errors concerning publishing at Rutgers, stating, "From the 1960s to the 1980s a relatively small number of IJS publications were printed by Transaction Books, Rutgers quasi in-house imprint. But thereafter the IJS sent its books to Scarecrow, now based in Maryland. By the 1990s the IJS, and eventually Rutgers as well, had turned to Scarecrow as their de facto house publisher" (p. 143). Scarecrow Press can hardly be called Rutgers's "de facto house publisher" as it has had its own Rutgers University Press since 1936.

Occasionally, some of Epperson's descriptions of works he discusses are not entirely accurate. For example, in discussing Edward Brooks's *The Young Louis Armstrong on Records: A Critical Survey of the Early Recordings, 1923-1928* (part of the aforementioned *Studies in Jazz* series), an impressive work marred

by its author's off-putting, sour assessments of many classic performances,⁸ Epperson writes, "Given the extensive breakdown of each song's structure—which, given the increasing sophistication of some tunes by 1928, can go on as long as a page—the work could even be considered a solography" (p. 145). It is not the structure of the song but the routine of the recorded performance (i.e. solos, ensemble choruses, tags, etc.) that Brooks maps out, and it is these elements that account for the length of the entries.

Next, Epperson covers "genre" discographies—works dealing with musical styles—and other "topical" works (e.g. women instrumentalists) and discographies devoted to recordings made in a particular country, as well as those covering special series like V-Discs, Armed Forces Radio Service (AFRS) and other transcription discs.

Chapter Seven continues the discussion of specialized discographies with works devoted to individual labels. As in previous sections, Epperson traces the origins of this genre to periodical articles in the 1940s, which led to separate monographs (e.g. Dan Mahoney's pioneering 1951 *Columbia 13/14000-D Series*) and ultimately to the extensive series of label discographies compiled by Michel Ruppli and published by Greenwood Press beginning in 1979 and continuing into the new millennium. Epperson quotes some writers who maintain that label discographies are more valuable than artist discographies, an odd position considering that they serve completely different functions. He does point out one advantage for compilers of label discographies: "[T]here is little need for subjectivity: either a record company produced a session (or bought a master) or it didn't, thus obviating any angst about whether it 'should' be in or out" (p. 162). Epperson presents something of a false "dilemma" regarding the compilation of label discographies: "Should single-label discographers keep their work 'pure,' including only the information extracted from the record company, no matter how incomplete, or should they include 'outside' data, such as from journal articles, books, or liner notes?" (p. 162) Why wouldn't a discographer want to supplement record company data with outside research that, when properly sourced, will add to the accuracy while still maintaining the integrity of the original label's files? Anyone who has used record company files, valuable as they are, has undoubtedly come across many problems that would benefit from annotations by the discographer: misspellings of musicians' names or song titles, incomplete personnels, catalog numbers that never reached the production stage, and confusion among recording, mixing, mastering, and release dates.

⁸ For a review of Brooks's work by Randall Sandke see *Annual Review of Jazz Studies* 12, 2002, pp. 208-212.

According to Epperson, in recent years discography has undergone a major shift and has become “a world of professionals, with its work done by professionals and its output sold to professionals” (p. 166). If one defines a “professional” as someone who makes a living at something, with the exception of Tom Lord I’m not sure this statement is valid. For example, if one looks at the recent discographical works in the aforementioned Scarecrow Press series, the authors include an attorney, a wine distributor, a typefounder, and two academics, only one of whom teaches in a music department. One might argue that the early discographers were more “professional” in that, as Epperson carefully documents, many of them were writing for music magazines, and Brian Rust, himself, became a music librarian. It is true, however, that the high costs of discographical works has, to some extent, put them out of reach of the average jazz fan, and many are sold primarily to libraries.

Epperson feels that the increasing cost and complexity of the comprehensive discographies meant “the average record consumer now needed a cheaper, more concise, more user-friendly alternative: the buyers’ guide” (p. 167), a spate of which appeared over the past two decades. The author traces the origin of this genre with customary thoroughness. It is good to see the inclusion of Roger D. Kinkle’s *Complete Encyclopedia of Popular Music and Jazz, 1900-1950*, an extremely useful four-volume work that combines elements of a record guide, biographical encyclopedia, and label listings, among other features. Although out of print, it is widely and inexpensively available used. Towards the end of Chapter Seven, Epperson examines publications aimed at the serious collector. These “trading journals” often combined record auction lists with carefully researched discographical and historical pieces. An example is Len Kunstadt’s *Record Research* (1955-1995), much beloved by collectors and researchers even though it surely contributed to their deteriorating eyesight thanks to its miniscule fonts and anarchic layout.

In Chapter Eight, the final chapter, Epperson surveys the modern (1979-) period of discography. He begins, somewhat incongruously, by returning to Brian Rust, tracing in detail the history of the later editions of his seminal works before turning to Lord and other more contemporary efforts. He revisits some of the criticisms of Lord, including the issues of plagiarism and lack of quality control, and then examines other Internet resources such as e-commerce sites and the All Music Guide. While discographical purists have rightly criticized the accuracy of data on these sites, they were never intended for discographical research. Nevertheless, the vast amounts of readily available

and up-to-date information they provide can be very helpful to discographers, who, of course, must verify the accuracy of anything they find.

Epperson discusses several other Internet based discographical initiatives, one of the more intriguing of which is J-Disc, a product of Columbia's Center for Jazz Studies (<http://jdisc.columbia.edu/>). Epperson claims that J-Disc is "similar to AMG" (All Music Guide), but, other than being Internet-based, I see no similarity in purpose or format. With a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, J-Disc may be the only strictly discographical project to be supported by a major funding organization. According to its website, J-Disc is a "collaborative, extensible online database of jazz recordings" and is "designed to make the vast existing body of available reference material about jazz recordings easier to use, and as a model resource in which scholars may edit, interpret, and share the insights they gain from that material." The goals are admirable, if somewhat amorphous, and judging from the data currently available, elusive; but the project is in its early stages and the jury is still out.

The author also deals with self-published, online discographies as exemplified by Jan Evensmo's solographies (www.jazzarcheology.com) and the Red Saunders Research Foundation (www.redsaunders.com). Evensmo's discographies are downloadable pdf files, whereas the Red Saunders site uses basic unmodified HTML. Perhaps the premier site for jazz discography is Michael Fitzgerald's www.jazzdiscography.com, which houses an extensive series of works produced using the BRIAN (named for Brian Rust) relational database program designed by Steve Albin and available free of charge from the website. BRIAN has been widely adopted and is well-suited to producing discographical works in a clear and consistent format, which can be viewed online. But it requires a fairly rigid entry protocol and does not easily lend itself to customization.

Later on, Epperson grapples with some of the broader philosophical issues in discography, as well as future trends in discographical research. Here, he revisits the question of "session-based" versus "record-based" discography, creating a divide where one does not actually exist. Other than Han Enderman, editor of *Names & Numbers*, whom he cites as an advocate of release-based discography, since Delaunay's work in the 1930s, almost all serious jazz discography has been session-based. The discussion is clouded by the use of imprecise terminology on the part of both Epperson and Enderman. The former summarizes the latter's position as believing "the basic block of the jazz discography ought to be the recording," but from Enderman's own statement (quoted by Epperson), it is clear that he is talking about releases (or issues) (p. 204). Epperson continues to refer to the "recording" throughout this section. He quotes Enderman: "A discography is a study of existing recordings

for collectors and researchers . . .”(p. 204). Of course, after one dispenses with the physical features of the release (label variants, pressing numbers, etc.), any study of “existing recordings” will inevitably lead back to the session that produced them.

Epperson becomes further entangled by alleging that “the primary reason Enderman chose the recording as the discography’s basic element is that he placed greater emphasis on the role of selection and the function of the jazz discographer as a gatekeeper” (p. 205). If this is Enderman’s position (and I’m not sure it is), don’t the compilers of session-based discographies fulfill the same gatekeeping function by their decisions of which sessions to include in their works?⁹ To balance out Enderman, Epperson quotes Matthew Snyder and Michael Fitzgerald as advocates of session-based discography.

This contrived schism is emblematic of a recurrent problem in this work. Much to his credit as a conscientious researcher, Epperson has unearthed vast amounts of fascinating material. He includes numerous quotations from wide-ranging sources espousing all sorts of beliefs but too often is reluctant to provide his own critical judgments about these positions. As in the issue of session- versus “recording”-based discography, this tends to give equal weight to all theories, regardless of their merit or degree of acceptance.

These relatively few criticisms aside, *More Important Than the Music* is a major achievement. To those of us in the limited world of jazz research and the even narrower field of jazz discography, pioneers like Delaunay, Rust, and their colleagues are true heroes, and it is gratifying to see them given their due in such a serious and comprehensive manner.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTOR

EDWARD BERGER recently retired after three decades at the Institute of Jazz Studies (IJS) to pursue freelance writing and photography, but continues his association with IJS as a consultant. He is a regular contributor to *JazzTimes* as both writer and photographer, and is the author or coauthor of three works in the Scarecrow Press/IJS Studies in Jazz series: *Benny Carter: A Life in American Music*, *Basically Speaking: An Oral History of George Duvivier*, and

⁹ I attempted to deal with the issue of the exclusion of marginally jazz-related sessions from comprehensive jazz discographies in “Between the Cracks: An Exploratory Discography of Jazz Artists on Nonjazz Recordings,” *Annual Review of Jazz Studies* 4, 1988, pp. 75-151.

Reminiscing in Tempo: The Life and Times of a Jazz Hustler, the memoirs of producer Teddy Reig. His photographs have appeared in many periodicals as well as on recordings by such artists as Benny Carter, Phil Woods, Frank Wess, Quincy Jones, and Ray Bryant. His biography of trumpeter Joe Wilder will be published in the Spring of 2014 by Temple University Press.