



Learning to Listen: The Jazz Journey of Gary Burton: An Autobiography

By Gary Burton

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By Gary Burton

(Berklee Press). In "Learning to Listen," Gary Burton shares his 50 years of experiences at the top of the jazz scene. A seven-time Grammy Award-winner, Burton made his first recordings at age 17, has toured and recorded with a who's who of famous jazz names, and is one of only a few openly gay musicians in jazz. Burton is a true innovator, both as a performer and an educator. His autobiography is one of the most personal and insightful jazz books ever written.

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Editorial Review

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Jazz musician Burton came out as a gay man on Terry Gross's National Public Radio program, Fresh Air, in 1994, although he did not intend it that way. In fact, he was surprised that she brought it up given that, as he notes in his introduction, he had only started telling a few friends and colleagues "that I had finally figured out I was gay." By that time, he was well into his forties, had been married several times, and had children. Learning to Listen is a fascinating exploration of one man, who happens to be a world-class musician, and his journey of self-discovery. He discusses his childhood in Indiana; his first music lessons at the age of six, primarily on the marimba and vibraphone; his college days at the Berklee School of Music in Boston; his early days playing the clubs in New York; his work with George Shearing and Stan Getz; forming his own quartet; and going solo. The book has plenty of anecdotes, too, such as when Duke Ellington and his band played at Burton's high school ("I still can hardly believe they came to our little town in southern Indiana for a gig"). Burton also includes miniportraits of famous musicians he has worked with over the years, including Lionel Hampton, Milt Jackson, Miles Davis, Samuel Barber, Thelonious Monk, Red Norvo, Pat Metheny, and Chick Corea. --June Sawyers

Review

Great musicians are no respecters of borders; they cross them at will, and in doing so define their own territory. Gary Burton's career has spanned that porous borderland between jazz and rock music, between the strictures of academia and the spontaneity of live performance. It has been a fascinating journey through the great plains of music towards the high plateaux of the realized self. Bravo! --Sting

Gary Burton's life and works have paralleled the twists and turns of a wild half-century of cultural upheaval and transition from a vantage point that is singularly fascinating and unique. Always one of the most fluent and articulate communicators of complexity and nuance as a musician, in this captivating autobiography, Gary takes us through a lifetime lived on the front lines of a shifting and evolving world with a clarity and focus that is worthy of his narrative skills as one of the greatest jazz soloists of his time. --Pat Metheny

About the Author

Widely recognised as the most technically accomplished of jazz vibraphonists, Gary Burton also led the first true fusion band, combining jazz with rock and storming festival stages and rock palaces around the world in the late 1960s. By then, he had already toured the world with jazz icons George Shearing and Stan Getz-all before he turned twenty-five. Burton has spent nearly sixty of his seventy years as a professional musician, balancing full-time careers as a groundbreaking jazz artist and an innovative educator at the renowned Berklee College of Music. Through his bands, as well as through his partnerships with Pat Metheny and Chick Corea, he has forever changed the musical landscape of the late twentieth century.

Users Review

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