

## RIPM Jazz

Reviewed by Meghan Gilhespy

In the plethora of academic and performance-related databases serving the study of music, jazz is consistently under-represented. RIPM (le Repertoire International de la Presse Musicale) Jazz Periodicals begins to rectify this deficiency by bringing an extremely comprehensive collection of 122 American jazz periodicals to scholars wishing to use primary sources to interrogate historical representations of jazz icons and analyze discourse. To say that this database is essential is an understatement.

RIPM Jazz, which began offering trials in the spring of 2019, is part of one of the highly comprehensive “R” projects (RIPM, RISM, RILM, and RIdIM) affiliated with the International Association of Music Libraries, Archives and Documentation Centres (IAML). The first installment of RIPM Jazz was developed with the support of the Institute of Jazz Studies (IJS) at Rutgers University-Newark, which holds the largest collection of historic jazz periodicals in the world. Occasionally, RIPM has secured a magazine runs directly from its publisher; more often, copies come from the collections of American institutions. Besides IJS, the University of North Texas, United States Library of Congress, Eastman School of Music, University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign), Oberlin College and Conservatory, the Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University, and others have contributed their holdings to the database. RIPM provides 30-day trials and full subscriptions to institutions with IP authentication to provide both on- and off-campus access to students. Annual institutional subscription prices range between USD \$1863-\$3810 for unlimited simultaneous users; prices are based on the full-time equivalency, or “FTE,” of a subscriber’s student population.

RIPM Jazz offers general jazz magazines, such as *Cadence* (Redwood, NY, 1976-2000) and *Metronome* (New York, NY, 1885-1961) as well as periodicals specific to given locations, such as *The Second Line* (New Orleans, LA, 1950-1976) and *Big Apple Jazz* (New York, NY, 1977). The database also offers more specialized publications, ranging from African-American selections (*Music Dial* (New York, NY, 1943-1945) to discographical magazines (*The Needle* (New York, NY, 1944-1945). Musically speaking, the coverage ranges from avante-garde – *Change* (Detroit, MI, 1965-1966) – to trad jazz assortments – *The Mississippi Rag* (Minneapolis, MN, 1973-2006). The periodicals reproduced in the database cover the years 1914 to 2006. Possibly due to the lifting of the 1942-1944 recording ban, 1944 is the year in which the most titles in RIPM’s collection were active.

Searching for a selection of the periodicals found in RIPM Jazz reveals very few holdings in Canadian collections. According to WorldCat, *Cadence* is held by six libraries, *Gene Lees Jazzletter* by five, and *Metronome* even fewer. The periodical runs of even the most common titles in Canadian libraries



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are often incomplete. Moreover, RIPM Jazz brings researchers access to rare magazines that Canadian libraries certainly do not have. Out of RIPM Jazz's 122 jazz periodicals, the University of Toronto has limited access to only 10, or 8%, in its collection. RIPM Jazz gathers together disparate periodical runs, sometimes cobbled together from various print holdings across the United States, in one online portal.

The convenience of online access is undeniable. RIPM Jazz has certainly made my research much easier. For example, in 2019, I examined critics and readers polls in *DownBeat* magazine, one of the most popular jazz magazines. I observed the top five vocalists from both male and female non-big band singer categories, published monthly from 1939 to 2019, noting the racial identities of popular vocalists as well as the transformation of the categories' titles. (The male category has stuck closely to "Male Vocalist" while the female category has ranged from "Girl Singer" to "Fem Chirper" to "Female Vocalist"). Searching RIPM Jazz was much more convenient and efficient than digging through approximately 1000 physical issues.

Unfortunately, RIPM Jazz only has the rights to *DownBeat* magazine issues published before 1964. While this may seem insignificant given the number of journals offered, I cannot emphasize enough how important *DownBeat* has been for jazz lovers, musicians, and researchers. Further, given *DownBeat*'s role in racial discussions, and given the growing discourse in jazz and the construction of gender and race, it is unfortunate that RIPM Jazz's run cuts off in 1963, a crucial time for race relations in America. At this time, RIPM states it has been unsuccessful in obtaining publication rights to later issues.

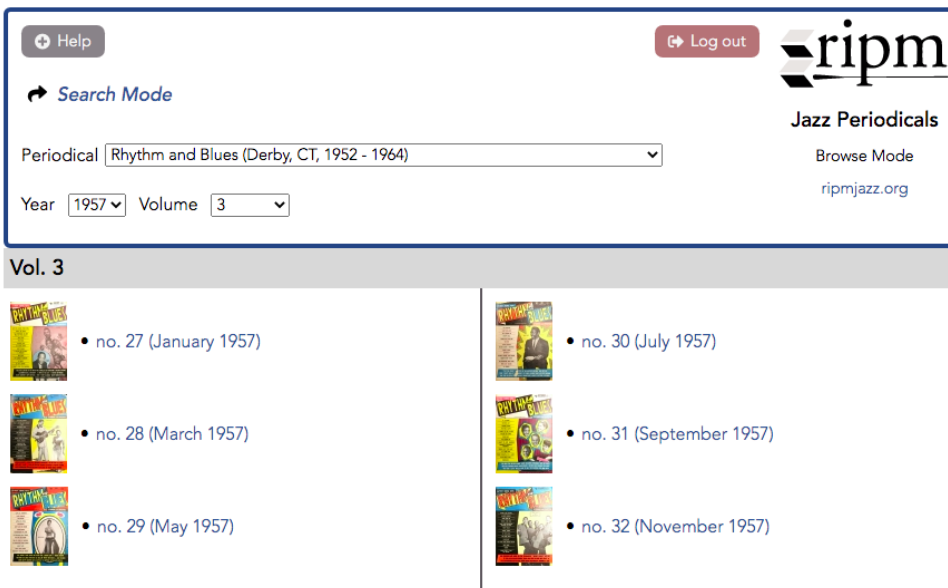
Incomplete runs are clearly listed on the RIPM homepage under "Lacunae," for RIPM's omissions, or "Numeration Irregularities," for the magazine's abnormalities, or both. In some cases, a justification is included. For example, the database is missing Vol. 64, no. 3, of *Metronome*, as well as all issues prior to 1932. The website states, "Although *Metronome* began publication in 1885, in 1932/33 the journal began shifting its editorial focus to jazz. Included here are the years primarily treating jazz, 1932 to 1961,"<sup>1</sup> when the magazine stopped publishing. While lacunae are clearly stated, I take issue when the site mislabels RIPM's holdings as "Date of Publication." In other words, its terminology can mislead the reader: for *Metronome*, the "Date of Publication" appears as 1932-1961, when in reality, the magazine's publication dates were 1881-1961 and RIPM's holdings are 1932-1961.

The RIPM Jazz database is extremely user-friendly, both in its design and in its content. It offers a Browse mode as well as Basic Search and Advanced Search. The first allows users to browse by magazine title. Once the magazine is selected from a large dropdown, the search must be refined by year and volume in order to see a magazine selection. In Figure 1, I have selected the year 1957 in *Rhythm and Blues* magazine.

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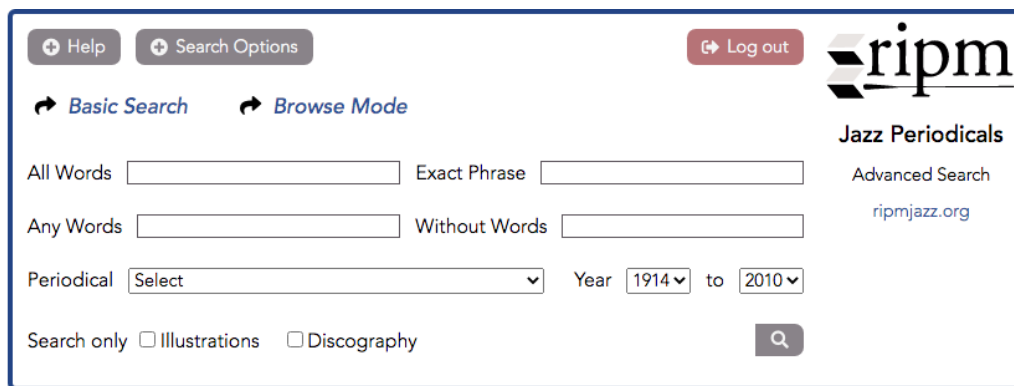
<sup>1</sup> "Metronome," RIPM Jazz, RIPM Consortium, 2021, <https://ripmjazz.org/journal/mtr/>.

Figure 1: RIPM Jazz – Browse Mode



While the Basic search includes a single search box for key words, the Advanced Search offers useful limiters, as seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2: RIPM Jazz – Advanced Search interface



Searching for the exact phrase “Melba Liston” (a brilliant bandleader, composer and trombonist) returns 340 relevant pages results. A click on a given magazine page reveals the search terms highlighted in the text. Users can then navigate through many different magazines within the search results, navigate within a single issue, or input a specific page number under “Browse or Select page.” It is possible to zoom in, turn the highlighting of search terms on or off, easily acquire a permalink, and save or print a pdf. There is a pdf download limit per session, which differs according

to institution. As seen in Figure 3, these features are clearly displayed, and make the database extremely user-friendly.

Figure 3: RIPM Jazz – Full-Text View

The screenshot displays the RIPM Jazz website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with buttons for 'Save/Print', 'About the Journal', 'New Search', 'New Browse', and 'Log out'. Below this, a breadcrumb trail shows 'Hollywood Note, Vol. 1 no. 1 (March 1946): 24' and 'Page 4 of 340 containing search term(s)'. The main content area is split into two columns. The left column contains the text of an article about Gerald Wilson, starting with 'A YEAR ago, Gerald Wilson was just another discharged Navy man...'. The right column features a black and white photograph of a man playing a trumpet. Below the photo is a box titled 'MEET THE BAND!' which lists the personnel of Gerald Wilson's orchestra, including Fredrick Brox, Leo Tarnham, Vernon Slater, Eddie Davis, Maurice Simon, Cecil Wilson, Snookie Young, Hobart Dotson, Joe Kelly, James Anderson, trombones, Melba Liston, Robert Burns, piano, Isaac Livingston, Jimmy Green, drums, Robert Rudd, bass, Henry Tucker, vocal quartet, Dick Gray and Estelle Edson, vocals. Vocal quartet, the "Four Wilsons", comprises Burns, Dotson, Miss Liston and Wilson himself. Below the photo, there is a small text block: 'most men, and she writes some of our arrangements.' and another paragraph: 'And so America's west coast is giving birth to another outstanding attraction. Taking note of the Wilson band, and many another to be slotted in future issues, NOTE predicts big things for this combination. If he gets intelligent booking and effective exploitation, Gerald Wilson may well move into the foremost ranks of maestri by the close of 1946. Musically, his band can't miss.'

The right-hand sidebar contains the RIPM logo, 'Jazz Periodicals', 'Advanced Search', and the website URL 'ripmjazz.org'. Below this are navigation buttons: 'Return to Current Search Results', 'Next/Previous Page With Search Term(s)', 'Current Issue: Browse or Select Page' (with a page number '24' in a box), and 'Display' options for 'Page', 'Zoom', 'Highlight', and 'Permalink'.

It is helpful to have the bibliographic information clearly provided over the search result, as seen above. The database is rich in its text, but also valuable for its photos and art. Photos are rarely excluded due to copyright issues, and keyword searches do retrieve hits from photo captions, which can be particularly helpful and informative.

Lastly, users can sort their search results chronologically, by journal title, or by density of hits. I have found this last sort option especially helpful when searching for information on obscure musicians since they are often mentioned in personnel lists rather than in articles about their lives or music. For example, when sorting by density in a search for June Tyson (vocalist and first female member of the Sun Ra Arkestra), the first results find her name in feature articles, whereas the last is simply discographical information. This sort can save the researcher valuable time.

The “search help” tools on the RIPM website – a user guide, a nickname guide, and Cab Calloway’s 1944 glossary of “Hep” language – are an interesting addition. (These tools are openly accessible

online at <https://ripmjazz.org/>.) Bandleader Cab Calloway's "Hepsters Dictionary" was created in 1938 and was the official jive language reference book of the New York Public Library. Included on the website is the 1944 edition, which features words like "blip" (n.), meaning something very good, and "cogs" (n.), meaning sunglasses. A quick dip into Calloway's dictionary can help decode the more cryptic writing found in RIPM Jazz. The nickname match is essential for exhaustive research: searching "Lady Day" provides 507 total results, and "Billie Holiday" provides 3750, demonstrating how often writers substituted nicknames for performers' full names, especially in the late 30s, 40s, and early 50s with Bird, Diz, Prez, Bags, Bean, Lady Day, and more. However, this guide proves less helpful when we find many musicians with the same nickname – there are 19 "Sonny's", 15 "Red's" and 14 "Buddy's." Nevertheless, this feature reduces the difficulties in searching for a given artist with multiple names.

While it is reasonable that RIPM would prioritize American periodicals, for Canadian jazz researchers, the lack of Canadian content is unfortunate. RIPM is still focused on broadening its coverage of jazz periodicals originally published in the USA; however, they do intend to expand internationally and explicitly state they will include Canadian jazz periodicals.<sup>2</sup> Canadian jazz researchers would particularly like to see *Coda* (1958-2009) in RIPM's database if licensing negotiations can overcome the challenges of changing ownership and multiple rights holders. *The Jazz Report* (Toronto, 1987-), and *Planet Jazz* (Montreal, 1997-2003) would certainly also be worth RIPM's consideration.

RIPM Jazz is currently working on the addition of Author and Title Field limits to its Search functions. One of RIPM's editors gave me a sneak preview over Zoom. This enhancement, called "Citation Search," should be integrated and available to subscribers by the end of May 2021 and will solve various search issues. In addition to now being able to search for specific music journalists and specific articles, this update will include a feature that allows the user to export citations.

Other recent developments include the addition of seven new journals in January 2021: *CRC Jazz Journal* (New Orleans, LA, 1987-1989), *CRC Newsletter* (Decatur, GA, 1975-1987), *Gene Lees Jazzletter* (Ojai, CA, 1981-2008), *Jazzbeat* (New Orleans, LA, 1989-2010), *The New Regime* (Chicago, IL, 1969), *Riffs: Jazz and Blues Review Magazine* (Arlington, TX, 1977-1978), and *Whiskey, Women, and...* (Haverhill, MA, 1971-1989).

The RIPM Jazz website, [ripmjazz.org](https://ripmjazz.org), is a vast well of information concerning content, forthcoming titles, the history of RIPM, and much more to inform the curious researcher and potential subscriber. I would sincerely recommend this database to any institution that deals with music, African American studies, or popular culture. I am sure many researchers and jazz devotees breathed a sigh of relief after RIPM Jazz's release – I know I did.

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<sup>2</sup> "Announcements," RIPM Jazz, RIPM Consortium, 2021, <https://ripmjazz.org/announcements/>.