



Really the Blues

Joseph Koenig

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Paris, 1941. American jazz musician Eddie Piron has lived in the city of light since before the war began. But Paris under occupation is not what it once was, and things are looking a lot darker for a man like Eddie. The great jazz artists of the day, like Django Reinhardt, are lying low or being swept away under the racial policies of the Nazis. But the SS has a paradoxical taste for the "negermusik" and their favorite gathering place is La Caverne Negre, where Eddie leads the band.

One night the drummer for "Eddie et Ses Anges", an indifferent musician but an essential part of the band, disappears. When his body is found in the Seine the next day, Eddie becomes entangled in the murder investigation. He soon finds himself in the clutches of a mercenary intelligence broker who discovers why Eddie Piron is really in Paris—and what he's really hiding.

Really the Blues Details

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From Reader Review Really the Blues for online ebook

John Pringle says

I liked the setting and thought many of the characters were well developed. Although I do think Major Weiler and Colonel Heinz Maier are by far the best things about the book. When either of these are around, the story improves. Unpleasant scenes like the one in Chapter 14, when Maier questions the prisoner Professor Smits, highlight Joseph Koenig's talents as a writer. As for the main character, Eddie Piron, Maier's focus on tracking him down has the effect of making Piron seem even more interesting than he might otherwise be. Nevertheless, this is another good book from Koenig.

Jim Willse says

Interesting idea, awful execution. Garbled and unreadable.

Kay says

A Mystery in Paris in 1941--jazz musicians from the US and chief among them is band leader and great trumpet player Eddie Piron, who left Louisiana partly because of the "one-drop" of black blood discriminatory laws. In Paris since before the war, all was well until the Nazis occupied and went after so many people, and now it is a sewer of cruelty and fear. Eddie and Ses Anges suffer, everyone suffers. Django is mentioned more than once. A hard-to-read piece of history but a superb story. Read it and weep.

Al says

Ok fiction Paris during WWII. A jazz musician fools the nazis

Barbara says

Meh. Jazz trumpeter in WWII Paris.

Col says

Synopsis/blurb.....

Eddie Piron thinks that performing in jazz clubs in Nazi-occupied Paris is bad enough, but when the drummer in his band is found facedown in the Seine and the police start asking questions, he realizes that his trouble is only beginning Paris, 1941. American jazz musician Eddie Piron has lived in the city of light since

before the war began. But Paris under occupation is not what it once was, and things are looking a lot darker for a man like Eddie. The great jazz artists of the day, like Django Reinhardt, are lying low or being swept away under the racial policies of the Nazis. But the SS has a paradoxical taste for the "negermusik" and their favorite gathering place is La Caverne Negre, where Eddie leads the band. One night the drummer for "Eddie et Ses Anges", an indifferent musician but an essential part of the band, disappears. When his body is found in the Seine the next day, Eddie becomes entangled in the murder investigation. He soon finds himself in the clutches of a mercenary intelligence broker who discovers why Eddie Piron is really in Paris and what he's really hiding.

My take.....

Joseph Koenig's debut novel Floater was one of those first crime reads that helped hook me on the genre. Floater was originally published in 1986 and was nominated for an Edgar. In between 1986 and 1993, Koenig had 4 books published before disappearing from the shelves until 2004 when he returned with a novel titled, Osud. (Osud is the only one of his books that doesn't sit on my shelves and was apparently released by Vantage Press, who were a "vanity publisher" until closing doors a year or two ago.) After this he vanished until 2012 when Hard Case Crime released False Negative. After only a two year gap this time around he's back with Really the Blues.

Set in Paris in 1941, we are in the company of American jazz musician Eddie Piron and life under the Nazi occupation. Eddie isn't too interested in the politics of the time as long as he can play his music and spend some time with his rich girlfriend. Events conspire to change his outlook and bring him some unwanted attention from the occupiers. The drummer in his band disappears and turns up dead; its murder arranged to look like suicide. The drummer's girlfriend dies next in a gas explosion, or does she? Add a blackmailer to the mix, threatening to reveal Eddie's history to the occupiers and his beau and life in war-torn Paris is losing some of its appeal.

With Eddie's girlfriend pregnant and harbouring a few right-wing views. It's an uncomfortable time when he reveals his bloodline – he's an octoroon - and whilst he might be able to "pass" successfully in Paris, back in New Orleans – a city he left in a hurry – he's subject to the same laws and discrimination as other non-whites. His girlfriend doesn't take the news well and Eddie life takes a much greater turn for the worse as a result.

With a target on his back and a limited number of friends; the last thing Eddie needs is a visit from the resistance and a plea for help.

Great story, interesting main character in Eddie, a fantastic setting in occupied Paris, with the portrayal of life as a Parisian under occupation; the struggle to survive, the routine informing against strangers in a bid to curry favour from the Germans and the machinations of the SS adding to the drama. The supporting cast of characters, in particular the SS odd couple of Colonel Maier and Major Weiler topped the book off wonderfully.

Drama, murder, music, intrigue, race, politics and history all blended expertly to produce an amazing read.

5 from 5 – welcome back Joseph Koenig!

2015 might be the time to dig out some of his backlist!

Really the Blues was published in August by Pegasus Crime. Thanks to Iris Blasi at the publishers for my

copy.

Harvey says

Started out interesting...good atmosphere of Nazi-occupied Paris...but ultimately disappointing. Plot points get lost or shuffled; Protagonist (jazz trumpet player Eddie) is just too innocent.

Chris says

Paris, 1941. The United States is not at war, which means ex-pat jazz musician Eddie Piron can live somewhat comfortably under Nazi occupation. His band Eddie et Ses Anges is a big hit at La Caverne Negre, where the SS's paradoxical love of "negermusik" outweighs the racial policies they've sworn to uphold. But all is not well within the band. Danish drummer Borge Janssen may not be the best, but any jazz musician is valuable in a town where such skills are in short supply. When Janssen abruptly decides to quit, he and Eddie get into a scuffle, with a punch compromising Eddie's lip and preventing him from playing the trumpet for a while.

The next day, Janssen's broken body is pulled out of the Seine; investigators reel Eddie in, where he learns that Janssen's live-in girlfriend, Anne Cartier, stuck her head in an oven and caused their apartment to blow up. And from there, Eddie's comfortable life is upended. First comes mercenary intelligence broker Thad Simone and his girlfriend Mavis, hoping to sell the secrets of occupied Paris to the US government—blackmailing Eddie in the process, once Thad finds out the complex circumstances that caused Eddie to leave the States. Then there's the two Nazi investigators, Maj. Weiler and Col. Maier, hoping to root out Janssen's co-conspirators before they bring revolutionary thoughts to the minds of the "docile" French. It's the reappearance of Anne Cartier that clinches it: Eddie is in the midst of something bigger than himself, desperately trying to keep his own secrets hidden while he's dragged into the conspiracies of others.

The atmosphere in *Really The Blues* is a lush portrait of Paris in 1941, a world colored gray from cigarette smoke, Nazi feldgrau, and French defeat. As something of a World War buff I was pleased to see the fine attention to detail, which I think helped build the novel's rich atmosphere and gave it a ring of authenticity. The characters are well-defined and the dialogue can crackle, yet it feels cut from the past and not constructed in the modern-day. The cover and design—especially that art deco title font—add to the atmosphere. And there's numerous references to the hits and performers of the jazz era.

The other strong element is race and race relations; it's something of a minor spoiler (though the book reveals it very early on), but one of the big secrets Eddie grapples with is that of his race. He's light-skinned enough to pass as a Caucasian, but his Louisiana Creole heritage and dark-skinned mother label him as a Negro back in the US. Having fled to Europe to start a new life, Eddie sees it crumble thanks to Thad Simone's interference and the Nazi's oppressive racial policies. And while the novel doesn't directly state it, it's fascinating to see the parallels between the American treatment of race with that of the Nazis—an uncomfortable contrast, given the point in history. The irony is that Eddie fled the racial intolerance of the Deep South only to find himself hiding out in the open, under the eyes of watchful Germans hunting other Caucasians—communists, Jews, gypsies, and other "undesirables."

Though the mystery plot is pretty good and the characters are nuanced and well-realized, the strengths of *Really The Blues*—the rich, moody atmosphere and thoughtful look at race in the 1940s—take it into another class of novels. The plot is subtle but crackles with energy, as the walls begin to close in on Eddie Piron, trapped between his past, the Nazis, death and lies, with no easy exit—so, he makes his own way out at the novel's thrilling climax. Eddie is a complex character, the perfect protagonist to lead us down the dark alleys of a shattered city. If you don't mind the subtleties and complexities, the often bleak outcomes in this world of gray, I'd recommend you follow Eddie down that road.

(Full review found [here](#).)

Thanks to Iris Blasi at Pegasus Crime for a review copy of this book.

Eileen Charbonneau says

Details, crisp and crackling dialogue, and vibrant characters bring occupied Paris and her citizens to life. The story flies along at a breathless pace as tension mounts, builds, and never lets up. An instant classic noir. Highly recommended.

Rose says

Well-realized setting of occupied France before America's entry into the war, and good characters although the plot could have been a little stronger. The unusual inclusion of American treatment of race contrasted with the Nazis made it an interesting and different read.

Richard says

Started off strong with a cool atmosphere, but then it fell apart and became a real slog with ultimately uninteresting characters.
