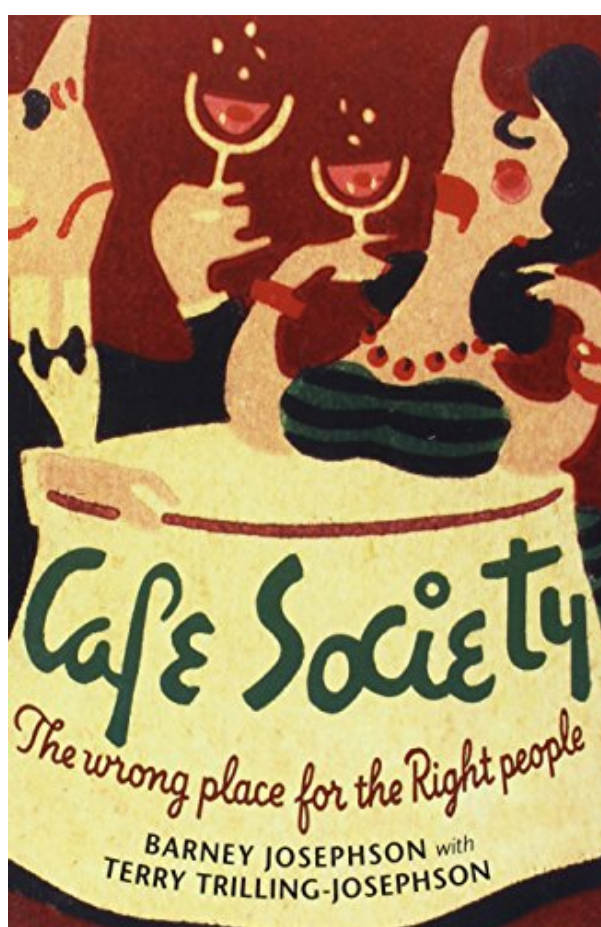
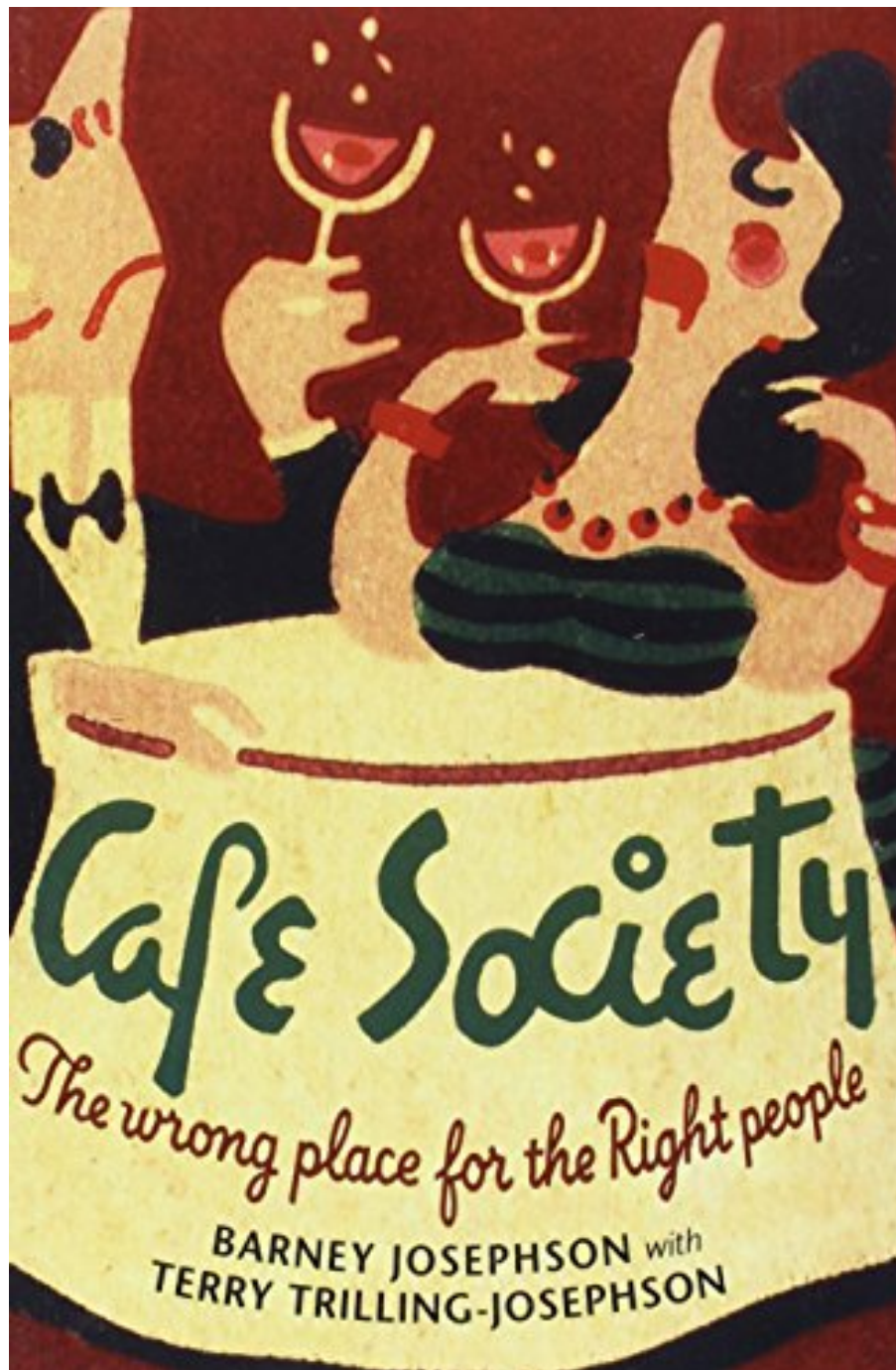


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THE RIGHT PEOPLE (MUSIC IN AMERICAN  
LIFE) BY BARNEY JOSEPHSON, TERRY  
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## From Booklist

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Set against the drama of the Great Depression, the conflict of American race relations, and the inquisitions of the House Un-American Activities Committee, *Cafe Society* tells the personal history of Barney Josephson, proprietor of the legendary interracial New York City night clubs *Cafe Society Downtown* and *Cafe Society Uptown* and their successor, *The Cookery*. Famously known as "the wrong place for the Right people," *Cafe Society* featured the cream of jazz and blues performers--among whom were Billie Holiday, Big Joe Turner, Lester Young, Buck Clayton, Big Sid Catlett, and Mary Lou Williams--as well as comedy stars Imogene Coca, Zero Mostel, and Jack Gilford, the boogie-woogie pianists, and legendary gospel and folk artists. A trailblazer in many ways, Josephson welcomed black and white artists alike to perform for mixed audiences in a venue whose walls were festooned with artistic and satiric murals lampooning what was then called "high society." Featuring scores of photographs that illustrate the vibrant cast of characters in Josephson's life, this exceptional book speaks richly about *Cafe Society's* revolutionary innovations and creativity, inspired by the vision of one remarkable man.

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#### Most helpful customer reviews

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful.

##### A Captivating Memoir

By Ann Seidler

Although jazz fans will find this captivating memoir a must for their libraries with its first-hand descriptions of some of the legends of the genre (Billie Holiday, Lena Horne, and Hazel Scott to name just a few), the book has a depth and an appeal far wider than that. It is a cultural history, a close-up description of the turbulent era from the post-depression years with the gradual breakdown of the strictures that had governed society until then. It takes us through the red baiting and the blacklisting of the House Un-American Activities Committee, leading to the demise of the Café Society clubs. It progresses up through the 70's when even age discrimination was challenged as Josephson launched an 82-year old jazz singer from the '20's, Alberta Hunter, onto a brilliant new career in his new club, The Cookery.

The narrative voice is that of impresario Barney Josephson, captured on tape over several years at the behest of his wife, Terry Trilling Josephson, And what a delightful storyteller he is! We meet all kinds of people from gangsters to artists to movers and shakers as they come alive, warts and all. We soak up the atmosphere. We are there in the club, the office, the backroom. We also come away struck by the thought of what a very decent human being this Barney must have been.

However, it is his wife, Terry, who deserves the credit for giving the book its depth and transforming it into a valuable document of this entire era. After what must have been years of research and interviewing and re-

interviewing of the jazz musicians, performers, and friends of the family whom Josephson talks about, she gives this book its continuity and context through the italicized inserts that appear throughout. Informative additional background can be found in the extensive end notes.

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful.

Barney Josephson's Remarkable Story

By R. Weinstock

The following is a review I have submitted to Jazz & Blues Report which hopefully will appear in its september issue.

I remember going to The Cookery when I was living in New York between 1978 and 1983 and having the privilege of seeing Alberta Hunter, Helen Humes and others perform there. What an experience and to hear its proprietor, one Barney Josephson introduce the performers before getting to listen to some American originals. I also remember reading about Cafe Society, legendary night clubs that Josephson operated from the late 1930s until they closed as a result because of Red Scare witch-hunt of the post-war World War II era. I knew that Cafe Society was where Big Joe Turner and the Boogie Woogie Trio played after their success at the legendary Spirituals to Swing Concert and that Billie Holiday had started singing "Strange Fruit" there. But there is much more to the club's (and Josephson's) story than that. While Barney Josephson died in 1988, his widow, Terry Trilling-Josephson had taped his recollections as well as written down some remembrances when tape was not available. As she notes in her preface, she then conducted interviews with some of those who had played important roles in Barney's life or performed at his clubs. She supplemented her interviews when necessary (she was unable to interview Lena Horne for example) with existing printed materials such as published interviews and contemporary press coverage of both Cafe Society and the Cookery. The result is "Cafe Society: The Wrong Place For The Right People," part of the University of Illinois Press' "Music in American Life" series.

Cafe Society pioneered as a night club admitting persons of all ethnic and racial backgrounds without preference to any particular group based on class or status, as opposed to the segregation that marked almost all other night clubs. It also presented a diverse group of performers in a dignified fashion. Blacks for example were not presented in a stereotypical role such as a Jungle Band or in mythical idyllic southern pastoral setting shows that bands played in while performing in shows at clubs like Cotton Club. This reflected Josephson's egalitarian values when he grew up. He was the youngest of six children born to the widow who had emigrated from Latvia (then part of the Russian Empire). His mother worked as a seamstress to support her family in Trenton, New Jersey. He graduated high school but did not go to college, rather working in the show store of one of his brothers who was a Hoover republican. Another brother went to law school and became a communist although not a Communist Party member. Through his brother he was receptive to socialist ideas, especially those relating to the equality of people, and became friends with the one black student at his school. He developed a love of literature, theater and the arts as a child and continued while helping his brother's shoe business. Somehow, he ended up opening Cafe Society in Greenwich Village with his friend John Hammond suggesting most of the musical talent such as the Boogie Woogie Trio, Billie Holiday and others while he himself decided on some of the other talent including the comedian, Jack Gilford, who was the initial emcee at the venue in addition to providing a comedy routine.

Opening between Christmas and New Year with the United States not out of the Depression was not the expected recipe for success, a point that Gilford would remind Josephson regularly. He would send Josephson a letter every year timed to arrive at the anniversary of Cafe Society's opening in December 28. The text of one letter is given in the memoir:

"Dear Barney



I keep telling you if you open a nightclub in New York City three days before New Year's Eve you will fail. I warn you three fat piano players will not attract business. Also a female black singer with a gardenia in her hair, a blues shouter singing about a sheik in any key, and a curly haired white comedian trying to convince audiences he looks and acts like a golf ball, will get you run out of town on a rail. Take my advice and go back to Trenton and open a shoe store that sells health shoes.

Yours, Jack. December 28, 1977."

It was not simply having someone like Hammond to suggest talent. Josephson had been to enough night clubs to know what he did not want. He did not want Blacks being in servant rolls. As far as the decor, he has a number of artists, including cartoonists for the New Yorker, do a mural for the walls, most of which spoofed high society. And there was the talent. So many famous performers were there. Teddy Wilson led a band, the great Mary Lou Williams performed there while the appearances by Hazel Scott, Lena Horne, Mildred Bailey, the Golden Gate Quartet, and Zero Mostel (and how Sam Mostel got to be called Zero is told here) were crucial in their careers. Sometimes someone would audition and he trusted his instinct in hiring them and then making suggestions as to repertoire, often buying outfits for them. He suggested "Strange Fruit" to Billie Holiday, which led to one of her signature numbers as well as recounts how the song got to be recorded. After all, what could follow that. Even later at the Cookery when he hired Susan McCorkle who was singing mostly unknown songs, he had her concentrate on better known songs and she became recognized as a song interpreter). Josephson also hired performers for extended stays, months, even years at a time. He also provided management services for some. He was a man of his word and even when he had a management contract, he did not take any money from his performers. For example he managed Hazel Scott early in her career including handling her money which enabled her to have quite some assets which she married Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. and then hosted the reception for at Cafe Society.

Cafe Society with its mix of entertainment was quite successful even though its booking policy defied what was viewed as common sense at the time. A second venue opened, Cafe Society Uptown. His clubs were trailblazing in how they presented music and as his memoir makes clear, what he did in booking unknown artists and how he had an open, diverse audience broke many rules on how night clubs operated. It's fascinating to hear his account of the two venues, and the fascinating stories of the performers.

What caused Cafe Society to shut its doors was the Post-World War II Red Scare. His brother Leon had been arrested in the mid-1930s in Denmark as an alleged participant in a plan to assassinate Hitler. He was exonerated but when he returned to the United States his passport was taken and even though a Communist, the Communist Party USA wanted nothing to do with him. He still worked as a lawyer for progressive causes but after World War II the House Committee of Un-American Activities, subpoenaed him to testify which he refused, citing the 1st Amendment. He was eventually convicted which was affirmed by the 2nd Circuit of the United States Court of Appeals (Justice Tom Clark dissenting) and the Supreme Court refused to hear his appeal. He was sentenced to a year in prison. After his brother is in jail, smears about Josephson and Cafe Society started, press coverage almost completely ceased and various licensing and regulatory agencies started harassing him and the clientele. It was only a matter of time until he was forced to close first Cafe Society Uptown and then the original venue.

He gives his own overview of the Red Scare, which saw many writers, performers and artists blacklisted while others betrayed their friends. Hazel Scott, then married to Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, testified that she only performed at certain benefits because Josephson directed her to. Josephson flat out contradicts this, stating he always left it to the performer, whether to perform for a cause. He was often asked years later why he did not hire her for the Cookery, and here he cites her 'false' testimony. It was not the innuendo of being a communist or a fellow traveler. There was an undercurrent of racism. He was accused of

being a red, but even worse encouraging race mixing. How dare he treat Blacks as good as Whites. It is telling that he was harassed at a time when mob-owned clubs were left alone.

After Cafe Society closed, Josephson opened an eatery called The Cookery around 1955 which expanded to three locations. However, by 1972 only one remained open, the largest one in Greenwich Village. He started presenting music there by happenstance. One day pianist Mary Lou Williams came by and mentioned to Barney how hard it was to find a place to work. She had tried to get booked at the Village Gate and was turned down. Somehow she convinced Barney to hire her and a bassist. While the Cookery lacked a cabaret license, he was still able to present a drummer-less entertainment without one. What started as an experiment, led to another decade of him presenting some of the musicians and singers who had played Cafe Society like Helen Humes, Big Joe Turner, Eddie Heywood as well as others of a similar vein like Ruth Brown and the marvelous jazz singer Susan McCorkle. Of course, there was one singer most identified with The Cookery, and that was Alberta Hunter. Josephson recounts how he came to meet and have her perform, and have a relationship that would lead to her touring around the world as well as visiting the White House and her perform at the Kennedy Center Honors for an old friend, Marian Anderson. As good as the music Josephson continued to present, she became so identified with the Cookery, that when she passed away, a void could not be filled. This and some personal issues led to the closing of that establishment

Barney Josephson was a remarkable man. Being true to his values and his instincts, he operated night clubs that presented pioneering music and comedy and pioneered in race relations. He treated musicians as friends and family and the many recollections of him included here display the affection so many had for him. He lived a rich life and contributed so much to our lives and culture. There are biographies of a number of performers that may provide a different perspective on some of the events discussed here. For example, there is a new biography of Hazel Scott that I have not read. But this is Barney's story and it makes for a compelling read. For those interested in jazz, blues, cabaret, social history and more, "Cafe Society" is spellbinding.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

Remembrances NYC Blues/Jazz Scene

By Elizabeth Lear

Terry's effort to document and preserve the history of the origins of our musical heritage would have been lost and forgotten if this book hadn't been written. She has accomplished important documentation by preserving these memories which would have been lost.

The entire contemporary Jazz/Blues/Soul/Rock scene is based on our past history and the humanist efforts of her husband and a handful of other people who gave these musicians the opportunities to perform, play and record.

Terry first contacted me after my father passed whom she had searched for and found living in Detroit. She conducted phone interviews with him and needed copywrite releases for the book. I had matchbooks from Cafe Society Downtown which were subsequently used as the cover and many quotes from their phone interviews in her book. My father, Colin Allen, was delighted to hear from Terry but passed away before the book was published. He had painted a mural in downtown for free meals and went onto to a successful career as a cartoonist syndicated by King Features.

So, Terry is to be congratulated in triumphing and recording the important contribution her husband has made to our heritage. This book should be read by all musicians, students and fans of the American music scene. Progress did not come easy to Black Talented American Musicians or for that matter Liberal Thinking Cartoonist's.

Elizabeth Allen Lear

East Hampton, N.Y.

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