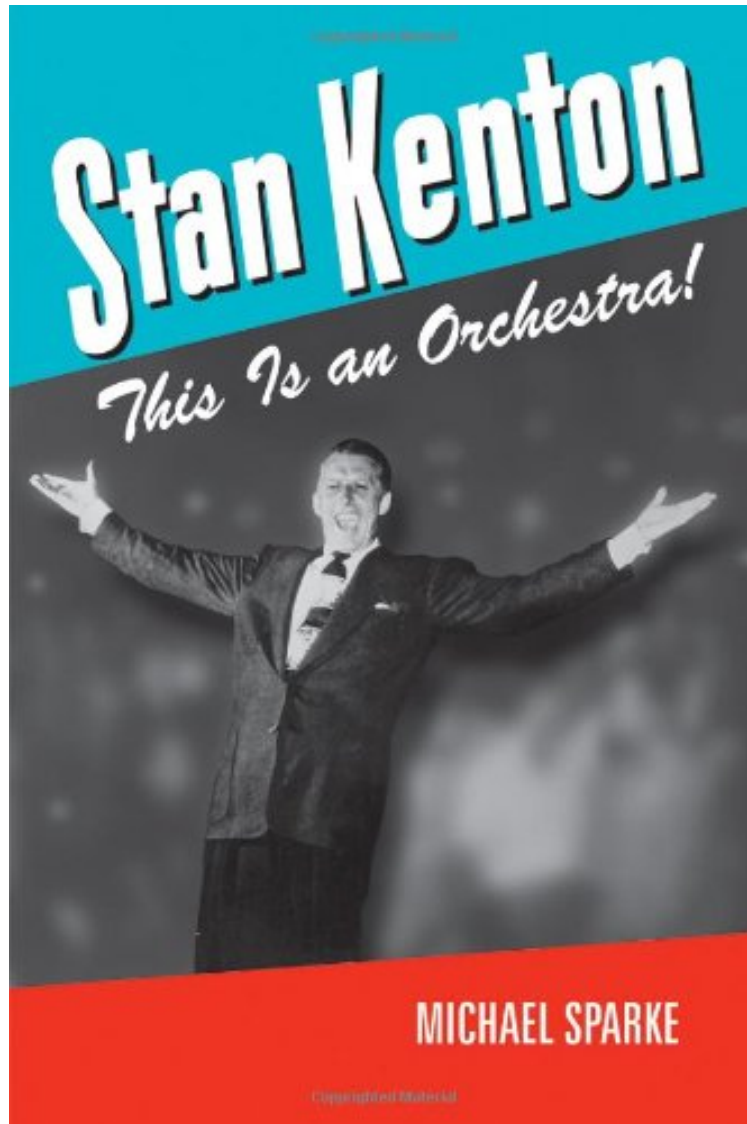


(Mobile book) Stan Kenton: This Is an Orchestra! (North Texas Lives of Musician Series)

Stan Kenton: This Is an Orchestra! (North Texas Lives of Musician Series)

Michael Sparke

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Michael Sparke : Stan Kenton: This Is an Orchestra! (North Texas Lives of Musician Series) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Stan Kenton: This Is an Orchestra! (North Texas Lives of Musician Series):

10 of 11 people found the following review helpful. ONLY FOR THOSE WHO WANT "ILLUMINATING" KENTON ANECDOTES"By W. BUTLERI can't help wondering if any of the 5-star reviewers really like Stan

Kenton's music? If they do what then is to be gained by reading endless mean-spirited "Kenton gossip" when surely the main purpose of any biography about a musician is to increase one's pleasure in listening to their music? In this instance extremely easy because thankfully Stan Kenton's entire output is safely preserved to be discovered (and demanded) by an entirely new generation who are beginning to realize he was a monumental American original (still ostracized by the jazz establishment. I.e. only 3 unflattering pages in Ken "Burns's Jazz TV/book). Clearly Mr. Sparke is catering for another kind of "fan" who want Stan Kenton's musical career spiced up with quotes from contemporaneous lesser lights - who more often than not contribute something derogatory to fill Mr. Sparke's filing cabinet. Thus one learns Stan wasn't such a great composer, eventually lost his touch as an arranger and had a very limited piano style. With so many of his ex-comrades chiming-in with their irrelevant "opinions" I suggest if you want to continue to enjoy Stan Kenton's music without any literary interference this book is definitely not for you. As the prescient 3-star reviewer points out the other big problem is that although Mr. Sparke appears to have "cornered the Kenton market" a huge question mark hangs over his musical tastes. What he thinks is good or bad about Kenton's music and albums seems to be constantly out of sync with the views of the Kenton faithful. A typical example being reviewers' reverence for the wonderful mellophonium album "Adventures in Jazz" and Mr. Sparke, who concludes it is "Not an album I can return to with unreserved enthusiasm" (truly pompous?). For him it's "a mixed bag" with "Waltz of the Prophets running far too long for its limited inspiration". Inevitably he adds a quote from another nonentity who says "It was kind of trite repetitive stuff". Stan's next great album "Adventures in Blues" only gets a half-page - with no accolades about its thematic unity and the unique sonorities provided by 4 bass instruments. But of course we get another nasty quote about Roland writing a few good arrangements but "a lot of duds". Why does he think we need to read this stuff? Later on Mr. Sparke says the only recording truly showcasing the mellophonium period "as it really sounded" is to be found on "Concert in England". Yet on this CD has only one tepid 3-star review saying "the sound is poor and the brass sound as if they were playing in the next room". Were they listening to the same CD? One of the main reasons for me to buy a new Kenton book is to discover which non-Capitol recordings the author recommends. Especially of concerts where Stan's more spontaneous performances are to be found but which often come up short because they're poorly recorded. Again Mr. Sparke lets us down by failing to identify those with BOTH valuable content AND good sound. But when he does pass judgment again his tastes seem to be diametrically opposite to those expressed by Kenton fans on both sides of the Atlantic. Just compare the ecstatic reviews for his 1972 English concert "Stan Kenton Today" and then read Mr. Spark - who considers the entire enterprise something of a disaster. In his opinion "The end results were listenable but far from spectacular". When in actuality this is a crystal clear recording with the English audiences' rapt appreciation for his slow classics and wild enthusiastic applause after (and during) the fast numbers explaining exactly how and why Stan Kenton's appeal transcended all the limitations of "authentic jazz". (In this same hall I never heard anything but respectful ripples of applause for Duke Ellington's big-name band - who usually looked even more bored than the audience while "going through their paces" playing the same basic program - for about 10 years) Regarding the legacy of the 2 great men Duke's tunes may live on but his arrangements can't because they were entirely dependant on the talents of unique band members. But for proof Stan Kenton's unique sound palette is still alive and well try visiting YouTube and clicking on "Malaguena" played by the Michigan Marching Band. No amplifiers or synthesizers, just incredible waves of pulsating sound produced by real instruments played with maximum force by over 400 instrumentalists. The same pulse-raising martial music one suspects was once used to inspire Roman Legions before they proceeded to demolish opposing naked hordes. I venture to say these magic modern BRASS SOUNDS are the true legacy of one charismatic obstinate Californian - who followed his own star to the very end.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. The band's four-decade history, warts and all
By James A. Vedda
For long-time Kenton followers, this is an excellent read that will bring back great memories and illuminate the ups and downs of the band's history. Sparke is not shy about expressing his opinions on the musical and business decisions made over the years, and not all readers will agree with his assessments. But it's clear that this book is a labor of love by a lifelong fan, who fortunately doesn't try to sugar-coat this tribute to his jazz idol. This is not a traditional biography. The book's treatment of Kenton the man is mostly found at the beginning and end, while the bulk of the text is about Kenton in the context of the organization he led (which was, admittedly, the overwhelmingly dominant aspect of his life). Still, there's plenty to be learned about his devotion to his music, his generosity as a leader, and the sad decline of his health in the 1970s. Sparke has compiled research spanning decades, including interviews and correspondence with many of the key players, including Kenton. The result is a thorough treatment that will warm the hearts of those of us who have been steeped in Kenton lore for most of our lives. However, readers may quickly get bogged down if they are only marginally familiar with the man and his music. This book is aimed at Kenton aficionados, not at winning over new fans. The cast of characters is large, encompassing musicians, singers, arrangers, managers, and others over the band's four-decade history. Specific recordings and arrangements are discussed at length. The author makes some assumptions about the reader's familiarity with all of this, and doesn't always adequately explain the identity or importance of certain people, events, or pieces of music. Overall, I found this to be a satisfying portrayal of one of the most memorable leaders in jazz. As Sparke and others have noted, the orchestra was Kenton's instrument. On a good day, there was no one who played it better. This book chronicles how

hard he worked, and what he sacrificed, to make that happen. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Putting the Music in Context By Mike D. I discovered big band music at the time my peers were discovering the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. While my admiration for the Ellington, Basie and Herman bands remained constant, Kenton was a different story. I was never quite sure of what I was getting with a new Kenton album (Tex Ritter?!), although the pleasures outweighed the disappointments. All of this makes more sense to me now thanks to Mr. Sparkes book and it's descriptions of the various incarnations of the Kenton band, the influence that different arrangers had on the band's sound, and the pressures brought upon it by the band's recording company. It was helpful going through the book with three of the Mosaic box sets loaded onto my iPod, along with some selective downloads from iTunes. Unlike some other reviewers, I didn't find the book overly critical of Kenton, either personally or professionally. I thought it balanced and complimentary. By the way, the DVD "Stan Kenton: Artistry in Rhythm" makes an excellent companion piece to the book.

Stan Kenton (1911-1979) formed his first full orchestra in 1940 and soon drew record-breaking crowds to hear and dance to his exciting sound. He continued to tour and record unrelentingly for the next four decades. Stan Kenton: This Is an Orchestra! sums up the mesmerizing bandleader at the height of his powers, arms waving energetically, his face a study of concentration as he cajoled, coaxed, strained, and obtained the last ounce of energy from every musician under his control. Michael Sparkes narrative captures that enthusiasm in words: a lucid account of the evolution of the Kenton Sound, and the first book to offer a critical evaluation of the role that Stan played in its creation. Insightful and thought-provoking throughout, and supported by liberal quotes from the musicians who made the magic, even at his most contentious the authors high regard and admiration for his subject shines through. The most knowledgeable of Stans fans will learn new facts from this far-reaching biography of a man and his music. Stan Kenton will be essential reading for every Kenton devotee and jazz historian.

A delightful read, start to finish. The inclusion of so much primary source material makes this the most authoritative account of Kentons story to date. He gets the man and the music and tells it like it was. Terry Vosbein, Washington and Lee University I read this book with mounting excitement and finished it confident that it is the best yet written on Kentons professional life. It is an irresistible volume that ought to be devoured in one sitting. Anthony Agostinelli, Kenton newsletter publisher