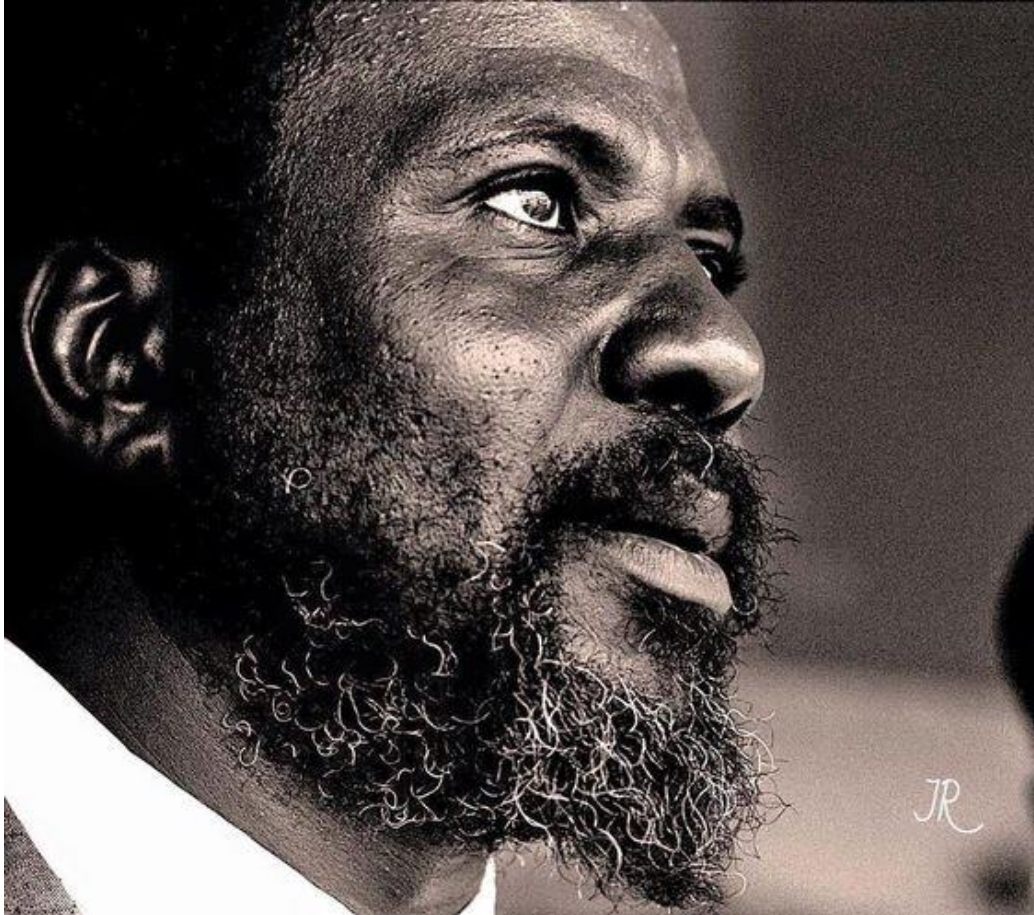


PIANO RECITALS YOU MAY HAVE MISSED

by Ian Muldoon*



"When you understand the inside the outside will be just fine"

-Thelonious Monk

**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. In 2021 he published a collection of essays on jazz subjects, entitled "My Jazz Odyssey: Confessions of a Lifetime Enthusiast".*

Jazz is weird yet blood simple. Jazz is complex and endlessly bewitching and enthralling, able to churn up feelings and ideas better than any other art, and provide a deep and moving respite from the pain of our confusing lives. Jazz is just like life: somewhat incomprehensible but impossibly beautiful. Am I making myself clear?

Take the simple pop song *Lover Man (Oh, Where Can You Be?)* (Davis/Ramirez/Sherman) written for Billie Holiday with a strong melody for the horn (voice). It was given its first treatment by Holiday backed by strings. In 1945 it was no 5 on the hit parade. It tapped into the zeitgeist of women pining for their absent WW11 husbands and boyfriends.



Billie Holiday: her 1944 version of "Lover Man" got to number 5 in the pop charts in 1945... PHOTO COURTESY OF TIME-LIFE

The lush sweeping sentimental strings were a Hollywood staple for many years in an attempt to raise the status of movies from matinee fodder for the working classes to aspirational art for the middle classes. There was just so much rubbish trying to pass as "art" that the Marx Brothers had a field day mocking the trend in the film *A Night At The Opera*. Holiday did get to number 5 in the pop charts with *Lover Man* in her 1944 version but it was somewhat anodyne compared to that by Sarah Vaughan (with Dizzy Gillespie) in 1945.

Charlie Parker's recorded version is a cult favourite which could be seen as him being so overcome with wrenching emotion he could barely continue, when in fact he was pissed and stoned and tired and any seeming "emotion" is accidental.



Charlie Parker: when he recorded "Lover Man", in fact he was pissed and stoned and tired..

Lover Man is steeped in the tradition of Tin Pan Alley "love" songs and Hollywood romance. Here is one stanza of those lyrics:

*I've heard it said
That the thrill of romance
Can be like a heavenly dream
I go to bed with a prayer
That you'll make love to me
Strange as it seems*

The woman is desperate for a man, praying to heaven that he'll come to her and love her, "make love" to her. Holiday did not interpret the song in any ironic way or with any special passion or poignancy, not that it mattered with her artistry. The reality of Holiday's "romantic life" was that she was a very attractive and very desirable woman who had no difficulties attracting any number of men some of whom raped, abused

and used her. There was very little “romance” in either her mother’s or her own relationships with men.

The facts of absent men in WW11 and the fact of her personal life circumstances added poignancy to her singing *Lover Man* but what gave it resonance and longevity was her 1939 rendering of *Strange Fruit* (Abel Meeropol) a song with a different poetic sentiment which became her best-selling recording of all. In other words, Billie Holiday carries a lot of associated emotional baggage and listener memories with whatever song she sings and *Lover Man* was no exception and she will always be associated with it. She remains a symbol for the African American racial experience in America but her brutal life experiences with African American men resonate with women anywhere regardless of culture. *Lover Man* was also recorded by Thelonious Monk.



A graphic relevant to “Strange Fruit”, including a shot of the song’s writer Abel Meeropol (top left) and Holiday (right)...

In 1971 a group called Giants of Jazz was formed by promoter George Wein to undertake a world tour. It comprised Dizzy Gillespie, trumpet; Sonny Stitt, alto saxophone; Kai Winding, trombone; Al McKibbin, bass; Art Blakey, drums; and Thelonious Monk, piano. The tour began in Australia and went on to Japan, Israel, Europe ending in London on 14th November.

One Australian performance was reviewed by Dick Hughes who wrote that the concert was “among the greatest experiences I’ve had in 30 years of listening to jazz”.* He also described Monk’s solo on *Round Midnight* (Monk) as “the most impressive single contribution to the whole series - an inspired testimony to his genius”.**



Dick Hughes: he wrote that hearing Monk was “among the greatest experiences I’ve had in 30 years of listening to jazz”... PHOTO CREDIT JANE MARCH FROM MIKE WILLIAMS’ AUSTRALIAN JAZZ EXPLOSION

Monk was 54 in 1971 and on this tour he was not a well man. He was losing weight, was lethargic to the extent that he rarely got out of bed between concerts, and refused to speak. But when he performed he astonished everyone even masters such as Jaki Byard who said of Monk's Perth, Australia, performance “ ...Oh Jesus, I’ve never heard anybody play so well.” It is possible Monk was having intimations of his own mortality and was playing as if life itself was at stake.

In London after the world tour Alan Bates of Black Lion recorded solo Monk. The first half of the session comprised five originals and five standards, one of which was *Lover Man*. There have been more than 30 versions alone recorded by the great melodist improviser Lee Konitz. Tenor sax giants Coleman Hawkins and Sonny Rollins did a gripping version on their 1963 document *Sonny Meets Hawk* (RCA). It will be always associated with Billie Holiday. Monk’s performance of it is the longest take of the standards played at this London session and

* *Downbeat*, “Caught in the act” 9/12/71, pp 27-28.

***Thelonious Monk: The Life and Times of an American Original*, Robin D G Kelley, JR Books, London, 2010, p 427.

the penultimate song of the programme. Its seven minutes seems to foment sadness, outrage, joy, love, wonder stirring up these feelings, and thoughts of Holiday, America, music, racism, mortality, Bird, art and the artist, alone, voicing to those that listen, “please connect, please understand, please love.” It is played with such percussive power, angular rhythmic delights and space and melodic and harmonic essence, it seems carved in the most exquisite marble, forever there, here.

I spent some time with Dick Hughes - a wise, educated, accomplished jazz pianist and warm outgoing individual - and his opinion on Monk’s Australian performance has weight and authority. I’ve been listening to music, mainly improvised music, for 70 years and in my inexpert view Monk’s influence and legacy may be greater than Bartok’s whose beautiful, inventive, sterile structures sourcing *inter alia* folk music are now used in turn as source material by new artists like Andrea Keller on her *Mikrocosmos* (Bartok) album of 2002 *The Bartok Project*.



Monk’s appearance on the cover of Time magazine meant less to him than the public comment of Edward Kennedy Ellington calling him “master”...

Confident and comfortable in his own art, praise meant little to Monk whose appearance on the cover of *Time* magazine meant less to him than the public comment of Edward Kennedy Ellington calling him “master”. And though Monk rarely played the music of others, when he did, Ellington compositions were favoured, and no-one could interpret Ellington on the piano with as much resonance and power as Monk (cf Berliner Jazztage Festival celebrating the 70th birthday of Ellington in November 1969 when Monk brought the house down with *Satin Doll* (Ellington/Strayhorn), *Caravan* (Tizol/Ellington), *Solitude* (Ellington) and *Sophisticated Lady* (Ellington)).

Monk transcends genres. And his performance of *Lover Man* is the greatest recording of that song (*Thelonious Monk: The London Collection Volume One* (Black Lion)) and one of the great performances for piano. And when the Martians arrive, who have no understanding of the context of Monk's performance, and hear those seven minutes, they will listen in wonder to its rhythmic and other magical charms.

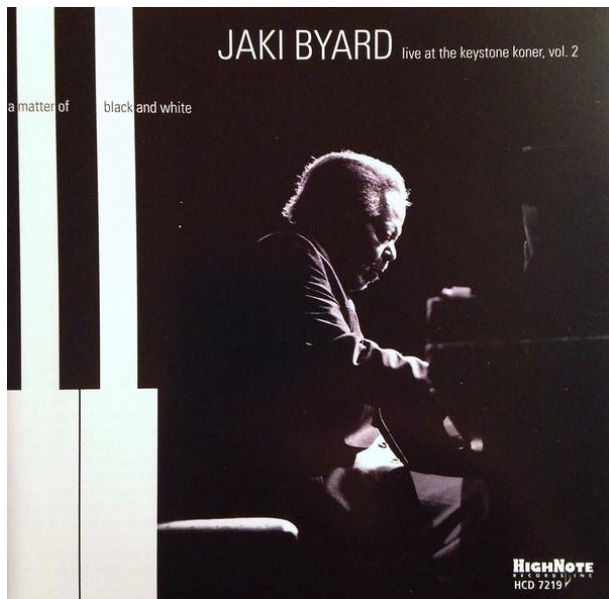


Monk at Minton's Playhouse in New York City, circa 1947... PHOTO CREDIT WILLIAM P GOTTLIEB/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

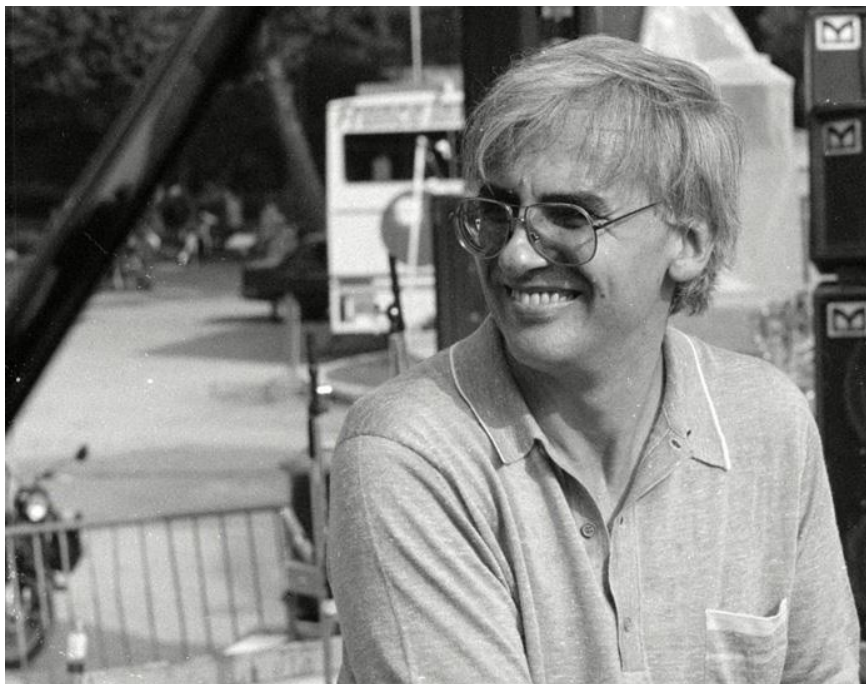
Jaki Byard is an interesting instance of an artist who calls upon all piano tradition, the inherent orchestral properties of the instrument, and any style to flavour his performance. When exploring works of other artists he searches for the essence of the work and improvises anything suggested by it. In this he cannot be pigeonholed or style-cast or immediately identified through a particular style or sound as say Erroll Garner is instantly recognised, or even Bill Evans.

He performed at Keystone Corner in San Francisco between 1978 and 1979 and some works were released as *Jaki Byard live at the keystone corner* (High Note). Volume 2 (*A Matter of Black and White*) concluded with a medley of the Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn compositions *Lush Life* (Strayhorn), *Day Dream* (Ellington/Strayhorn) and *Johnny Come Lately* (Strayhorn). He opens the performance with a two-minute overture-like introduction of cascading runs with his left-hand building tension, exploring, searching, then makes an elegant and simple statement of the memorable *Lush Life* melody. Most of the performance is taken with exploration of *Lush Life* which segues into *Day Dream* and then a climax of *Johnny Come Lately* when echoes of ragtime and Bud Powell surface, ending in

what may be thought of as a romantic 19th Century orchestral thundering piano climax. Byard's mastery of many styles is in contrast to the pianism of Paul Bley.



Bley for me is one of those pianists who epitomises the glory of jazz. And what is that glory? In its essence, I think it is the music of now, the "sound of surprise", improvisation and the seemingly infinite pleasures of rhythm. There's nothing wrong with the familiar, and I have my radio permanently tuned to ABC FM Classical for background calm, and a sense of security, yes, sonic wallpaper if you will. But for pleasure, stimulation, intrigue, moments of joy, and hope, I listen to improvised music.



Paul Bley: one of those pianists who epitomises the glory of jazz... PHOTO COURTESY THE WIRE

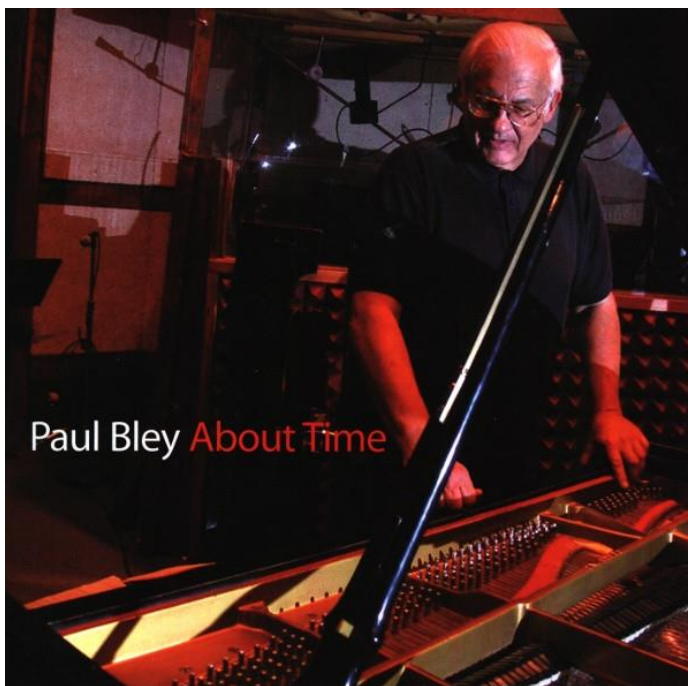
I'm constantly amused when some see improvised music as the "slumming" option. Take the recently published popular romantic potboiler by Imogen Crimp *A Very Nice Girl* (Bloomsbury) 2022 in which Anna the working class protagonist is training to be an opera singer and is slumming as a jazz singer for cash. At this I smile because the artistic demands of attaining the credibility of a jazz singer - a jazz instrumentalist (voice) accepted by peers of the genre - may be just as demanding as that of opera. In both, many aspire, but few are called. The artistic accomplishments of Gian Slater - voice, composition, arrangements, leader - in our time in our new world, may well be remembered and taken just as seriously as the likes of vocalist Joan Sutherland have been. Sutherland made her name with an established repertoire and was in a constant reach for the perfect and was no composer or leader. Slater is a complete musical artist continually searching, refining and evolving, in the way great artists like Paul Bley have done.



Gian Slater: a complete musical artist continually searching, refining and evolving... PHOTO COURTESY AUSTRALIAN JAZZ REAL BOOK

Bley (1932 - 2016) never let technique get in the way of his creativity. At 17 years of age fellow Canadian Oscar Peterson asked Bley to complete Peterson's contract at the Ambers Lounge, Montreal. In 1953 Bley recorded with Charlie Parker but his first solo outing was not until 1972 when ECM released *Open To Love* which contained the mesmerising *Ida Lupino* (Carla Bley). He released at least 19 solo albums, five since the year 2000. *About Time* (Justin Time) recorded in New York in 2007 has

the title track at 33.28 and *Pent-Up House* (Sonny Rollins) at 10.25. He was 65 at the time of this recording.



The cover of *About Time* has a colour photo by Carol Goss from a piano's point of view: the lid prop of the open lid of a grand piano in the foreground with Bley looking into the centre of the assembled innards of the instrument with his left index finger gently resting on the extreme bottom end tuning knob. It's intriguing that the final two notes of his recital are one high note and then the lowest note with extended sustain. His pensive expression and downcast eyes looking into the hundreds of

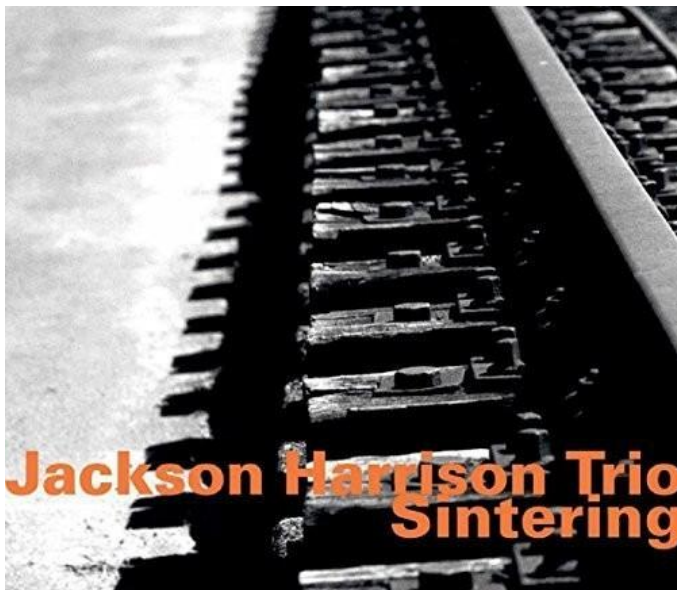
made pieces assembled and joined and glued and fixed now at rest, awaiting the touch of a master to unfold and flourish. At this moment he had been involved with piano playing for 58 years. In childhood he lived through the Great Depression, in youth WW11, then the most profound revolution in music in recorded history, a revolution in which he was part, moving from classical, traditional, swing to free. One can only wonder at the thoughts and feelings as he gazed into the works of the beautiful grand piano and a life spent in its service.

About Time (Bley) is a work composed in performance and opens with some rapid run phrases repeated with long sustain and silence between. A 3/4 time signature features then some very slow searching statements, as we search with him, silences, space. Throughout the 30+ minutes bottom end power is a feature, a percussive approach prevails, there are tempo changes, sweet melodies, some stormy moments, jaunty passages, some tango references, building and finding emotional highs, and the journey like many of Bley's is one in which the listener becomes complicit, searching too, sometimes exclaiming "My God, where did that come from?" There are no licks, habits, or cliches to be found. The recital is a fitting instrument. There is no reflex, cliché or lick, in his measured approach.



Jackson Harrison in 2013: clarity of touch, a refined understanding of time and space, an embracing of the power of repetition, and a strong sense of relationships between phrases and notes and chords within his own playing and that of his musical partners... PHOTO CREDIT TOMAS POKORNY

A new generation pianist Jackson Harrison seems to me to have similar approach to his art as Bley and Russ Lossing. “Less is more” is not just a clever cliché but like many clichés has a foundation in a revealing truth. On the evidence of Harrison’s document *Sintering* (hatOLOGY) recorded 6/9/13 in Sydney, with Ben Waples, double bass; and James Waples, drums, Harrison is establishing himself with, it seems to me, the musical intelligence of a major artist. His pianism has clarity of touch, a refined understanding of time and space, an embracing of the power of repetition, and a strong sense of relationships between phrases and notes and chords within his own playing and that of his musical partners. He tends to a percussive approach and it is noteworthy the role James Waples undertakes in the eponymous *Sintering*. This is a joint composition of the three players which is to say an extemporization. In it the drums play a rhythmic, melodic, chordal role and the bass the beat/harmony whilst the piano plays repetitively simple and clear phrases throughout. It is a quite beautiful five minutes of music yet could be off-handedly and wrongly dismissed as a “drum solo”. It’s one of James Waples’s very fine efforts on record that I have heard. I don’t want to overstate it, but elements of Harrison’s music hint at the trance-like feeling that emerges from Indian music, its extensive melodic inventiveness and the power of repetition in percussion. Lossing, Harrison and Bley have things in common.



Bley’s mentor Oscar Peterson left behind a very fine instrument when he passed in 2007: a Bosendorfer Concert Grand 290 Imperial. Peterson has given me and millions like me so much deep pleasure over so long it’s easy to forget his contribution - like birds in the garden we take for granted, in the background of our lives. But his swing, contribution to making art out of the Great American Songbook, and his compositions make him a member of the jazz pianist pantheon. The Bosendorfer Grand and Peterson deserved each other.

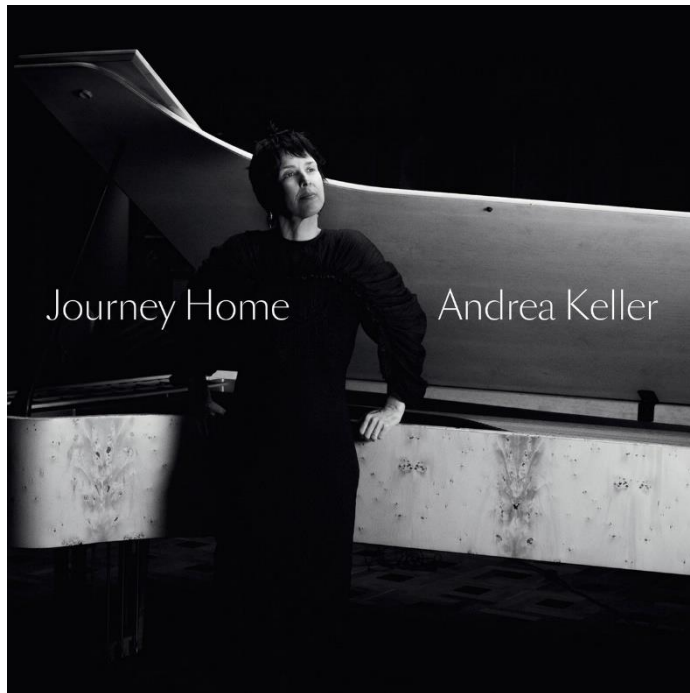
The first of two grand pianos Peterson most adored in his life was a Danish Hornung and Mueller which suffered in the Canadian climate and refused to stay tuned. In the late 1970s he first played a Bosendorfer Grand. In due course he attended Bosendorfer Vienna sited in a former monastery where there were 20 Imperials displayed. On the one he chose he later recalled: “ ...it spoke to me in a way I’d never heard before: the sound seemed to run through my fingers, straight up my arms, and into my whole body.”



Oscar Peterson with his wife Kelly, pictured in Paris in 2006. They married in 1987. She invited a range of musicians to perform Peterson’s compositions on Peterson’s Bosendorfer in his private studio in Ontario, between October 2014 and September 2015...

His widow Kelly was told by the *primo* tuner of Bosendorfer, Hans Muff, in 2012 on a visit from Vienna that “the piano needs to be played”. Kelly invited a range of musicians to perform Peterson’s compositions on the instrument in his private studio in Ontario. Between October 2014 and September 2015 the following artists did so: Bill Charlap, Benny Green, Renee Rosnes, Monty Alexander, Justin Kauflin, Ramsey Lewis, Gerald Clayton, Michel Legrand, Oliver Jones, Dave Young, Makato Ozone, Robi Botos, Kenny Barron, Hiromi, Chick Corea, Lance Anderson, and Audrey Morris. Their efforts are documented on three CDs issued as *Oscar With Love* (2015) Two Lions.

What a joy it must be for those fine pianists to play on such a beautiful hand-made and crafted instrument. In Australia the great Andrea Keller on her *Journey Home* document, played solo on three separate special Stuart grand pianos which feature 108 keys. And what a moving and delightful outcome that is. Those Stuart instruments are about \$300,000 to buy and seem very reasonably priced considering the Bosendorfer Imperial is about \$665,000.



Andrea Keller on her “Journey Home”, played solo on three separate Stuart grand pianos which are about \$300,000 to buy, compared to the Bosendorfer Imperial which costs about \$665,000...

Context and timing are a lot and Peterson struck gold with both. In the 1950s a cashed up demographic of young adults and veterans of WW11 who had been raised on swing music, were ripe for Peterson’s artistry especially that nurtured through the canny production and marketing of jazz loving impresario Norman Granz. Granz doubled down by using the Great American Songbook to get the punters in. Additionally, his *Jazz At The Philharmonic* national and European tours from 1945 to 1959 and sporadically until 1983, were very popular, effectively exposing some of the music’s finest artists to thousands. Significantly, these were the first racially integrated concerts featuring major artists. Peterson’s recording of piano trio documents featuring inter alia bassist Ray Brown, guitarists Herb Ellis and Barney Kessel, and drummer Ed Thigpen, established the format as a commercially successful and very popular one. Peterson made much money in that business but also contributed compositions and masterful if not original pianism. During Peterson’s coming of age, the music had undergone a revolution especially, but not exclusively, at the hands of pianists. And it was rhythm and percussion that chiefly drove that revolution. In this regard, Duke Ellington’s music and pianism were major influences.

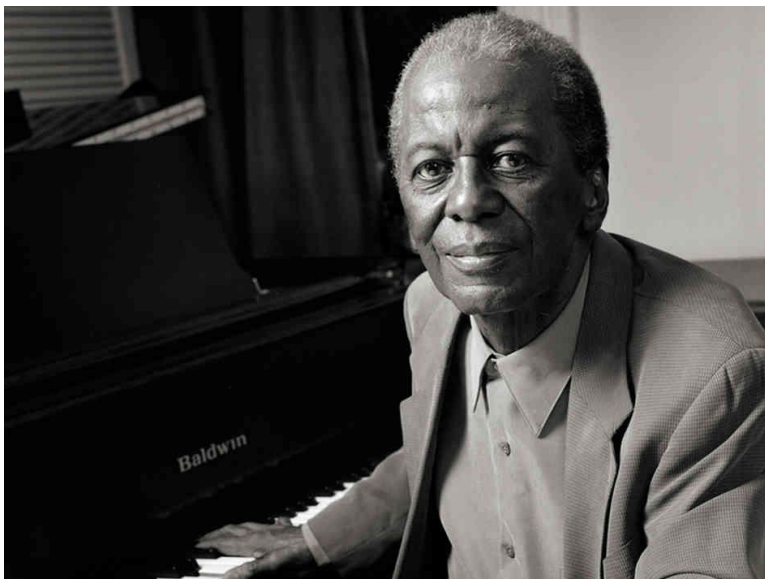
Psychology may provide insights into the predilection for us to want to hear the same music over and over. This phenomenon has been used by advertising agencies, record producers and radio stations to create fortunes for lesser artists. Meanwhile, many many artists not just musicians some of them of very great talent, are sidelined and forgotten. Despite his notoriety and influence, Thelonious Monk remained relatively poor to the end of his life. Ellington once said that "jazz is music; swing is business."

Ellington was speaking in the context of the popularity of swing bands of the 1930s and 1940s such as Glenn Miller but the same remarks might apply to Paul Whiteman, rock bands, Herb Alpert, Mitch Miller, ABBA, rap and other popular music as "business". On the other hand, any art - visual, literary, dance, architecture, cinema or musical - excellence in it comes from commitment, talent, discipline over years, sometimes many, many years. But the legacy of that commitment may be as important to humanity's survival as bread and water itself. When a great artist like pianist McCoy Tyner talks of jazz as "serious as your life" he's not making small talk. Religion has failed humanity.

Psalm 8:

*When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
what is mankind that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them?*

And much of the greatest art takes in turn commitment and discipline from its audience to reap its glory. It's in our nature to resist the different, to take comfort in the same, to want to hear the same over and over.

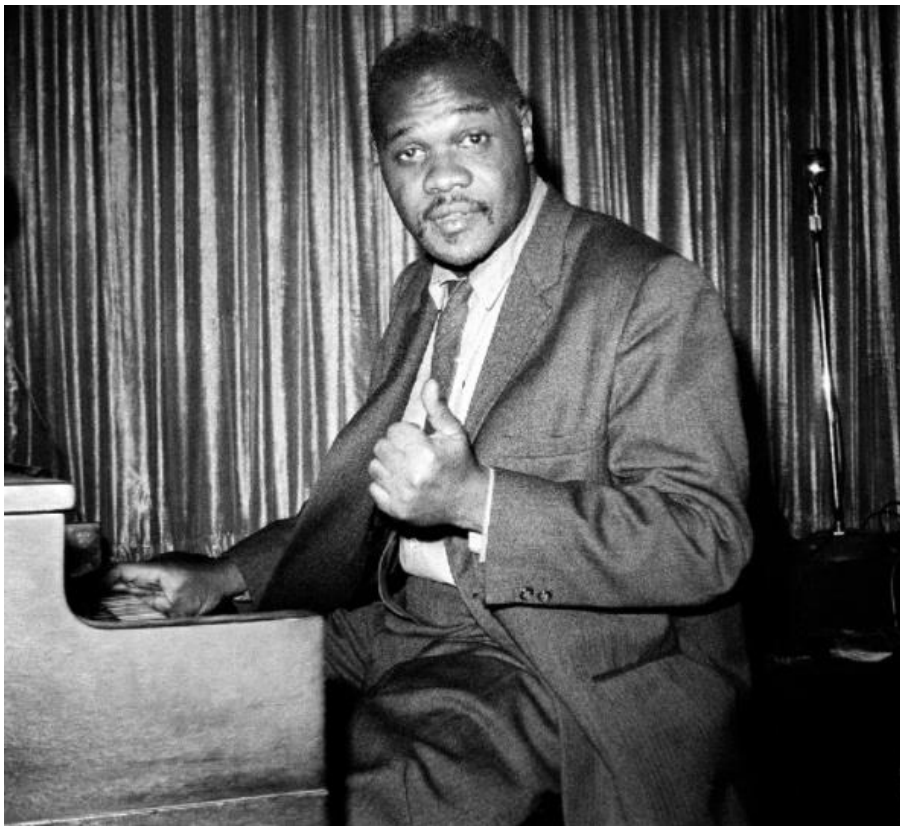


Andrew Hill: despite his outstanding artistry he remained relatively less known compared to his peers such as Sun Ra, Herbie Hancock, or Chick Corea...

Call it laziness, or resistance to the unknown, or a reflex inclination to accept some way, some particular routine, or style, rooted in our learning from respected tutors, but these are barriers to releasing the deep pleasure to be found in these “different” artists. Andrew Hill and Hasaan Ibn Ali were different.

Despite Andrew Hill’s (1931–2007) outstanding artistry he remained relatively less known compared to his peers such as Sun Ra, Herbie Hancock, or Chick Corea. And Hasaan Ibn Ali (1931-1980) despite his outstanding artistry and peer respect, remains relatively unknown. Some solo work of both is documented.

Hasaan (born William Henry Langford Jr on 6/5/31) died 7/10/80. He released one album *The Max Roach Trio Featuring The Legendary Hasaan* (1964). In the notes accompanying that document he referenced Elmo Hope as his mentor: “I learned not as one hit by a ruler or chastised by a stick paddle or a natural teacher. I went to school. I played like no-one that I heard because however hard I would try or apply myself to those duties it just wouldn’t work. But by meeting Mr Hope it was like talking to and having acquaintance with the mystery of music, who explained not by the ruler, but with music. So from him I heard how to learn, which leaves itself truly open, don’t you think?” In 2021 *Hasaan Ibn Ali Retrospect in Retirement of Delay: The Solo Recordings* (2CD) Omnivore released 21 previously unreleased solo performances recorded between October 1964 and January 1965.



Hasaan Ibn Ali: he remains relatively unknown, but some of his solo work is documented.... PHOTO CREDIT ALAN SUKOENIG

There are 14 standards including the jazz musician war horses *Cherokee* (Noble) and *Body and Soul* (Green/Sour/Heyman/Eyton). The sweet romantic 1938 waltz *Falling In Love With Love* (Rodgers/Hart) which has been frequently converted to 4/4 by Clifford Brown et al, becomes unrecognisable under Hasaan's fingers. Although the chord changes of the composition are pedestrian it seems to have an inbuilt irresistible groove and has been performed by Sinatra, Jimmy Smith, Hank Mobley, Wes Montgomery, Art Blakey and in 1989, Sonny Rollins. It was also recorded by Hasaan's mentor, Elmo Hope, in 1955 on his *Meditations* Album (Prestige) 1955.

Hope (1923-1967) was a friend and contemporary of Bud Powell (1924-1992). Hope died at age 44 from *inter alia* drugs and artistic neglect, and was not anywhere near as well-known as either Powell or Monk. He was an original who may be linked to Bud Powell and could be described as a compositional pianist. His recorded trio legacy from 1963-1966 included bassists Paul Chambers, Percy Heath, Curtis Counce, and John Ore. Drummers included Philly Joe Jones, Clifford Jarvis and Frank Butler. Of the 62 tracks, 48 are original compositions. Hope had piano lessons from age seven and with boyhood friend Powell spent much time listening to Bach. Powell made a profound life-changing impact on Hasaan.



Elmo Hope: a friend and contemporary of Bud Powell, he died at age 44 from drugs and artistic neglect... PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

In a Hasaan performance there are recurring features. He seems to address each performance of whatever length as a formal recital. His take on *Cherokee* (Noble) gets beyond 300 beats per minute. He attacks the work with incredible power over

ten minutes, sometimes with his left hand at one tempo with a distinct melody, the right meanwhile doubling down in Powellish runs. He pounds the keyboard with chord clusters. I can't recall a performance of the tune quite like Hasaan's. Its simple melody has been a source of invention by Lee Konitz in more than 20 recording sessions. Artists who have made the tune famous include Count Basie, Charlie Barnet, Charlie Parker, Bud Powell, and Stan Kenton. In short, the tune is made famous by interpretations by artists more than any inherent quality of the piece itself.

Body and Soul on the other hand, is as iconic a jazz standard as any in the repertoire. It was used in the 1947 noir film of the same name starring John Garfield, but has been more associated with jazz than perhaps any other show tune - originally in *Three's A Crowd* (1930). Louis Armstrong recorded it in October of the same year. But it was Coleman Hawkins' 1939 take on it that propelled it to stardom, especially amongst aspiring tenor sax players. Charlie Parker recorded it. Art Tatum recorded over 20 versions along with pianists Thelonious Monk, Jason Moran (2002) and Keith Jarrett (2007).



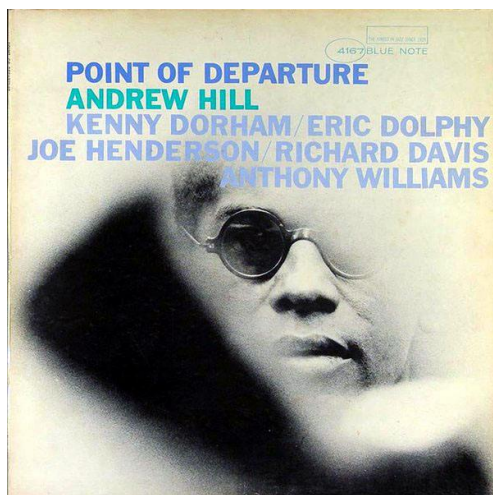
Coleman Hawkins: his 1939 take on "Body and Soul" propelled it to stardom, especially amongst aspiring tenor sax players...

Although Coleman's version became a hit, it was most unexpected because Coleman's version has very little to do with the song's melody - indeed his solo is an elaborate improvisation built on phrases that are just not of the sing-along type - sing-alongs were famous "follow the bouncing ball" melodies from 1945 starting with *When GI Johnny Comes Home* and continuing into the early 1950s using an animated ball with a bounce cycle in cinema audience sing-alongs. They originated in 1923 cinema and were revived in 1945. In some ways, *Body and Soul* is a test of an artist's jazz "creds" as Bach's *Partita in D minor BWV 1004* may be for a classical violinist. The big difference being of course, Bach's composition is beautiful in itself, whilst *Body and Soul* is made beautiful by the performing artist.

Hasaan's 14-minute take on *Body and Soul* is addressed as if it's Beethoven. He opens up-tempo and pounds the melody with the left hand and does some Tatumesque runs with the right. His performance is very much variations on a theme with tempo changes and melodic consistency in the left hand with elaborate orchestral improvisations on the right. He takes a simple song and makes it a very large musical meal.

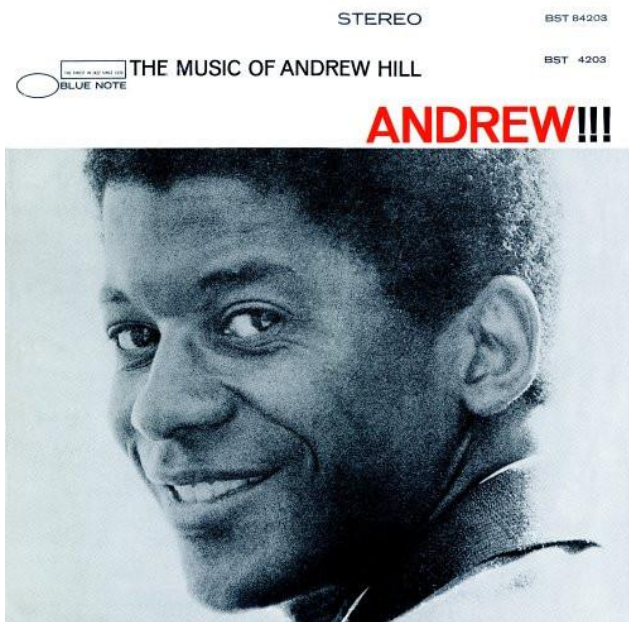
Andrew Hill (1931-2007) came to attention between 1963 and 1966 with a series of magnificent albums on the Blue Note label featuring some of the finest musicians not just from that stable but in all music: tenor saxophonists Joe Henderson, John Gilmore, John Coltrane and Sam Rivers; trumpet players Kenny Dorham and Freddie Hubbard; bassists Richard Davis, Walter Booker and Cecil McBee; the major jazz innovators, Eric Dolphy (reeds) and Bobby Hutcherson (vibraphone); and drummers Roy Haynes, Elvin Jones, Tony Williams and Joe Chambers.

All the albums were recorded by the doyen of sound engineers, Rudy Van Gelder. One of these has become a list favourite when aficionados compile desert island discs or 100 best jazz albums: that album is *Point Of Departure* (1964) with Kenny Dorham, trumpet; Eric Dolphy alto saxophone, flute and bass clarinet; Joe Henderson, tenor saxophone; Richard Davis, bass; and Tony Williams, drums.



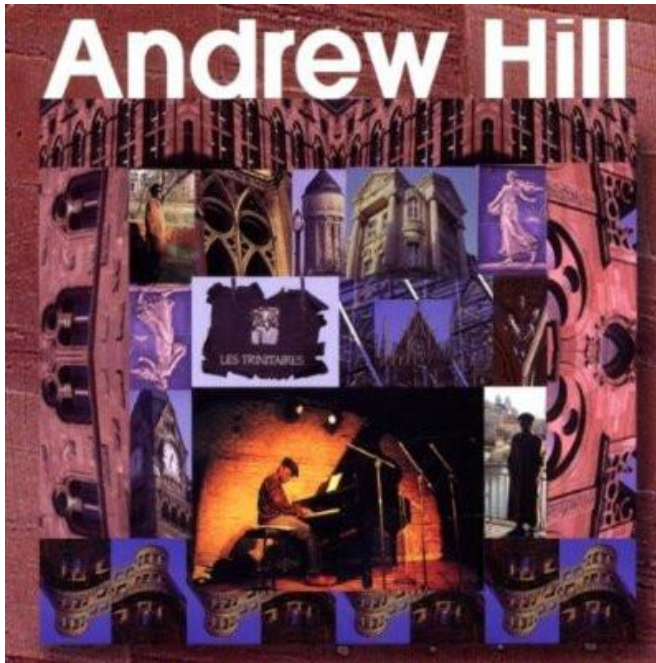
That same year *Out To Lunch* (Dolph); *Crescent* (Coltrane); *Ju Ju* (Shorter); *Witches and Devils* (Ayer); and *Breaking Point* (Hubbard) were also released. *Point of Departure* sits happily in that esteemed company. But since 1966 his recorded output has been sporadic and his worth under-appreciated. He did undertake a successful tour of Australia and New Zealand in 1996. In 1997 he performed in London's Queen Elizabeth Hall, a sign of his artistic standing.

Hill is an original to the extent he's difficult to categorise though is considered a Monk descendant. All 62 takes on the Blue Note albums were composed and arranged by Hill - no standards for Andrew. In one instance on the album *ANDREW!!!* (1964) the 33rd(!) take was the one released. Clearly he knew what he wanted. His idea of the intent of the composition is firmly established in his consciousness.



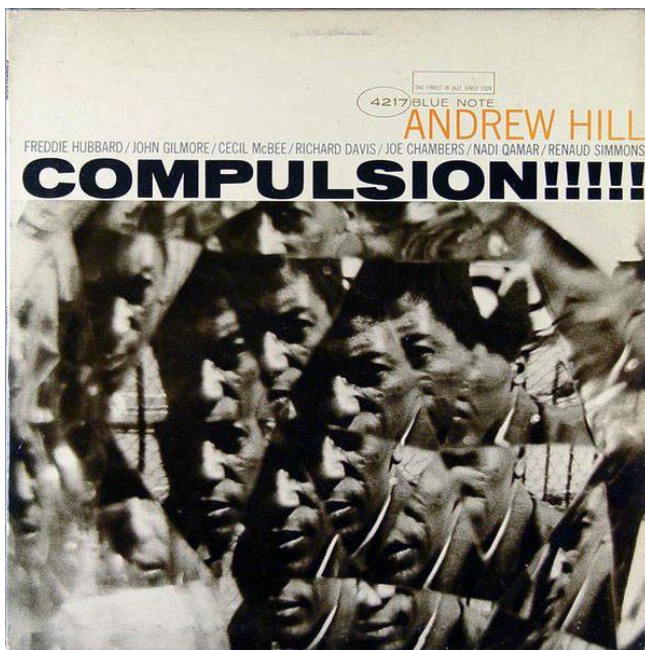
One feature of Hill's playing is a recurring shift in time signatures. On *Point Of Departure* he maintains the beat whilst Williams ranges widely on percussion. Hill's pianism was neither traditional nor *avant garde* but it is one which reveals a deep musical intelligence. He made at least six solo recordings one of which is a double CD of a live performance called *Les Trinitaires* (1998) Jazz Friends Productions Concord. 12 Rue des Trinitaires, 57000 Metz, France is a performance space which includes a one-time chapel inside of which is a bricked arched alcove where the grand piano resides. The sound as expected is sterling.

Unusually or unexpectedly, Hill performs two standards on this recital: *What's New* (Haggart/Burke) and *I'll Be Seeing You* (Fain/Cabal) which cleverly bookend the programme on the CDs. The latter was Liberace's theme song. The former was recorded by John Coltrane, Cecil Taylor and most famously by Billie Holiday.



Les Trinitaires: unusually or unexpectedly, Andrew Hill performs two standards on this recital: “What’s New” (Haggart/Burke) and “I’ll Be Seeing You” (Fain/Cabal)...

Hill does a 15-minute take on *What’s New*. Without patient attention it’s always the case that the listener will lose his way in an Andrew Hill performance. The melody is unrecognisable. Hill does not use a left-hand rhythmic base but clusters of chords, Byzantine startling deviations, angular turns, repetition, varying emphases in touch, tension building, with a percussive approach, and moments of startling beauty. In short his solo work is much more challenging than that for his quartet and quintet work in the 1960s.



Even so, his abiding fascination with the percussive elements of his artistry might be best sampled with *Compulsion!!!!* (Blue Note) 1965, which has Freddie Hubbard, trumpet, flugelhorn; John Gilmore, tenor saxophone, bass clarinet; Andrew Hill,

piano, compositions, arrangements; Cecil McBee, bass; Richard Davis, arco bass (title track only); Nadi Qamar, African drums, African thumb piano, percussion; and Renaud Simmons, ega and percussion. If there has been a criticism of Hill, it has been, “always fascinating but occluding”. Even so, any of Hill’s Blue Note work of 60 years ago is as fresh as it was then and worth a revisit from time to time. Anything artistically difficult - modern poetry, improvised music, Tarkovsky’s cinema inter alia - have their deep rewards, including spiritual, empathetic, whilst fuelling one’s sense of wonder.



The Borderlands Trio, with Kris Davis (centre), Stephen Crump (left) and Eric McPherson (right). Davis at 42 is jazz piano today... PHOTO CREDIT JIMMY KATZ

In that regard, Canadian Kris Davis at 42 is jazz piano today. Her performance with Borderlands Trio on *Asteroidea* (2017) is astonishing, and memorable. Australian Jackson Harrison nearing 40 has scant recorded evidence but the evidenced indicates a major talent as well. These two representatives of this great art are building on the legacies of Bley, Peterson, Hill, and Hasaan. Long may they thrive and grow.
