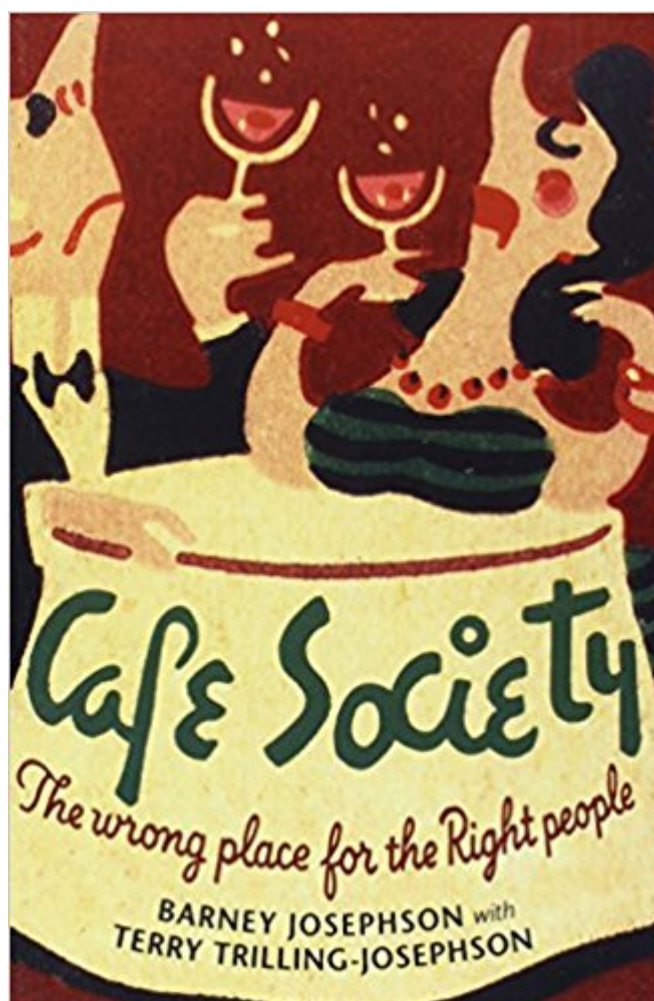


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# Cafe Society: The Wrong Place For The Right People (Music In American Life)



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In 1938, months before the beginning of World War II, Josephson, a New Jersey shoe salesman who loved jazz, opened *Caf   Society*. Unlike at the famed Cotton Club, the clientele and performers "many just getting started in their careers" were a mixture of races and classes. Among the entertainers who appeared at the *Caf   Society*, at both the uptown and downtown

venues, were Billie Holiday (introducing the song "Strange Fruit"), bluesman Big Joe Turner, Lena Horne, Hazel Scott, Paul Robeson, and Sarah Vaughan. Comedians Zero Mostel, Imogene Coca, and Jack Gilford also performed at the clubs. Josephson's wife draws on taped interviews with her husband before his death, interspersed with interviews with some of the artists who performed at the cabaret. Josephson was a great raconteur with a love for music, artistic people, and progressive politics. Photographs of the performers, as well as photos of the colorful and cartoonish murals that graced the walls, add to the evocation of a freewheeling ambience in a Depression-era cabaret that promoted itself as the "Wrong place for the Right people."

--Vanessa Bush --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This highly entertaining and historically informative book will bring a lump to the throat of those who attended the jazz and comedy performances at Cafe Society Uptown and Downtown, and warm appreciation from those who learn about Barney Josephson's contribution to the success of some of the world's greatest jazz entertainers.

--Carl Reiner "This beautifully crafted book hypnotizes the reader with the magical notes of a bygone era and gives one the sensation of actually having experienced one of the most extraordinary eras in contemporary history. It is a superb tribute to the artists and musicians whose talents have made the world we live in a brighter place."

--Lee Gabler "We're different from other nightclubs. You go to these places, I won't mention names, but the initials are Stork Club and El Morocco. The cigarette girls come around and sell you little doggies, gardenias and other insults. Well, we don't have anything like that. We have a cigarette girl too. She just sells cigarettes. But we have something they don't have. We have another girl following our cigarette girl . . . calling out, 'ashes, ashes.'"

--Jack Gilford "Josephson was a great raconteur with a love for music, artistic people, and progressive politics. Photographs of the performers, as well as photos of the colorful and cartoonish murals that graced the walls, add to the evocation of a freewheeling ambience in a Depression-era cabaret."

--Booklist "The lineup of talent [Josephson] discovered and presented (Billie Holiday, Jack Gilford, Hazel Scott, Lena Horne, Zero Mostel and Josh White, among others) is so astonishingly hot that it makes you want to rush into the street and flag down a time-traveling taxi to take you to either the venue in Greenwich Village or its larger satellite Cafe Society Uptown."

--Shelf Awareness "Fascinating story of the founder of New York's Cafe Society nightclub. . . . Highly recommended."

--Choice

There are books one reads and there are books one savors. This is rare. I can count on one hand the books which fall into the latter category, but 'Cafe Society: The wrong place for the Right people'

not only meets the criteria but tops the list. Thanks to the suggestion of a friend, I was introduced to the late Barney Josephson, impresario extraordinaire and all-around decent human being, via this compelling book for which I shall be forever grateful. Put simply, this memoir is a labor of love. Compiled from tapes made while Barney was alive, and with superb attention to detail and nuance, his widow Terry Trilling-Josephson expertly takes us to a by-gone era where mobsters mingled with the hoi-polloi, and where - regardless of your talent - other forces are at play. At first glance, this might appear to be a retrospective on the Golden Age of Jazz, but look deeper and you might just discover that, if history does nothing else, it repeats itself. Now my only question is: Why isn't this a film, or at the very least a series?

This remarkable book on the development of the early jazz scene in the U.S. is a delight to read. It is also a cultural history of the pre-World War II era when blacks were discriminated against in audience make-up as well as employment. Barney Josephson's wife, Terry Trilling-Josephson, has based her book on tapes of her husband's stories during the last decade of his life and on her many interviews of the early performers and their heirs. The careful research, the tracking down of numerous photographs never before viewed by the public, and her development of the story of the emerging stars, such as Billie Holiday, Lena Horne, Carol Channing, Zero Mostel, etc., result in a beautifully and painstakingly crafted book. The early history of this family of Latvian immigrants is fascinating as well. Barney Josephson, the youngest of six, was raised by a widowed mother who supported them as a seamstress. This valiant (and very attractive) woman was determined to raise these children by herself - they would not have a stepfather! Barney Josephson showed the same courage when, in his mid-30s, with little money, he realized a long-held dream when he opened a cabaret at Sheridan Square in Greenwich Village in 1938. He was determined to have a mixed audience as well as performers and cordially asked anyone who objected to sitting next to a black to leave. The club was an immediate success and he soon opened an uptown club, Cafe Society Uptown, on East 56th Street. This is a most satisfying book on many different levels.

What an enjoyable book. This book is well written and fascinating (at least it was for me). Josephson created two of the hottest hot-spots in New York during these years. He was daring and bucked the social rules of the time. He broke the color line at his nightclub, both for performers and guests. His clubs became the darlings of the far left NY society and did great business until the period of the post-war red scare. Social pressures from conservatives closed him down and in doing lost an exciting spot for hip music. This was the place where Billie Holiday first sang "Strange Fruit"

and Hazel Scott played the piano for weeks on end. I wish I could have experienced Barney Jacobson's Cafe Society - who cares about his politics - I'd go for the love of the music.

This was an awesome read. It gives you a first hand look inside the world of music and segregation during the great depression and the desire and will of one man who made all the difference for some of the greats like Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald etc.

Dry writing.

You won't want to put this down. If you are a jazz fan and live or have lived in NYC this book brings back so many memories.

One man's vision, instinct and style changed the face of jazz and race relations in New York. Barney Josephson and all his siblings were raised without prejudice and with highly developed senses of justice and fairness. It showed throughout their lives, and in none more than Barney. A shoe salesman from Trenton, he went into the nightclub business in the depths of the Depression, when it was utterly dominated by organized crime. Worse, he employed black performers, encouraged black customers and would not tolerate any prejudice by his patrons. Worse still, he used his own instinct to hire and develop unknown talent instead of booking headliners. He even had artist friends paint murals all over his establishments, instead of fake palm exotic decors. This recipe for disaster led to a golden age that gave rise to countless household names (Billy Holiday, Art Tatum, Joe Turner, Lena Horne, Jack Gilford, Zero Mostel) and made careers not just for them but for cooks, waiters and waitresses who never forgot. This is a wonderful, classic New York story, as told by the man who made it all happen. Josephson not only picked the talent, but often managed the performers, who were babes in the woods. He took not a cent of the ten percent he was entitled to. Ever. He nursed careers, bought performers clothes, and allowed them to blossom in the shelter of his two clubs: Cafe Society Downtown (Greenwich Village) and Uptown (Midtown East). He paid well and managed their savings if they wanted. He did it all out of love. He gave many their big break, and took such great satisfaction from living that life that it was all he ever wanted. He was miserable without it, and despite the many setbacks, was planning to open another club in his late 80s, when he died. He breaks his story into short chapters that follow the discovery and development of various performers, interspersed with less happy chapters about his personal life. The anti-communist era is particularly heartbreaking, as he was

blackballed out of the business, along with numerous friends and performers. Some of them turned on him to save their own careers. It was a shameful era, and Café Society lets it unfold in a very personal way. On the other hand, John Hammond glommed onto Josephson and the clubs from the outset, and provided an endless stream of new talent for them, without remuneration. They were likeminded and identically driven. The Alberta Hunter story is particularly gratifying. She came back to perform at the end of her life, having not sung in 20 years. She performed for a new audience nightly until her death, thanking Josephson for making her old age the best part of her life. From a racial standpoint, Josephson was a guardian angel. His attitude went so contrary to the segregationist attitude of the time, it is astonishing his clubs weren't firebombed. He simply insisted everyone was equal and had to be treated with equal respect. Even the cramped Downtown club, with its one communal dressing room, played its part. Imogene Coca remembers when black musicians were cursing in the dressing room: "One night we were dishing some white people and they suddenly looked at me and started to laugh. Everybody had forgotten I was white, including me." There are three hundred and some pages of these stories. There are far too many great things to say about Café Society than I can write here. It is endlessly rewarding and most worthy of documenting. David Wineberg

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