

## Vital Reading List

---

*I've been reading and collecting books about music and musicians for about 25 years. Here is a list of some of my favorite books that I have found to be a great source of information and inspiration.*

— Enjoy, Steve

### **Blues People by LeRoi Jones**

This book is required reading for all musicians who play any form of US music. Blues People is a very well-researched and well-written book on the history of the blues. Typical "history of the blues" books go back to the early 1920s or 1930s — this one goes back 400 years to the beginning of slavery in the U.S. and really tells the ENTIRE story.

### **Father Of The Blues - an Autobiography by W. C. Handy**

Handy is a good story teller and he documents how he discovered the beauty of the blues, inspiring him to write — in sheet music form — blues tunes, which helped spread the blues to "mainstream America." This writing gives us insight into the life of a professional musician in the late 1800s/early 1900s.

### **Deep Blues by Robert Palmer**

Deep Blues is a well-written book that explains the history and development of Delta Blues. This music has incredible emotional impact and depth and had a profound impact on U.S. Music, especially rock; this makes Deep Blues required reading. Palmer includes often overlooked details about the survival of African drumming concepts in the US during the slavery years when drumming was outlawed for the slaves. I used a quote from this book during the "Patting Juba" section of the History of the US Beat -- the Formative Years. Palmer uses occasional references from Dena Epstein's book Sinful Tunes and Spirituals, which led me to read her book.

### **Sinful Tunes and Spirituals - Black Folk Music to the Civil War by Dena Epstein**

Sinful Tunes and Spirituals is the "Holy Grail" when it comes to research material on the foundation of U.S. Popular Music. Dena Epstein did 20 years of research before writing this indispensable book which is chock-full of findings and first-hand written accounts regarding the survival, evolution and acculturation of African musical concepts in the U.S. (1600s to the mid 1800s). Also included is information about the slaves of the Caribbean and South America. I quoted a passage from this book during the "Patting Juba" section of the History of the U.S. Beat — the Formative Years.

### **Early Jazz by Gunther Schuller**

Schuller is a music scholar of the highest order. His comments give us a perfect example of how to critically listen to music. This piece of work is a comprehensive analysis of jazz from the early 1900s to the 1930s.

### **Mister Jelly Roll by Alan Lomax**

I consider this book to be the "Dead Sea Scrolls" of jazz. It's an incredible story as told by the self-proclaimed "inventor of jazz," Jelly Roll Morton. Alan Lomax interviewed Jelly Roll extensively and then removed himself from the interview so Jelly does all the talking — very well done!

### **The Baby Dodds Story by Larry Gara**

The Baby Dodds Story is inspired by and written in a similar way to Mister Jelly Roll. This book is rich with timeless words of wisdom from one of the first great jazz drummers; this is required reading for the serious student of the drums.

### **Klook - The Story Of Kenny Clarke by Mike Hennessey**

Kenny Clarke was one of the founding fathers of bebop music and bebop drumming. Because “Klook” moved to France in the early 1950s, he didn’t get as much credit and attention as some of the drummers who followed his lead (e.g., Max Roach, Roy Haynes). This is an educational, interesting and well-written book.

### **Traps - The Drum Wonder - The Life Of Buddy Rich by Mel Tormé**

Mel Tormé kept my interest in his biography about his friend Buddy Rich, “the greatest drummer of all time.” Mel Tormé was mainly known as a singer but he also played drums well enough to be able to understand and then write coherently about Buddy Rich, the drummer. He also knew Buddy as a friend, so we get an insight into Buddy Rich, the man.

### **Backbeat - Earl Palmer’s Story by Tony Scherman**

Backbeat is the story of one the USA’s great session players and one of the creators of Rock Drumming. Earl Palmer’s musical journey is a good example of the early “rock ‘n’ roll session musician” — starting off as jazz player but following the more lucrative emerging genres of rhythm and blues and rock ‘n’ roll.

### **The Wrecking Crew by Hal Blaine**

Hal is a born story teller and he recounts many interesting episodes in this book about his life as a session drummer. The Wrecking Crew gives us a glimpse into the LA studio scene during the 1960s and 1970s.

### **Big Bangs by Howard Goodall**

This is a story of five discoveries/inventions that profoundly changed Western music — music notation, equal temperament tuning, opera, the piano, and sound recording. Goodall is a composer/historian from the UK who writes in a very down-to-earth and humorous way.

### **The Sound Of The City by Charlie Gillett**

This is the best history of rock and roll music that I have read, as told by a very well informed and articulate English music writer/radio personality, Charlie Gillett.

### **Jazz Rock - A History by Stuart Nicholson**

This is the best book written on the history of jazz/rock/fusion. Stuart writes in great detail about the emerging jazz/rock scene in the early/mid 60s — a period many writers overlook — and progresses through the 70s, 80s and 90s. Another writer/historian from the UK; they really do their homework!

### **Drumming On The Edge Of Magic by Mickey Hart**

This book covers Mickey Hart’s own history as well as the history of drumming on the planet Earth, which he calls “Planet Drum.” Starting with the “Big Bang,” as the first drum beat, Mickey’s writing is thought-provoking and educational.

### **Afro-Cuban Jazz by Scott Yanow**

Scott Yanow is a very knowledgeable writer and he tells the story of the “latin” influence in U.S. Music. The book profiles the important players and recommends good Afro-Cuban jazz recordings. Yanow has also written excellent books on Swing and Bebop.