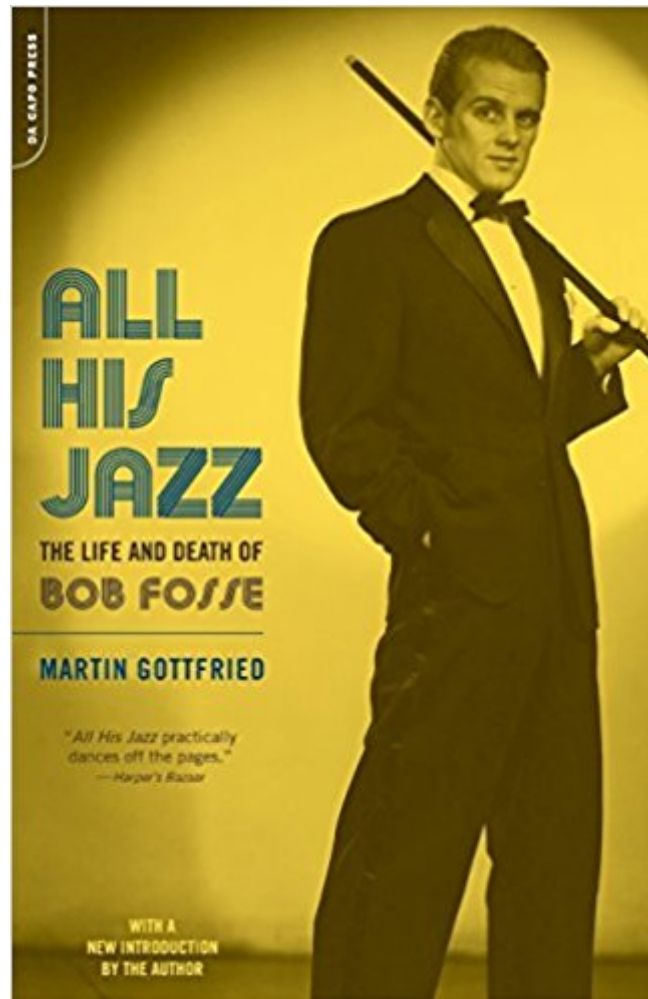


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All His Jazz: The Life And Death Of Bob Fosse



Synopsis

Bob Fosse (1927-1987), the director and choreographer of *Chicago* and *Sweet Charity*, has never been more popular than he is right now. Here is the less-publicized side of his story—his surprising ascent from the world of sleazy Chicago strip joints to the glitter of Broadway. A legend's memory is preserved in this eloquent biography.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Martin Gottfried has done a superb job of illuminating Fosse's life and work; I cannot imagine a better biography. He shows a complete understanding of the issues that informed Fosse's creative genius and creates a fascinating narrative which intertwines his life and his work. I picked this book up after having seen and loved the revival of "CHICAGO" on Broadway and have been transfixed by the book. I am a great admirer of Fosse's film work as well -- most notably ALL THAT JAZZ -- and found Gottfried's behind the scenes accounts of the movies gripping. I cannot recommend this book highly enough for anyone who is interested in Fosse, choreography, or the development of an artist. I'd give it ten stars!

(This review is of the Hardcover version.) ALL HIS JAZZ: THE LIFE AND DEATH OF BOB FOSSE by Martin Gottfried (1990, paperback edition 2003) was for many years the foundational biography of the legendary entertainer, choreographer and director who gave the world such entertainments as "Who's Got the Pain (When They Do the Mambo?)" from DAMN YANKEES, the Broadway

blockbuster PIPPIN, the movies CABARET, ALL THAT JAZZ, STAR 80, and many other achievements; and the book still holds up well. As other biographers have done, Gottfried locates Fosse's sometimes conflicted personality and tendency to depression in his youth. He uses Fosse's earliest performing name, "Bob Riff," as a metaphor for his love/hate relationship with "razzle-dazzle" (and sometimes downright smut--young Fosse/Riff often did his taps in burlesque clubs on Chicago's North Side), while yearning for more prestige and authority, to be taken seriously as an artist. In warts-and-all fashion, Fosse's legendary womanizing and his various addictions to booze, tobacco, and amphetamines are dealt with, as well as the hard work and innovation that forged the definitive, and largely visual, "Fosse look" that is as recognizable now as it was when he died at age 60 in 1987. It is inevitable that people will wonder which bio is now the one to read: this one from 1990, or the much more recent (2013) *Fosse* by Sam Wasson. While there is considerable overlap, FOSSE is about a third longer in the number of pages given over to text, the book even longer overall because it includes end notes as well. As part of that, FOSSE is able to cover more ground on the whole, although I personally would give ALL HIS JAZZ a slight edge on discussing how the films CABARET (1972) and ALL THAT JAZZ (1979) were developed. I was sad to catch a few easy mistakes in this book, though: the "beer garden" song in CABARET was called "Tomorrow Belongs to Me," not "Tomorrow the World Belongs to Me" as the book avers, and for all the loving discussion of the various "hospital fantasy" production numbers toward the end of ALL THAT JAZZ, the author manages to omit that the song sung by "Old [Girl]Friends" was the witty and allegorical "Who's Sorry Now?" While either ALL HIS JAZZ or FOSSE will serve, a better course yet for the neophyte might be to buy or rent some of Fosse's most indelible movies as a representation of the man's style and for their sheer entertainment value, most particularly *Cabaret: 40th Anniversary* and *All That Jazz*, either of which at this point can be had fairly cheaply.

"All His Jazz" is compelling for the blow-by-blow account that it gives of Bob Fosse's unparalleled career. It is probably one of the more comprehensive and insightful books about show business that has been written. The main problem with the book lies in his subject matter, which one would think would be untenable for a biography. Bob Fosse and those around him (with the exception of very few) come across as arrogant, self-centered, and certainly self-destructive. Hey, let's face it. Truth certainly can be stranger than fiction, but it kept me from really getting into the book on a personal level. I ended up angry more than sympathetic and incredulous more than intrigued. The other problem I had with the book is a noble one, but exposes the flaws all the same. There really are not enough photos to supplement the narrative. The only reason I say this is because so much attention

is spent on the details of Fosse's career, that it is a shame there are so few photos representing his amazing stage career. We can all go rent the movies if we want to see what they are about, and it might not be a bad idea to watch "All That Jazz" (which, by the way, is one of my all time favorites) before picking up a copy of this book.

I'll tell you right off the top, I'm not a huge fan of Broadway musicals. Mostly I'm a fan of Fosse because of his films, which rank among my favorites. But regardless of any of that, Fosse's personality and his life make him a fascinating subject for biographical study. Gottfried's book is heavily detailed, describing the events of Fosse's life, exploring his work and his personal relationships, and really getting inside the man's head, all the while maintaining a very readable, and appropriately jazzy style. There's also enough quoted dialogue to keep the book flowing almost like a work of fiction. A great read and an informative one. Highly recommended to fans of Fosse and his work, or those simply interested in one of the most intriguing of showbiz lives.

One of at least four major print-works on Bob Fosse, and deeply insightful to theatre and film-making, the others, "Fosse" by Sam Wasson, "Hoofing on Broadway" by Richard Kislak, and "The Fosse Style" by Derba McWaters, foreword by Ben Vereen." If you're writing for Musical Theatre this piece is essential. Some subtle prejudices of the author do sneak through. Of course, a complete library of the DVDs of his work are also a necessity. Cheers! This is good reading.

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