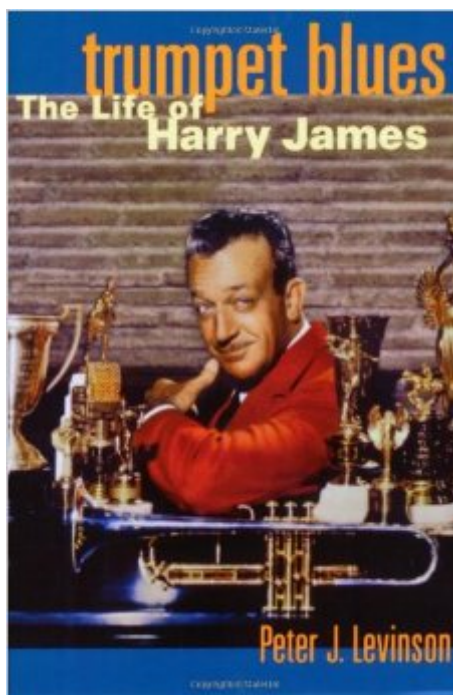


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# Trumpet Blues: The Life Of Harry James



## Synopsis

Swing is back in style, and with it a renewed interest in the Big Band Era. And few players dominated that era more than Harry James, whose soaring trumpet solos and romantic hit tunes influenced popular music for a generation. Now, Peter J. Levinson, who knew Harry James personally, has written a revealing biography of this jazz icon, based on nearly 200 interviews with musicians and friends. Harry James led a truly colorful life, and in *Trumpet Blues* Levinson captures it all. Beginning with James's childhood in a traveling circus, we follow the young trumpeter's meteoric rise in the 1930s and witness his electrifying performances with the Benny Goodman Orchestra. We see how James formed his own band in 1939, an incubator for many pop music stars of the 1940s and '50s, including Frank Sinatra, Connie Haines, Dick Haymes, Helen Forrest, and Kitty Kallen. Combined with James's superb musicianship, peerless trumpet technique and talented sidemen, this stellar group dominated the war years and the immediate post-war period. And James himself, especially after his marriage to film goddess Betty Grable, became one of America's most famous personalities and lived like true Hollywood royalty. Levinson describes their twenty-two-year marriage with insight and sympathy. But he shows how James's marriage--and his triumphant late-1950s comeback in Nevada's casinos--were slowly undermined by his penchant for compulsive gambling, womanizing, and alcoholism. He gives us the inside story of James's sybaritic life style, and probes the profound psychological reasons for James's destructive behavior. The first biography ever written on Harry James, *Trumpet Blues* is a scintillating portrait of Swing's brightest star--his life, his loves, and the music that defined an era.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I originally bought this book when it came out in 1999 and actually spoke with Mr. Peter Levinson putting him on to several contacts when the book was in preparation. I have not chosen to send in my review until now after having reread the book several times. Harry James was a phenomenon in the music world: a musician who reached the pinnacle of success in record sales, popularity with the masses, stardom in the glory days of Hollywood musicals and longevity in the big band arena long after the hay days of the big bands. He was a child prodigy, mastering his instrument, the trumpet, at a very early age of fourteen. In two years he was on the road with territory bands and at twenty he was leading the top big band trumpet section in the country with the Benny Goodman band. When he formed his own band at twenty three he already had a body of recorded jazz work equal to all the trumpet giants of his era. He had the blues soul of a Louis Armstrong, Mugsy Spanier and Bix Beiderbecke but because he reached real commercial stardom based on commercial ballads, and, he was WHITE, many of the so called jazz critics of the day demeaned his jazz work and dismissed all his later work. If one traverses the jazz shelves of the local libraries one will be hard pressed to find many references to Harry James listed among the elite jazz icons in any number of jazz histories as reviewed by current so-called jazz critics. These wet behind the ears critics continue to believe you have to be BLACK to have any credibility in jazz. Similarly, one does not see the name of Stan Kenton or Artie Shaw mentioned as much or ever as one sees the names of Basie, Fletcher Henderson or Chick Webb.

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