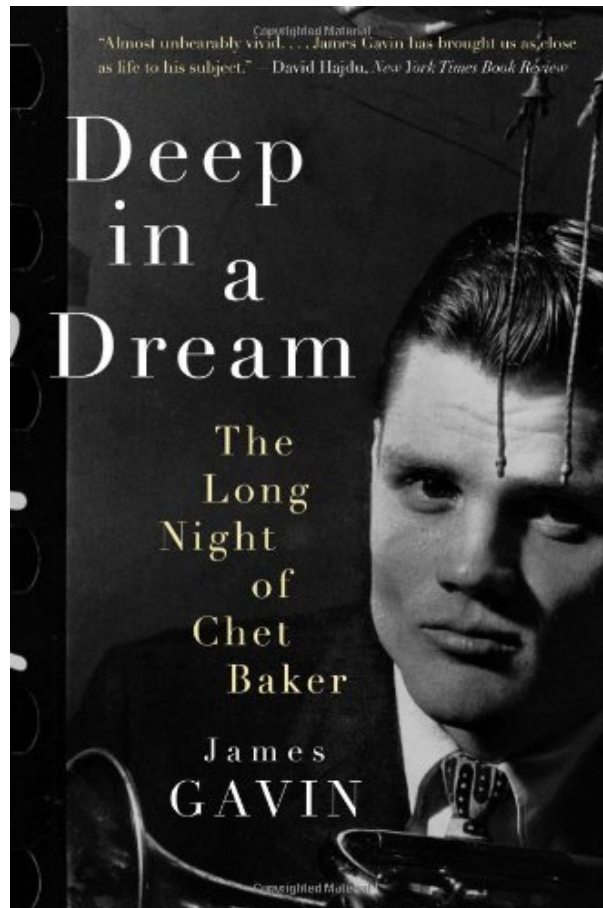
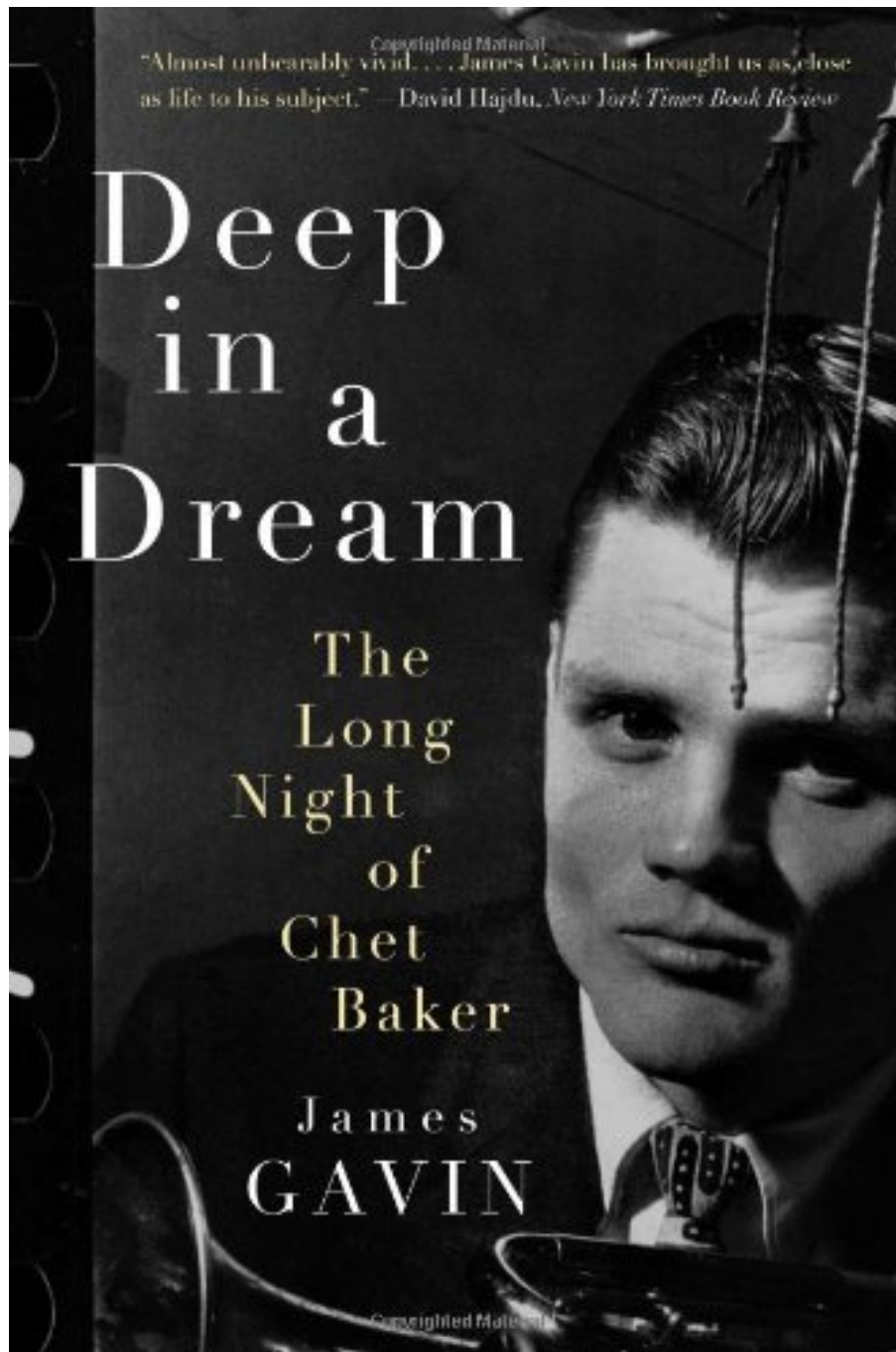


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From Library Journal

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This first major biography of the most romanticized icon in jazz thrillingly recounts his wild ride. From his emergence in the 1950s--when an uncannily beautiful young man from Oklahoma appeared on the West Coast to become, seemingly overnight, the prince of "cool" jazz--until his violent, drug-related death in Amsterdam in 1988, Chet Baker lived a life that has become an American myth. Here, drawing on hundreds of interviews and previously untapped sources, James Gavin gives a hair-raising account of the trumpeter's dark journey.

- Sales Rank: #159593 in Books
- Published on: 2011-07-01
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.00" h x .90" w x 6.00" l, 1.41 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 440 pages

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Where's the music?

By Melissa L. Roberson

While this book will certainly make compelling reading for any Chet Baker fan, or any follower of the 1950s-60s jazz scene, be prepared for a frigid treatment of the subject. Mr. Gavin may have a knack for writing about jazz musicians, but he neither understands nor appreciates the music itself one whit. There was a definite gap in the Chet Baker bio market, and Gavin has filled it. Unfortunately, he has not only taken the same angle that the tabloids always did, covering the drugs-and-domestic-violence aspect of Chet Baker, but he has gone them one better--to suit his theme he paints Baker not as a hip musician, which he was, but as a bumbling Okie square, who could never keep up with the music's 'advances'. Baker's conservative opinions of free jazz and fusion, to name just one example, are held up to ridicule. He is dismissed as being 'incapable' of such 'catharsis', as if his opinion were formed out of jealousy or open-mouthed incomprehension. In fact, Miles Davis, who is repeatedly held up as an example of what a great musician is made of so Baker can pale in comparison, despised free jazz. For that matter, many very hip black jazz musicians hated free jazz, and fusion as well. Louis Armstrong thought bebop itself was a joke. All the usual jazz cliches are resurrected here: white jazz is intellectual and precise but lacks feeling, while black jazz is earthy, charged with life and dripping with soul, etc. Except for frequent put-downs of Baker's music for its alleged "lack of feeling" (what, if not feeling, is Baker's music known for?) Gavin barely mentions any of Baker's recorded legacy, aside from occasional session details which always involved Chet's forgetting the date because he was stoned, and his subsequent lack of blowing power when finally coaxed into the studio. His quiet, intimate music is repeatedly dismissed as 'cold' or 'dead', either because Gavin apparently cannot understand feeling unless it is loud, sweaty and intense, or because any other analysis would complicate his single-minded theme. History features no shortage of creeps, louses or idiot savants who packed their music with feeling--Mozart anyone? Charlie Parker? Miles? Then what's all the fuss about? Why do we listen to this man's music

30, 40 and 50 years after it's been recorded? Why aren't we listening to Abbey Lincoln's or Albert Ayler's or any of the other cathartic free jazz or fusion that Gavin holds up as supreme examples of hip? If you didn't know before reading the book, you won't know after.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Five Stars

By heymjo

interesting read

38 of 43 people found the following review helpful.

one of the saddest stories ever told

By Stuart Hoffman

It's difficult to recreate the arrival of Chet Baker to the world of jazz. At that time, around 1950, the trumpet masters were Roy Eldridge, Dizzy Gillespe, Fats Navarro, and the Stan Kenton trumpet section, with Maynard Ferguson, and Buddy Childers. These "monsters" played above high C. F's, G's, and yes even DOUBLE high C's were their daily vocabulary. Along comes a kid from Oklahoma, whose family settles near LA, who never practices, has no high register(if he ever played a high C, I've never heard it) and decides to confront these guys, and the public with his idea of jazz, and jazz singing.He is an immediate sensation. His chamber music approach to jazz trumpet playing affects many people as does his singing. There are those who rate him a spinoff of Miles Davis, and that his singing isn't singing at all. I rate him a true master in both categories. The only fly in the ointment was his discovery and love of heroin. It superceded everything in his life---loved ones(some say he only loved heroin) children, musical associates etc. James Gavin does a masterful job recreating a life if possible, more tragic than Art Pepper's, or Charley Parker's. It's not for the faint of heart. If you worship every note and vocal of this master as I do, it's a must.

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