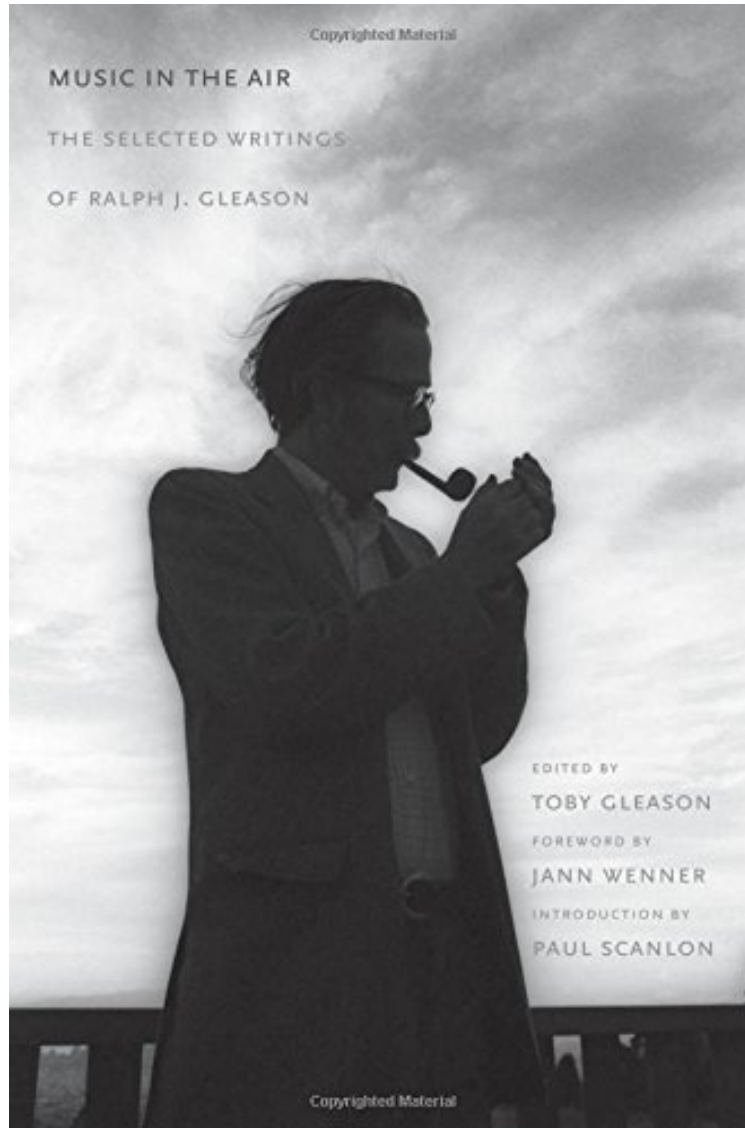


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Music in the Air: The Selected Writings of Ralph J. Gleason

Ralph J. Gleason

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Ralph J. Gleason : Music in the Air: The Selected Writings of Ralph J. Gleason before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Music in the Air: The Selected Writings of Ralph J. Gleason:

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. A WRITER WHO UNDERSTOOD JAZZ, BLUES, AND THE "NEW" SOUND FROM S.F. By Stuart Jefferson I've been waiting for decades for someone to rummage around and

collect Ralph Gleason's work ever since I read his column in the S.F. Chronicle and in Rolling Stone Magazine (not to mention the occasional album liner notes), and that great book of it's time "Jefferson Airplane and the San Francisco Sound", that had interviews with the band and other cool stuff about the music from that city. I still remember thinking at the time that here was someone who "got it" as far as jazz and rock 'n' roll. Gleason was an icon of intelligent, common sense thinking in his writing--especially jazz and the then burgeoning S.F. rock scene. We could use a writer of Gleason's caliber today. There's a reason his name still appears (along with Hunter Thompson's) on the masthead of Rolling Stone Magazine. And now his son Toby Gleason has collected some good, representative work from his Father's files including a couple of sections on music, but also important (at the time) comedians, and a section on politics. There's no photographs, but a much needed Index is included. These pieces are from various sources including the S.F. Chronicle, Down Beat, Ramparts, Rolling Stone, Evergreen Review, Encyclopedia Britannica, American Scholar, and other publications, along with album liner notes--including one piece for a cancelled 1965 Dylan album. The music portion of the book (in two sections) includes jazz and blues articles with pieces on Coltrane's "Ole Coltrane" album, the birth of jazz, B.B. King's "Completely Well" album, Miles Davis' "Bitches Brew" album, and other pieces covering Ellington, Tjader, Holiday, Mingus, and a few others from that genre. The second section deals with folk, pop, and rock music and includes The Limelighters, Odetta, Joan Baez, Hank Williams, The Beatles, Simon Garfunkel, and the death of Janis Joplin, among others. There's a long heartfelt farewell to Ellington from Rolling Stone ('74), and a piece on Frank Sinatra and what Gleason feels Sinatra has lost--"It is simply weird now to see him all glossed up like a wax dummy...". One of the more interesting pieces is whether John Lennon and Bob Dylan are one and the same person. The piece (from the S.F. Chronicle in 1964) posits some similarities between the two artists from a fan who wonders if both performers are one person. Remember, this article was before computers, and from an innocent period when all this music and the artists were new. Plus there's a column from '64 about Dylan's performance from Feb. of '64 at the Berkeley Community Theater, which is one of the better, more enlightened pieces from that period--typical good Gleason writing--"...Dylan alone is one of the greatest warning voices of our time.". The section on comedians includes Dick Gregory, Jonathan Winters, Lenny Bruce (a long article), and a '67 article on Bill Cosby, "...he is the most popular comic in the country right now.". The Gregory piece deals with comedy and the reality of being a black man ("All I know about Birmingham is the jails.") during this period. The Winters article is about just how funny a man ("...the real heir to Will Rogers and totally unique.") Winters is. The Bruce piece goes into some detail about his "routines" (nothing was truly a set routine) and the trouble he found himself in with both the law and various city powers. Contrast that period with today's comedians. Hmmm. The political section has pieces like "The Times, They Are A-Changin'", "The Flower Children", "We've Got To Get Rid Of Nixon" (which I remember pretty well), "Payola: It's In The Grooves", and other prescient pieces that give the flavor of those times. One of the most telling pieces (published in the S.F. Chronicle in 1964) is "The Tragedy at the Greek Theater". which deals with the (then) burgeoning student movement which included the free speech movement. The UC "powers that be" had the police take over and drag students away--which included dragging them downstairs ("Don't drag 'em so fast, take 'em down a little slower, they bounce more that way".--One S.F. cop to another.) while hiding their badges so as to remain unidentified. For me this piece is one of the most telling from that entire era of student unrest/awareness of the '60s because I too witnessed similarly unjust actions taken against students a few years later. And few (especially someone so close to the action like Gleason) could write so well about what was happening in a relatively few words. The article "Sound Is Without Color", published in Rolling Stone in 1967 is Gleason asking why ("Racial prejudice is a drag but also a fact...") artists like Otis Redding, Booker T. and the M.G.s, Ray Charles, James Brown, and others are not seen (and heard) on American TV. "The answer is color.". "...and in America...color is a handicap.". If you weren't around then this article will give some insight into what the color barrier was like back then, and how formulated television and radio were. This piece is another look at where America was in that era--contrast what Gleason writes in '67 with American radio/TV today. There's a Forward by Jann Wenner who, along with Gleason's encouragement, insight (and seed money) helped start Rolling Stone Magazine. And just to be fair to Gleason's memory, that magazine was far different back then from the slick, N.Y. style magazine it is today. Back then it cost a quarter and was a bulky, folded over magazine/newspaper printed on thick-ish paper stock. But it was full of good, interesting, and informative writing and reviews ("our" music!) by people who were fans of the music. And there was always a piece on something pertinent pertaining to (usually, mostly) the (then) younger generation and the U.S./world. Plus, the photographs were always a big part of the magazine--remember all this was before the internet--we could actually see what these bands (and other relevant people) looked like. This was the first attempt to publish a magazine on rock 'n' roll on a nationwide scale--few of us knew there were so many others like ourselves! I still remember the long wait between issues and having to scour news stands to hopefully find the latest issue. And I always liked the little box that contained a short poem by Richard Brautigan that appeared once in a while in the early days. Those poems put me onto his novels and his poetry books that I still have (and re-read) today. So if you want a look into that era covering a broad range of topics, written by someone who was there and had the ability to observe/listen to whatever he was focusing on, and then put it down on paper in an intelligent, easy to read style, this would be a good addition to your library. While it helps to be from that era (like me) because you remember some of these people/happenings, someone

unfamiliar with the book's subjects will still come away with some idea of what it was like then--exciting, scary, sad, fantastic. I say this because I was a college student in the late '60s in Palo Alto and was there for the student unrest at Stanford, and the Berkeley demonstrations (including tear gas) and I still remember the use of force against free speech and other ideals (the Viet Nam War, Black equality, women's rights) that the "people in charge" wanted to squash. I sometimes wonder what happened to those ideals today--but maybe the time's not right for people to really get behind a cause (or causes) and to not stop demonstrating for their cause until something is changed for the better. This is a good looking book printed in America using paper designed for permanence. And on another note, also check out "Conversations In Jazz: The Ralph J. Gleason Interviews" (also published by Yale), another just released collection of Gleason's interviews (done in his living room) with many jazz artists like Quincy Jones, Dizzy Gillespie, Milt Jackson, Sonny Rollins, Bill Evans, Horace Silver, and a number of other great jazz musicians. Now, if someone would reprint Gleason's book "Jefferson Airplane and the San Francisco Sound", that would be very cool. I sincerely hope Gleason's son Toby/Yale Publishers will come together for another volume similar to this one, or perhaps a book devoted to his writings on music in the Bay Area. Now that would really sell. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. great selection of writings from the past of an outstanding ...By john westlakegreat selection of writings from the past of an outstanding witness to a period of music history." Music in the Air" a great primer for those who were not there. Remember fondly the originals. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy Ralph JungheimGreat historic reviews, albeit from liner notes, etc.

A collection of the best music writing and cultural criticism from one of the most influential music journalists of his day The co-founder of Rolling Stone magazine, Ralph J. Gleason was among the most respected journalists, interviewers, and critics writing about popular music in the latter half of the twentieth century. As a longtime contributor to the San Francisco Chronicle, Down Beat, and Ramparts, his expertise and insights about music, musicians, and cultural trends were unparalleled, whether his subject was jazz, folk, pop, or rock and roll. He was the only music journalist included on President Richard Nixon's infamous Enemies List, which Gleason himself considered the highest honor a man's country can bestow upon him. This sterling anthology, edited by Gleason's son Toby, himself a forty-year veteran of the music business, spans Ralph J. Gleason's four decades as popular music's preeminent commentator. Drawing from a rich variety of sources, including Gleason's books, essays, interviews, and LP record album liner notes, it is essential reading for writers, historians, scholars, and music lovers of every stripe.

Gleason didn't review art or life from the sidelines; he wrote from inside the moral, political, and artistic crises of the times, and he perceived them clearly and understood them passionately. His standard of critical practice and his model of critical responsibility are awe-inspiring. Richard Brody, The New Yorker--Richard Brody "The New Yorker ""A godsend to folks like me who already know and admire [Gleason's] work and a standard setter for those who should know him. Felix Contreras, NPR Books--Felix Contreras "NPR Books ""The kind of righteous combination of sociocultural theory and radical politics that, today, you might find on Mark Fisher's K-punk blog, or in the odd article Ben Watson is able to sneak past editors. In 1970, Gleason wrote "If there is no way to change this world without killing half of us, then fuck it. I'll do my best to have a ball and go out swinging. The world still needs changing. We still need writing like this." Daniel Spicer, The Wire--Daniel Spicer "The Wire" (06/01/2016)"Two important new collections . . . both make for absorbing and instructive reading, in quite different ways. Nate Chinen, Jazz Times--Nate Chinen "Jazz Times ""Gleason didn't review art or life from the sidelines; he wrote from inside the moral, political, and artistic crises of the times, and he perceived them clearly and understood them passionately. His standard of critical practice and his model of critical responsibility are awe-inspiring."--Richard Brody, The New Yorker--Richard Brody "The New Yorker ""A godsend to folks like me who already know and admire [Gleason's] work -- and a standard setter for those who should know him."--Felix Contreras, NPR Books--Felix Contreras "NPR Books ""The kind of righteous combination of sociocultural theory and radical politics that, today, you might find on Mark Fisher's K-punk blog, or in the odd article Ben Watson is able to sneak past editors. In 1970, Gleason wrote "If there is no way to change this world without killing half of us, then fuck it. I'll do my best to have a ball and go out swinging." The world still needs changing. We still need writing like this."--Daniel Spicer, The Wire--Daniel Spicer "The Wire" (06/01/2016)"Two important new collections . . . both make for absorbing and instructive reading, in quite different ways."--Nate Chinen, Jazz Times--Nate Chinen "Jazz Times "About the AuthorTwo-time Grammy Award winner Ralph J. Gleason (1917-1975) was the author of numerous articles and three highly regarded books on music as well as an acclaimed TV and documentary film producer. Toby Gleason is a veteran jazz radio producer, programmer, and host, and a former assistant editor at Rolling Stone.