

February 1984

Vol. 3 No. 7

State of the Arts

A friend of mine attended a recording session in England recently. The group to be recorded was using drums. This disconcerted the engineer. He had never recorded "real" drums.

If you are not up on current practices in pop music, you may not know that the drum machine is in widespread use. This gadget, or gadgets, for there are various brands, synthesizes the sound of drums. When one first encounters a drum machine, it seems interesting, but after a while you begin to be aware of its monotonous sameness. It is a dead thing. This is sound made by a machine, not by man.

This problem, you will be happy to know, has been eliminated by the introduction of a further gadget that programs into the sound a certain chance variety.

It is called the Humanizer.

Life Among the Cartons

SANTA MONICA, CALIFORNIA

"I think," Charlie Lourie said, "that Michael and I are out of our minds to be doing what we're doing."

Michael is Michael Cuscuna, and what they are doing is trying against odds and good judgment to found yet another jazz label, one based, furthermore, on several seemingly absurd principles. Their albums cannot be purchased in stores, only by mail. They are pressed in limited editions. The pressings are excellent and costly to make. The company is indifferent to commercial trends. It has no employees, excepting its owners, and no office but Lourie's three-bedroom apartment, a block inland from the steep bluffs that overlook the Pacific Coast highway and the great metallic ocean. Lourie's tolerant wife, Fran, lives with a living room piled high with cartons of records. The balcony is *hors de combat*: it is crammed with cardboard mailing cartons.

"But if there's a god," Lourie said, sipping a California red wine from a stem glass, "and I have been put on this earth for a purpose, this is it. I am doing what I want to do. I am not even making ends meet, but I'm being helped by family." His accent is faded Boston; Fran's is New York City. They are attractive people, bright, clever, questing, humorous, indignant, moral, very much alive. Their son, David, three, ballocks to the breeze, and daughter, Sarah, seven, play and vie for attention among the cartons. Charlie, forty-four, is six feet tall, with a strong face and a full head of dark hair.

The label is Mosaic. It does boxed multiple-disc jazz reissues of considerable distinction, with elaborate booklet documentation. To date:

The Complete Pacific Jazz Small Group Recordings of Art Pepper, three-disc set, \$25.50, edition limited to 7500.

The Complete Blue Note and Pacific Jazz Recordings of Clifford Brown, five discs, \$42.50, 7500.

The Complete Blue Note 1940s Recordings of Ike Quebec and John Hardee, four discs, \$34.00, 5000.

The Complete Recordings of the Port of Harlem Jazzmen (Sidney Bechet, Frankie Newton, J.C. Higginbotham, Albert Ammons, Meade Lux Lewis, Big Sid Catlett, Teddy Bunn and

Johnny Williams), one disc, \$8.50, 5000.

The Complete Blue Note Recordings of Thelonious Monk, four discs, \$34.00, 7500.

The Complete Pacific Jazz and Capitol Recordings of the Original Gerry Mulligan Quartet and Tentette with Chet Baker, five discs, \$42.50, 7500.

The Complete Blue Note Recordings of Albert Ammons and Meade Lux Lewis, three discs, \$25.50, 5000.

(The prices do not include postage.)

Future collections will be devoted to Sidney Bechet, Bud Powell, Edmund Hall, and James P. Johnson. Negotiations are almost completed to permit the reissue of all the Nat Cole jazz recordings from the Capitol archives, including the *After Midnight* twelve-inch album with Sweets Edison and Stuff Smith and the earlier *Manhattan Serenade* ten-inch LP with Jack Costanza, one of Cole's best piano recordings, unobtainable now for more than thirty years. When Cole became Capitol's star male singer, the company simply shelved a good many jazz recordings that were in the can. These will be issued in the Mosaic collection.

That's the good news. Here's the bad news. Of the company's first three releases, numbering 20,000 pressings, they sold in fourteen months only 4,000 copies. "You wonder if anybody's out there," Charlie Lourie said.

But has the company advertised? Yes. In every jazz magazine, in the United States and abroad. Has it had publicity — good reviews, that sort of thing? "Incredible. The writers have been wonderful to us. The Monk package was voted Number One reissue for 1984 in the *Down Beat* Critics' Poll. The *Village Voice* polled ten jazz musicians and critics for their desert island lists. We made six of those lists. *Newsweek* called the Ammons-Lewis package one of the top ten albums of the year. I told Michael, 'You had better put everything aside, because they're going to be bringing the mail to us in sacks.' We got maybe fifty orders out of it."

Aha. Lourie and Cuscuna are two of those naive good souls who love jazz but don't know much about the record business, right? Wrong.

Charles Lourie graduated from the New England Conservatory on woodwinds. (His wife was a theory major; she has a solid knowledge of music.) He played with the Boston Symphony, the Boston Pops, the Herb Pomeroy Band, various pick-up jazz and classical groups, and pit bands in musical theater. Then he went to work for Columbia Records, in advertising, to become in time director of marketing for Epic Records. He moved to California to be director of marketing for Blue Note Records. From there he went to Warner Bros., to be director of the jazz department. "Such as it was," he adds ruefully.

Cuscuna, who is thirty-six, graduated from the University of Pennsylvania. He was a radio personality in Philadelphia, then on WPOJ in New York City. He became a writer, researcher, discographer, and producer of jazz recordings from Dave Brubeck to Anthony Braxton. "He's a phenomenal individual," Lourie said. "I could go on about him to the point of the ridiculous." Cuscuna had compiled a great deal of information about the Blue Note archives when he and Lourie met. Together they started the acclaimed Blue Note reissue series.

Lourie and Cuscuna are currently talking to CBS and RCA

about the musical treasures hidden away in their respective vaults — much of which Frank Driggs was reissuing on RCA's Bluebird label when Ken Glancy was fired as president of the company, along with Driggs and just about everybody else in production, thereby bringing the Bluebird program to a halt.

"It took fourteen months of negotiations with EMI to get the rights to our first three albums," Charlie said. "Now the companies are coming to us. That's nice."

When the American record industry faced its famous and fake vinyl shortage, companies began to get away with using ground vinyl from scrapped recordings in their mix. That was when American pressings began sounding as if they are made of cement. How does Mosaic get its excellent surfaces?

"We use nothing but virgin vinyl and the discs are thicker than the industry standard," Charlie said. "Most important, our pressings are done in El Segundo by a man named Bill Smith, who works in a warehouse with five old hand presses of the kind that went out with buggy whips. He's just an old-world artisan who gives a damn."

Then, entering on the down side of the mood, he said, "I'm afraid art and commerce don't mix. Our troubles really started with the Beatles, when the record companies discovered what popular music could do commercially. Do you listen to KKKGO?"

"Not often," I said. KKKGO is the Los Angeles "jazz" station. It has play lists and other practices and paraphernalia of a pop music station. It leans to a kind of homogenized commercial "jazz" and is, throughout most of its day, relentlessly bland.

"I'm enough of a businessman," Charlie said, "to know that KKKGO has to play what it does to survive. The only stations doing good jazz programming are the Public Broadcasting stations."

For overseas readers, it is perhaps necessary to explain that the Public Broadcasting System is a loosely-affiliated group of radio and television stations supported partly by grants and partly by listener donations. They are chronically short of money and the broadcasters are paid poorly if at all. The stations are not supported out of general tax revenues and bear little resemblance to the BBC and similar institutions extant in every country in the civilized world except the United States. They nonetheless do the best broadcasting to be heard in the U.S.

Why have Lourie and Cuscuna deliberately avoided conventional store distribution? The reason is in the nature of the record industry itself, and in fact is at the heart of the major cultural crisis now faced by the American society.

The record industry has long maintained a policy of accepting as "returns" all unsold records. This is in keeping with practices in book and magazine distribution. If a record label gets a hit, it must press records to put in the stores to take advantage of the impulse to buy before it passes. The records that do not sell are shipped back. In essence, then, all records are sold on consignment.

Small independent record labels are at the bottom of the priority list of the big record store chains through which the vast majority of records are sold. And these stores are interested in fast-moving low-inventory hits, not music of enduring value and long shelf-life.

Small independent shops are hard-put to stay in business against such competition, and the problem is worse for stores devoted to music of high quality. As much as the independent label owner might wish to be supportive of these outlets by letting his records sit there, his investment in the pressings makes this impractical. That is to say, no matter how much faith he has in his product, he cannot make great quantities of records and let them gather dust until the lover of good music, browsing in the bins, eventually discovers them.

"Now," said Lourie, "if you do get a record that sells well, the next problem is collecting your money." Translation: much of the

money is stolen in small shavings all along the distribution line. This is a major element in the appeal of mail order. When Mosaic sells one of its packages, at least it does get the money, and all of it. Furthermore, it gets the retail price, minus of course its not inconsiderable costs. (The company has yet to receive a bad check.)

Lourie is a man in whom the practical former marketing director wars with the idealistic musician. Having, by late afternoon, recounted all the reasons why Mosaic is bound to fail, he said, "I have never been happier doing anything in my life. The returns aren't in on this company yet. And Michael and I are totally committed to it."

Some attractive fragrances were drifting through the apartment. There, amid the record cartons, Fran was making dinner.

(Inquiries should be directed to Mosaic Records, 1341 Ocean Avenue, Suite 135, Santa Monica, California 90401.)

Re: Person I Knew

When Modigliani died, the prices of his paintings shot up overnight, and now are astronomical. In a delicious example of funereal opportunism, his home town of Livorno, Italy, which ignored him when he was alive, is dredging its canal in search of sculptures he deep-sixed there one night in 1914 in disgust with this aspect of his own work. If any are found, someone will make a lot of money.

That an artist's work rises in "value" with his death is inevitable, but the record industry is outstanding in the exploitation of necrophilia, as witness the cases of Janis Joplin, John Lennon, and Elvis Presley. Nor has jazz been free of this kind of avarice.

If it is true that an artist has a right to be judged by his best work, it is only just that in most instances the recordings a jazz musician has rejected be left in obscurity. He clearly did not want to be represented by them. To issue flawed or interrupted takes to milk a few more dollars out of the departed is questionable practice.

No such unfortunate story attaches to the two albums producer Helen Keane has derived from tapes of two concerts played Paris November 26, 1979, by the Bill Evans Trio. They are not only not inferior Evans. They are, in my opinion, the best and highest examples of his extraordinary talent to be found on record.

It is difficult for me to write about Bill. His life, Helen's, and my own were too closely involved for too long a time. For the last two years I have been trying without success to find a way to write an extended portrait of Bill.

I had not listened to Bill very much in his last years. And what these albums, recorded less than ten months before his death, prove beyond question is that he had begun to evolve and grow again, which is unusual in artists in any field. Artists tend to find their methods early and remain faithful to them, which sometimes leads in actors to the kind of mannered and self-satirizing performance so sadly typified by John Barrymore at the end. It is rare to see sudden growth in older jazz musicians, as we have in the case of Dizzy Gillespie since he changed his embouchure two or three years ago. Bill, on the clear evidence of these albums, was in his most fertile period when we lost him.

Jazz is not the ceaseless fount of pure invention that some of its annotators believe it or would like it to be. "They think," Ray Brown said dryly, "we just roll out of bed and play a D-major scale." Every good jazz musician develops his own methods — approaches to scales, chord voicings, ways of playing arpeggios, rhythmic figures. If a critic likes a certain musician, he will

graciously refer to these recurring patterns, if at all, as the man's licks. If he doesn't like the playing, he will draw attention to them as cliches.

Bill too had his cliches. But they were very much *his*. Many pianists have copped them, and still more have tried. He was far and away the most influential jazz pianist after Bud Powell. And he used his various configurations in interesting combinations. There were, however, times when he seemed stuck in them. Had I not known of what he was capable, I would doubtless have found these performances marvelous. But his work at such times bored me, a fact I always tried to conceal from him, although he probably knew. Perhaps he too was bored by it.

I first heard him on the album *Everybody Digs Bill Evans*, which remains a landmark. Oscar Peterson raised the level of playing the piano in jazz to the proficiency long the norm in classical music. It was Lalo Schifrin who made this remarkably apt observation: "It was said in their own time that Liszt conquered the piano, Chopin seduced it. Oscar is our Liszt and Bill is our Chopin." The poetry of Bill's playing compels the comparison to Chopin, whose music, incidentally, Bill played exquisitely. Oscar brought jazz piano to the bravura level of the great Romantic pianists. Bill, who said he was strongly influenced by Oscar, brought to bear coloristic devices and voicings and shadings from composers usually considered post-Romantic, including Debussy, Ravel, Poulenc, and Scriabin, and maybe Alban Berg. After listening to a test pressing of *Conversations with Myself* that I had sent him, Glenn Gould phoned to say of Bill, "He's the Scriabin of jazz." I had no idea whether Bill was even that familiar with Scriabin, but sure enough, he turned out to be a Scriabin buff, and gave me a soft and enormously enlightening dissertation on that Russian, whose mysticism seemingly appealed to a like element in Bill's own half-Russian half-Welsh soul. (One of my pleasant memories is of introducing Bill to Glenn. They so admired each other.)

Everybody Digs Bill Evans was a hauntingly lyrical album. It managed to blend sophisticated methods with a trusting youthful emotionality, almost like the music of Grieg. I was discussing Grieg with Bill once, specifically the lovely *Holberg Suite*. "I went through a phase of pretending I didn't like Grieg," I said. "So did I," Bill said. And, anticipating his answer, I said, "I know what happened to me, but what happened to you?" "The intellectuals got to me," he said. Bill and I shared a distrust of intellectualism.

The mood of *Everybody Digs*, that springtime lilac poignancy, is muted in his later albums. There are moments when it comes forth, as in the astonishing *Love Theme from "Spartacus"* track in *Conversations*. But generally Bill's development was in the direction of intelligence (which is not the same thing as intellectualism). Bill knew, and even acknowledged once in an interview, that there was something special in *Everybody Digs* that had been lost. And he seemed to want to combine both qualities.

Bill was one of those wonderfully co-ordinated people. His posture and his bespectacled mien made him seem almost fragile, but stripped, he was, at least in his thirties, strong and lean, with well-delineated musculature. He had played football in college, he was a superb driver with fine reflexes (who, like Glenn Gould, had a taste for snappy cars), he was a golfer of professional stature, and he was, by all testimony, a demon pool shark.

When he was young, he looked like some sort of sequestered and impractical scholastic. There is a heartbreaking photo of him on the cover of the famous Village Vanguard recordings, made for Riverside in 1961 and reissued on Milestone in 1973. Whether that photo was taken before or after the grim death of Scott LaFaro in an automobile accident ten days after the sessions, I do not know.

But there is something terribly vulnerable and sad in Bill's young, gentle, ingenuous face. I knew Scott LaFaro only slightly, through Bill, and I didn't like him. He seemed to me smug and self-congratulatory. But he was a brilliant bass player, as influential on his instrument as Bill was on his, and Bill always said Scott was not at all like that when you got past the surface, which I of course never did. The shock of Scott's death stayed with Bill for years, and he felt vaguely guilty about it. This is not speculation. He told me so. He felt that he had made insufficient use of the time he and Scott had had together. He was like a man with a lost love, always looking to find its replacement. He had a deep rapport with Eddie Gomez, but perhaps he came as close to replacing Scott in his life as he ever would in the young Marc Johnson, at the end.

The best thing for being sad is to learn something.

— Merlin, in *The Once and Future King*

In any event, to look into that face, with its square short small-town-America 1950s haircut, is terribly revealing, particularly when you contrast it with Bill's later photos. He looked like the young WASP in those days, which he never was — he was a Celtic Slav — but in the later years, when he had grown a beard and left his hair long in some sort of final symbolic departure from Plainfield, New Jersey, he looked more and more Russian, which his mother was. She used to read his Russian fan mail to him, and answer it. Russian jazz fans, I am told, think of him as their own.

His speech was low level but he was highly literate and articulate. He was expert on the novels of Thomas Hardy, and he was fascinated with words and letters and their patterns. *Re: Person I Knew*, one of his best-known compositions, which is recapitulated yet again in the second of the Paris albums, is an anagram on the name of Orrin Keepnews, who produced for Riverside all Bill's early albums and was one of his first champions. Another of Bill's titles, *N.Y.C.'s No Lark*, which it certainly isn't, is an anagram on the name of Sonny Clark, whom Bill said was one of his influences. He also, by the way, said that the Toronto pianist Bill Clifton was one of his influences. But Clifton, who committed suicide, never recorded. He simply was one of Bill's innumerable pianist friends. I've heard tapes of Clifton, who was much older than Bill, and you can hear a certain seed that grew in Bill's own playing.

Bill's knowledge of the entire range of jazz piano was phenomenal. Benny Golson says that when he first heard Bill — they were both in their teens — he played like, of all people, Milt Buckner. One night late at the Village Vanguard in New York, when there was almost no audience, Bill played about ten minutes of "primitive" blues. "I can really play that stuff," he said afterwards with a sly kind of little-boy grin. And he could.

And he had phenomenal technique. I doubt if anyone in the history of jazz piano had more. But he never, never showed off those chops for the mere display of them. He kept technique in total subservience to musicality. But he assuredly had it. I once saw him sight-reading Rachmaninoff preludes at tempo.

One of the greatest glories of his playing was his tone. Trilingual people will often be found to speak their third language with the accent of the second. I suspect this phenomenon may carry over into music. Oscar Peterson first played trumpet, which may account for the soaring nature of his playing and that shining projecting sound. Bill was a fine flutist, although he rarely played the instrument in the later years.

The level of his dynamics was usually low, like his speech. He was a very soft player. But within that range, his playing was full of subtle dynamic shadings and constantly shifting colors. Some

physicists have argued that a pianist cannot have a personal and individual "tone" because of the nature of the instrument, which consists of a bunch of felt hammers hitting strings. So much for theory. It is all in *how* the hammers are made to strike the strings, as well of course as the more obvious effects of pedaling, of which Bill was a master. One of the great piano teachers (and one of the unsung influences on jazz) was Serge Chaloff's mother, all of whose students, including Dave MacKay and Mike Renzi, have beautiful tone in common. Mike showed me how he gets it: it is a matter of pulling the finger toward you as it touches the key, drawing the sound out of the instrument, as it were. It is a comparatively flat-fingered approach, as opposed to the vertical hammer-stroke attack with which so many German piano teachers tensed up the hands and ruined the playing of generations of American children. Bill used to argue with me that his playing was not all that flat-fingered, but I sat low by the keyboard on many occasions and watched, and it certainly looked that way to me. On one such occasion, I kidded him about his rocking a finger on a key on a long note at the end of a phrase. After all, the hammer has already left the string: one has no further physical contact with the sound. "Don't you know the piano has no vibrato?" I said.

"Yes," Bill responded, "but trying for it affects what comes before it in the phrase." That borders on the mystical, but he was right. Dizzy Gillespie and Lalo Schifrin were once in Erroll Garner's room at the Chateau Marmont in Los Angeles. Erroll was putting golfballs into a cup against the wall. Dizzy asked if he might try it, took Erroll's putter, and sank one ball after another, to the amazement of Erroll and Lalo, who asked if he had played a lot of golf. He said he had never done it before. How, then, was he doing it? "I just imagine," Birks said, "that I'm the ball and I want to be in the cup." He with a golfball and Bill with a vibrato influencing events in time already past were, deliberately or no, practicing pure Zen.

Bill did not always have that tone. Some time before he recorded *Everybody Digs*, he took a year off and went into comparative reclusion to rebuild his tone, with which he was dissatisfied. I doubt that he consciously sought to be flute-like, but some ideal derived from playing that other instrument surely was in his conception. Whatever the process, the result of that year was the golden sound that in recent years has often been emulated though never equalled.

And that year was typical of him.

He made absolutely no claims for himself. Orrin Keepnews had a hard time talking him into making his first album as a leader, *New Jazz Conceptions*, recorded before *Everybody Digs*, in 1957, when Bill was about twenty-eight. It is, incidentally, a remarkable album even now, a highly imaginative excursion through bebop, in which we hear strong hints of the Bill Evans that he would within two years become. When Orrin gathered glowing testimonials from Miles Davis, Ahmad Jamal and others for the cover of *Everybody Digs*, Bill said, "Why didn't you get one from my mother?" But what he was — an emergent genius — was apparent to every musician with ears, though credit for the earliest discovery no doubt goes to Mundell Lowe, who heard him in New Orleans when Bill was still an undergraduate at Southeastern

Louisiana College, and hired him for summer jobs.

Bill said once, "I had to work harder at music than most cats, because you see, man, I don't have very much talent."

The remark so dumfounded me that I did not retort to it for about ten years, when I reminded him of it.

"But it's true," he said. "Everybody talks about my harmonic conception. I worked very hard at that because I didn't have very good ears."

"Maybe working at it *is* the talent," I said.

Bill once said to me that despite the obvious differences in their playing, he and Oscar Peterson played alike in that their work was pianistic. This is a crucial point. The influence of Earl Hines had become widespread, resulting in the phenomenon of so-called one-handed pianists, that is to say pianists playing "horn lines" in the right hand accompanied by laconic chords in the left. It was an approach to piano that reached a zenith in bebop, but for all the inventiveness of some of these players, it was an approach that eschewed three-quarters of what the instrument was capable of.

The piano is not naturally an ensemble instrument. It is a solo instrument. It has no place in the traditional symphony orchestra, although some Twentieth Century composers occasionally use it for color as a member of the percussion section. It is wheeled onstage as a guest, as it were, for concertos. Even in chamber music, it always sounds a little like an outsider. Gerry Mulligan had good reason to leave it out of his quartet — and precedent in the marching bands of New Orleans. Played to its full potential, the piano overwhelms everything around it, and so, in jazz, it must in a context of horns be played with exceptional restraint. The perfect orchestral jazz pianist was Count Basie, who understood this and actually restricted a not inconsiderable technique.

If the piano is to be what it inherently is, it must be taken away from the horns, allowed to do its solo turn, like a great magician or juggler. It is not by its nature an ensemble actor but the spell-binding story-teller. It is Homeric. Because jazz is a music whose tradition is so heavily rooted in horns, the instrument is therefore very much misunderstood, which fact results in those strange comments that Oscar Peterson plays "too much", the logical extension of which is that Bach writes too much. Art Tatum so thoroughly understood the nature of the problem that he, preferred, I am told, to play without a rhythm section. If, however, a pianist wants to partake of that special joy of making music with a rhythm section, the logical context is the trio, a format elected by Nat Cole in those too-few years before his success as a singer overwhelmed his career as a pianist.

Oscar Peterson changed the nature of jazz piano, and Bill changed it further. Oscar's sources were Tatum, Teddy Wilson, Nat Cole, Fats Waller, James P. Johnson, although an overlooked influence is that of his sister, Daisy, who taught him.

I once had to write an essay on Oscar for *Holiday* magazine in New York. I was musing on what Bill had said about the similarity in their playing. I realized that there were also similarities in personality, including a profound stubbornness. When Oscar has made up his mind to something, a tractor cannot budge him. And Bill was the same.

I noted that Oscar was born August 15. On a whim I phoned Bill — this was when he was living in Riverdale — and said, "What's your birthdate?"

"August 16," he said. "Why?"

"You're going to laugh," I said, and told him.

But he didn't laugh. He said, "I used to think there was nothing to it, but over the years I've noticed with my groups that the signs have often worked out. Leos do seem to be stubborn. You know," he said, naming a certain superb bassist whom he had fired, "he's a Leo. And he was always trying to run the group. I told him, 'Look,

Jazzletter is published twelve times a year at Ojai, California, 93023, and distributed by first class mail to the United States and Canada, air mail to other countries. Subscriptions are \$30 per year in U.S. currency for the United States and Canada, \$35 for other countries.

if you want to lead a trio, form your own.' But it didn't do any good, and I let him go." He paused a second, then said, "I'd never have a Leo in my trio."

I laughed out loud, partly at the sound of it and partly because he had in that generalization illustrated the very quality we were discussing. On the one hand, I cannot imagine that Bill would ever have rejected a man solely for his sun sign. On the other hand, as far as I know, Bill was ever afterwards the only Leo in that trio.

Bassist Marc Johnson and drummer Joe LaBarbera, who were with him at the end and in these Paris recordings, were beautifully sympathetic to Bill. Characteristically, he gave them much credit for what had happened in his playing, suggesting a direct relationship between this final trio and the one with LaFaro and Paul Motian.

The two Paris albums — whose covers, by the way, deserve graphic design awards — consist almost entirely of material he had recorded before, which gives us a chance to compare his early and late work. The first, Elektra Musician 60164-1, comprises *I Do It for Your Love*; *Quiet Now*, a Denny Zeitlin composition of which Bill was particularly fond; *Noelle's Theme*; *My Romance*, *I Love You Porgy*; *Up with the Lark* (a Kern tune; Bill had a flair for reviving forgotten gems); *All Mine*, and *Beautiful Love*. The second, Elektra Musician 60311-1-E, contains *Re: Person I Knew*; *Gary's Theme*, a Gary McFarland tune; three of his own tunes, *Letter to Evan* (his son); *34 Skiddoo*; *Laurie*; and the Miles Davis tune *Nardis*.

My Romance was in that first Riverside LP, *New Jazz Conceptions*, recorded when he was twenty-eight, uncertain of his worth, and uncomfortable with the praise that was being poured on him. He truly believed he didn't deserve it, as he said to me once in a long letter I lost in a fire, which is all the more unfortunate in that it was one of the most remarkable examples of self-analysis by an artist I have ever encountered. I vividly remember one line of it: "If people wouldn't believe I was a bum, I was determined to prove it." He never succeeded in proving any such thing to any of us.

That early *My Romance* is two choruses long, ballad tempo, without intro. He simply plays the tune, twice, solo, with minimal variation. But already there is that enormous control of the instrument, and those intelligent voice leadings — Bill loved the writing of Bob Farnon. To go from that version to the one in Paris twenty-two-and-a-half years later, is fascinating, and somewhat disturbing. The later version opens with a long intro that has only the most abstract relationship to the tune, as Bill moves through a series of chords that float ambiguously (to my ear at least) between A-flat and E-flat, then goes into the tune itself, in C, up-tempo, with rhythm section. It is like a sudden sunburst, so bright, and the audience applauds. C, incidentally, is the key of the early Riverside version. Bill was very fussy about keys. When he was taking on a new tune, he would try it out in all the keys — and such was his influence on other pianists that his (and my) friend Warren Bernardt learned Bill's *My Bells* with Bill's voicings in all twelve keys, as a discipline. In any case, *My Romance* stayed in C for all those years, but the last version is profoundly different, a distillation of years of musical wisdom, quite abstract, exploding with energy and life.

In the first album we hear a prodigy; in the Paris album we hear an old master. Bob Offergeld said to me once that revolutions in art do not come from the young upstarts but from old masters who have grown bored with their own proficiency. This is obvious in the work of Henry Moore, whose early sculptures are representational, excellent, and academic, and in the work of Beethoven, whose First Symphony echoes Mozart and whose late quartets foreshadow jazz, among other things. The change in

Bill's playing reminds me a little of the evolution of Rembrandt's brushwork, but even more of the development of Turner, whose representational landscapes gave way in his later years to something bordering on the non-objective. An exhibition of Turner's late work is startling for its modernity. In his seeking for light and pure color he anticipated the French Impressionists. Something like that happened to Bill's playing. What were once conspicuous and characteristic phrases, executed in some detail, have been condensed into quick slashes, elided into casual and passing comment in the search for something else, possibly even something beyond music. Everything about his playing has become condensed.

Phil Woods went into a fury a year or so ago when he read a critic's comment that Bill didn't swing. First of all, "swing" is a tricky verb as applied to music. What swings for one person may not swing for another, since the process involves a good deal of the subjective. It is impossible to state as an objective "fact" that something "doesn't" swing. What Bill did not do was swing *obviously*. If you want to hear Bill swing obviously, go back to the first Riverside album. The influence of Bud Powell was, it seems to me, not yet internalized, and Bill goes bopping happily away, backed by Teddy Kotick and Paul Motian, banging out the time in a way that only the deaf could miss. But like Turner making the implicit assumption that you don't need obvious waves and horizon and clouds to know what the sea looks like and giving you only his heightened perception of them, Bill often in his later years didn't hit you over the head with the time. He assumed you knew where it was.

He was quite conscious of what he was doing. He once explained to me how he felt about it, and I do not know whether he ever told anyone else. He drew an analogy to shadow lettering in which the letters seem raised and you see not the letters themselves but the shadows they apparently cast. That's how Bill played time, or more precisely played with it.

When Bill was recording the *Spartacus* track, he did any number of takes on the basic track, the one on which he would later overdub two more. This performance, which is a miracle, should be listened to in a special way, and on good stereo equipment. Bill said that he had to get a perfect basic track, or the others wouldn't work. His mystical perception of time is evident in this performance. There are three pianists, in effect, although they are all Bill. And they play *separate solos*. It's very weird. And the pianist playing the first, or basic track, is a very responsive accompanist to those other two soloists *who are going to be playing* an hour or so from now. In some strange way, Bill is hearing what his other two selves are *going to do*. And then, when he dubs in the later tracks, his response to the earlier playing indicates that he is remembering it perfectly. That performance is free and rhapsodic, with a retard at the end. After Bill had made seven or eight passes at the basic track, Creed Taylor, who was producing the album, pushed the log sheet across the counter in the control room to Helen and me and tapped it with his finger, indicating the timings: 5:05, 5:06, 5:04, 5:05, 5:07, 5:05. Bill had that kind of time.

By the way, Bill is playing Glenn Gould's piano on that album, the one Glenn kept in New York. When I sent Glenn the test pressing and told him that it was done on his piano, he said "I'll kill him!"

There is no better refutation of the definition of jazz as a folk music than Bill Evans. To be sure, it once was a popular music, though whether anything as complex as collective improvisation should have ever been called "folk" art is doubtful. As the music evolved in the 1920s, few of its practitioners apparently thought of themselves as Artistes, although it may now and then have crossed

someone's mind that what they were doing might have more than passing value. It is in retrospect that we see that what Louis Armstrong and those he inspired were doing was genuine art. A few pioneering critics seem to have taken the accurate measure of jazz before the performers themselves, although the striving for quality was always there, as it is (or should be) in masonry or cabinet-making. It is in the 1940s, really, that genuine awareness of jazz as an art becomes widespread among the musicians themselves.

No musician I ever knew consciously rejected jazz as an art form more than Bill, and his encyclopedic knowledge of all music, quite aside from his own accomplishment, gave him more than sufficient qualification to make that judgment. What we hear in the Paris album is a distillation of his intense dedication to it.

The playing is open and deeply communicative and very lovely, like that of *Everybody Digs*, but at the same time it is far more daring and complex, both in thought and texture. And the tone! Oh, the tone! It simply glistens.

If you loved Bill's playing, I would urge that you run, not walk, to a record store and get these two albums. Indeed, I would suggest that you get two copies of each, then tape them for listening and store the originals. The reason is that Bruce Lundvall has left Elektra Records to join Capitol, and the only reason that the Musician label existed is that Bruce willed it into being. Elektra is a division of Warner Communications. These albums are inextricably contracted to the company, sad to say. Given Warners' dedication to avarice and historic indifference to music, it is impossible to guess how long these albums will remain in print.

Bill knew pianists all over the world. They idolized him. One of them, Doug Riley, in Toronto, sat up all night and played in mourning when Bill died. And no one knows how many musicians wrote heartbroken farewells in music to him, including George Shearing, Steve Allen, Mickey Leonard. Phil Woods wrote a lovely melody simply titled *Goodbye Mr. Evans*.

I was in Canada at the time. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation called me and, knowing of our relationship, asked me to do an interview about Bill. They played Tony Bennett's record of *Waltz for Debby*, the version he made with Bill on piano — Tony has recorded the tune three times. Music and fragrances have astonishing powers of summoning up the past and, as I listened, it all came back to me, all the places where I had spent time with Bill: Los Angeles, Toronto, Chicago, Paris, Montreux, New York. I remembered writing the *Waltz for Debby* lyric in Helen's living room. (Jobim always calls it *The Debby Waltz*.) And it hit me that Bill was really gone, and I began to come apart. It was just at this point that the lady producer of the show asked possibly the most tactless question I have ever had in an interview. She said, "Can you tell us any funny stories about him?" I didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

Yet, oddly, I did think of several funny incidents.

Bill had gone to his mother's in Florida to straighten out his life, a phrase that needs no explanation to those who knew him, and he had done so, in one of his periodic acts of courage. When he came back to New York, he bunked with me in my small basement apartment on West End Avenue at 70th Street. A whole bunch of us lived in the neighborhood — Phil Ramone, Roger Kellaway, Billy Byers, Tony Studd, Erroll Garner. Bill and I wrote *Turn Out the Stars* at that time. The title was a variant on that of some dumb movie we saw on late-night television, *Turn Off the Moon*. The song is so dark that I have never had the guts to sing it, and, so far as I know, only Ruth Price ever has. And that is peculiar. Its hopelessness is at variance with the fact that it was a very happy time in both our lives. That little apartment, with a sofa and

rumpsprung armchairs, a rented spinet piano and worn carpet, seemed hidden and safe. Its kitchen and living room gave onto a small cement courtyard from which, if you looked up, you could see a rectangle of sky. Warren Bernhardt used to come by, and Gary McFarland, and Jobim. Bill used to wake me up in the morning and give me a harmony lesson. "I think of all harmony," he said one such morning, "as an expansion from and return to the tonic."

We were both nominated for Grammy awards that year, Bill for *Conversations with Myself*. He had nothing appropriate to wear to the banquet. As it happened, I was storing a closet full of clothes for Woody Herman, one of the dapper dressers in the history of the business. There was a particularly well-made blue blazer which, to Bill's surprise and mine, fit him perfectly. So he donned it. Just before we were to leave, I turned somehow and spilled a drink in his lap. Fortunately there was another pair of slacks that fit him. We picked up Helen and went to the banquet. And I managed to repeat the trick: I turned and spilled another drink in his lap. He said, "Man, are you trying to tell me something?" At that moment, they called his name. Bill picked up his Grammy for *Conversations* very wet.

Bill had never met Woody Herman, one of his early idols, and I arranged for the three of us to have lunch a few days later. Bill turned up wearing, to my horror, that blazer. "Do you like the jacket?" Bill said, after the formality of introduction.

"It looks faintly familiar," Woody said.

Bill flung it open with a matadorial gesture to show its brilliant lining. "How do you like the monogram?" he said. It was of course WH. "It stands," Bill said, "for William Heavens." And Woody laughed. Fortunately.

That evening we went to hear the band. Woody tried to introduce a tune only to be interrupted by some drunk blearily shouting, "Play *Woodpeckers Ball*." Woody tried to talk him down but the drunk persisted, "Play *Woodpecker's Ball*."

Finally, Woody said, "All right, for Charlie Pecker over there, we're going to play *Woodpecker's Ball*."

"Man," said Bill, who was of course quite shy, "that takes real hostility. If I tried that, some cat would come up on the bandstand and punch me in the mouth."

After I finished the CBC interview, the one person I wanted to be with was Oscar Peterson. I drove out to his house in the Toronto suburb of Mississauga. I thought of an evening in New York when Bill and I went to hear him. When we entered the club, Oscar brought whatever he was playing to an early close and then played, beautifully, *Waltz for Debby*. Bill said afterwards, "I don't think I'll ever play it again." He did, of course. Bill wrote that melody when he was in college. It is based on a cycle of fifths.

Oscar too had heard the news of Bill's death, and the banter and insult in which we usually indulge was suspended that day. He knew what I was feeling. Under that powerful Leonine facade, Oscar is a very sensitive man. We talked about Bill for a while and Oscar said softly, "Maybe he found what he was looking for."

In previous ages only written music and written words could be preserved, but with the coming of motion pictures and other recording devices, performance itself immortalized and great performers take equal place in the pantheon with great writers and composers. Because of the fact of recording, Bill, in a very real sense, is still with us.

Helen tells me there is still some excellent material to be issued. Given her fierce protectiveness of him, it is unlikely that anything but the best of it will come out, the material Bill himself would want released.

I doubt, however, that any of it ever will excel what is in the two Paris albums.

Bill had found his grail.