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Autore	Gioia Ted
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Sommario/riassunto	Taking a wide-ranging approach rare in jazz criticism, Ted Gioia draws upon fields as disparate as literary criticism, art history, sociology, and aesthetic philosophy in order to place jazz within the turbulent cultural environment of the twentieth century. He argues that because improvisation--the essence of jazz--must often fail under the pressure of on-the-spot creativity, we should view jazz as an "imperfect art" and base our judgments of it on an "aesthetics of imperfection." Incorporating the thought of such seminal thinkers as Walter Benjamin, Jose Ortega y Gasset, and Roland Barth