

Let Freedom Swing: Collected Writings on Jazz, Blues, and Gospel

Howard Reich



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A swing note is, to the listener of the rhythm, an unexpected note, and it is the spark of life in jazz and its relatives. Whether playing the standards or the most experimental piece, it is how a musician handles these notes—fearlessly or safely—that determines the fate of the performance. Howard Reich's critical writing is similarly unexpected and fearless, and *Let Freedom Swing* is a collection of the articles from the past three decades that best capture this spirit.

Each section of *Let Freedom Swing* composes a suite, focusing on either a person, place, or scene. Reich gives new life to the standards with his profiles and elegies for such giants as Gershwin, Ellington, and Sinatra. A profile of Louis Armstrong brings out the often angry side of Satchmo but also reveals a more remarkable musician and human being.

His open-mindedness makes Reich a particularly astute observer of the experimental and new, from Ornette Coleman to Chicago experimentalist Ken Vandermark. And his observations about street music open our ears to the songs of everyday life. Reich's fearlessness is evident in his writing about daunting subjects, such as the New Orleans music scene after Katrina, the lost legacy of jazz in Panama, and the complicated legacy of "race music" in America.

Howard Reich combines a deep enthusiasm for music, a breadth of knowledge, and an ability to share his world with his readers, and *Let Freedom Swing* is essential reading for anyone interested in the continuing vitality of jazz, gospel, blues, and American music in general.

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