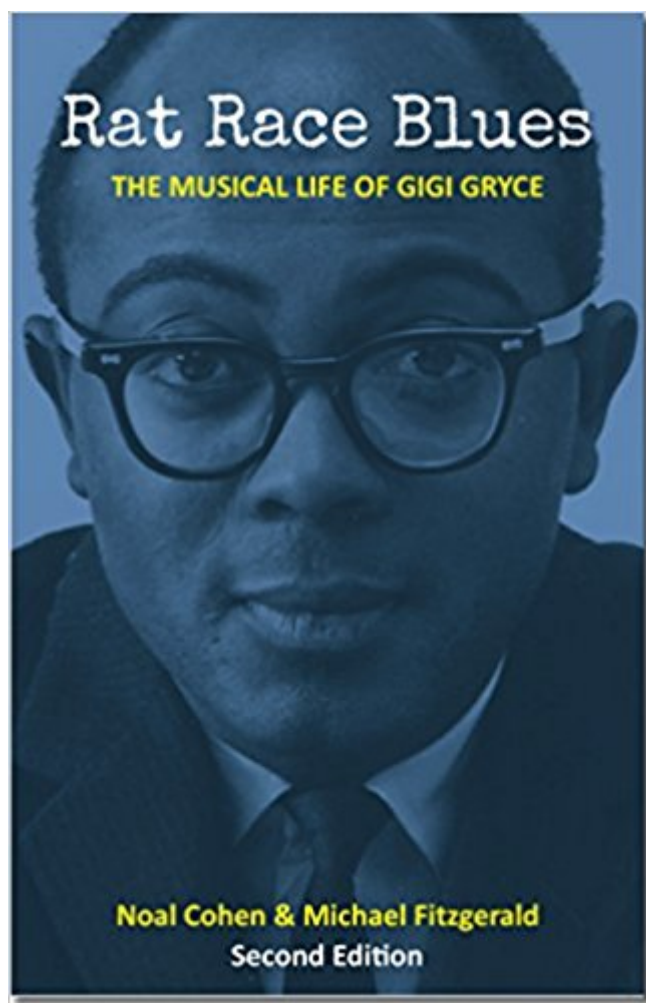


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# Rat Race Blues: The Musical Life Of Gigi Gryce



## Synopsis

Gigi Gryce was a saxophonist and composer who worked with some of the best-known names in jazz during the 1950s, including Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, and Max Roach. His many compositions remain a part of the jazz repertoire today. His remarkable rise from poverty led to conservatory studies and tours of Europe and Africa before he established himself as a fixture on the New York scene. His efforts as a music publisher were bold and groundbreaking, and his quiet, unassuming personality set him apart from most of his peers. In only a decade as a professional musician, he earned the respect and admiration of his colleagues and served as a mentor to numerous aspiring young players. Gryce's sudden disappearance at the start of the 1960s left the jazz world wondering as to his fate. Few were aware of his change of identity and professional rebirth. Misinformation about Gryce abounds and rumors have circulated for decades. Years of research and dozens of interviews were conducted for this book, resulting in a biography that finally tells the true story of this often overlooked figure and illuminates his contributions to one of the richest periods in jazz history. Winner of the 2003 Award for Excellence from the Association for Recorded Sound Collections, the first edition has now been updated with new information from another decade's worth of research and never-before-seen photographs.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Has established a new standard against which all future jazz biographies must be judged." - Bill Barton, Signal To Noise  
To say this biography is a comprehensive undertaking would be an

understatement. It is also an interesting and important contribution to jazz literature." - Rob Bauer, IAJRC Journal "Cohen and Fitzgerald have done a heroic job of tracking down obscure facts and questioning the accepted details...a work of quality." - Brian Priestley, Jazz Research News "Cohen and Fitzgerald have done a masterful job of bringing Gryce's life to light...an exemplary study of a neglected figure." - Coda Magazine

"There are any number of reasons for someone interested in the story of America and its music to delve deeply into the legacy of Gigi Gryce. To begin with, he was a superbly melodic composer who wrote pieces that linger in the memory. He was a master of writing music for larger ensembles and knew the intricacies of all of the instruments. This enabled him to combine them in ways that sounded fresh, and that were both challenging for the players and intriguing to the listener. Gigi Gryce is far too important a figure to remain in relative obscurity. This book will correct that situation." -- Loren Schoenberg, saxophonist and artistic director, National Jazz Museum in Harlem

The release of the Second Edition of "Rat Race Blues" is a cause for celebration among jazz fans and anyone who enjoys good music. The first edition became a rarity and to have it once again available, accompanied by a staggeringly comprehensive on-line support site, is a blessing indeed. It is subtitled "The Musical Life of Gigi Gryce" and it is this to the nth degree with a detailed a consideration of every aspect of the great musician's musical life, from incisive musicological analyses of recordings, compositions and arrangements to performing history. It also delivers on Gigi Gryce the person, his family history, personality, motivations, intentions, and struggle against personal demons, to present a well-rounded portrait of the man. Much of this is supported by an impressive array of oral history testimony from colleagues, friends, and family, deftly woven into the narrative and thereby bringing us closer to the artist and his time, blowing away many of the mists and myths that have circulated about this elusive and enormously creative musician, who also courageously fought for the right of musicians to control their work. A must read and a great resource.

This book is as rare as the subject matter itself: a scholarly work that is also quite readable. It tells the story of a jazz performer who, although clearly a giant, has been nearly forgotten by time. Why? He simply wasn't flamboyant enough! The authors have done a fine job of adding substance to his incomplete image. In the process, they uncovered an unexpected gem. They found a relevant

modern-day role model cleverly disguised as a sax player.

Rat Race Blues is a real find. This account of the life of Gigi Gryce was an inspiration to me. We read it in our library book club for January 2003, where it was a great hit with all our members. I would recommend it to anyone who is curious about life and/ or music and particularly to young people, struggling against the odds of poverty and racism. The book rediscovers Gigi Gryce, a name that appears on the records of numerous famous Jazz musicians, Clifford Brown, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Max Roach, Thelonius Monk, Donald Byrd, Art Farmer.... to name only a few. The research done by Noal Cohen and Michael Fitzgerald is meticulous and sensitive. They manage to give us an insiders view of the Jazz scene in the 50's and early 60's, depicting Gigi's whole life from a strict and loving upbringing in Pensacola, Florida to his education at the Boston Conservatory; heady days in New York playing with all the greats and starting a family; his attempts to help musicians protect their publishing rights and finally his reinvention of himself as a teacher in the Bronx. For the most part, the authors are in the background, letting the musicians, family and friends speak for themselves about their memories of Gryce. Some of the anecdotes are hilarious. There are also great photos, including one of a young Quincy Jones and Clifford Brown who worked with Gigi in the Lionel Hampton band. Finding Gigi Gryce is akin to finding Zora Neal Hurston or more recently Henry Grimes. Congratulations to the authors for a book that sets a high standard for biographies of musicians.

This book is the most complete discography you will ever find about the jazz great, Gigi Gryce. It is well-written and a very fascinating history of jazz, itself, revealing many "insider" type anecdotes about the old days in jazz history. There are many interviews with famous jazz greats but best of all, the story of a very talented and enigmatic gentleman, Mr. Gigi Gryce. Kudos to Cohen and Fitzgerald for a Class A book destined to become a textbook reference on this period in jazz history.

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