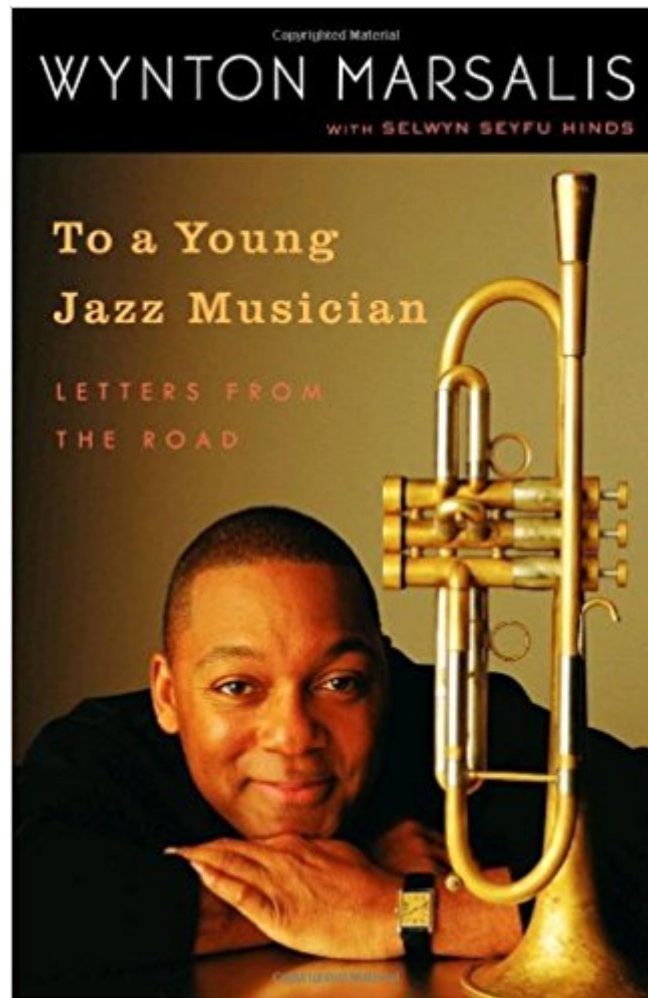




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# To A Young Jazz Musician: Letters From The Road



## Synopsis

In *To a Young Jazz Musician*, the renowned jazz musician and Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Wynton Marsalis gives us an invaluable guide to making good music—and to leading a good life. Writing from the road—between the bus ride, the sound check, and the gig—Marsalis passes on wisdom gained from experience, addressed to a young musician coming up—and to any of us at any stage of life. He writes that having humility is a way to continue to grow, to listen, and to learn; that patience is necessary for developing both technical proficiency and your own art rather than an imitation of someone else's; and that rules are indispensable because freedom lives in structure. He offers lessons learned from his years as a performer and from his great forebears Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker, and others; he explores the art of swing; he discusses why it is important to run toward your issues, not away; and he talks about what to do when your integrity runs up against the lack thereof in others and in our culture. He poetically expresses our need for healers: "All of it tracks back to how you heal your culture, one patient at a time, beginning with yourself." This is a unique book, in which a great artist offers his personal thoughts, both on jazz and on how to live a better, more original, productive, and meaningful life. *To a Young Jazz Musician* is sure to be treasured by readers young and old, musicians, lovers of music, and anyone interested in being mentored by one of America's most influential, generous, and talented artists. From the Hardcover edition.

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## Customer Reviews

America's foremost jazz classicist assesses the state of the art in this impassioned epistolary manifesto. Marsalis, now the artistic director of Jazz at Lincoln Center, answers critics who denounce him as the "gatekeeper" for a fossilized middlebrow establishment with a spirited defense of standards against both post-bebop modernist abstraction and the contemporary trend toward promiscuous fusion with other pop styles. As conservator of the Armstrong-Ellington legacy, he champions a jazz grounded in melody, blues, romantic feeling and, above all, swing rhythmâ "a "democratic, quintessentially American concept" that "channels the spirit of the nation." He urges young musicians to take their art seriously through constant practice and a stern work ethic: "practicing is a sign of morality in a musician." Marsalis and amanuensis Hinds (Gunshots in My Cook-Up) sometimes sound like a motivational tape ("unleashing your personal power is the result of codifying... your own hard-earned objectives"), and their occasional mystic invocations of musical self-discovery and "the emotion of the sound" can confuse. Also, Marsalis's jazz traditionalism shades, at points, into a jeremiad about modern "decadence" and "corruption," inveighing against what he sees as our culture of absurdity, with its sexually precocious children and jeans-wearing jazz men. But musicians, aficionados and casual listeners alike will enjoy this lively polemic.

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In "To a Young Jazz Musician, the renowned jazz musician and Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Wynton Marsalis gives us an invaluable guide to making good music-and to leading a good life. Writing from the road "between the bus ride, the sound check, and the gig," Marsalis passes on wisdom gained from experience, addressed to a young musician coming up-and to any of us at any stage of life. He writes that having humility is a way to continue to grow, to listen, and to learn; that patience is necessary for developing both technical proficiency and your own art rather than an imitation of someone else's; and that rules are indispensable because "freedom lives in structure." He offers lessons learned from his years as a performer and from his great forebears Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker, and others; he explores the art of swing; he discusses why it is important to run toward your issues, not away; and he talks about what to do when your integrity runs up against the lack thereof in others and in our culture. He poetically expresses our need for healers: "All of it tracks back to how you heal your culture, one patient at a time, beginning with yourself." This is a unique book, in which a great artist offers his personal thoughts, both on jazz and on how to live a better, more original, productive, and meaningful life. To a Young Jazz Musician is sure to be treasured by readers young and old, musicians, lovers of music, and anyone interested in being

mentored by one of America's most influential, generous, and talented artists. "From the Hardcover edition.

In *To a Young Jazz Musician: Letters from the Road* one encounters wisdom about music and life, skillfully interwoven and candidly presented through personal letters Marsalis addresses to a young jazz musician. Key themes and metaphors headline each chapter, with content on: humility, what it means to be human, rules and freedom, facets of playing jazz, arrogance, jazz in an era of unchecked decadence and decline of intellectual rigor, morals, innovation, and healing of our culture. Musicians, philosophers, and social thinkers alike would appreciate Marsalis's remarkable depth of insight into the humanity of music-making, as well as his commentary on social and political issues—including on the African-American experience, which may be eye-opening for some. The book more than meets its intent to present meaningful reflections on the life of music-making (jazz in particular) and how these reflections have everything to do with how one lives. For example, around the larger notion of integrity and "selling out" Marsalis gives all of us something to consider as he contrasts the thinking of older generations of musicians ("we want to play some music so powerful that it'll actually change the world for the better") noting that kind of impulse and goal "versus what he laments in some of the thinking of today (I want to make sure I can get me an SUV)" (81). He also comments about having an objective when playing, and later refers to activities of life in general needing to have "objectives of the soul" because that's what "can heal our whole nation" (97). As a musician, and for other musician readers, this book provides helpful stimulus on the pathway toward breaking free of mechanistic, competitive thinking about one's own performance, creativity, and how one stacks up against others. Marsalis's depth of illumination inspires one to consider larger questions such as the degree to which one is committed to the art as a form of beauty and expression, the humility or arrogance we bring into ensemble playing, and, ultimately, who we are in the world. The format of letter-writing, in its casual writing style, effectively supports an intimate feeling of wisdom being passed to the young. It also provides a natural, integrated flow and important weight to what might otherwise come across as mere side-comments about society in general and America in particular. There's a great deal of depth to consider in this small book, which packs a big punch. In this way one could be drawn to reading it again and again, letting the messages wash over you like a sweet jazz melody.

I've never been in America. I was born and raised in Greece, I leave in Paris and I make a living

doing "this and that" and I'm trying to play some Jazz. I don't have much in common with Mr. Marsalis except... the Jazz. Having said that, you see why I might not fully understand (or, to put it better, "feel") everything that Mr. Marsalis writes in his book about the American society, the situation of the black Americans, the segregation etc., but I understood well that he is a man of great dignity and taste and I deeply respect that. He has a deep knowledge of Jazz and through the pages of his book the reader can sympathize with the writer, with the difficulties and the anxieties that are involved in studying and playing music but also feel the great joy of it. The book was very interesting, fun to read (I read it in 2 days time) and it spoke deeply in my heart and soul. The last 10 years I've been thinking that when I'll reach 50 (in about 20 years), I would like to write a book according all the difficulties and joys, the pressure and joys, the frustration and joys of studying Jazz (if you know what I mean)... ;) But Mr. Marsalis has already done it. And he has done an excellent job! Oh well... perhaps I'll think of something else! Meanwhile BUY THE DAMN BOOK! IT'S GREAT!

After hearing Wynton Marsalis speak this summer, I got this book from the library. I loved it and want to give it as a gift to a couple of young musician relatives. He is writing about life here in an accessible manner. The book is not long and is divided into separate letters. Teens and young adults will find much to think about here. He is wise.

I really enjoyed reading Marsalis' reflections about key questions artists face in the pursuit of excellence within an American art form: Jazz. Whether you play or just enjoy to listen, I recommend reading it because many of his reflections translate either to your profession or personal life.

Simply amazing. An absolute must-read for any young jazz musician.

Wynton is, quite simply, THE Man!

I wish I had a book /letters like that when I was a young musician! Excellent read!

I got this as a gift for someone and he really loves Wynton and plays the trumpet. He wants to be a musician like Wynton so I thought this would inspire him and it did.

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