FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Social Sciences

The Birth (and Death) of the Cool
Ted Gioia
Fulcum Publishing
978-1-933108-31-5
(October 31, 2009)

Like Dim Sum for the intellectually curious and literary-minded, Gioia's chronicle of the birth and death of cool samples a variety of genres and disciplines. In the end, the reader has not consumed great portions from any literary group, yet he finds himself gratified. Part Jazz history, part African American history, part Sociological and Marketing text, this work defies easy classification. It is a must-read for marketing and sociology "philes" that no music historian, particularly a Jazz Historian, should be without.

One might expect this work, coming from the author and musician who penned such notable works as *Delta Blues* and *The History of Jazz*, to delve into the cool world of Jazz. And it does. Far from an exposé on the cool, cool world of Jazz and the hip musicians who personified it, however, this book is an in-depth study of cool and its influence on society. The cool, as Gioia explains, was a psychological attitude, cultural phenomenon, and worldview which is relatively new to society. In fact, it was only decades-old, yet is already dead.

Gioia traces cool as it morphs through the American lexicon and emerges in the African American community as an ethos aimed at preserving dignity and providing protection against the violence which befell those who violated the cultural norms of racism. It was Jazz musicians, however, who ushered cool from the African American sub-culture to the American mainstream. Gioia names white cornetist Bix Beiderbecke as the founding father of cool Jazz, while saxophonist Lester Young is credited with adding the meaning of "hipness" to cool. The so-called Prince of Darkness, trumpeter Miles Davis, completes the triple crown of cool with his *Birth of Cool* recordings.

Cool soon becomes the new Zeitgeist, permeating every facet of society. The generation who worried only about "life" gave way to a new generation concerned with "lifestyle." That lifestyle had to be fashionable-it had to be cool. Cool was more than an attitude; it was a worldview, a paradigm. It was epitomized in Bugs Bunny and Charlie Brown cartoons with their

subtle and cerebral punch lines under-girded with cool Jazz soundtracks. Cool was embedded in fashion, in bookstores, in comedy, in the way people talked, and even the way they argued.

Unfortunately, as Gioia makes clear, cool died. Commoditized, co-opted by the corporate machine, cool became merely a marketing tool. The current postcool Zeitgeist rejects materialism and sees coolness as superficial, even suspicious. And, as Gioa writes, the death of cool has come with a price: society is angrier. One only needs to listen to talk radio or read Internet blogs for evidence that we have lost our cool. Like everything else, this postcool era will pass one day. But Gioia says the cool will never return.