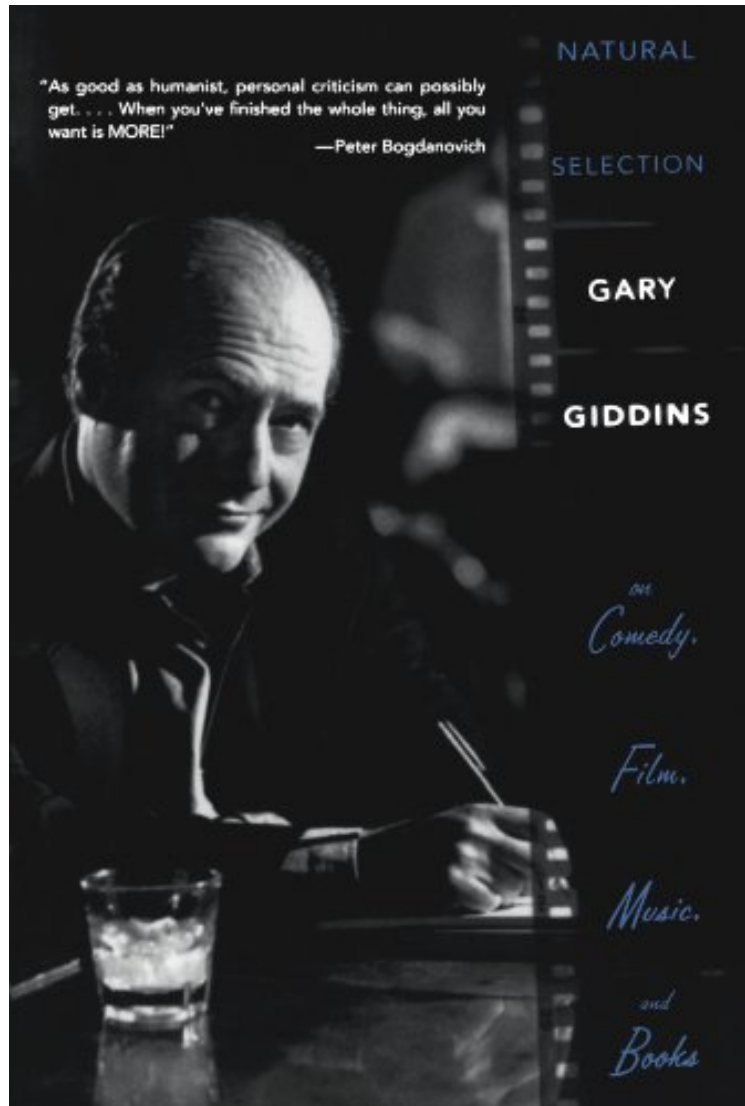


Natural Selection: Gary Giddins on Comedy, Film, Music, and Books

Gary Giddins

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Gary Giddins : Natural Selection: Gary Giddins on Comedy, Film, Music, and Books before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Natural Selection: Gary Giddins on Comedy, Film, Music, and Books:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Worthwhile By Kevin Killian You'd have to be Gary Giddins to find everything in this book of interest, and even money says that Giddins himself probably yawned his way through a couple of this collection's non essential items. His discussion of Leo McCarey's SATAN NEVER SLEEPS, for

example, misses the boat on most counts, and yet even at his least connected Giddins usually manages to insert something of value, and here he goes back to McCarey's sources for a solidly researched piece on Nobel Prizewinner Pearl Buck's connection, or lack of one, with the script of SNS. You keep hoping that Giddins will go on from there and pursue any of the wealth of ideas that this tidbit of info provokes in the reader, and yet he just comes to a halt and types -30- under his last line. Maybe being a high profile journalist for all those years was good for his writing in one sense, but word count trumps everything else in this kind of collection of occasional essays and prose. The book's worth buying just for Giddins' inspired advocacy of nearly forgotten film legend Jack Benny at the beginning of NATURAL SELECTION, and for his read-through, just before the volume's end, of the 1940s and 50s comic book series CLASSICS ILLUSTRATED. On both of these topics he shines. Partly it's the newness of any cross cultural approach on these subjects, which have rarely been treated with the scholarly and humanist gloss he is noted for, but really it's because he writes out of enthusiasm, perhaps nostalgic affection for the young man who grew to love Benny against all odds, and the little boy who spent his spare time hunting down odd issues of CLASSICS ILLUSTRATED (like Mr. MIDSHIPMAN EASY or THE BLACK TULIP) in Brooklyn comic shops far from his Long Island home. I was a CI rat myself of a later period, when I didn't even know the comics had been discontinued, and whoever was selling them was basically just putting through the equivalent of "remainders," which led to some odd turns of events, like a flood of BLACK TULIPS in one month of 1972, but a veritable drought of issues that were, for Giddins, a dime a dozen almost literally. Giddins puts all this nostalgia for the garish and overstated into a powerful cultural perspective, showing how the canonical "list" format on the back of each issue of CI was part and parcel of a larger list mania perpetrated by middlebrow institutions. Nice work. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A+ By Gloop. The Goblin. Customer Mr. Giddins is knowledgeable, articulate and engaging. This wide-ranging volume is a splendid collection of his work and a joy to read. A must read if you have even a shred of interest in his topics. 5 of 10 people found the following review helpful. Fine writing, sloppy editing By B. Sloane Taking nothing away from Gary Giddins' command of the English language or his encyclopedic understanding of the American cultural landscape, this collection of essays on music, books and film is nonetheless marred by some of the worst copy editing I've seen -- by Oxford University Press, of all publishers. In just the first hundred pages, the names of Brendan Behan, Jean Hagen, Henry Daniell, Darryl Zanuck, and Melvyn Douglas are all misspelled. With this many goofs, it's tough to focus on Giddins' insights; after awhile, one's attention is drawn (however unwillingly) down the page to the next name, expecting the worst. I sincerely hope the hardbound version of Natural Selection sells enough to warrant a paperback edition; maybe by then Giddins and/or his agent will have insisted on better proofing.

Long recognized as America's most brilliant jazz writer, winner of the prestigious National Book Critics Circle Award, Gary Giddins has also produced a wide range of stimulating and original cultural criticism in other fields. With Natural Selection, he brings together the best of these previously uncollected essays, including a few written expressly for this volume. The range of topics is spellbinding. Writing with insight, humor, and a famously deft touch, he offers sharp-edged perspectives on such diverse subjects as Federico Fellini and Jean Renoir, Norman Mailer and Ralph Ellison, Marlon Brando and Groucho Marx, Duke Ellington and Bob Dylan, horror and noir, the cartoon version of Animal Farm and the comic book series Classics Illustrated. Throughout, Giddins reveals his uncommon ability to address in very few words an entire career, so that we get an in-depth portrait of the artist beyond the film, book, or recording under review. A wonderful gathering of little-known treasures, Natural Selection will broaden the perception of Gary Giddins as one of our most important cultural critics.

From Booklist Giddins is that rare creature, the deadline-driven journalist with a distinctive voice. This collection also reveals that, while best known for his award-winning writing on jazz, his range is really quite remarkable. Besides jazz, he writes authoritatively about film noir, silent comedy, and contemporary fiction; about Jack Benny and Friedrich Durrenmatt; and, in intelligent, heartfelt reflections on a youth spent reading it, that late but seldom lamented comic-book series, Classics Illustrated. Not every editor has appreciated Giddins' insistence on speaking his mind, and Giddins reveals in the autobiographical introduction that his negative review of Lady Sings the Blues in Hollywood Reporter cost him that particular writing gig. Happily, he has spent most of his career writing for publications like the Village Voice, for which he wrote the jazz-oriented column "Weather Bird" for more than 30 years, and the New York Sun, which appreciates strong writers with strong opinions. Just as happily, Giddins has chosen to corral the best of his elegantly written, exquisitely argued pieces, most of them written in the last 15 years or so, for this eclectic collection, which should please film buffs, jazz fans, and anyone, really, who loves the fine art of literary journalism. Jack Helbig Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved "Just try to read all of 'Natural Selection' without buying at least a few CD's and DVD's; the Criterion Collection should pay Giddins a commission." --New York Times Book "In an age of blogs and the everyman critic, it's reassuring to know people as brilliant as Giddins are still ready to offer insights only a true critic can provide. This is an exceptional addition to a remarkable career.... Nowhere else in his works do we find such a wide range of subjects, which proves his perceptive talents and in-depth knowledge of the mediums of which he writes are unequalled." --Library Journal (starred review) About the Author Gary Giddins

wrote the Village Voice's 'Weather Bird' column for more than thirty years. His eight books and three documentary films have garnered unparalleled recognition for jazz, including a National Book Critics Circle Award in Criticism, two Ralph J. Gleason Music Book Awards, six ASCAP-Deems Taylor Awards, a Guggenheim, and a Peabody. He lives in New York City.