BILL EVANS PLAYS

ORIGINAL COMPOSITIONS PLUS WHO CAN I TURN TO TRANSCRIBED
NOTE-FOR-NOTE FROM HIS RECORDINGS
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Common man, like the digital computer, is a sum of his experiences — what is put in comes out in some way at time. The artist is not a common man and, like art, is

in point: William John Evans, b. Aug. 16, 1929; began

studies at 6, violin at 7, flute at 13; graduated South-

Louisiana College, 1950; joined Herbie Fields band,

army, 1951-54; various playing jobs in New York City,

post-graduate study, Mannes College, 1955; first trio

touring, 1956; joined Miles Davis Sextet, 1959; formed own

late 1959; recipient of several jazz awards, including

Beat International Jazz Critics Poll and Readers Poll;

so NARAS Grammy awards for best jazz album of the

Conversations with Myself (1964) and Bill Evans at the

Jazz Festival (1968).

... if you add all that up, you won’t get Bill Evans, not

if you add the following authoritative statements:

This is the first genius of the piano since Art Tatum.”

(Fred Feather)

the revolution that has come to jazz piano.”

(Rex Lees)

one of the most influential musicians in jazz today.”

(Orsten)

hen Bill Evans is in town, one goes not to listen so much

worship.” (Brian Priestly)

ips what is needed to find all of Bill Evans is some

commentary on his work:

an pulse and harmonic movement are immensely slow

ballads; the middle register chords scrunchly sensuous,

being warm, the texture enveloping; yet through and

an introverted quiet the melodic lines float and soar

in the treble, insinuate in the tenor range, and usu-

ally reverberate in the bass. Evans’ ability to make

lines ‘speak’ on the piano is of extraordinary subtlety;

he says the sensuousness leads not to passivity but to

... The dance-like flows into spring-like song; the in-

stinctively inventive cross-rhythms and counter melodies are

never rebarbative, always supple and in that sense songful.

Even when Evans plays quick numbers ... the rhythmic

zest provokes song ...” (English composer, critic, and

historian Wilfrid Mellers, in his book Music in a New Found

Land)

“Evans has brought piano jazz forward to a new plateau of

lyrical beauty. He has a touch of phenomenal gentleness, a

fine facility with the pedals for dynamic contrast, and most

important of all, an ability to voice chords so ingeniously that

the placement of the notes, the question of which notes are

doubled, which struck softly and which heavily, may be far

more important than the basic identity of the chord.” (Leonard

Feather, in his revised The Book of Jazz)

“When he plays, it is like Hemingway telling a story.

Extraneous phrases are rare. The tale is told with the

strictest economy, and when it is over, you are tempted
to say, ‘Of course, it’s so simple. Why didn’t I think of

that?’ He is, in essence, a synecdochist, an artist who implies

as much as he plays. And moving all his music, coloring every

note, is that deep, rhythmic, almost religious feeling that is

the seminal force of jazz.” (Don Nelsen, in Down Beat)

And, if I may, a few abstracts from reviews I’ve written of

Evans’ work in the last few years:

“In Evans’ music, mind and heart become one. His fine-

lace improvisations are webs of finely spun steel — strongly

structured but flexible and open to the sun’s light. His work,

particularly on ballads, slithers through a maze of unexpected

twists and turns, revealing a complex mind and staunch heart

at play .... He has the knack of turning over-played tunes

into quite personal musical excursions that give the impres-

sion that this is the first time he’s ever explored the pieces.

He exposes new facets that lend such vitality to the tunes

that the listener begins to wonder if these are the same tunes

he’s heard over and over through the years .... He tenderly

unravels the threads that make up the material and then

rewraps them into a stunning tapestry of color and move-

ment .... His voicing of chords (the epitome of clarity) is at

the root of his ability to draw so much tonal beauty from his
instrument... Evans' fine touch brings a delicate lightness to lush passages that if played with one degree less artistry would be cheap and melodramatic; by measuring and controlling his emotion, Evans turns such passages into art. (He has an uncanny sense of when to pull up on the reins.)

But maybe we're looking in the wrong places for Bill Evans. He is a man of no mean intellectual ability, an articulate and analytical man, well-read, well-educated. If anyone knows what Bill Evans is all about, it should be Bill Evans. Perhaps if he went all the way back, he might reveal something... "My older brother, Harry, played a big part in influencing me throughout my life," Bill said recently. "He was the first one to take piano lessons, and it was my mimicking him that led me to start playing myself. I was always fascinated with music, I suppose."

He started playing trumpet when he was two years old and very athletically inclined. The same way with piano. He started playing trumpet (our parents made us take a secondary instrument) in a high school rehearsal band and got interested in playing jazz. One day the piano player got the measles; I went to the rehearsal and read the music arrangement exactly as written — exactly, and you know what they're like? I think I was about 12. But this was the thing: though I could play masterpieces on the piano and had a good technique and could play them musically, I couldn't play My Country Tis of Thee without the music. There was no way I could make music. I'd developed a very good reading ability and was very happy in the pleasure I got from playing great piano pieces.

"Anyway, they decided to keep me. Then one night we were playing Tuxedo Junction, and for some reason I got inspired and put in a little blues thing. Tuxedo Junction is in B-flat, and I put in a little D-flat, D, F thing, bang! in the right hand. It was such a thrill. It sounded right and good, and it wasn't written, and I had done it. The idea of doing something in music that somebody hadn't thought of opened a whole new world to me."

Evans' interest in jazz stems from that night.

He said that he was fortunate in getting with a group of older players shortly after his dance-band debut. The leader of the older group was Buddy Valentinco, but it was bass player George Platt whom Evans names as the man who helped him most at the early stage of his career.

"He knew chord changes very well," Evans recalled, "and understood harmony and wrote arrangements and had the patience of Job. I guess, because he called chord changes to me for a year and a half without ever saying, 'Haven't you learned them yet?' Finally, instead of thinking of them as isolated changes, I worked out the system on which traditional theory is based: I just used numbers — 1, 5, 6, and so on — and began to understand how the music was put together.

"Also the band was more of a jazz band than the high school band. I had to play solos. On some of the jobs, the people expected to hear jazz, so I just dived in and tried it. I had recordings from the very beginning that show I was very clear in what I was doing. I've always preferred to play something simple than to go all over the keyboard on something wasn't clear about. Back then, I would stay within the triad."

He told of playing four or five nights a week throughout his high school days (and falling from straight A's in his freshman year to D's in his senior year) and working resort jobs in New Jersey during the summer. In addition to this practical experience, the young musician became deeply immersed in jazz.

"I was buying all the records... anything from Coleman Hawkins to Bud Powell and Dexter Gordon. That was when I first heard Bud, on those Dexter Gordon sides on Savoy, heard Earl Hines very early and, of course, the King Cole Trio. Nat, I thought, was one of the greatest, and I still do. I think he is probably the most under-rated jazz pianist in the history of jazz.

"I'd play hookey from school and hear all the bands at the Paramount in New York or the Adams in Newark. Or we'd snek in the clubs on 52nd St. withphony draft cards, just to hear some jazz. I got a lot of experience with insight that way.

"Now, in retrospect, I think it was a good thing I didn't have a great aptitude for mimicry, though it made it very difficult for me at the time because I had to work very hard to take things apart. I had to build my whole musical style. I'd abstract musical principles from people I dug, and I'd take their feeling or technique and apply things the way that I'd built them. But because I had to build them so meticulously, I think, worked out better in the end, because it gave me a more complete understanding of everything I was doing."

Evans has been paying learning dues ever since he hit that minor third on Tuxedo Junction. He tells of learning to accompany when he was with Herbie Fields, of studying music of all kinds when he was younger, of sitting in with other musicians and learning to be flexible so he could play with any kind of rhythm section, of doubling between the Fifth Army Band at Ft. Sheridan (in which he played flute and piccolo) and jazz clubs in nearby Chicago (the doubling almost killed him, which teaches one a lot about one's self). He undoubtedly still brings something home each night that he wants to ponder and analyze and perhaps add to his playing arsenal.

Where does it end? Where does he want to go?" I'd just like to go forward," he answered. "Forward by replacing what I'm doing with something better. And that's the hang-up, you see. The hang-up also is that whatever you try to learn, you learn very fast at first and then the learning gets slower and you're up against an almost impenetrable wall, and the next sixteenth of an inch takes an enormous effort. I'd like to be changing every night, have something absolutely new every night.

"I don't feel I'm cramped by a style; I'm cramped by my own limitations. I'm free to do anything I want with my trio, but I believe in quality — I try to play something that's good, that's a complete product. I might jump out into a new area, a free area, but this doesn't last long; because I have to have something that offers a wider scope emotionally to express myself in.

"I really believe in the language of the popular idiom, the song, and this has come out of not just our culture but all of history, especially the traditional jazz idiom. It's the expressiveness of millions of people and of conditions which are impossible to take into consideration. But I'd rather deal with something as real as that than anything that is merely a parody, such as playing without chords, bar lines or form."

"Now, it is the unique quality and experience I have from this traditional idiom and somehow extend it to another area of expression — whether it's 'free or not' — to continuously progress with it, that I would like to do. I want everything to have roots — and not only that, but that it express something that has esthetic value. I don't want to express just my feelings — all my feelings aren't interesting to everybody. My everyday frustrations are not all interesting, and I don't want to hear about anybody else's. I want to put in music something that will enrich somebody. I'm the first one, of course, to be enriched when I discover it, and that's the reason for doing it really."

"My creed for art in general is that it should enrich the soul; it should teach spiritually by showing a person a portion of himself that he would not discover otherwise. It's easy to rediscover part of yourself, but through art you can be shown part of yourself you never knew existed. That's the real mission of art. The artist has to find something within himself that's universal and which he can put into terms that are communicable to other people. The magic of it is that art can communicate this to a person without his realizing it.

"Enrichment, that's the function of music."

Despite Evans' analysis, despite the explanatory attempts of critics, despite the piecing together of data, you will not find Bill Evans on pieces of paper. You will find Bill in his music. Catch him — if you can.

—Don DeMicheal
TURN OUT THE STARS

Music by BILL EVANS

Ad lib - Rubato

\[ B^0 \quad E_6 \quad Am \quad Dm7 \quad G7 \quad Cmaj7 \]

\[ Fm7 \quad Bb7 \quad Ebmaj7 \quad Cm7 \quad Am7 \quad D7 \quad Gmaj7 \]

\[ C#m7 \quad F#7 \quad Bmaj7 \quad Bb0 \quad Eb7 \]

\[ Abm7 \quad Bb7 \quad Ebm9 \]

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ONE FOR HELEN

Music by BILL EVANS

Medium bright (J=ca. 160)

Note: This version was transcribed from tapes of Bill Evans' Town Hall Concert, February 21, 1966. For purposes of comparison, it is suggested that the advanced piano student listen to the version recorded on BILL EVANS TRIO AT MONTREUX JAZZ FESTIVAL—Verve 6-8762 to hear the way the tune developed.

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transcribed from SIMPLE MATTER OF CONVICTION — Verve 6-8675 under title Unless It’s You

ORBIT

Music by
BILL EVANS

© Copyright 1967 and 1969 LUDLOW MUSIC, INC., New York, N. Y.
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*1 chorus of melody omitted.
ONLY CHILD

Music by
BILL EVANS

Ad lib. F9    F(b9)    Bb maj7    Bb dim    F9    F7    Bb    Bb maj9

Cm9    Cdim7    Dm7    Gm7    Fm9    Em11    A7

Ab7    Db    Bb maj7    Gm7    C9    Fmaj7    F6

Em7    A7    D    Ab7    Fdim7    D97    Eb m9

F7    Bbm9    Fm    Gm9    C7    Ab    Bbm7
WHO CAN I TURN TO
(When Nobody Needs Me)

Piano Arrangement by
Bill Evans

Ad lib.

Moderately ad lib., but with a feeling of 2

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FUNNY MAN

Music by
BILL EVANS

(Also as a bright 2 beat)

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