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Jazz A-B-Z: An A to Z Collection of Jazz Portraits

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Marsalis, Wynton and Phil Schaap. *Jazz A-B-Z: An A to Z Collection of Jazz Portraits*. Illustrated by Paul Rogers. Candlewick Press, 2005. ISBN 0763621358. \$24.99. 64 pp.

Reviewer: AnnMarie Hamar

Reading Level: Primary, Intermediate

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Contemporary realistic poetry; Informational books;

Subject: Jazz musicians--Juvenile poetry; Books--Reviews;

The idea for *Jazz ABZ* came to illustrator Rogers as he watched a performance of "Swan Lake." Realizing that he was not really interested in the ballet, Rogers tried to name a major jazz artist for each letter of the alphabet. As he did this, he began to imagine the musicians mixed up with letter forms. Rogers later wrote down his ideas and asked jazz musician Marsalis to be his collaborator on a book. The result of their work is an engaging and creative text that introduces young readers to some of the greatest jazz artists who have ever lived. Marsalis and Rogers list one major jazz artist for each letter of the alphabet, among them Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, the Modern Jazz Quartet, and Sarah Vaughan.

Each poem contains biographical information for the highlighted performer, and is full of words beginning with the letter of the alphabet. For example, of Charles Mingus, Marsalis writes, "Mingus makes mad, majestic, mind-boggling music." The poem for Nat "King" Cole is written in the style of the nursery rhyme, "Old King Cole." Dizzy Gillespie is honored with a poem that reads like hip-hop. One of the most imaginative poems, written for drummer Abdullah ibn Buhaina, reads like a drum score. The alliteration in each poem makes it challenging to read aloud and shows a great imagination in word usage. The illustrations are done in ink and acrylics, and are bright and in-your-face. The book design itself is reminiscent of the books used to store 78 rpm records. Included at the end of the text are short biographies of each artist written by jazz historian Schaap. The authors have included explanations of each of the 27 poetic forms used, like haiku, sonnet, rondeau, and beat poetry. The book works brilliantly as an introduction to jazz and an introduction to poetic forms. Marsalis is considered the most outstanding jazz artist of his generation. Rogers has worked as an illustrator for 25 years and is the recipient of numerous awards. Schaap is curator of Jazz at Lincoln Center in New York City.