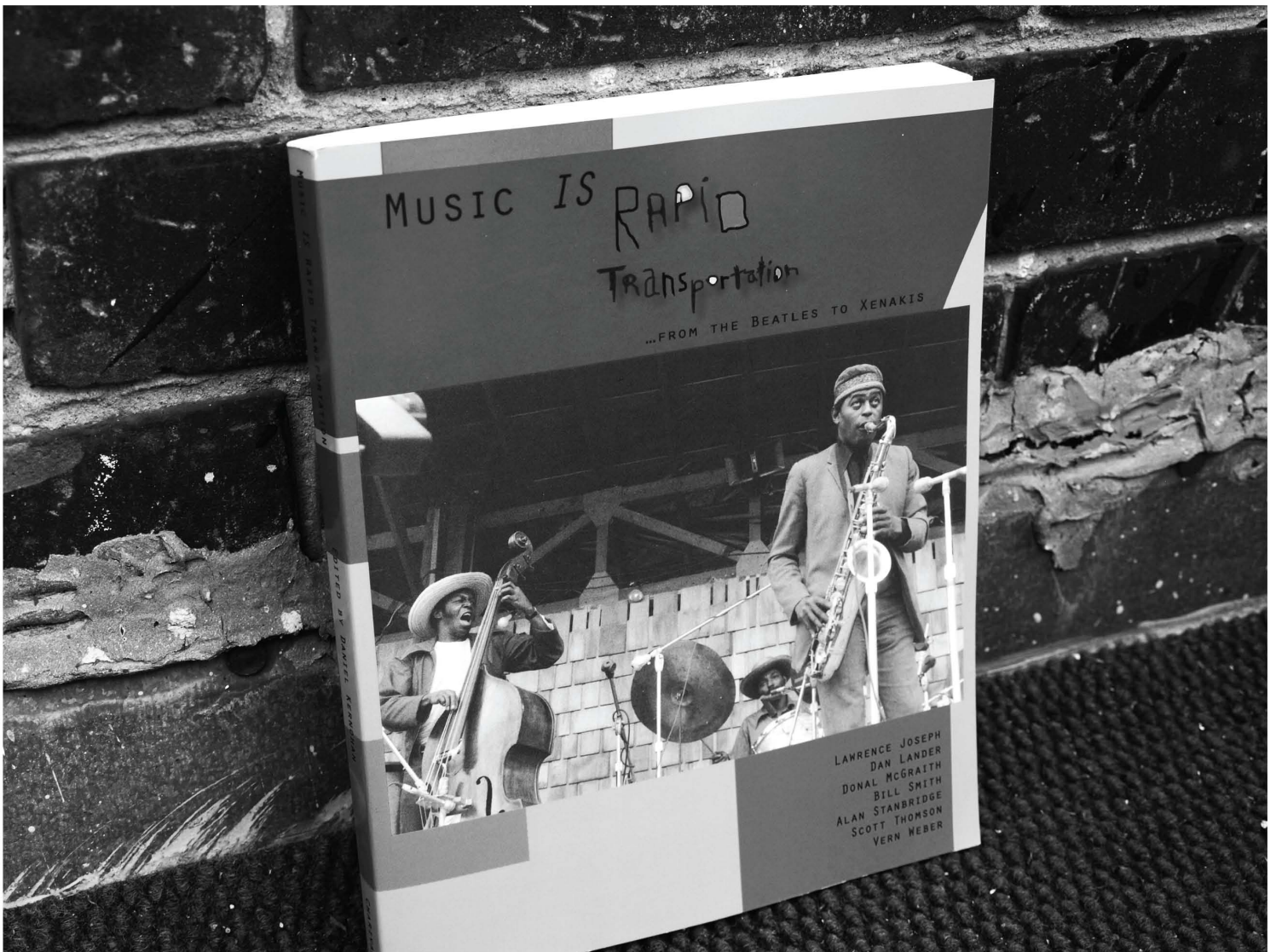


MUSIC IS RAPID TRANSPORTATION

By Steve Sladkowski



As I currently exist with the mindset that the vast majority of musicology should be altogether avoided, I approached the reading of Daniel Kernohan's collection, *Music is Rapid Transformation: ...from the Beatles to Xenakis*, with a great deal of trepidation. While there were contributions from two people and I know and respect—the one-and-only Alan Stanbridge and the effervescent Scott Thomson—I was expecting something

stuffy, pretentious and long-winded. And while there were a few sweeping generalizations characteristic of nitpicky, so-called 'postmodern' academia—"For the most part, recorded music is not an authentic performance in the sense that some people cling to; it is almost always a constructed illusion similar to a movie" (Kernohan, pg. 10)—I was pleasantly surprised by the rest of the book.

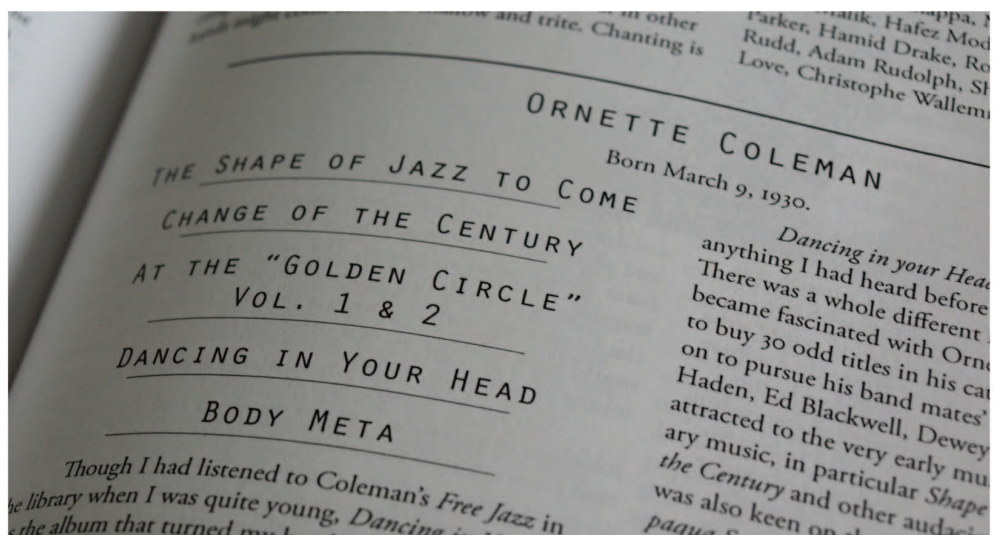
Taking shape in three parts,

the book first presents a series of essays written by current or former Torontonians audio-philosophers. Reading less like critical essays and more like a series of short autobiographies describing lives spent agonizing over recorded sound, most of the essays were steeped in a romantic nostalgia for what are seemingly-bygone eras: the golden ages of radio, television, long-playing record, tape cassette, and compact disc (!!) along with the music

forever tied to, but never bound by, these technological breakthroughs. Particular “life-changing” (a recurring phrase) records and experiences are mentioned, including a fascinating account of Stanbridge’s time spent as the artistic director of the Glasgow Jazz Festival and Thomson’s reflection on his acute transformation from enthusiastic listener to monster player.

Those who are dedicated to the arts in all spheres will be fairly aware of these types of narratives—juggling the roles of performer, curator, attendee, arts advocate and somehow-bill-payer—having probably lived some variation themselves. However the second and third parts of the book are much more interesting for audiophiles, musicians and interested readers alike.

Part two presents a series of short pieces on influential albums, as chosen by the writers, that truly does range from pop music to avant-garde to jazz and classical music to world traditions such as gamelan. As a guitarist, Chuck Berry next to The Art Bears was particularly exciting; so too was the discovery of new musical acts such as Dave Burrell and Swell Maps. I also relished the opportunity to salivate over now-legendary compilations such as 1978’s Brian Eno-produced *No New York*, which previously existed only as pored over YouTube clips and Wikipedia entries. Each entry attempts to describe the recording in a style akin to the Penguin Guide to Jazz and major entries—such as the few pages devoted to Ornette Coleman—



In a phrase, one could sum up Music is Rapid Transportation as a meditation on the profound and often-unexpected sonic evolution of listeners.

also include in-the-moment performance pictures.

The book’s third section is entitled “The Lists”—though it is by no means the last, as the book also includes in-depth sections on Recommended Reading, Contributors’ Biographies, and an Index. “The Lists” is a compilation of “the most important recordings or artists in [the writers’] lives” (pg. 226). This final section works to tie the other two sections together, giving context to the autobiographies and providing serial numbers and other audiophilic information not contained in other sections. Lists are organized alphabetically as chosen by each writer and it is fascinating to track each writer’s evolution as a listener: Moondog, Radiohead and Chris Potter all make Dan Lander’s list, while Captain Beefheart, Kronos Quartet and Tom Petty all make Vern Weber’s.

In a phrase, one could sum

up Music is Rapid Transportation as a meditation on the profound and often-unexpected sonic evolution and development of music listeners. Indeed, that tenet is the most interesting undercurrent that permeates this collection and proves to be its longest-lasting lesson. Great pains are taken to show that this book is not making any type of overt aesthetic value judgment or reverting to typical binary arguments; instead it shines further light on perhaps the most important element of the musical life: if you approach every day with open ears, there is no telling the sonic potential you will discover.

For more information, visit
www.charivariexpress.com