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### A Note-Worthy Exhibit

I have never been to the Apollo Theater in Harlem. I have never stepped inside a jazz or piano bar. I have never even seen a live jazz performance. However, I have seen an extraordinary number of movies and I confess to listening to a playlist of 1940s jazz while I write this review. While I listen to Dizzy Gillespie's leaping melodies and featured riffs amidst the constant bass notes and cymbals tapping the beat, I can only imagine a performance in a nightclub where everyone in the band is having the time of their lives. The trumpet player interrupts the trombone player's solo with one of his own and the beat is so infectious that many of the audience members are dancing along. While this is what I imagine the Apollo Theater must have been like in the 1940s, I cannot say for certain. However, I can confirm that Santa Clara University's on-campus art museum, the de Saisset, currently showcases an exhibit called *Jazz Greats: Classic Photographs*, which captures the feeling of walking into a piano bar and history at the same time.

As soon as you step inside the de Saisset, the first thing you will see is a red curtain behind a silver microphone and sign reading "Live at the Alcove." Only a few steps forward, and the melodies of Miles Davis are audible. The clearer the tunes get, the closer you are to a room lined in black and white images of jazz stars and their audiences. These gelatin silver prints lent from the Bank of America collection showcase jazz pioneers from Cab Calloway visiting schoolchildren to Marylou Williams between performances and feature the work of fifteen photographers. While the phonograph playing a Miles Davis record may seem like a small touch,

it sets the mood and transports you to the Apollo in the 1940s. In addition, the rooms are minimalistically designed with a monochrome interior and soft lighting to give the exhibit a touch of sophistication.

Among the thirty-four images hosted at the de Saisset, one of Louis Armstrong in a Seattle hotel room is especially notable. While Mr. Armstrong himself may have seen trees of green and red roses too, Milton J. Hinton's black and white candid of him offers a view of natural beauty among human constructions. Many people will often recall a singer or an actor in the middle of their performance, remembering them as part of a song or as a specific character, but this 1953 shot shows a man who has finally earned his break. Mr. Armstrong is surrounded in his small room with three record players and several bottles of beer. He is not holding a trumpet—though there is one in the background—and he is not wearing a tuxedo. Rather, he wears his glasses and an old checked shirt, but he is no less happy sitting in a cramped hotel room than he appears on stage while crooning “La Vie En Rose.” Despite the lack of color in the photograph, the honest smile on Mr. Armstrong's face feels as if he is genuinely looking at you, reassuring you that he would not trade his musician's life for anything, even though he travels from place to place, lives out of a suitcase, and survives on cheap beer and barely decent hotel food. That love of life and love of work is what sets jazz apart from many other genres of music and what makes this piece an especially important inclusion in the de Saisset's exhibit.



**MILTON J. HINTON (AMERICAN, 1910-2000)**  
***LOUIS ARMSTRONG, HOTEL ROOM, SEATTLE, 1953***

Gelatin silver print

Bank of America Collection

Take a couple steps to the right and you ought to come across William Gottlieb's portrait of Ella Fitzgerald accompanied by Dizzy Gillespie. Though this mid-performance shot does not contain all the energy present in jazz music, it captures the emotion—the heart and soul—of jazz. In the print, Ms. Fitzgerald clutches the microphone tightly, eyes closed, crooning a tune while Dizzy Gillespie looks on in awe. Listen to any of Ms. Fitzgerald's songs and a similar look will come over you because no matter the tempo, jazz is delightfully infectious and she pours so much feeling into every cadence, every note. Gottlieb's print is incredibly expressive: Ms. Fitzgerald must be singing something slow, like "That's My Desire" because there is no hint of

her swaying. Furthermore, her closed eyes reveal her savoring of the moment. She sings for an audience, and for just a short amount of time, that includes you. This black and white candid provides a look into what one of Ms. Fitzgerald's performances would have been like: genuine and incredibly heartfelt. Like Louis Armstrong, Ms. Fitzgerald's portrait exudes her love of her line of work. The utter surety and trust she places in the music and the accompanying band may not be evident in a smile, but in her posture. There is no place she would rather be.



**WILLIAM GOTTLIEB (AMERICAN, 1917-2006)**  
**ELLA FITZGERALD PERFORMS WITH THE DIZZY GILLESPIE BIG BAND**  
**(DIZZY ON RIGHT), NYC, 1947**

Gelatin Silver Print

Bank of America Collection

What makes jazz so special is that the people who play it love to do it and cannot imagine themselves doing anything else. This is a common theme among all the photographs in the *Jazz Greats* collection, as you can tell with one look that jazz is not only a large and important part of each artist's life, but that jazz *is* their lives. As a casual listener of the genre, I think seeing this visualization in such an exhibit helps capture the vibe of a jazz performer's life, both on and off the stage. And just like any jazz concert, no two pieces are alike, in subject or rhythm and tone. Jazz lover, art appreciator, or none of the above, this de Saisset exhibit is worth a trip and will be on display until June 16, 2018.