SO! Amplifies: The Blues and Jazz Dance Book Club

Sounding Out! Authors

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Abstract

***SO!* Amplifies. . .a highly-curated, rolling mini-post series by which we editors hip you to cultural makers and organizations doing work we really really dig. You're welcome!** — Breaking down the paywalls of academia can take many forms, but lifelong learning collectives centered around a shared passion may perhaps be one of the most fun.

Keywords

Music (Subfield), American Studies, Black Studies, Civic Engagement, Dance/Movement, Digital Media

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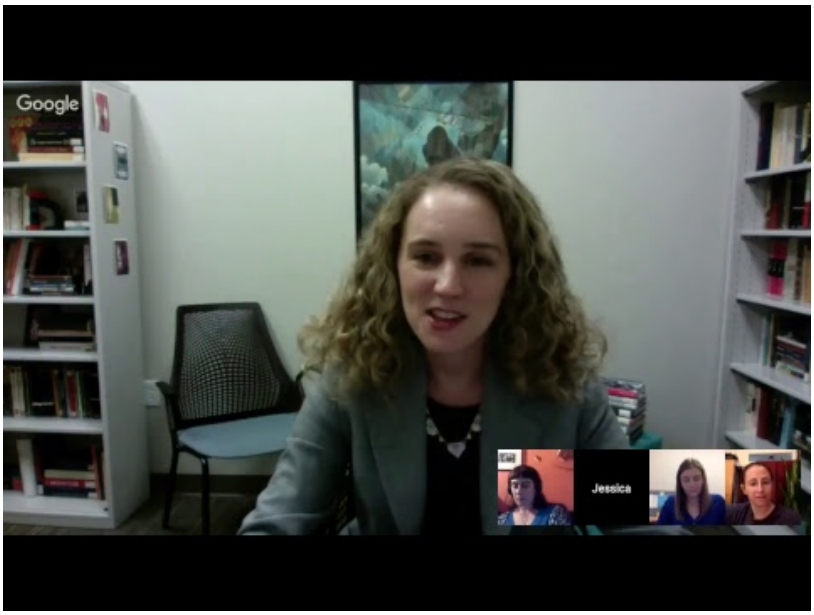
Breaking down the paywalls of academia can take many forms, but lifelong learning collectives centered around a shared passion may perhaps be one of the most fun. The Blues and Jazz Dance Book Club is an international group of people connected by a love of blues and jazz culture, who read books together and tune in—free of charge—via Youtube Live to lectures and Q and As from experts and scholars from around the United States. Literature scholars such as Jessica Teague have discussed jazz poetry and August Wilson's blues influence; dancer and scholar Dr. Fenella Kennedy has offered an online mini-workshop and discussion forum; and blues musician Tad Walters has played music and discussed the Delta Blues and its origins, among other lectures. All of these lectures are available on the Book Club's website and on YouTube for anyone to enjoy.



An open-access scholarly project founded in 2014, The Blues and Jazz Dance Book Club (BJDBC) was the brainchild of Sara Cherny, Damon Stone, Devona Cartier, Brenda Russell, and Kelly Porter (no longer a participating member). This team envisioned a free online space where people could learn about and discuss the history of blues, jazz, and African American dances, enriching both their own knowledge and the knowledge of the blues and jazz groups in which they participated. The Book Club's current administrator, Chelsea Adams—PhD candidate at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas with a specialty in blues and African American dances in literature—took over operations in 2016.

Since then, Adams has worked hard to create a space where all blues and jazz lovers could access new scholarship on both the music and the dances done to that music, building a website to better facilitate the growing global group. Adams even coordinates live lectures at times that work the best to connect audiences who regularly chime in or visit the BJDBC website from Australia, England, Korea, Spain, France, Canada, Brazil, Sweden, the Netherlands, Germany, China and Hong Kong, among other places.

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A Blues and Jazz Book Club live lecture by Dr. Jessica Teague, UNLV English

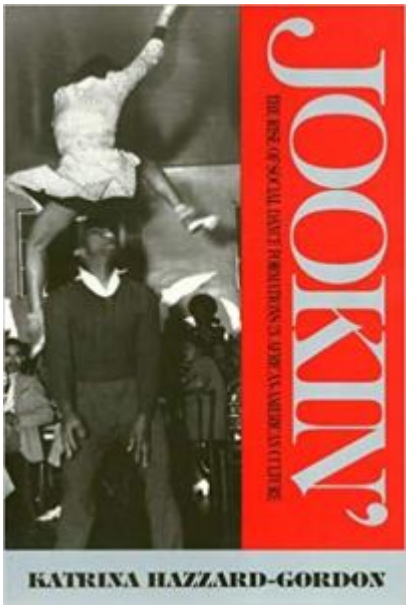
Recently, the Book Club has expanded to include multiple offerings for both scholar and enthusiast. One addition is quarterly feature articles, interviews, and community spotlights on blues and jazz topics. International dance instructor Julie Brown recently wrote the article "A Landscape of Slow Drag," cataloguing and exploring how scholars and dancers have described the partnered blues idiom dance. Also featured is a never-before-published interview with Joe McQueen, the Oklahoma Jazz Hall of Fame inductee and Ogden, Utah's King of Jazz.



https://youtu.be/P1BydxBIUFE

Other feature articles have been spotlights on community engagements, literary criticism, and even a how-to on how to dive into research on blues and jazz topics. Practicioner and dance historian Damon Stone's "A Brief Introduction to Savoy Walk," Dr. Caryl Loney-McFarlane's "'Inside Nothing': The Silent Protest March in Tony Morrison's *Jazz*" and Dr. Licia Morrow

Hendricks's "A Dog Named Blue: Song as Patrilineal Legacy in August Wilson's *Fences*" have all been popular pieces among group members and beyond. The website will soon publish an article all about Barbara Morrison's work in LA for the California Blues and Jazz Museum and the charity event called Signifyin' Blues that raises money for her museum (forthcoming June 15th, 2019). And, in September 2019, Pat Taylor will be writing our third feature for the year on her work and life as a jazz dance choreographer.

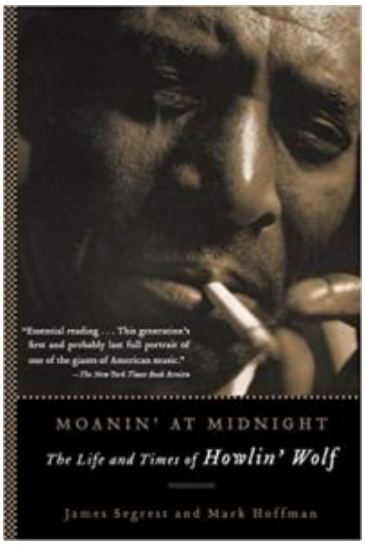


Start Jookin' with the Blues and Jazz Book Club this Summer!

The Blues and Jazz Dance Book Club's signature offering is of course its quarterly book readings, where groups around the globe read together. Currently, we are reading *Beyond the Crossroads: The Devil and the Blues Tradition* by Adam Gussow, which we will finish during the first week of July 2019 (access the schedule here). Should you want to join us to read in 2019, future offerings include *Jookin': The Rise of Social Dance Formation in African-American Culture* by Katrina Hazzard-Gordon (Summer 2019; start date July 21), *Moanin' at Midnight: The Life and Times of Howlin' Wolf* by James Segrest and Mark Hoffman (Fall 2019; start date September 15), and a blues-inspired novel for December 2019, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (December 1). For the full 2019 reading list, click here.

Furthermore, the group's website is a hub that also offers new reading lists and watch lists, including ones on African American history (and soon to include updated lists for blues and jazz music, and African American dance) and a discussion questions archive, where readers can find past discussion questions for previous books and films that they can access for their own thought or to read and discuss these books with others. Our Facebook page not only has regular posts about not only the Book Club, but also shares other research, news and information on blues and jazz around the United States, as does our Facebook Group.

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The JBDBC will be reading Moanin' at Midnight this Fall!

"Open access groups like Book Club offer a friendly environment to learn how to approach academic literature," Book Club Organizer Adams says, "while enjoying gaining more knowledge about their hobbies and interests. It's a form of scholarly outreach that I think is vital if we truly believe in the idea that our research can make a difference outside of the academy.

Groups like this are important because they offer guided access to scholarship and literature to people who for one reason or another do not have the opportunity to learn in formal academic environments or other professional institutions. Scholarly literature is a specific and often intimidating genre to tackle alone, even if someone is interested in learning more about a topic."

And the engagements the Book Club has are rich and multifaceted. "My favorite experience with a live lecture," Adams remembers, "was with Dr. Kennedy, when they demonstrated dances out of Jean and Marshall Stearns' diagrams from their book *Jazz Dance*. Watching the group actually learn how to dance some of these dances listed in the book was a joy."

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In April 2018, the Blues and Jazz Dance Book Club announced the goal to provide two yearly scholarships: a Community Learning Scholarship for blues and jazz events to bring out a scholar, musician, or practitioner to teach about blues or jazz culture and history, and another for an individual with financial need to attend an event with a blues or jazz history and culture focus or to perform research. To provide these scholarships, the Book Club relies solely on community donations. To date, they have been able to raise the money to fund one Community Learning Scholarship, which will be open for applications starting in August of 2019.

If you would like to participate in the Blues and Jazz Dance Book Club, please check out our website: bluesjazzbookclub.com. We accept abstract submissions for feature articles on a year-round basis, and have multiple volunteer positions available, from one-time positions like guest lecturer to rolling positions such as book discussion leader. If you would like to support the open-access project goals but do not have time to volunteer, we always welcome donations to the cause!

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Featured Image from the Blues and Jazz Book Club, "A Landscape of Slow Drag," 1925/Published 1961, Info Likely from Harlem, NY Dancers.

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Currently a PhD candidate in English at UNLV, ***Chelsea Adams*** *focuses her studies on African American literature, blues and jazz music, and African American dance. She writes about minority culture representation in literature, with a focus of representation of black musicians, dancers, and the art forms they produce. She also runs the Blues and Jazz Dance Book Club, an international online book club project, to offer the public open access information about the history of blues, jazz, and black dances. You can learn more about Chelsea and her work at cjuneadams.com.*

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