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Review of *A Thousand Honey Creeks Later: My Life in Music from Basie to Motown and Beyond* by Preston Love

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A Thousand Honey Creeks Later: My Life in Music from Basie to Motown and Beyond. By Preston Love. Hanover, New Hampshire: Wesleyan University Press, 1997. Illustrations, index. xxiv + 270 pp. \$45.00 cloth, \$19.95 paper.

"Some people don't like what I said in this book. But that doesn't bother me because I know—and *they* know—it's true. Besides, it's my story, and I have a right to tell it the way I see it. Nobody helped me write it. Every word you read is mine."

Preston Love sat across from me, hands gesticulating, words flying fast and passionately around my head, making me just a tad dizzy. I hadn't expected to talk to Love about his book, nor had I planned to drive from Lincoln to Omaha to catch the last set of his show at the Stork Club. But that particular Friday evening turned into a series of bitter and sweet improvisations nonetheless—just like Preston Love's life.

Few musicians can follow their muse *and* pay the rent. Only the dauntless, like Love, are willing to face the economic hardships, the mental and physical stress, and the itinerant life of a full-time musician. As a musician myself (who pays her rent by teaching English), I find Love's account of the day-to-day struggles to survive a fascinating one. While he writes of glorious moments working with stars like Ray Charles, Aretha Franklin, and Count Basie, he also recounts the winter when he and his band were playing high school dances and making just enough to keep their lemon of a bus running and the IRS off their backs. Love provides countless road trip stories and insider glimpses into the music business; and since his career spans over sixty years,

he gives a valuable, firsthand report on how the industry has changed (in his view, for the worse) over time. Though the writer in me cries out for more editing (are *all* of those little details necessary?), I have to admire Love's steel-trap memory.

As though reading my mind or having heard this criticism before, Love remarked, "The editors didn't give me any trouble except they made me cut out a beautiful letter I wrote after my Aunt passed away." He holds his hands to his heart as if he's reliving a stabbing. "That letter expressed so much of who I am and what I was feeling during that period of my life." For the first time in our conversation, Love pauses, lost in a painful memory. Yet his face also expresses a dedication to telling all the truth—the truth as he sees it through the lens of his experiences.

That's why his book is an intriguing combination of autobiography, sermon, and manifesto. Love's mission is not only to recount his life's many memorable moments, but also to lament the present state of jazz in America (particularly the weak music scene in Omaha, a city that between the 1930s and 1960s boasted of world class musicians and a thriving club scene), and the "whitewashing" of jazz which he considers to be black music. "If my anger seems excessive," he writes, "consider that Elvis Presley became the biggest star in the history of show business and was referred to as the king of rock and roll while many thousands of great Afro-American folksingers and musicians with thousands of times more talent than Presley wallowed in comparative obscurity."

Jabs like these are sprinkled throughout the book because Love is a fundamentalist when it comes to his definitions of good music. But thoughtful fans and musicians will appreciate his candor and passion for the music itself, even if they don't agree with all of this positions.

Before leaving my table to begin his final set, Love leaned toward me as though we were two cronies who'd been around the block together too many times to mince words. "You

and I both know that if you're black then it makes a difference. Black musicians have a harder time than white ones and that's just a fact. I've got white musicians in my band, but that doesn't stop me from telling it like it is."

I nod and smile. That's what you do when speaking to Preston Love. Nod and smile because you're not going to get too many words in the conversation and because this is a man who has played with every musician that counts yet has never received the recognition he deserves. Preston Love has an important story to tell, and we would all do well to listen.

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