

GOD IS IN THE HOUSE: ASPECTS OF MY RELIGION

by Ian Muldoon*

“The spirit of jazz is the spirit of personal freedom.... jazz needs these acts of freedom to reconfirm itself in every era.”

-Keith Jarrett, quoted in *Is Jazz Dead (or has it moved to a new address?)* Stuart Nicholson, Routledge, Taylor & Francis, NY, 2005, p 51.



Keith Jarrett: jazz needs these acts of freedom to reconfirm itself in every era....
PHOTO CREDIT
HENRY
LEUTWYLER



**Ian Muldoon has been a jazz enthusiast since, as a child, he heard his aunt play Fats Waller and Duke Ellington on the household piano. At around ten years of age he was given a windup record player and a modest supply of steel needles, on which he played his record collection, consisting of two 78s, one featuring Dizzy Gillespie and the other Fats Waller. He listened to Eric Child's ABC radio programs in the 1950s and has been a prolific jazz records collector wherever he lived in the world, including Sydney, Kowloon, Winnipeg, New York and Melbourne. He has been a jazz broadcaster on a number of community radio stations in various cities, and now lives in Coffs Harbour.*

“I think Cecil Taylor is potentially the most important musician in the Western World.”

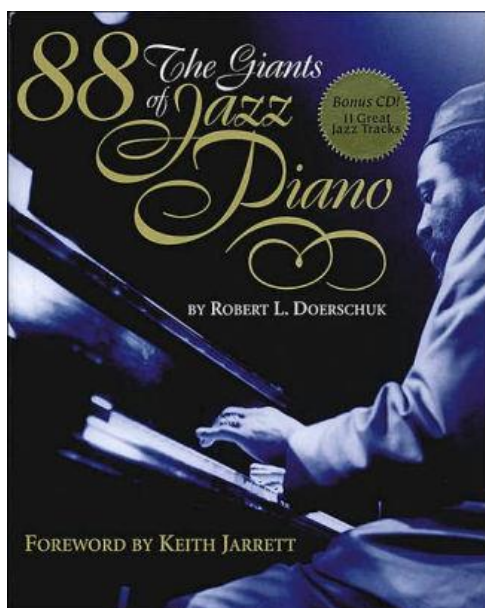
-Buell Neidlinger, principal bassist for the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra; principal bassist in the Warner Bros studio orchestra for 30 years; musical educator at the New England Conservatory. Quoted in *Four Lives in the Bebop Business*, A B Spellman, MacGibbon & Kee, London, 1967, p 23.



Buell Neidlinger (bass) performing with pianist Cecil Taylor in 1957... PHOTO CREDIT ROBERT PARENT COURTESY CODA MAGAZINE

Robert Doerschuk: “What is the greatest misconception that white America still has about black music? Cecil Taylor: Ignorance of the magic of rhythm.”

-88 *The Giants of Jazz Piano*, Robert L Doerschuk, Backbeat Books, San Francisco, 2001, p 244



Nina Simone, George Shearing, John Coltrane, Art Farmer, Michel Petrucciani, and Cecil Taylor are six major artists whose contributions to humanity are hard to quantify. Yet their achievements - both personal and artistic - as members of the jazz “priesthood” are deserving of consecration as saints, and remarkably revealing of some of the social, artistic, and political forces that shaped the last 100 years or so. They are also living examples of the greatness of the music they helped prosecute throughout their lives. Recordings of some of their live performances reveal this greatness best - speaking of which, when I go to a live event, I can’t help myself.

Without exception, every time I’ve attended a live jazz event and spoken to one of the members of the jazz priesthood, I’ve managed to say something mind-bogglingly stupid. Beginning with Jonah Jones and Sarah Vaughan in Brisbane in 1960, I’ve spoken to Paul Cutlan, Adam Nussbaum, Terumasa Hino, Roger Frampton, Barney McAll, Reggie Workman, James Muller, Sandy Evans, Dollar Brand (Abdullah Ibrahim), Paul Furniss, Keith Jarrett, Charles Lloyd, Don Burrows, John McCarthy, Linda May Han Oh, Bernie McGann, Dick Hughes, Mark Hannaford, Mike Nock, Paul Grabowsky, Gerald Clayton, Simon Barker, Bob Barnard, Andrea Keller, John Pochée, Dale Barlow, Phil Slater, Julien Wilson, Sam Anning, Ellery Eskelin, Ken James, Marty Erlich, Lloyd Swanton, Paul McNamara, Mark Simmonds, Dale Barlow, Julie Amiet, Joe Lovano, Lisa Parrott, Don Burrows, Mark Murphy, Shannon Barnett, Miroslav Bukovsky, Judy Bailey, Gian Slater, Merv Acheson, Julian Lage, Scott Tinkler, among others, and I apologise to all.

Each has been unfailingly polite when engaged in conversation and they all exude a vibration which I can only identify as “civilised, humane, kind, creative, humble, loving and empathetic” - as opposed to the manner, attitudes and ways of those leaders of the established religious groups, priests and otherwise, who seemed knowing, smug, and self-satisfied.

My use of religious language is in the same way it’s used when someone says 'God is in the house' when referring to Art Tatum, or speaks of being 'alive in the house of saints' as Myra Melford does with her trio at the *Alte Oper* in Frankfurt and *Der Club* in Heiligenhaus, Germany in February 1993.



Myra Melford: alive in the house of saints...
PHOTO CREDIT MICHAEL WILSON

Something happened in the 1970s. Take 1976 for example. In 1976 some Saints of this priesthood had passed: Paul Robeson (a jazz lover), Ray Nance and Jimmy Garrison among them.

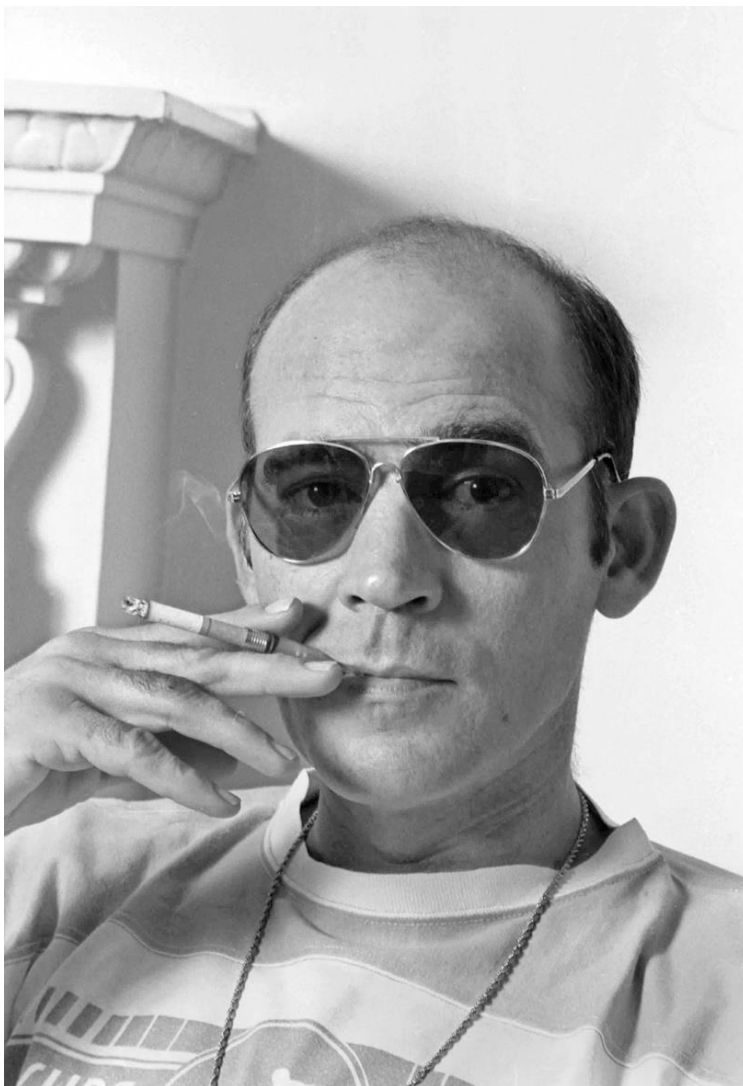


In 1976 some Saints of this priesthood had passed: singer Paul Robeson (left, a jazz lover), violinist Ray Nance (below) and bassist Jimmy Garrison (far below) among them... NANCE PHOTO COURTESY ILLUSTRATED ENCYCLOPEDIA OF JAZZ; GARRISON PHOTO COURTESY JAZZ REFLECTIONS



1976 - oh yeah! There was one great jazz moment for me that year, but the previous November there had been a political coup in Australia; the US Supreme Court had decided the death penalty was not cruel and hence did not contradict the 8th Amendment of the Constitution; nuclear war loomed over Middle East oil; and Neil Diamond performed at the Sydney Sports Ground, singing songs about “blue” which had nothing to do with the blues.

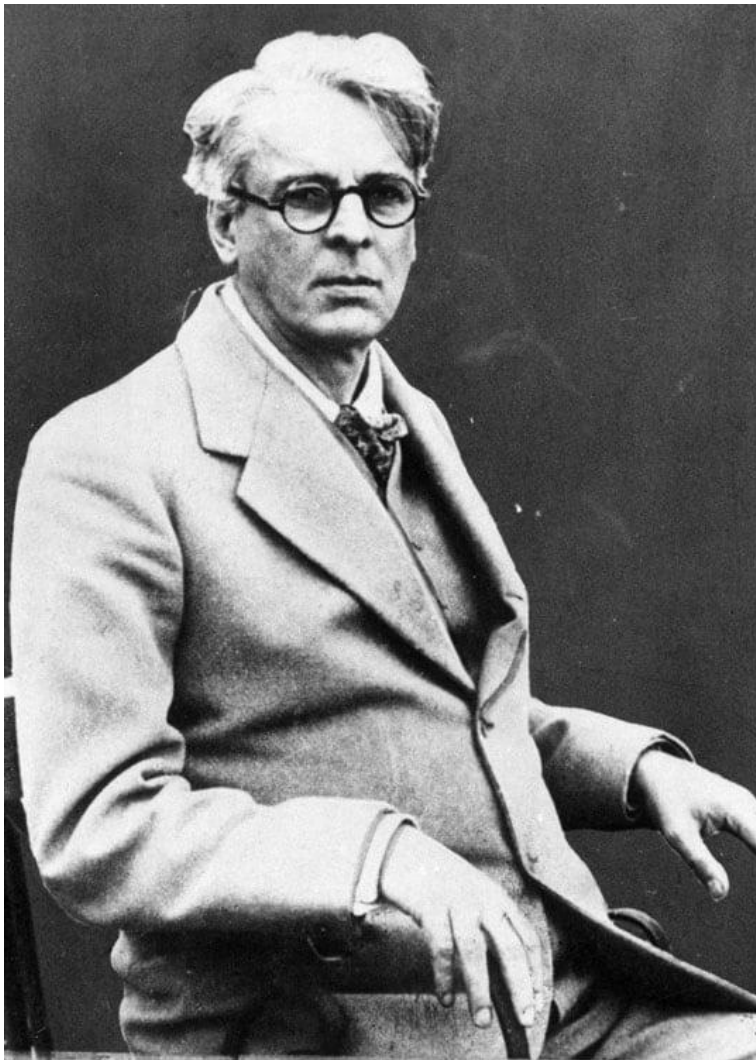
At the same time the Great American Songbook was, it seemed, no more, evidenced by J J Cale’s hit *Cocaine*. And jazz was dead. Return to Forever was the name of an actual band which purported to play jazz but, in my view didn’t. Its bizarre nonsensical name was typical of the strange times that prevailed: Hare Krishna-robed devotees wandered down Oxford Street, Sydney; tens of thousands of heroin-addicted US soldiers returned from a war lost in Vietnam; the leader of the so-called “free world” had been outed as a liar and a cheat; and a general weirdness prevailed, typified by the writings of Hunter S Thompson and his best-seller *Fear And Loathing In Las Vegas*, written whilst its author was addled by drugs, the themes of which turned on the corruption of present day institutions (police, government, Church) and the loss of idealism.



Hunter S Thompson: his best seller “Fear And Loathing In Las Vegas” was written whilst its author was addled by drugs... PHOTO CREDIT ALLEN ARPADI

In the advanced Western economies adult males, apparently sane, and sober, wore denim vests and denim trousers that flared so much at the bottom the men who wore them tripped (cf band members of Return To Forever). This was a time when to be “mad” was in fact to be sane, as the world was spiralling into madness and the psychiatrist *du jour* was R D Laing, who argued that if you were a diagnosed schizophrenic you were probably sane as this condition was a proper response to the madness prevailing in the world. In suburbia, Encounter Groups where people sat in groups and “emotionally revealed” themselves, had replaced Tupper Ware parties. “Streaking” - an activity of sole naked adult males running naked in public - was a popular activity. A 1919 poem by Yeats, written at the close of the 'War to End All Wars', seemed to sum the 1970s up:

*...twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?**

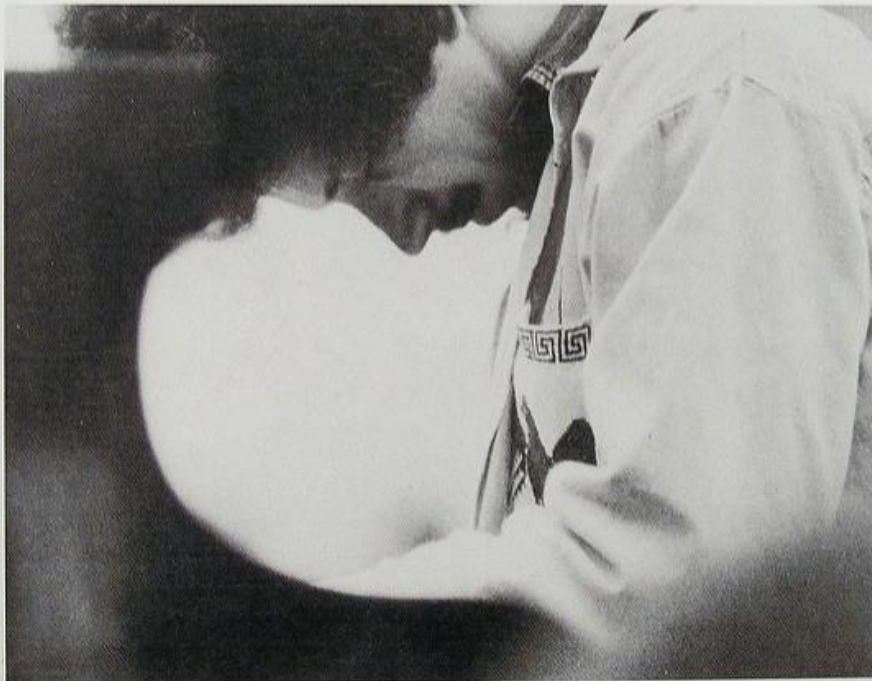


*W B Yeats... PHOTO COURTESY
THE TELEGRAPH*

* *W B Yeats, The Second Coming.*

I was at some time that year on the second circle of Dante's hell at the Town Hall railway station, Sydney, pondering these matters, wondering whether I should throw myself in front of the next Hornsby train, or just stand still and die from breathing the polluted air meshed with the foul breaths of hundreds of commuters, when the ceiling seemed to part, the noise disappeared, the smell dissipated, and my ears and mind were filled with the sound of angels, or at least, a sound made by someone with angelic qualities of musical artistry and I left the platform in search of the source. It came from a pokey little record shop in the station precinct called Anthem managed by Kieran Stafford (bless that man) and the record was *The Koln Concert* by Keith Jarrett. The opening notes of that music are memorable. Jazz was not dead, or if it had been, the resurrection was surely here! And in a "sacred" place called Anthem no less. Once again the beauty of the music called jazz was my beacon. It also reinforced the view of how powerful recordings of live events can be – *The Koln Concert* remains a fine example of Jarrett's work notwithstanding the dodgy piano, and his later *At The Blue Note* (1994) and many other live recordings of his. And it is recordings of live events with an audience that have seen some of the music's finest moments.

KEITH JARRETT THE KÖLN CONCERT



ECM

Keith Jarrett's "The Koln Concert": the opening notes of that music are memorable. Jazz was not dead, or if it had been, the resurrection was surely here...

Saint Nina



Nina Simone: within an hour of learning that Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson, and Carol Denise McNair had been murdered by the KKK on 15/9/63, she composed "Mississippi Goddam"...

Around 1965 I heard a Philips live recording of Nina Simone singing *Mississippi Goddam* (Simone) from a concert she performed at Carnegie Hall, which shocked me because of the contrast between its presentation and its lyrics.

The first shock was to hear the tone of the music – up-tempo, lighthearted, sung in a girlish voice - with the content of the lyrics which read in part:

*Oh but this whole country is full of lies
You're all gonna die and die like flies
I don't trust you any more
You keep on saying 'Go slow!'
'Go slow!'*

America claimed itself as the blessed land of freedom, and boasted great big motor cars that shone red and white and blue; a land that stood for the free world against the "communist peril"; the home of Coca Cola and Christian movies like *Ben Hur* (1959) in Cinemascope with a thousand extras and the distinguished features of Moses, played by Charlton Heston. The phrase "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" was known by educated and ill-educated children alike around the world exposed to American movies. And yet Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson, and Carol Denise McNair had been murdered by the KKK on 15/9/63 in Birmingham, Mississippi, whilst attending a Sunday Baptist Church assembly. Nina Simone composed *Mississippi Goddam* within an hour of learning of this event.

Observing what was sometimes referred to as “the fairer sex” growing up, and noting that adults, parents, teachers, ministers, often referred to children in terms such as “she’s a good little girl”; “be a good girl and do this task”; “be quiet and be a good girl”. And in school being quiet, sitting still, and on Sundays going to Sunday School run by the local Church of England were all signs of this “goodness”. I speculated that these social mores were common in other Western societies. I thought it entirely possible that these mores applied to whole cultures so that one indication of “fitting in” by migrants or indigenous individuals was to follow these mores as well as, indeed better than, our culture. This was the basis of the Stolen Generations of Aboriginal children. The images of little Aboriginal girls in their dresses and white pinafores and white ribbons in their hair with their unsmiling “quiet” expressions of containment and fear of offending. It seemed to me to be one of the most gripping and telling images of what is meant by the destruction of innocence, of the destruction of the joy of being a child.



African American children in white dresses, circa 1910... PHOTO COURTESY PINTEREST

In the same way, the African American slave descendants would have seen that the path to perceived success was assimilation: adopting, and adapting the ways that ensured social acceptability and mobility, especially being compliant, and thankful, and polite. Most importantly, never to get above one's station. To label such ambitions as "Uncle Tom" behaviours is perhaps unfair. Deeply felt religious beliefs were understandably common coin for most and, in theory, the Christian message, like the Constitution, spelt out in illustrious terms, notions of equality, charity (love) and "the pursuit of happiness" etc. When little African American girls did as they were told, like Addie, Cynthia, Carole and Carol, dressed as they were told, and went to Church as they were told, so to be labelled "good little girls" and to progress in their adopted society and, holding hands perhaps, dressed in their white dresses, with white ribbons in their hair, as they walked through the entrance of the 'House of God', being the Sixth Avenue Baptist Church, Birmingham only to be murdered in that place by members of the "superior" culture, members moreover who were, tacitly or otherwise, encouraged in their actions by the culture in which they lived, is one of the most damning and searing images of that cancer called racism.



Nina Simone, nee Eunice Waymon, told the world in the documentary *What Happened Miss Simone* (Liz Garbus) that she lived in fear half her life. She changed her name to Simone (after Simone Signoret) to avoid the shame her parents might feel of finding out she played "devil's music" in clubs. She was told early on her nose was too big, her lips too thick, and her skin too dark. When she was invited at age seven to play the piano in a church, her parents were required to sit up the back behind the white congregation. She refused to play until they were seated at the front. She studied classical music as this, she was led to understand, was the highest level of music - Bach she loved - and she attended Julliard, which then had an acceptance rate of 7%, to study classical music. She applied to enter Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia but was refused admission despite a well-received audition - racial discrimination the likely cause. Her performance of *Mississippi Goddam* at that hallowed centre of culture, Carnegie Hall, using language that may be thought tame, compared to Rapping in modern pop music, was genuinely shocking at the time. She repeated a performance in March 1965 in Montgomery, Alabama accompanied only by a guitarist on a stage made from empty coffin crates.

Her desire to be the first African American female to play classical music at Carnegie Hall was never realised. Even into her mature years she was still driven by the belief that classical music was superior, even though she not only played compelling piano, jazz or otherwise. She had a voice which, in her words, could sound like gravel one minute and creamed coffee the next. Her performance of *Love Me Or Leave Me* (Donaldson/Kahn) is good enough to feature in the Smithsonian Collection of Jazz Vocals. In the same way, when performing in a concert hall, she would use classical music performance protocols - dress formally, stand silently before sitting at the piano, sit looking at the keys until complete silence prevailed before playing, and she felt free to reference classical motifs, especially Bach, in her jazz piano. She was known to leave mid-performance where noise occurred through talking or otherwise. She lived when she performed, and “died” when off-stage. Because it was deeply imbedded in her early years that girls are like *this*; great music is like *this*; women should look like *this*; and “black” is *ugly*; she never embraced jazz or the jazz persona as such but played music - soul, jazz, pop - to earn. To me she’s a jazz saint. One of the very finest live recordings in jazz is *Nina Simone At Town Hall* (Colpix) 1959 supported by Jimmy Bond, bass; and Al “Tootie” Heath, drums.

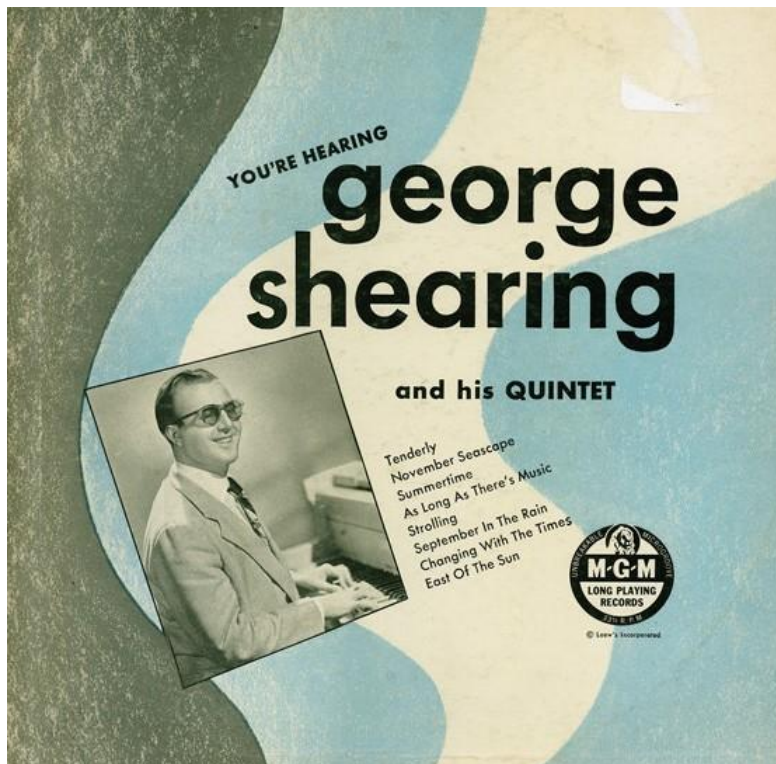


She wrote that "making records was dirty, popular music was dirty and to mix all that with politics seemed senseless and demeaning" about her penning *Mississippi Goddam*, again revealing the social mores that were so powerfully imbedded in her personality. It's ironic therefore that she was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2008. It may be that popularity was something that some jazz critics and the jazz establishment somewhat demeaned. Simone retired to France where she remained a revered artist. Another popular artist contemporaneous with Ms Simone was George Shearing and it is not uncommon for Shearing to be derided for playing “cocktail” jazz. And yet, Shearing is among the finest of jazz pianists.

Saint George

My first encounter with George Shearing was a ten-inch LP titled *You're Hearing George Shearing* (MGM, 1950) with liner notes by the man who “discovered” Shearing, fellow Brit Leonard Feather. The line-up was Shearing, piano; Marjorie Hyams, vibraphone; Chuck Wayne, guitar; John Levy, bass; and Denzil Best, drums. The immediate impression of the music was strong representation of classic melodies from the established songwriters:

Summertime (Gershwin/Heyward), *Tenderly* (Lawrence/Gross) and *As Long As There's Music* (Styne/Cahn); powerful rhythms; most unusually a female instrumentalist; and an unforgettable whistleable take on *September in the Rain* (Dubin/Warren).



Paying further attention, the pianism displayed what was termed the “locked hands” technique, based on Milt Buckner’s stylistic innovation in which the left hand played block chords in unison with the right, instead of the left using repetitive rhythms as in boogie woogie or stride. Unusually for the time, two African American musicians were part of the quintet, Levy and Best. Shearing’s arrangements, having the vibraphone, guitar and piano in octave-unison voicings mimicked the Glenn Miller sound. A major element of Shearing’s quintet was that he made bebop palatable. Not unlike one of jazz piano’s greatest, Jaki Byard, Shearing could call upon a range of styles at will. Byard had classical lessons from age seven but early on was drawn to live performances of Count Basie, Earl Hines and Fats Waller and was playing trumpet in local bands at age 16. Where Byard established himself as a major artist and educator, Shearing focussed on financial security, a motivation driven by his family circumstances and perhaps underpinned by the conservative class-bound nature of English society. The approach to his art remained a conservative one throughout his life.

At his first audition for an agent in New York in 1946, Shearing played like Teddy Wilson, Art Tatum and Fats Waller and the agent, coldly, asked: “What else can you do?” That awakening moment was the fact that original pianists could be heard any night in person in New York and he had to forge a new pianist identity. Hence was born his Quintet. He collaborated with Mel Tormé, Carmen McRae, and Jim Hall. He employed Gary Burton, Cal Tjader, Joe Pass, Al McKibbin, Israel Crosby, and Vernel Fournier over the years. In 1952 he wrote *Lullaby of Birdland* on commission from that famous establishment which had to stop using *Jumpin’ With Symphony Sid* (Young) as its theme song. His ability to accompany vocalists was considered without parallel - Peggy Lee included.



George Shearing & vocalist Peggy Lee....

Shearing was born totally blind, the youngest of nine children. His father delivered coal for a living, and his mother cleaned railway cars at night whilst the children slept. His first interaction with the piano was when he banged it with a hammer at age three. In time, musicians would claim Shearing “could hear paint dry” in reference to his musical ear. The sound of his piano is one of the most beautiful, and he was masterful in interpreting ballads. For anyone even mildly interested in jazz pianism the 4CD document (Properbox 40) *George Shearing: From Battersea to Broadway* is worth a listen. The early influences of Meade Lux Lewis, Earl Hines, Art Tatum, Joe Sullivan and Teddy Wilson *inter alia* may be heard on these 97 selections, spanning the period 1939-1951 from boogie to bop.

Two other documents are recommended: one is *Shearing On Stage* (Capitol, 1958), which was recorded live at Claremont College, Claremont, California, 8/3/58 when college performances in that period included top tier groups such as Dave Brubeck and his Quartet. The programme includes numbers that he had made famous a decade before: *September in the Rain*, *Roses of Picardy* (Wood/Weatherly), and *Little White Lies* (Donaldson) as well as jazz standards *Little Niles* (Weston), *Caravan* (Ellington/Tizol), *I’ll Remember April* (DePaul/Johnston/Raye) *East of the Sun* (Bowman) and a popular show

tune *On the Street Where You Live* (Lerner/Lowe). The band was Shearing, piano; Emil Richards, vibes; Toots Thielemans, guitar and harmonica; Al McKibbon, bass; Percy Brice, drums; and Armando Peraza, congas on one track, the original *Mambo Inn* (Peraza). Highlights include Shearing's solo on *Little Niles*, and the rhythm on *Nothin But De Best* (Best) featuring Peraza on congas and extended coda by McKibbon. Although it's true that some pieces like *East of the Sun* sound routine, even "easy listening", there's enough jazz throughout to justify a close listen.



The second document is *The Shearing Piano* (Capitol, 2001) a solo recital programme of 20 pieces including *Reverie* (Debussy). Though it's been dismissed by some critics, I found it a remarkable demonstration of Shearing's pianism, especially his take on *Stella by Starlight* (Young/Washington).



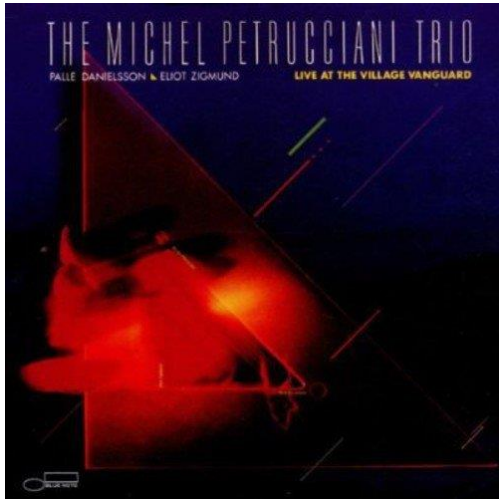
Saint Michel

Michel Petrucciani had to overcome a challenge unlike poverty and blindness - he suffered the physical disability of *osteogenesis imperfecta* which colloquially is known as the glass-bone disease. In maturity he weighed 23 kilos and was 90 cm tall. Born in France 28/12/62, he died in New York 6/1/99. In solo performances he rivalled Keith Jarrett. The contrasts in his playing were an absolute marvel - huge percussive moments, blues, and hard-felt romantic lyricism. Over the 17 years of his performing he played with Joe Henderson, Jim Hall, Bobby McFerrin, Joe Lovano, and Wayne Shorter, not through any concessions by these major artists to his physical disability, but as a musical peer. A consistent element of Petrucciani's playing is his evident joy in creativity which has led his playing, according to some commentators, to extravagant emotionalism. Like some creative comet he ripped across the jazz firmament making the most of those 17 years.



Michel Petrucciani: he suffered the physical disability of osteogenesis imperfecta which colloquially is known as the glass-bone disease...
PHOTO COURTESY PINTEREST

Two documents reveal him at his best: *Michel Petrucciani Live At The Village Vanguard* (Blue Note, 2002) a recording of his performance with Palle Danielsson, bass, and Eliot Zigmund, drums, on the night of 16/3/84. The programme includes four originals and four jazz standards including *Nardis* (Davis) which opened the set in acknowledgement of Bill Evans, who was Petrucciani's original inspiration. The bassist and drummer had each worked in different versions of Evans' trios. At this time Petrucciani was 21 years old.



The second document is *Michel Petrucciani Piano Solo The Complete (1997) Concert In Germany* (Dreyfus) 2007 which has an 11-minute take on *Caravan* (Ellington/Tizol) which is likely to make your hair stand on end. Please allow jazz pianist Robert Doerschuk to comment:

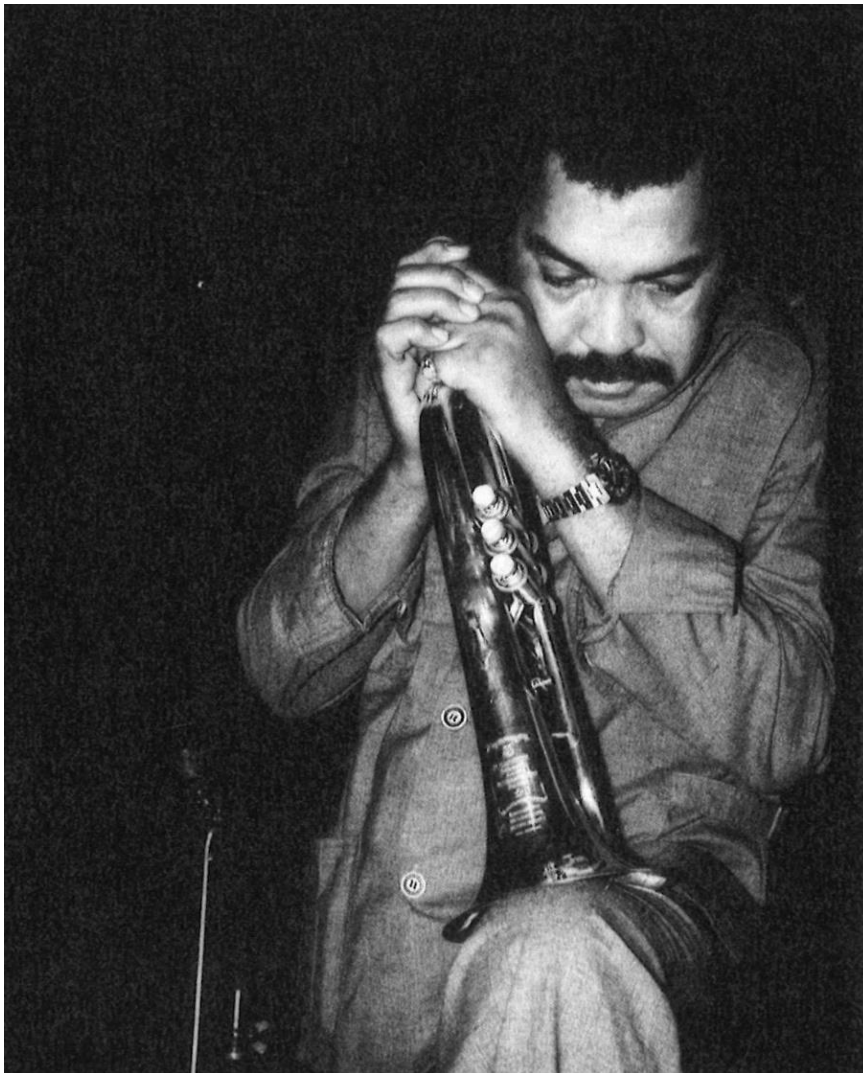
*...Petrucciani launches his improvisation not just by examining the exotic implications of the theme, but by building the concept of his introduction on a volcanic rumble in the low end of the piano. Once he moves into the tune, the steady rhythm feels almost quaint - which is probably why it gives way so quickly to eccentric truncations and extensions, a simplistic one-octave imitation of stride, dizzy accelerations, a mosquito-like flight through the theme in the upper range of the keyboard, gnarly clustered approximations of the tune, and so on. He pulls it off with a panache that brings the crowd to its feet more than once. While one could question his taste, this performance is undeniably electrifying. (88 *The Giants of the Jazz Piano*, Blackbeat, San Francisco, 2001, pp 216/217).*



Saint Art

When I first heard *Blueport*, played by Gerry Mulligan's Concert Jazz Band, it was like an electric shock - the marvel of it. And who was its composer? Art Farmer, who wasn't in the Concert Jazz Band.

Trumpet players are often very loud - Buddy Bolden, Maynard Ferguson - or often have personalities bigger than life - Armstrong, Gillespie - or are show ponies with brilliant technical chops like Harry James or Wynton Marsalis. It seems to be in the nature of the instrument, and what it asks of a player. But Art Farmer was not in the normal mould.



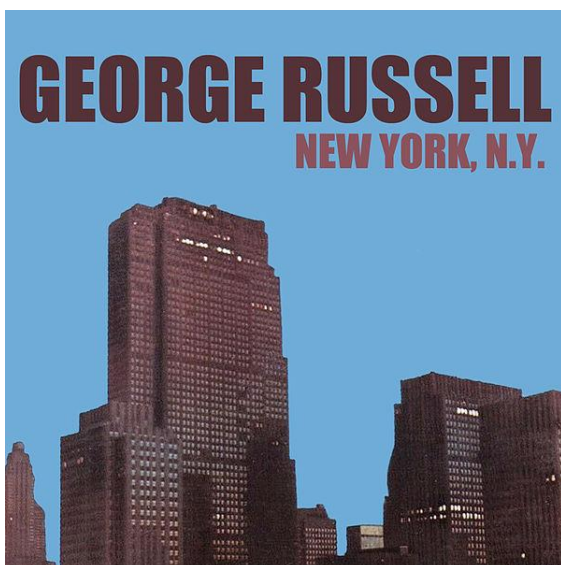
Art Farmer: he was not in the normal mould... PHOTO COURTESY JAZZ A HISTORY OF AMERICA'S MUSIC

Born in Iowa a twin, he and brother Addison moved to Los Angeles in 1945 when they were 17. Art befriended Charlie Parker who told him: "...listen to everybody... don't limit yourself to what any one person's conception of what jazz should be... find what is in them but don't copy.. absorb everyone.. and end up yourself" (As quoted by Farmer in notes to *Portrait of Art Farmer* (Contemporary). Art moved to New York, worked as a janitor, hotel janitor and hospital file clerk, and joined Lionel Hampton's Orchestra in 1952.

In the 1950s he made some records with his twin brother Addison (bass) released on Contemporary along with masters Hank Jones, piano and Roy Haynes, drums. One was *Portrait of Art* (1958) which had three originals by the leader. It was a lyrical, thoughtful, beautifully realised programme of music which allowed him plenty of room, with a strong rhythm section. Farmer might usefully be described as a musician's musician.



The iconic and influential George Russell, musician, composer, and musical theoretician of the Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization, one of the first theories to be based on studies of jazz in lieu of European derived theories, chose Farmer to be first trumpet for his influential recording *New York, NY* (1959) which featured Bob Brookmeyer as first trombone; John Coltrane, first tenor saxophone; Bill Evans, piano; George Duvivier and Milt Hinton, basses; Charlie Persip, Max Roach, and Charlie Persip, drums; and Jon Hendricks, vocals, which speaks volumes for Farmer's standing in 1959 - the year *Kind of Blue* and *Sketches of Spain* were recorded, the year *Giant Steps* was recorded. In 1959 he made up one quarter of the pianoless Mulligan Quartet replacing Chet Baker.



He was quiet, reflective, and gentle in manner, and that's the initial impression gained from his recorded output, the style of his playing and the preference for the mellow sound of his flugelhorn. Trumpet players often want to shout, or yell, penetrating the space with their hard brightness. He was in the Miles Davis mould rather, with lyricism and mellow sounds his forte and a reserve not always followed even by Davis. Farmer started on the piano, learnt the bass tuba and violin, before settling on cornet and then trumpet at the age of 13, finally turning to the softer sounding flugelhorn. In 1989 he had instrument maker David Monette make him a hybrid trumpet-flugelhorn called a flumpet. Farmer's small groups have included masters such as guitarist Jim Hall, bassist Steve Swallow, drummer Pete La Roca, and pianist Steve Kuhn.



Art Farmer with Pete La Roca in the background, 1964...

It was in 1959 also he co-founded a sextet with tenor saxophonist Benny Golson, and a trombonist and a piano-bass-drums rhythm section. In its first phase, the Jazztet lasted until 1962, and helped to launch the careers of pianist McCoy Tyner and trombonist Grachan Moncur III. Over the years - between disbandment and reforming - the Jazztet released a dozen albums. It's inclusion of trombone gave the sextet a wide range of textures in its sound.



L-R, Benny Golson & Art Farmer... PHOTO COURTESY DEFINITIVE ILLUSTRATED ENCYCLOPEDIA OF JAZZ & BLUES

At least two of Golson's compositions became jazz standards: *I Remember Clifford* and *Whisper Not*. The first, which has been recorded by Lee Morgan, Dizzy Gillespie, Sonny Rollins, Keith Jarrett, and Arturo Sandoval, was written in response to Golson's respect and love for Clifford Brown with whom he worked in Lionel Hampton's band. Golson related how he "agonised over each note and that several weeks went by before he had put together a song that was both a fitting memorial and, even better, captured in some degree the musical personality of the late trumpeter." (*The Jazz Standards*, Ted Gioia, OUP NY, 2012, p 178).

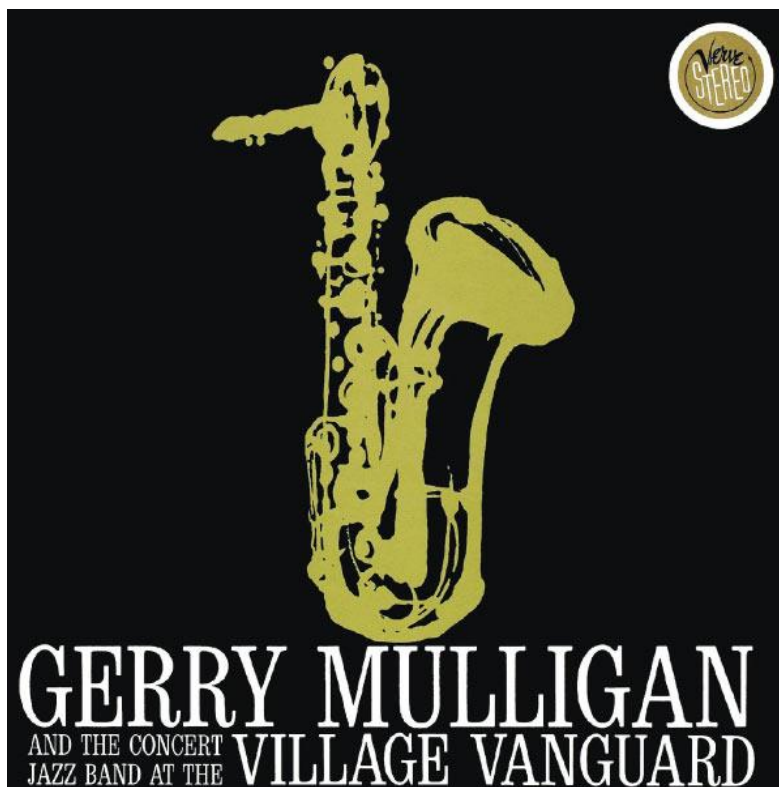


*Clifford Brown:
his death at the
age of 25
reverberated
powerfully
amongst the
jazz
community...
PHOTO
COURTESY
TWITTER*

The death of the brilliant "clean living" Clifford Brown at age 25 reverberated powerfully amongst the jazz community in which early deaths were more often associated with drug overdose than car accidents. Perhaps it was no coincidence that Golson teamed up with equally "clean living" Art Farmer, who is in the same ballpark of trumpet playing excellence as Brown. But it was not until the following year, 1960, that one of the great live recordings publicly reinforced what an amazing artist Farmer was. And it was his composition, not his playing, that raised the roof.

Gerry Mulligan began employment as an arranger for the Gene Krupa band in 1946. He contributed writing and playing to the legendary *Birth of the Cool* sessions including *Venus De Milo*, *Jeru*, and *Rocker*, along with an arrangement of George Wallington's *Godchild*. His two big lessons in dynamics were drawn from experiencing Claude Thornhill and Stan Kenton, the first good, the second bad. In the first was the feeling of moving from soft, slowly swelling to louder. The second

was being too loud with nowhere to go. His 13-piece Concert Jazz Band was formed in 1960 with three trumpets, three trombones, five reeds, bass and drums. There were four solo chairs: baritone sax, trombone, trumpet and tenor. After months of rehearsals it opened at the Newport Jazz Festival. The band toured 17 US cities from West to East coast and then toured Europe. Its performance on return from Europe in December 1960 at the Village Vanguard was one for the ages, with Mulligan, baritone sax, piano, arrangements; Nick Travis, Don Ferrara, Clark Terry, trumpets; Bob Brookmeyer, valve trombone; Willie Dennis, Alan Ralph, trombones; Gene Quill, alto sax, clarinet; Bob Donovan, alto sax; Jim Reider, tenor sax; Gene Allen, baritone and bass clarinet; Bill Crow, bass; and Mel Lewis, drums. Mulligan's approach is to make music that is enjoyed by the player as well as the listener.



Blueport (Farmer) is the opening track of the document *Gerry Mulligan and the Concert Jazz Band at the Village Vanguard* (11/12/60). It's one of those iconic moments, a performance captured at the holiest live performance space in jazz: a band honed to a thrilling brilliance by hundreds of hours of live performances together in two continents allowing - in Mulligan's words - for the band to "find itself"; a composition originating in the leader's famous pianoless quartet, rearranged by saxophonist Al Cohn for 13 so that it communicates an emotion, in Mulligan's words - "that comes from the interaction between its members as a *unit* which enjoys what it's doing and can have fun"; an arrangement that starts like a quartet then evolves with the addition of a trombone solo by Dennis over backing horn patterns, followed by a tenor solo by Reider, then a snap back rollicking conversation between Mulligan's baritone sax and Terry's trumpet which almost, but not quite, breaks up. Oh to have been there! A riveting example of a moment that begins with notes on a page by the fine artist Art Farmer, which is transformed into magic and captured on record.

Farmer ultimately moved to Vienna and in 1994 he was awarded the Austrian Gold Medal of Merit. He produced over 50 albums under his own name, dividing his time between Vienna and a second home in New York. In 1999, the year he died, he was selected as a National Endowment for the Arts Jazz Master. Saint Art.



*Art Farmer, 1982:
in 1999, the year he
died, he was
selected as a
National
Endowment for the
Arts Jazz Master...*

St John

John Coltrane's candidacy for Sainthood is based as much on his character as it is on his huge musical contribution: indeed, one fuelled the other. His curiosity, humility, work ethic and self-discipline were renowned - at the height of his fame he might be witnessed practising during a break between sets. Somewhat like Art Farmer, he was of quiet demeanour and according to his former employer, Jimmy Heath, he "never talked until he put the sax in his mouth". The pain and anguish of living, or of racism that he experienced or witnessed, never led to angry music; rather he created music that was an expression of his deeply felt spiritual yearnings - eg, *A Love Supreme*, *Ascension*, and the beautiful *After The Rain*. His first live album is as significant a document as any in the canon, including the famous live recording of the 1938 Carnegie Hall Concert by Benny Goodman, to which comparisons are apt.



John Coltrane: his curiosity, humility, work ethic and self-discipline were renowned...

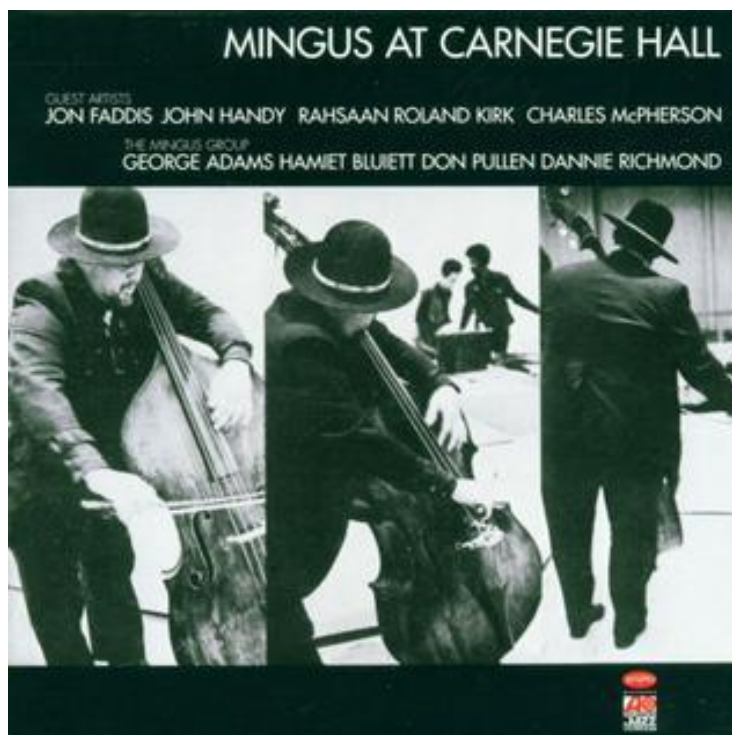


The 1938 Benny Goodman Carnegie Hall Concert, L-R, Gene Krupa, Goodman, Cootie Williams, Vernon Brown, Johnny Hodges...

The Goodman concert is considered legendary for a number of reasons. Firstly, Carnegie Hall is an iconic cultural centre of one of the great cities, and to give a platform to music known as jazz was to give the music and its practitioners something of an imprimatur of legitimacy. Secondly, the musicians were of various cultural backgrounds including African Americans at a time when segregation, Jim Crow and lynchings were still realities in a racist society and most bands were either “black” or “white”. Thirdly, the music itself was an intelligent and generous programme which acknowledged jazz past whilst celebrating jazz present. *Sensation Rag* (Lamb) is one of the earliest jazz recordings by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band (1918) and was the fourth item on the program played by the Quintet; *I’m Coming Virginia* (Cook/Heywood) was a “Dixieland” standard once performed by Bix Beiderbecke(1927) and was the fifth number on the programme performed by the

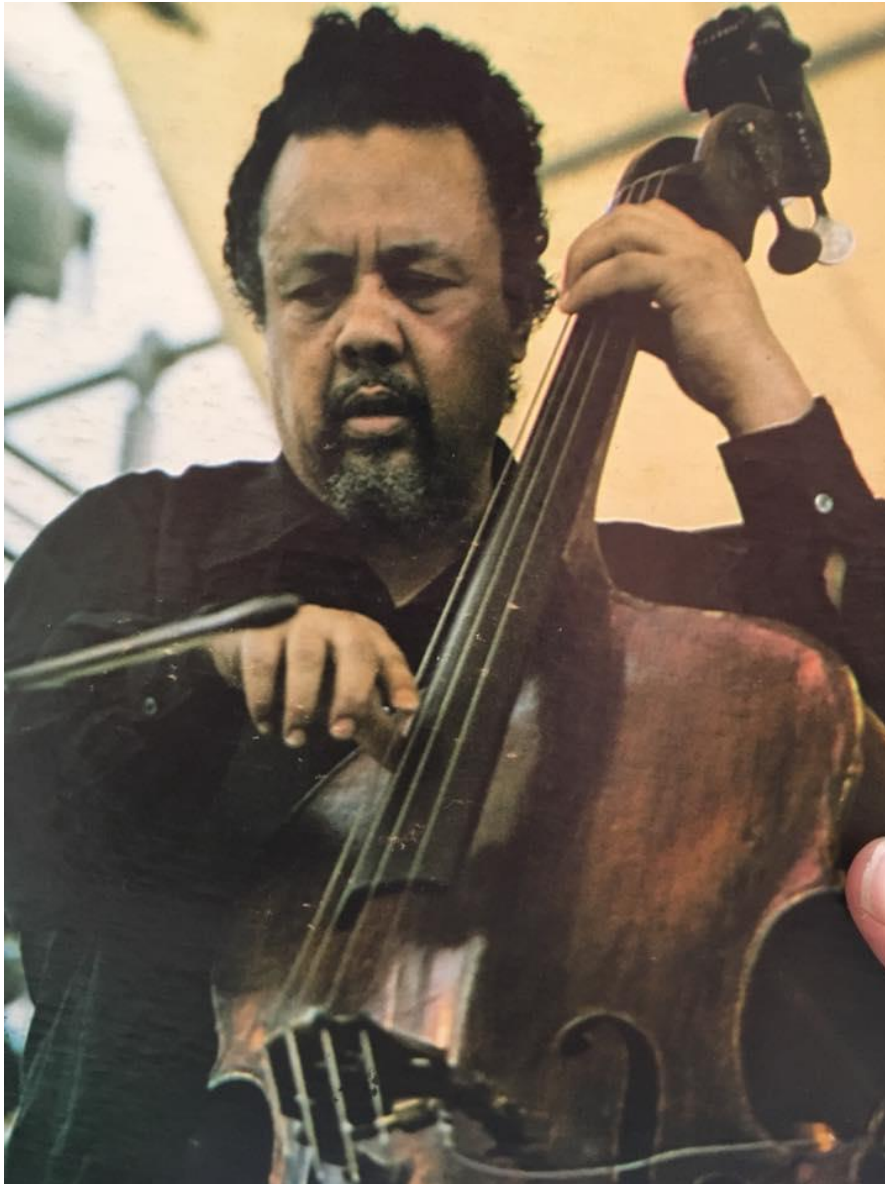
Septet; *When My Baby Smiles At Me* (Munro/Sterling/Lewis) is a Broadway song (1920) made famous by Ted Lewis, who is parodied by Benny Goodman and played by the Quintet; *Shine* (Mack/Brown/Dabney) is a nod to Louis Armstrong and *Blue Reverie* (Ellington/Carney) played by the Sextet, is a nod to Duke Ellington. Popular songs, traditional songs, jazz standards, show tunes and original compositions were played. A jam session on *Honeysuckle Rose* (Waller/Razaf) was a highpoint.

But an equally interesting and far more musically satisfying jam session at Carnegie Hall was that by Charles Mingus on 19/1/74. Dinner suits were not worn as they were with Benny Goodman. The programme was not retrospective but open and free. The musicians were mainly young (eg 21, 31, 32, 32). The music was about the present and future. And significantly, for the second part of the concert, only two pieces were performed: one by the acknowledged greatest American composer and artist Duke Ellington, *C Jam Blues*; and one by Ellington alumni Juan Tizol and made famous by Ellington, *Perdido* (Tizol/Lengsfelder/Drake). The artists were Mingus, bass and leader; George Adams, tenor sax; Hamiett Bluiett, baritone sax; Jon Faddis, trumpet; John Handy, alto and tenor sax; Rahsaan Roland Kirk, tenor sax and stretch; Charles McPherson, alto sax; Don Pullen, piano; and Dannie Richmond, drums.



Nearly 50 years later it still sounds fresh, even though the format of "jam session" might suggest longeurs, as can occur in many of the Jazz At The Philharmonic live performances. The soloists on *Perdido* mainly keep to four choruses with the exception of Kirk, who does nine choruses on tenor and stretch in a "perpetual-motion" solo. On *C Jam Blues* Handy and Adams each do 15 choruses whilst Kirk does 24, paying tribute in the process to *inter alia* George Adams, Sonny Rollins, John Coltrane, Illinois Jacquet, Dexter Gordon and Ben Webster - remarkable stuff! The coda is a nine-minute free blowing blast, begun by Kirk's non-stop drones as a pedal for some outside playing by the others, which brings the audience to its feet.

Even so, a great joy to me in these performances is the acoustic bass of Mingus which maintains a rock solid 4/4 throughout because (he said): “none of the other bass players do!” If he did play perhaps 10,000 quarter-notes over the two pieces they are just so beautiful, so swinging, they’re the heartbeat of the music, and worth listening to specifically in the knowledge that the man could make the bass talk, sing, perform anything *avant garde*, but chose to be the base and let the others sing their song.



Charles Mingus: his acoustic bass maintains a rock solid 4/4 throughout...
PHOTOGRAPHER
UNKNOWN

The presentation of Goodman’s Carnegie Hall Concert included the full orchestra; Trio of clarinet, piano and drums; Quartet of vibes, clarinet, piano and drums; Quintet of clarinet, tenor, trombone, piano and drums; Sextet of trumpet, alto sax, baritone sax, piano, guitar, bass and drums; and a Septet of clarinet, trumpet, trombone, piano, guitar, bass and drums. There is a jam session and there are representatives from the great big bands of Count Basie and Duke Ellington. Musically however, in terms of artistry, Goodman’s concert does not live up to the hype, whereas John Coltrane’s *Live At The Village Vanguard* if anything has grown in stature since 1961.

What makes a venue “sacred”, as the Village Vanguard is to jazz musicians, is a complex combination of many things. Probably the first and perhaps most important element is the attitude and motivation of the owner of the venue. No matter how well a venue may be designed or situated, it will not matter as much as the feelings the owner has towards the art being presented. Because of the nature of jazz improvisation, the musician’s ability to spontaneously create will have much to do with his or her feelings at the time, all other things being equal. Knowledge that the owner manager is not worried about people listening and not spending, or that the players are playing too long, or too loud, is to help creativity.

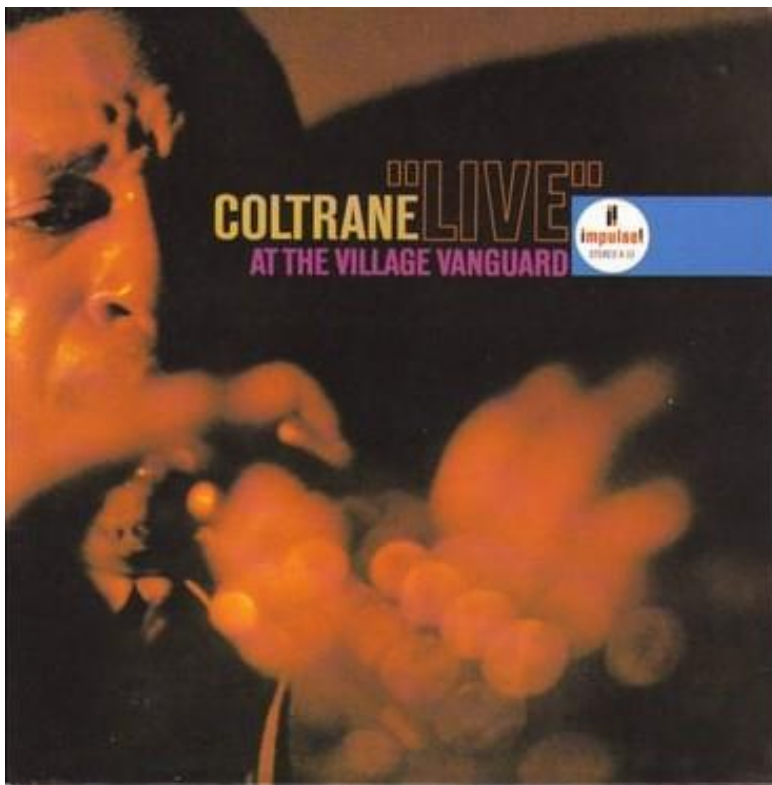


Max & Lorraine Gordon, owners of the Village Vanguard, pictured in the 1950s in The Blue Angel, Max’s East Side nightclub...

Max and Lorraine Gordon’s sympathy for jazz and empathy with artists have been crucial to the success of the Vanguard. Secondly, because this music is primarily about communication between players, and between players and audience more than any other music, a certain closeness or intimacy helps the music work. The Vanguard in a basement might even be described as cramped with lousy dressing rooms, but it has intimacy and informality in spades! Thirdly, the ghosts of artists past is no small thing, especially to creative artists, especially perhaps to improvising jazz artists. To stand where Sonny Rollins stood, to sit where Bill Evans sat, is like a young indigenous AFL player putting on a number 37 guernsey, the number worn by Adam Goodes.

Finally, the Vanguard history has been described as casual, almost accidental, like a finely improvised solo, which is appealing to the attitude and intelligence of jazz artists. So when John Coltrane was engaged to headline an engagement at the

Vanguard in October 1961, featuring as well singer Ada Lee and the Mal Waldron Trio, there was an equivalence with Benny Goodman appearing at Carnegie Hall, especially when it came to how this event was seen by other jazz musicians worldwide and by jazz fans. Significantly it was Coltrane's first live album, and it was the first of his classic quartet with McCoy Tyner on piano; Jimmy Garrison, bass; and Elvin Jones, drums. In other words it's similar to Cate Blanchett appearing for the first time on Broadway, or a poet having a work accepted by the *New Yorker*. Is the artist up to the history and significance of the venue? Just as importantly, there was the confidence enjoyed by the musicians in the knowledge that the attending patrons had an expectation fostered by the foregoing which suffused the atmosphere of the place.



A very few years after the 1938 Carnegie Hall Concert by Benny Goodman, it was apparent that that concert was a recital of some historical interest, rather than something “defining”. It was an event that was more a culmination of an era, and a musical retrospective of some musicians and some trends, which is not to detract from its sociological or social interest, but to call it for what it musically was - a recital of one trend in jazz by one of its leading exponents, which also briefly reviewed some other signposts of performance that led to 1938. Exciting as it could be, the music was already somewhat predictable and lacked the crucial element of “surprise”. By 1950 when the concert was issued in part in a double Columbia LP, it sounded “dated”, with the parody of Ted Lewis’s reminding us that the recital’s focus was exciting entertainment. In 12 years between 1938 and 1950 there had been a musical revolution in jazz. Between 1961, the year of Coltrane’s first live album and 2020, a period of 60 years, jazz had been transformed, had “died” and been reborn with the mainstream retrospective resurgence of Wynton Marsalis and the European influence of ECM. Yet Coltrane’s 1961 live recording is as fresh as today, and not just because of its avant-garde style.

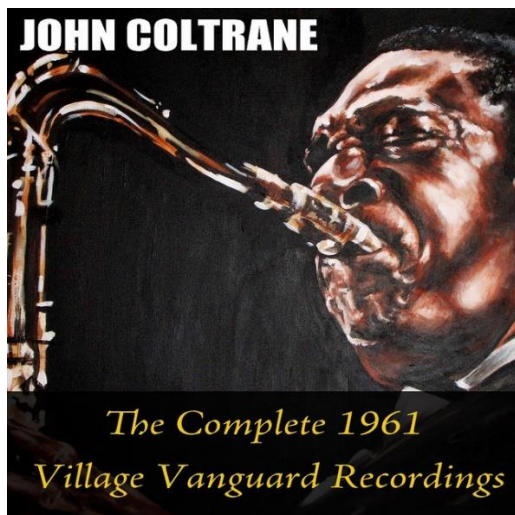
The performances recorded were Wednesday 1/11/61, Thursday, 2/11/61, Friday 3/11/61 and Sunday 5/11/61. The album *Live at the Village Vanguard* was released in 1962 with *Chasin' The Trane* and *Spiritual*, originals by the leader, and *Softly, As in a Morning Sunrise* (Romberg, Hammerstein II). This was Coltrane's tenth album as leader and his first live album, recorded by the eminent engineer Rudy Van Gelder and issued as AS-10 on Impulse. It was side B of this album and Coltrane's 16-minute solo which resounded with a creative thunderclap in the way say Louis Armstrong's solo on *West End Blues* (Oliver) did in 1928. *Chasin' the Trane* had Coltrane on tenor, Jimmy Garrison on bass, and Elvin Jones on drums though the issued album wrongly credited Reggie Workman as the bassist. Eric Dolphy is heard joining in on the last note of the tune.

The up-tempo performance starts at full force as it were, as if the three musicians were lined up at a starting gate like thoroughbred horses, with Coltrane pushing out front, bursting with energy. His solo is joyful, yet roiling, swaggering in its confidence, in the upper register reaching at times the edges of tonality, beyond the limits of the horn, whilst remaining beautiful and kept on the "race" track by the bass and drums. There is a feeling of ecstatic shouting at times, and a feeling of skipping with joy. Coltrane in this performance escapes the social masks we all wear - our separate identities, our status, our clothes, possessions, our cultural references - to connect directly with our shared humanness. It's one of those rare performance moments where the artist feels himself outside himself as if he's given himself up, and is released. This November 2nd performance is one for the ages.



Coltrane: his solo on "Chasin' the Trane" on November 2, 1961 is one for the ages... PHOTO COURTESY JOHN FORDHAM'S THE SOUND OF JAZZ

Added to the elements spoken of above regarding venue, is the range of musical groups presented by Coltrane over three nights: a trio; four different quartets; five different quintets; four different sextets; a septet, which opened the residency on Wednesday 1/11/61 with Coltrane, soprano, Eric Dolphy, bass clarinet, Tyner, piano, Garrison and Workman, basses, Jones, drums, and Ahmed Abdul-Malik, tampura; and an octet with Coltrane, soprano sax, Dolphy, bass clarinet, Tyner, piano, Garrison and Workman, basses, Jones, drums, Abdul-Malik, tampura, and Garvin Bushell on cor anglais.



Errors that appeared in the original albums have been corrected over the years, most likely in response to the importance of these performances. 16 separate aggregations with a total of 22 performances of one standard, one traditional song and eight original compositions by Coltrane, means the Vanguard audiences enjoyed a considerable range of music over the three nights, music that pointed to the cultural divergence - Asia, Africa, Europe - of its origins, as well as the wide embrace of its tonalities, rhythms, melodies, and the directions in which the music was heading.



The Village Vanguard, New York: a sacred venue to jazz musicians...



Steve Lacy: he liberated the soprano saxophone from its association with Sidney Bechet, and was the inspiration behind Coltrane taking up that instrument... PHOTO COURTESY DEFINITIVE ILLUSTRATED ENCYCLOPEDIA OF JAZZ & BLUES

Another major musical development has to be Coltrane's choice of the soprano saxophone, which had been liberated from its association with Sidney Bechet by Steve Lacy, who was the inspiration behind Coltrane taking up that instrument.* His performance on *India* (Coltrane) of which four versions are documented (MCA and GRP, 1997), reveal a range of expression from the sounds of the flute, to the sounds of the tenor saxophone, even the tenor's bottom end. The nod to the East is not unexpected as Coltrane had expressed interest in Eastern religions and culture. The aerophone range of Indian instruments including the snake charmer's pungi or the bagpipes or the flute or the double reed instrument the shenai, can be suggested on the soprano saxophone by a master such as Coltrane in his extended melodic

* Valerie Wilmer, *“As Serious As Your Life”*, Quartet Books, London, 1977, p 35.

extemporisations. The nature of Coltrane's extended solos have been referenced by the musician himself following his residency with Thelonious Monk. He related that Monk would stop comping during a horn solo and dance or wander off, and look out a window so to speak, perhaps as long as the solo seemed inspirational, and then wander back to the piano. During Coltrane's solos, Monk's "looking out the window" often lasted a considerable time, seemingly giving permission to Coltrane to dig in and keep going. Coltrane did not ignore this opportunity and, after working with Monk, he had the confidence to play extended solos, comfortable in himself that it would not seem like "showing off", but a normal element in his playing. This fits admirably with the knowledge of Coltrane's renowned shyness and humility.



Thelonious Monk: he would stop comping during a horn solo and dance... thus giving permission to Coltrane to dig in and keep going...

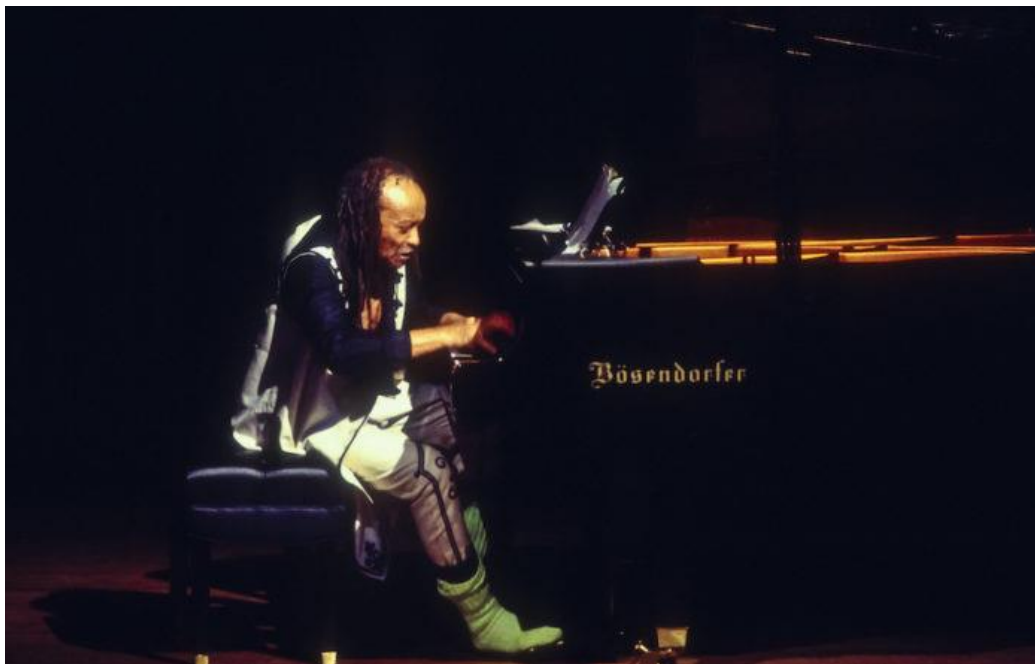
St Cecil

Cecil Taylor is a startling otherworldly unique example of sainthood in jazz. My understanding, appreciation and opinion of him is confined to my own experience of his music, documents I own of his live performances, and ruminations about the purity of his approach to the greatest music so far imagined by humanity. To analyse his music, best refer to a musicologist. As to "jazz" he has said: "I don't know what jazz is. And what most people think of as jazz I don't think that's what it is at all.. I don't think the word has any meaning at all." (from an interview with Chris Funkhouser, Brooklyn, 3/9/94).



Cecil Taylor: I don't know what jazz is...

Taylor's discipline and purity of approach, is closely tied to his generosity of spirit, deep intelligence, understanding, talent and love. He may well be also the purist example extant of the marriage between European "classical" traditions and the music known as jazz. As to the former, his instrument of choice is the most beautiful and most responsive Western musical instrument invented, the grand piano. He referred to it as his "orchestra". His preference is for a Bösendorfer featuring nine extra lower-register keys (he says whereas a Steinway *plays itself*, he has *to play* a Bösendorfer).



Cecil Taylor on the Bosendorfer in 1994...

He was classically trained, at the New England Conservatory of Music. He worked with Johnny Hodges and Hot Lips Page. He admired Art Tatum but was drawn to the sounds of Fats Waller and the approach of Bud Powell, Horace Silver and Thelonious Monk, and collaborated with John Coltrane. Sonny Greer was a family friend and Duke Ellington an influence, especially Ellington's successful marriage of European and African elements. His aim, similar to Ellington's, was to use his piano, where Ellington used his orchestra, to imitate the sound of nature. He lifted soprano saxophonist Steve Lacy from Dick Wellstood's trad jazz band and with Buell Neidlinger, bass; and Dennis Charles, drums; inaugurated the jazz policy at the Five Spot in 1956. Let's just say in the vernacular: he had cred, he was hip.

Note that in the age of Jim Crow, at a time (1955) when the Black Power movement was getting traction, when African American jazz musicians generally were employing only black musicians, Taylor not only engaged Lacy, a white musician, but one who was also from the genre despised by the new black politically aware bebop players, Dixieland. Lacy was transformed by his experience with Taylor and went on to influence Coltrane and develop his own substantial artistic legacy. Lacy played with Taylor for six years during which Taylor "turned me on to dance like Cunningham and Balanchine; he clued me in on politics, films, a certain amount of literature and theatre, and humanity, people." (cf Interview *Downbeat* February 1997).



At the Newport Jazz Festival, July 6, 1957, L-R, Buell Neidlinger (bass), Cecil Taylor (piano), Steve Lacy (soprano saxophone)... PHOTO CREDIT ROBERT PARENT

Taylor's music challenges the listener, which brings me to reflect on criticism often directed at jazz lovers, or even by some lovers of jazz at other jazz lovers, who may have a broader listening palette than say "swing" or "mainstream". Jazz can be labelled an elitist interest as if "elitist" in artistic endeavours is a snub to ordinary folk or amateur musicians or an affront to the theory of post-modernism. And yet in almost any other endeavour - business, medicine, law, and especially sport, the elite are admired, paid handsomely, and waited upon. The difference with the arts, and especially an art such as Taylor's, to "get it", it requires discipline, dedication, effort, focus, an open mind and heart, and time, and much listening to much music. In other words, something approaching the attitude, if not the dedication, of the artist.

In culinary terms, most popular MTV music is Coca Cola; rock and roll - fast food; classical music - meat and three veg; jazz - fine dining; and the likes of Taylor, eight part degustation at Lumi (Sydney) accompanied by very fine wines. Just as in the other arts, writings such as Proust and the deep rewards to be had from *Remembrance of Things Past*, these require a similar commitment. Just as in marriage, or its equivalent, the deep rewards do not reveal themselves easily or quickly, but require discipline, dedication, effort, focus, an open mind and heart, and

time and much listening. And just like in marriage, Taylor's art is a mutual art and his performing for other humans is its *raison d'être*. In other words, the notion that the listener, the audience say, like the Aristocracy of old, engages the artist to create "approved" music, to be entertained, to be pleased, has been overtaken by the emergence of democracy. And just as democracy depends upon an informed citizenry to thrive, so "jazz", and especially Taylor's music, depends upon the willingness and efforts of the listener to inform himself, to discipline himself, to engage himself in the artist's endeavours.

Taylor's purism I refer to, firstly, is performance. He eschewed studio recordings because he had to cede control to engineers, and studios removed the other partner in the creative activity, the audience, or listener. Consequently, almost all of his finest works are live recordings: *Cecil Taylor Complete Live At The Café Montmartre* (2CDs) (1962 Copenhagen); *Silent Tongues* (1974, Montreux Jazz Festival); *Max Roach and Cecil Taylor* (1979, Columbia University, NY); *Fly! Fly! Fly! Fly! Fly! Fly!* (1980 Villingen); *Cecil Taylor in Berlin/88* (11CD); *The Willisau Concert* (2000 Jazzfestival Willisau); and *2 Ts for a lovely T* (10CD, 1990 London).

CECIL TAYLOR COMPLETE LIVE AT THE CAFE MONTMARTRE



His music typically is characterised by energy, contrast, complex rhythms, tempo variations, forward momentum or drive, sudden stops and thunderous clusters using the left hand. A piece like *After All (Fifth Movement)* from *Silent Tongues*, begins "solemnly", where a theme is stated, and repeated, there is a gentle

response, then the music grows, becomes more intense, as if Taylor's mind is responding to the creation in real time, perhaps marvelling at the creation, and continuing the process. *On D Trad, That's What* (#1 from *Live at the Cafe Montmartre*), at times his left hand explores the melody, whilst his right hand has a percussive conversation with the drummer Sunny Murray whilst tension continues to build. It is an amazing and exciting performance. Taylor may begin with a few written notes as ideas but the playing is improvised completely - composition in the moment which has been labelled "free jazz".



L-R, Jimmy Lyons (tenor saxophone), Sunny Murray (drums), Cecil Taylor (piano), Kurt Lindgren (double bass)...

He has referred to performance as "instant composing as body language" (*Wire* magazine, 12/87) and by 1988 his performances had become more theatrical, accompanied by song and dance. The notion of "freedom" in relation to "free jazz" has been addressed by Taylor:

If a man plays for a certain amount of time - scales, licks, what have you - eventually a kind of order asserts itself. Whether he chooses to notate that personal order or engage in polemics about it, it's there. That is, if he is saying anything in

his music. There is no music without order - if that music comes from a man's innards. But that order is not necessarily related to any single criterion of what order should be as imposed from the outside. Whether that criterion is the song form or what some critic thinks jazz should be. This is not a question, then, of 'freedom' as opposed to 'non-freedom', but it is rather a question of recognising different ideas and expressions of order. (Quoted by Erik Wiedermann, in notes to Cecil Taylor Complete Live at the Cafe Montmartre.)

The Australian group The Necks (Chris Abrahams, piano and Hammond organ; Tony Buck on drums, percussion and electric guitar; and Lloyd Swanton, bass; are the only live performances I've attended which reflect Taylor's principles of performance. The group Chiri (Scott Tinkler, trumpet; Bae Il Dong (voice); and Simon Barker (drums); may also follow these principles, but my understanding is the vocals of Bae Il Dong are based on pre-existing forms.



The Necks, L-R, Tony Buck, Lloyd Swanton, Chris Abrahams: their live performances reflect Cecil Taylor's principles of performance...

The purism I refer to, secondly, concerns his holistic approach to his art - European/African improvised music (jazz). He said in a *Downbeat* interview in 1975, when *Disco-Tex and the Sex-O-Lettes* were on the hit parade and *Rhinestone Cowboy* by Glen Campbell was number 2, when jazz was, if not dead, seriously wounded:

Obviously, to me, the stool upon which I sit when I'm playing could be considered an altar, a tripod upon which Isis or the Pythoness sits containing the closed calabash, the Iqua Odu, the seed, the beginning, the water, the sea of divinity from which my heritage speaks (cf Doerschuk ibid, p 234).

He ventured into R&B early in his career, and once shared a concert with Oscar Peterson, whom he admired. He liked Michael Jackson and saw young brilliant gymnasts (for example) as inspirational, whereas poetry he found exciting. In performance he reconciles the left and right sides of the brain, the spontaneous and the preconceived.



Taylor in 1989: he washed dishes, and lived on welfare rather than compromise...
PHOTO COURTESY NEW YORK TIMES

The purism I refer to finally, by which I mean the uncorrupted approach to his art which is determined by his own will and belief and talent, and not determined by others or by commercial imperatives or prejudices, is manifest in his vision, and in the discipline he brought to his art - he washed dishes, lived on welfare rather than compromise. He would routinely practise four hours in the day preceding a performance. In practice he says: “It begins with the breath of one note, with hearing and experiencing that, and the separation of that note from all the notes you play... it begins with the attempt to make the one note itself a universe... I sing when I strike a note.. remember that before music, there is the word, the voice, the drum... (cf Doerschuk, *ibid*, p. 238).

Such respect for art generally, may have had its roots in a mother who loved him unconditionally and encouraged his artistic endeavours, including music, theatre, architecture, dance ('I try to imitate on the piano the leaps in space a dancer makes') and poetry (sensual at the same time literal), sculpture and art, and told him to listen to Bessie Smith. Like Monk he often dances in workshops and some performances. He wrote poetry. He saw his art as a “celebration of life.” He also refers to his aesthetic approach:

First of all I want clarity of sound, I want the precision of the note as it is struck... Playing Bach for instance, when I was eight or nine, it became very clear that each note was a continent, a world in itself, and it deserved to be treated as that. When I practice my own technical exercises, each note is struck, and I hear it, and it must be done with the full momentum and amplitude of the finger being raised and striking - it must be heard in the most absolute sense. (Notes to Cecil Taylor in Berlin FMP 11CD by Steve Lake).

In relation to practise as an example, before the recording at Villingen to a select audience, he practiced five hours the first day, nine hours the second, and eight hours the third, before the performance on Sunday 14/9/80.

Overriding all perhaps are two significant ideas he prosecuted all his life, one to do with music, the other with human existence. The former relates to his statement that “to feel is the most terrifying thing in this society.” An obvious example of this is white embarrassment at African American exuberance in church gatherings, but also evident in the sermon-like cadences in speeches of prominent leaders such as Martin Luther King. When in New York I attended the film *A Time To Kill* where the audience frequently shouted at the screen and interrupted incidences with “yeah”! At a performance at Lincoln Centre featuring a jazz trombone chorus the audience started dancing in the aisle. In contrast Australian audiences react to whispering in the cinema! And are restrained in their applause at performances in fear of being “incorrect”.



*Members of Cecil Taylor's
Feel Trio: William Parker
(above, acoustic bass), and
Tony Oxley (left, drums)...
OXLEY PHOTO CREDIT
STUART NICHOLSON*

Taylor married European instruments and European musical developments with that of Africa, and never lost sight of the belief that music is feeling above all else, and that the complex structures and intellectualism (perhaps emphasised by Anthony Braxton) of European music, should not be pursued at the expense of feeling. He went so far as to call one of his greatest aggregations The Feel Trio (with William Parker, acoustic bass; and Tony Oxley, drums). In short, he never was very far from music and life's beginnings: the word, the voice, the drum and feeling.

The other idea, perhaps more significant and not unique to him, is that of the constant wish of humans for simplicity, where the reality of human existence is anything but, and an artist like Shakespeare constantly demonstrated this complexity:

What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason, how infinite in faculty! In form and moving how express and admirable! In action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world. The paragon of animals. And yet..... (Hamlet, Act 2 Scene 2)

When reference was made to his life as a single man he refused to allow being labelled gay: "Do you think a three-letter word defines the complexity of my humanity?". This complexity he brought to his work, its contradictions, its mysteries, and he refused to offer explanations about a performance - it was intended to be felt. The dedication to his art was unseparated from his dedication to his mind and body, both of which thrived until his 89th birthday. He passed away on 5/4/18.

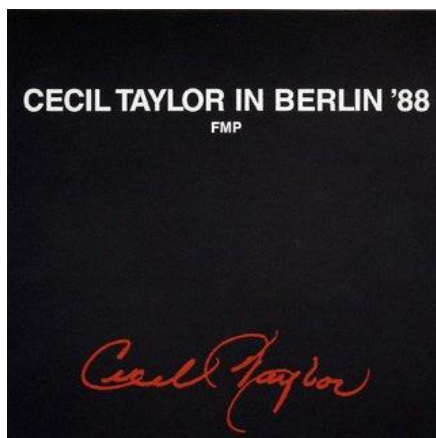


Taylor: he died on April 5, 2018 aged 89...

Taylor's persistent focus and understanding of human complexity and contradictions, highlight the contrasting universal human need in children for simplicity which tends in many cases to last into adulthood. The simplistic answers to life by established religion. The constant habit of labelling people: black, yellow, fat, nigger, Abo, faggot. The constant reference to nationhood and flag-waving by a nation that despised his colour, and ignored his art. The compulsion to believe the simplicities of fundamentalists or the statements of Presidents: "I've done more for blacks than anyone with the possible exception of Abraham Lincoln, and maybe even more than he did"... (President Trump on National Debate 23/10/20). Taylor explained the complexities of music generally and his own music:

Anybody's music is made up of a lot of things that are not musical. Music is an attitude, a group of symbols of a way of life, whether you're conscious of it or not.... And of course, it naturally reflects the social and economic and educational attitudes of the players. And that's why the fools don't think I play jazz. (As Serious As Your Life, Valerie Wilmer, Quartet, London, 1977, p 45).

A summary of his life and works is perhaps an insult and a concession to simplicity, so evidence of his legacy may be experienced on two significant documents of recorded music of live performances: *Cecil Taylor in Berlin '88* (11 CDs) and *2 Ts For A Lovely T* (10CD).



The first is a record of some of the results of the period between 17th June 1988 and 17th July 1988 in East and West Berlin, when Taylor organised and performed in numerous concerts, rehearsals and workshops. He appeared as soloist, played duo concerts, gave a piano master class with five pianists, led a workshop ensemble with 13 musicians, and gave two concerts with a 17-piece orchestra.

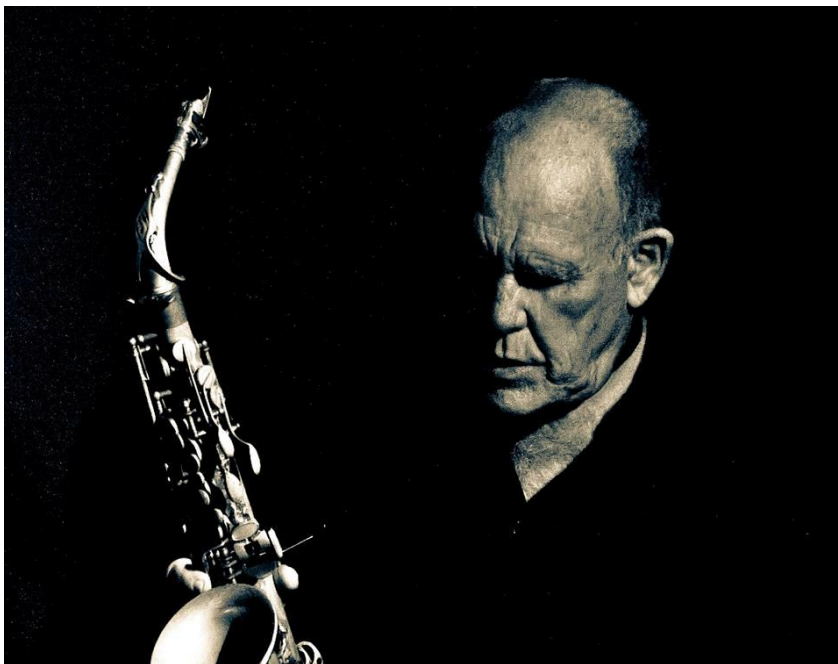
Musicians involved include Derek Bailey, guitar; Johannes Bauer, trombone; Han Bennink, drums, everything/anything; Peter Van Bergen, tenor, bass clarinet; Peter Brotzmann, alto, tenor, baritone, and bass saxophones, clarinets, tarogato; Gunter Hampel, vibes, flutes, baritone sax, piano; Tristan Honsinger, cello; Hans Koch, soprano, tenor sax and bass clarinet; Peter Kowald, acoustic bass, tuba; Paul Lovens, selected drums and cymbals; Martin Mayes, French horn; Louis T Moholo, drums; Tony Oxley, drums; Evan Parker, soprano and tenor sax; William Parker, bass, tuba; Christian Radovan, trombone; Enrico Rava, trumpet, flugelhorn; Louis Sclavis, soprano sax, clarinet, bass clarinet; Gunter Sommer, drums; Tomasz Stanko, trumpet; Cecil Taylor, piano; and Wolter Wierbos, trombone.



The second is a 10-CD record of a week of shows he undertook in 1990 with his Feel Trio: himself on piano; with William Parker, bass; and Tony Oxley, drums. The average performance is about 40 minutes. Remarkable clarity. It is a beautifully recorded club experience with great clarity and transparency of sound, and a sustained example of improvisation by master musicians rather than the interpretation of a repertoire. I'm unaware of any parallel in recorded music.

In musical terms my feeling is that Taylor in time will be remembered for his work in much the same way Edward Kennedy Ellington is remembered for his.

Saint Bernard



Bernie McGann: Saint Bernard... PHOTO CREDIT TOMAS POKORNY

In my opinion Bernie McGann is the artist I feel stands out regarding Sainthood within the Australian context. Of course there may be many others, such as Roger Frampton, but McGann had a unique voice, a dedication to his art, and a vision which made an indelible impression. I'll never forget being the only audience member at Jenny's Wine Bar, Sydney in the mid-1980s and Mr McGann played as if Charlie Parker himself and a hundred others were present.