



Sound Tracks - A Musical ABC - Volume 1 - 3

Michael Jarrett

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From ambient music to "Dixie" and "Zulu Nation", from Sonny Rollins to the Beastie Boys and Elvis' tailor, "Sound Tracks" quick-shuttles like a jukebox on Saturday night. Alphabetically ordered, this collection of pithy definitions and extended meditations most resembles a boxed set of anthologized sounds compiled by an omnivore of music. Spinning off from the "Definition of Sound" column he wrote for "Pulse!" magazine, Michael Jarrett mixes astute music criticism, an engaging writing style, and a wicked sense of humor to produce three alphabets that will provoke readers to rethink all sorts of popular music. Inventive and whimsical, these small essays coalesce around a serious purpose-writing about contemporary culture in a way that is meaningful to electronic-age readers and listeners. Take, for example, the entry on ambient music: like all of the entries in the book, it is preceded by evocative album art and followed by lists of readings and recordings that amplify the definition; this one lists related videos as well. But it also presents an interview with Carla Bley and Steve Swallow on the influential music of Erik Satie. "Under the ls", producer George Avakian talks about how the technology that made LPs possible changed the music industry, and Pat Metheny talks about the challenges of sequencing an LP from a musician's point of view. The entry for Carol (as in traditional songs for Christmas and the Middle Age dance craze) opens into a riff on cultural roots and survivals that invokes Chuck Berry's classic song. Whether it is read start to finish or sampled, "Sound Tracks" is a book that music lovers and students of contemporary culture will applaud. Author note: Michael Jarrett is Associate Professor of English, Pennsylvania State University, York, and the author of "Drifting on a Read: Jazz as a Model for Writing" (forthcoming).



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