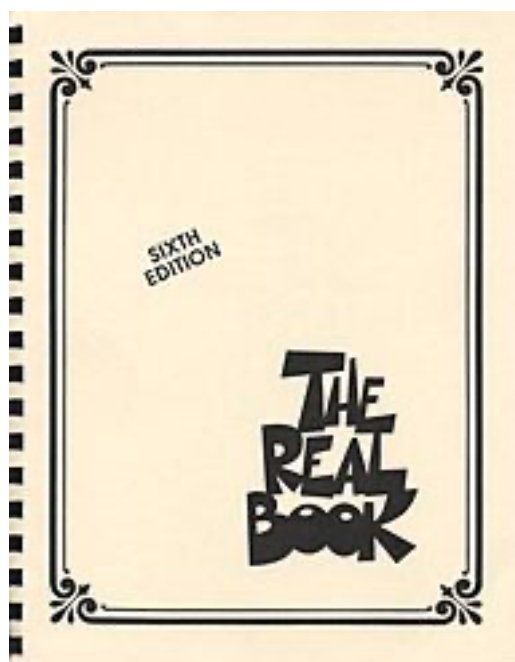


FEATURED

Real Alaskan Jazz: Announcing the Long-Awaited Alaska Real Book



The Real Book

Back in the 1970s, a handful of students at Berkeley College of Music in Boston, decided they had had enough of the hand-cobbled musical resources at their disposal. Those resources were known as 'fake books' for a reason. Called so for containing (usually) handwritten melody lines from popular, standard (copyrighted) songs without permission from the artist/composer, jazz fake books were usually hand-written and thus wildly different from one another, sometimes to the point of being entirely illegible. But through the hard work of those Berkeley students, the first 'official' fake book was born, ironically entitled The Real Book.

While technically illegal under copyright law, copies of The Real Book found their way into the hands of jazz musicians and music educators around the world. As the official website for The Real Book states, "Musicians viewed the Real Book as a godsend..." Sold on street

corners near music schools and in under-the-counter deals in music stores, The Real Book eventually even spawned its own bootleg-copies, until in 2003, the Hal Leonard Corporation secured the copyrights of almost all the pieces in the original Book, and published the first truly official Real Book in 2004.

Conceived at a jam session a few years ago, jazz musicians here in Alaska have been floating the idea of coming together to create Alaska's own Real Book, of music written by local musicians and composers.

Like the other Real Books before it, The Alaska Real Book is meant to be a resource for all, as a way to begin to organize and standardize a piece of the local jazz music scene, for all to share.

"Traditionally, jazz musicians have relied on well-known and standard repertoire for education and collective (performative) improvisation. The Alaska Real Book will build community, bringing musicians of all ages together to play each other's songs as well as others from composers around the state," said Alaska Real Book editor and local musician, Cameron Cartland in a recent interview.

Fellow educator and musician Michael Dickerson already has a lot of ideas on how he plans to use it. "(A book like this) means when I play a gig around town, I can call on tunes that connect with this place. When I play out of town, I can bring something that represents this place. Perhaps most importantly, it means that Alaskan musicians have and value our own voices (in this scene)."

The Real Book also serves to help pass that value and voice on to the next generation. Numerous music educators have already expressed excitement in getting to use the Alaska Real Book as a teaching tool. As long-time Alaska musician and educator, Rick Zelinsky put it, "It basically becomes another textbook."

Fellow musician and educator John Damberg expanded on that point, "I can put a piece by Herbie Hancock and a piece from the Alaska Real Book on the stand for someone, and they hold the same weight. If I go into a school, I can put down my song from the Alaska Real Book and say, 'I wrote this. Let's play it.' "

The Alaska Real Book serves as a way to pass the musical heritage of Alaskan jazz to the next generation. A resource like this creates ample opportunity for shared space and learning, and begins to build bridges between musicians, educators, and community members of all generations in communities all over the state.

This year, one of the major organizations behind the Alaska Real Book, Spenard Jazz Fest, is dedicating a majority of its event-season to beginning to build the community behind the book. This began this past weekend with a hosted panel of Alaska Real Book composers, local music educators, and an audience of Spenard Jazz Fest members playing compositions from the Book, and talking about what it means to them and their hopes going forward. The event also kicked off Spenard Jazz Fest's JazzEd season, leading up to Spenard Jazz Fest 2021 this summer. JazzEd continues on February 27th and March 20th, culminating on International Jazz Day, April 30th with the official launch of the Alaska Real Book.

All events are free to festival members, and currently scheduled to happen online. More details on obtaining your own copy of the Alaska Real Book will be announced soon. More information can be found on spenardjazzfest.org, as well as @spenardjazzfest on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.