



Really the Blues (New York Review Books Classics)

By Mezz Mezzrow, Bernard Wolfe

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Mezz Mezzrow was a boy from Chicago who learned to play the sax in reform school and pursued a life in music and a life of crime. He moved from Chicago to New Orleans to New York, working in brothels and bars, bootlegging, dealing drugs, getting hooked, doing time, producing records, and playing with the greats, among them Louis Armstrong, Bix Beiderbecke, and Fats Waller. *Really the Blues*, the jive-talking memoir that Mezzrow wrote at the insistence of, and with the help of, the novelist Bernard Wolfe, is the story of an unusual and unusually American life, and a portrait of a man who moved freely across racial boundaries when few could or did, “the odyssey of an individualist . . . the saga of a guy who wanted to make friends in a jungle where everyone was too busy making money.”

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Editorial Review

Review

“American counter-culture classic *Really the Blues* [is] a stylized oral history that anticipates the Beat novel...*Really the Blues* is part quixotic adventure novel, part inside-scoop...Mezzrow’s voice is funny, impulsive, full of itself and often spectacularly scatological....Listening to “Mezz” is tremendous fun...the book’s true literary inheritance is its style...one of the great, flawed, jubilant, jive-talking characters of American literature.” —Martin Riker, *The Wall Street Journal*

“The mighty Mezz was at once the greatest digger, the greatest chronicler, the greatest celebrator of [jazz] culture, as well as being a principal actor on its main stage and contributor of its most characteristic fragrance—the pungent aroma of burning bush.” —Albert Goldman, *High Times*

“Mezz Mezzrow’s rambunctious enthusiasm for jazz and the world it shaped and defined keeps the pages turning...The lost world of the Jazz Age comes alive in these pages, replete with all the Chi-town bounce and streetwise braggadocio that came with the risqué territory...Mezzrow’s love of the music and the ‘bandit’ lifestyle is palpable and infectious, giving his story a novelistic verve. In many ways, Mezz is the Augie March of jazz.” —Matt Hanson, *The Arts Fuse*

“As to the books of Bernard Wolfe, his extraordinary imagination, his range of styles and genres, should alone qualify him for a conspicuous role in 20th-century American literature.” —Thomas Berger

“*Really the Blues* returns us...to the roots of rock, to the roots certainly of beat and hence to the beginnings of the sixties counterculture through an extended look into the life of a Jewish boy...who turned his back on the middle class and all it had to offer to blow jazz in ‘more creep joints and speakeasies and dancehalls than the law allows.’ ”—Brooke Horvath, *Review of Contemporary Fiction*

“An intense, sincere and honest book. It makes all the novels with jazz backgrounds seem as phony as an Eddie Condon concert.”—Bucklin Moon, *The New Republic*

“An autobiography such as was never seen before beneath the moon.”—Ben Ray Redman, *The American Mercury*

About the Author

Mezz Mezzrow (1899–1972) was born Milton Mesirow in Chicago to a Jewish family “as respectable as Sunday morning.” As a teenager, however, he was sent to Pontiac Reformatory for stealing a car; there he learned to play the saxophone and decided to devote his life to the blues. Beginning in the 1920s, he had an intermittent career as a sideman in jazz groups, and struck up friendships with many of the greats of the day, including Louis Armstrong and Bix Beiderbecke. Enamored of African American culture, he helped channel it to whiter and wider audiences, backing and producing significant recordings by Frankie Newton, Teddy Wilson, Sidney Bechet, and Tommy Ladnier, among others, and helping to spark the New Orleans revival of the late 1930s. In the 1940s, Mezzrow started his own record label, King Jazz Records. He spent the last years of his life in Paris.

Bernard Wolfe (1915–1985) was born in New Haven and attended Yale University, where he studied psychology. An active member of the labor movement, he moved to Mexico for eight months in 1937 to

work as personal secretary and assistant to Leon Trotsky. In subsequent years, Wolfe held disparate jobs—from serving in the Merchant Marines to working as a pornographic novelist to editing *Mechanix Illustrated*—while writing fiction and science fiction. His best-known work is the 1959 novel *The Great Prince Died*, a fictional account of Trotsky's assassination. Among his other books are *The Late Risers, In Deep, Limbo*, and *Logan's Gone*.

Ben Ratliff has been a jazz and pop critic for *The New York Times* since 1996 and has written four books including *The Jazz Ear: Conversations over Music* and *Coltrane: The Story of a Sound*. His latest book is *Every Song Ever: Twenty Ways to Listen in an Age of Musical Plenty*.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Andre Roberts:

Book is to be different for each and every grade. Book for children until finally adult are different content. As it is known to us that book is very important for all of us. The book *Really the Blues* (New York Review Books Classics) ended up being making you to know about other understanding and of course you can take more information. It doesn't matter what advantages for you. The reserve *Really the Blues* (New York Review Books Classics) is not only giving you considerably more new information but also being your friend when you feel bored. You can spend your spend time to read your book. Try to make relationship with all the book *Really the Blues* (New York Review Books Classics). You never really feel lose out for everything if you read some books.

Dan Hanner:

People live in this new morning of lifestyle always make an effort to and must have the time or they will get large amount of stress from both lifestyle and work. So , when we ask do people have extra time, we will say absolutely of course. People is human not really a robot. Then we question again, what kind of activity are there when the spare time coming to you of course your answer may unlimited right. Then do you try this one, reading publications. It can be your alternative within spending your spare time, the particular book you have read is usually *Really the Blues* (New York Review Books Classics).

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