

Bill Evans LIVE '64 France '65 Denmark '70 Sweden '70 Denmark '75

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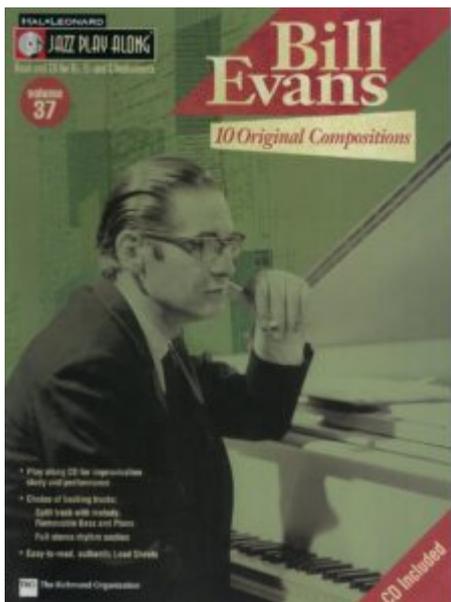
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Bill Evans

Bill Evans, one of the most influential and tragic figures of the post-bop jazz piano, was known for his highly nuanced touch, the clarity of the feeling content of his music and his reform of the chord voicing system pianists used. He recorded over fifty albums as leader and received five Grammy awards. He spawned a school of "Bill Evans style" or "Evans inspired" pianists, who include some of the best known artists of our day, including Michel Petrucciani, Andy Laverne, Richard Beirach, Enrico Pieranunzi and Warren Bernhardt. His inescapable influence on the very sound of jazz piano has touched virtually everybody of prominence in the field after him (as well as most of his contemporaries), and he remains a

monumental model for jazz piano students everywhere, even inspiring a newsletter devoted solely to his music and influence.

Yet Bill Evans was a person who was painfully self-effacing, especially in the beginning of his career. Tall and handsome, literate and highly articulate about his art, he had a “confidence problem” as he called it, while at the same time devoted himself fanatically to the minute details of his music. He believed he lacked talent, so had to make up with it by intense work, but to keep the whole churning enterprise afloat he took on a heroin addiction for most of his adult life. The result was sordid living conditions, a brilliant career, two failed marriages (the first ending in a dramatic suicide), and an early death.



Origins

Bill Evans was born in Plainfield, New Jersey, in 1929, of a devout Russian Orthodox mother and an alcoholic father of Welsh origins, who managed a golf course. Evans' Russian side accounts for the special feeling many of his Russian fans have for him that he is one of them. Bill received his first musical training in his mother's church; both parents were highly musical. He also held a lifelong attachment to the game

of golf.

Bill Evans began studying piano at age six, and since his parents wanted him to know more than one instrument, he took up the violin the following year and the flute at age 13. He became very proficient on the flute, although he hardly played it in his later years. Proficiency at these instruments in which great emphasis is laid on tonal expressiveness, might have encouraged Evans to seek the similar gradations of nuance on piano. He did, of course, thereby extending the expressive range of jazz piano.

Evans' older brother Harry, two years his senior, was his first influence. Harry was the first one in the family to take piano lessons, and Bill began at the piano by mimicking him. He worshipped his older brother and tried to keep up with him in sports too, and was devastated by his death in 1979 at the age of 52.

By age 12 he was substituting for his older brother in Buddy Valentino's band, where at one point he discovered a little blues phrase by himself during a stock arrangement performance of "Tuxedo Junction." It was only a Db-D-F phrase in the key of Bb, but it unlocked a door for him, as he said in an interview, "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." This idea became the central one of his musical career.

Also, by the late 40s Evans considered himself the best boogie-woogie player in northern New Jersey, according to an interview with Marian McPartland on the radio show Piano Jazz. That was the musical rage at the time; later, however, Evans rarely played blues tunes in his performances or on his recordings.

Evans' Reading Habits

Evans' mother was an amateur pianist herself and had amassed piles of old sheet music, which the young Bill read through, gaining breadth and above all speed at sight reading. This enabled him to explore widely in classical literature, especially 20th century composers. Debussy, Stravinsky, notably Petrouschka, and Darius Milhaud were particularly influential. He found this much more interesting than practicing scales and exercises, and it eventually enabled him to experience broad quantities of classical music. As he told Gene Lees, "It's just that I've played such a quantity of piano.

Three hours a day in childhood, about six hours a day in college, and at least six hours now. With that, I could afford to develop slowly. Everything I've learned, I've learned with feeling being the generating force." (Lees, Meet Me, p. 150). And as he later told Len Lyons, playing Bach a lot helped him gain control over tone and to improve his physical contact with the keyboard (Great Jazz Pianists, 226).

College and After

Evans received a music scholarship to Southeastern Louisiana College (now Southeastern Louisiana University) in Hammond, Louisiana, where he majored in music, graduating in 1950. There is an archive there now dedicated to him administered by Ron Nethercutt. His professors faulted him for not playing the scales and exercises correctly, although he could play the classical pieces perfectly with ease. In college he discovered the work of Horace Silver, Bud Powell, Nat King Cole and Lennie Tristano, who was to have a profound influence on him. He also participated in jam sessions with guitarist Mundell Lowe and bassist Red Mitchell. After college he joined reedman Herbie Fields' band. It was in this last position that he learned to accompany horn players. After that he spent 1951 to 1954 in the army, during which he managed to gig around

Chicago. Upon his discharge he decided to pursue a jazz career and settled in New York. There he worked in the dance band of clarinetist Jerry Wald and saxophonist Tony Scott, and became known as an exceptional player in musicians' circles. His first professional recording was made accompanying singer Lucy Reed in 1955, and in 1956 he joined George Russell's avant-garde band and began studying Russell's Lydian Chromatic Concept.

First Recording as Leader

In 1956 Mundell Lowe called Orrin Keepnews at Riverside and prevailed upon him and his partner Bill Grauer to listen to a tape of Evans over the phone. This was highly unusual, but Keepnews and Grauer heard enough to convince them they had to record Evans. But first they had to convince him! The very self-effacing Bill Evans didn't believe he was ready to record, and Keepnews and company had to persuade him to the contrary. The atmosphere in the studio was relaxed. Evans had chosen Paul Motian, his drummer with Tony Scott, and Teddy Kotick, an excellent young bassist, who had already worked with Charlie Parker and Stan Getz. They recorded 11 pieces in a single day in September of 1956-it was Riverside's money saving policy-including four Evans originals: "Five," "Conception," "No Cover, No Minimum," and the eventual classic "Waltz for Debbie." This last tune was one of three short (under 2 minutes) piano solos Evans recorded after the other members were dismissed. The album, entitled "New Jazz Conceptions" was a critical success, winning Evans very positive reviews in Down Beat and Metronome (by Nat Hentoff). But it only sold 800 copies in a year.

Gaining Experience

As a sideman that year and the next he also recorded with trombonist Bob Brookmeyer, trumpeter Art Farmer, and reedmen Lee Konitz and Jimmy Giuffre, vibest Eddie Costa, and avant-garde conductor-composer (-pianist) George Russell, whose

Lydian harmonic system Evans had found very useful. That year he also met Scott LaFaro, while auditioning him for a place in an ensemble led by trumpeter Chet Baker. Evans was impressed by the young bassist, whom he found overflowing with almost an uncontrolled energy and creativity. When Evans later chose LaFaro for his own trio he found that LaFaro had his talents under better control.

During a concert at Brandeis University in 1957, which combined written-out classical style music and jazz improvisation (before Gunther Schuller had founded the "third stream" movement, which claimed to do just that) Evans distinguished himself during a long solo on George Russell's "All About Rosie." Schuller and Russell were part of the event, along with jazz bassist Charles Mingus, Jimmy Giuffre and composers Milton Babbitt and Harold Shapiro. The solo constituted the announcement of the arrival of a new major talent, which his subsequent recordings would soon confirm.

Miles Hires Him

Evans' big break, though, came when Miles Davis hired him shortly thereafter, putting him in a rhythm section behind John Coltrane and Cannonball Adderley in addition to himself. Miles' former pianist, Red Garland, had walked out on him, and Miles needed someone more versatile anyway. He was looking for a player who could handle modal playing, and Evans was it. He had met Evans through George Russell, with whom Evans was studying.

A performance of the Ballet Africaine from Guinea in 1958 had originally sparked Miles' interest in modal music. Miles had very big ears and was always listening for new musical currents, both inside himself, from his past, and to new sources fellow musicians brought him. This African music, which featured the finger piano or kalimba, was the kind of music which stayed for long periods of time on a single chord, weaving in and out of consonance and dissonance. It was a very

new concept in jazz at the time, which was dominated by the chord-change based music of bebop, which was really an extension of the American popular song. Miles realized that Evans could follow him into modal music. Moreover, Evans introduced Miles to Rachmaninoff, Ravel and Khachaturian, revealing new scales to him and generally expanding his appreciation for classical music.

Miles found Evans a very quiet, self-effacing person, so he wanted to test Evans' musical integrity. After all, Evans was the only white guy in a powerful, prominently black band. Miles needed to see if he would be musically intimidated, so he said to Evans one day,

"Bill, you know what you have to do, don't you, to be in this band?"

He looked at me puzzled and shit and shook his head and said, "No Miles, what do I have to do? I said, "Bill, now you know we all brothers and shit and everybody's in this thing together and so what I came up with for you is that you got to make it with everybody, you know what I mean? You got to f... the band." Now I was kidding, but Bill was real serious, like Trane [John Coltrane].

He thought about it for about fifteen minutes and then came back and told me, "Miles, I thought about what you said and I just can't do it, I just can't do that. I'd like to please everybody and make everyone happy here, but I just can't do that. I looked at him and smiled and said, "My man!" And then he knew I was teasing. (Davis, 226)

So Evans passed the test. Here's why Miles liked Bill's playing:

Bill had this quiet fire that I loved on piano. The way he approached it, the sound he got was like crystal notes or sparkling water cascading down from some clear waterfall. I had to change the way the band sounded again for Bill's style

by playing different tunes, softer ones at first. Bill played underneath the rhythm and I liked that, the way he played scales with the band. Red's [Garland] playing had carried the rhythm but Bill underplayed it and for what I was doing now with the modal thing, I liked what Bill was doing better. (Davis, 226)

Evans made 10 albums with Miles in less than a year they were together, February to November, 1958. But Evans was uncomfortable in the group after seven months. He wanted to form his own-so did Adderley and Coltrane. They would all eventually become leaders in the field, and Miles' group, despite the fact that it was at the top of the jazz field, was hemming them in. In addition, Evans disliked all the travelling, and the harrassment he was getting from black fans about being the only white musician in the group was getting to him-it was disturbing to Miles too. There was also the annoying criticism that he didn't play fast enough or hard enough, that his playing was too delicate.

Evans' Second Album as Leader

Evans had his second outing as a leader, once again for Riverside, in December 1958. He had officially left Miles' group by that time. For this recording he chose Miles' drummer Philly Joe Jones, with whom he worked many times after that, and Dizzy Gillespie's bassist Sam Jones (no relation), who went on to a longterm relationship with Cannonball Adderley. The influence of his stay in Miles' band is clear from his driving version of "Night and Day" as well as his choice of and performance on the hard bop tunes "Minority" by Gigi Gryce and "Oleo" by Sonny Rollins.

The real classic during that session is his original "Peace Piece," which was originally conceived as an extended introduction to Leonard Bernstein's standard "Some Other Time." It became a jazz standard, and he performs it during a 6 minute 41 second piano solo on the album. The tune is based on

a succession of scales, which the player extends at will before going onto another scale, a new kind of balance at the time between structured and free (although similar in concept to Indian ragas) The tune, therefore, would never be played the same way twice. This is the nature of a free piece: the structure as well as the melody is unique to each individual performance occasion.

Along with the more driving swing in this album came a more personal, more nuanced touch. Evans was moving away from the dominant influences of his jazz formation-Bud Powell, with his extended horn lines, and Horace Silver, with his bluesy percussive approach-and toward the sound that would characterize his mature years. It testifies to a large amount of exploration and growth in the 26 months between the two recording sessions, including the assimilation of the influence of Lennie Tristano's long flowing lines into his playing.

Since the stint with Miles had only benefited Bill's reputation, Keepnews decided to title the album Everybody Digs Bill Evans and put testimonials from Davis, George Shearing, Ahmad Jamal and Cannonball Adderley on the cover. Issued in May, 1959, it sold much better than the first one.

Miles Davis' Kind of Blue

Nonetheless, Evans played on Miles' breakthrough Kind of Blue album (recorded in March-April 1959), even though he had been replaced by Wynton Kelly by then. Miles had planned the session around Evans' playing. According to Miles, Wynton Kelly combined what he liked in Evans with what he had liked in Red Garland, and Kelly actually played on one tune on this album, "Freddie Freeloader." The album grew, as did so many of Miles' projects, out of a musical impression floating in Miles' mind, in this case that Ballet Africaine, mentioned above, combined with some gospel music he had heard as a six year-old in Arkansas.

That feeling had got in my creative blood, my imagination, and I had forgotten it was there...So I wrote about five bars of that and recorded it...But you write something and guys play off it and take it someplace else through their creativity and imagination, and you just miss where you thought you wanted to go. I was trying to do one thing and ended up doing something else. (Davis, 234)

Miles wrote only sketches for the session, in order to tap into his musicians' spontaneity, and with no rehearsals. It worked so well that everything was accepted on the first take. Evans applied his deep musical integrity and imagination to the task, as Miles said, "Bill was the kind of player that when you played with him if he started something, he would end it, but he would take it a little bit farther. You subconsciously knew this, but it always put a little tension up in everyone's playing, and that was good" (Davis, 234).

Yet the collective result did not correspond with Miles' original inspiration. The album was acclaimed as a masterpiece, but Miles told people he had missed getting what he wanted. Perhaps he got more; perhaps he never could have gotten it given the degree of freedom he gave his powerful sidemen. Recognizing his articulateness about music, Miles had Evans write the liner notes for the album. Evans summarizes the spontaneous process in the purest possible light, an ironic contrast to Miles' mix of intentions, realization and frustration:

There is a Japanese visual art in which the artist is forced to be spontaneous. He must paint on a thin stretched parchment with a special brush and black water paint in such a way that an unnatural or interrupted stroke will destroy the line or break through the parchment. Erasures or changes are impossible. These artists must practice a particular discipline, that of allowing the idea to express itself in communication with their hands in such a direct way that deliberation cannot interfere.

The resulting pictures lack the complex compositions and textures of ordinary painting, but it is said that those who see well find something captured that escapes explanation.

Every procedural and structural element in this description has its analogue in jazz, and this statement could well stand as Evans personal artistic manifesto. "Ordinary painting" could well refer to classical music.

Bill Evans on His Own Development

Evans was extremely aware about every factor in his music and musical development, making him one of the most articulate jazz musicians on the scene. Throughout his career he did numerous interviews, which not only document his views on a variety of musical subjects, but offer us his eloquent thinking voice. One of the clearest messages he gave dealt with his own development, its difficulties and the rewards of those difficulties:

I always like people who have developed long and hard, especially through introspection and a lot of dedication. I think what they arrive at is usually...deeper and more beautiful...than the person who seems to have that ability and fluidity from the beginning. I say this because it's a good message to give to young talents who feel as I used to. You hear musicians playing with great fluidity and complete conception early on, and you don't have that ability. I didn't. I had to know what I was doing. And yes ultimately it turned out that those people weren't able to carry their thing very far. I found myself being more attracted to artists who have developed through the years and become better and deeper musicians. (Williams, n. p.)

Evans once told Gene Lees right out that he didn't think he had much talent, and later that he had to work on his harmonic concept so much because he "didn't have very good ears" (Lees, Meet Me, 151-2).

Evans' Chord Voicings

Although he rarely talked about them, Evans was the main person responsible for reforming jazz voicings on piano. A voicing is the series of notes used to express a chord. Up until that time chords had been expressed either by spelling the chord, with root, 3rd, 5th, 7th and sometimes 9th, or with a selection of these notes. Bud Powell had pioneered the so-called "shell" voicings or alternations between outer and inner notes of a chord, that is root-7th or 3rd-5th or 3rd-7th.

Evans abandoned roots almost entirely to develop a system in which the chord is expressed as a quality identity and a color, with the root being left to the bassist, or to the left hand on another beat of the measure, or just left implied. The system has become quite widespread, and a student can find it explained in any number of books on jazz piano theory and technique. But Evans had to derive them from composers like Debussy and Ravel and make a standard system out of them so they could be used unconsciously, automatically, and in doing so he transformed jazz piano.

The Piano Trio Concept: Equality of Instrumental Voices

From there Evans launched into a career characterized mostly by trio recordings. His concept of the trio was a much more egalitarian one than the one prevalent at the time. Evans gave the bassist and drummer more active roles than most rhythm section sidemen in trios, with a resulting greater degree of interplay among the musicians. He made a series of live recordings at the Village Vanguard in 1961, embodying this principle. These remain among his best recordings, featuring Scott LaFaro on bass and Paul Motian on drums. Evans, who was normally very critical of himself was quite pleased with these recordings. In them he also reveals his predilection for the waltz, which would be a constant throughout his career.

When bassist Scott LaFaro died tragically later that year in a car accident at age 23, these recordings took on even more significance as his memorial. Evans did not record for almost a year while mourning for LaFaro. During the rest of his career Evans searched for LaFaro's equals on bass. He may have found them later in Eddie Gomez and Marc Johnson.

Awareness of His Stylistic Identity and Its Influence

Evans maintained that he was not aware of the importance of his influence on jazz piano, although he finally believed it, after hearing it so many times. He saw his own style as simply the necessary one to express what he wanted to express. Here's how he explained it:

First of all, I never strive for identity. That's something that just has happened automatically as a result, I think, of just putting things together, tearing things apart and putting it together my own way, and somehow I guess the individual comes through eventually...I want to build my music from the bottom up, piece by piece, and kind of put it together according to my own way of organizing things...I just have a reason that I arrived at myself for every note I play (Enstice and Rubin, 139-140).

Evans on One's Personal Sound

As a corollary to a musician's stylistic identity, one eventually develops one's own unique sound. This may be very difficult to define, although easily recognizable by ear. Not everyone has one. "I think having one's own sound in a sense is the most fundamental kind of identity in music," said Evans.

But it's a very touchy thing how one arrives at that. It has to be something that comes from inside, and it's a long-term process. It's a product of a total personality. Why one person is going to have it and another person isn't, I don't know why

exactly. I think sometimes the people I seem to like most as musical artists are people who have had to- they're like late arrivers... They've had to work a lot harder... to get facility, to get fluency... Whereas you see a lot of young talents that have a great deal of fluidity and fluency and facility, and they never really carry it any place. Because in a way they're not aware enough of what they're doing. (Enstice & Rubin, 140)

Bill Evans' Mature Style

Evans' mature style has been such a pervasive influence in jazz piano over the past thirty years that in many ways it is almost undetectable. We can speak of his highly nuanced touch, his melodic shapes, and his chord voicings and still be at a distance from the essence of his sound. To clarify this essence it is useful to isolate and describe the elements of his style, which other pianists have picked up with different degrees of fidelity to Evans, and then see what is left to Evans alone.

At the most general level, jazz pianists today tend to sound more like Evans than they do like his two great piano predecessors and influences, Bud Powell, and Lennie Tristano. Like Evans and unlike Powell and Tristano, the contemporary style utilizes a greater proportion of shaped phrases than continuous lines; it utilizes a greater proportion of chromaticism and non-major scale modes than Powell certainly; and it utilizes Evans' chord voicings as a point of departure for its harmonic conception. After this, approaches to touch, harmony, and melodic shape are highly individualized.

At closer stylistic proximity to Evans are the members of his "school," mentioned above, whose playing makes direct reference to his style. In the work of these pianists you will hear more frequently such typical Evans traits as moving inner voices, fleet block chord melodies, rhythmically truncated melodic lines which leave the listener in mid-air, scalar passages-especially diminished scales-in thirds, and his

poignant harmonies, including reharmonizations and original tunes with harmonic structures similar to those Evans used.

Yet when you listen closely to the recordings of Evans himself you hear things not present even in his closest followers, for example, the fine gradation of touch that offers up emotional nuance at a truly surprising level of sensitivity. Any of Evans' external figures can be imitated, even nuances of touch, but that's just the surface structure of his music. The key to the uniqueness of his sound which is immediately identifiable and has never been perfectly duplicated by anyone, lay deep within his aesthetic consciousness. Putting into perspective how he arrived at his sound offers a clue to the nature of this consciousness, this emotional intention expressed musically, which is the deep engine of his music and accounts for its uniqueness.

Evans' Internal Musical Engine

We know Evans disliked exercises, avoided playing them; that he read quickly and accurately an enormous amount of classical (and other) printed music, and performed it perfectly; that he stressed that he played nothing without feeling; and that he felt he had arrived at his mastery and hallmark sound the long way around, not by imitating anything, or by any method other than the assimilation of enormous amounts of music. From this perspective a finger exercise would be an unacceptable shortcut, since it would remove the player from the emotional potential of music by unacceptably isolating technique from feeling. By taking the time to refuse to do this during his entire formation Evans recreated jazz piano for himself, and by extension for the rest of the field.

Personal students of Evans say that he would never spell out anything he did for them: chord voicings, fast passages, whatever-you just had to figure it out if you really wanted it. But Evans wasn't just being difficult: he was insisting on the same standards of authenticity for his student as he

claimed for himself. But that leaves us with a paradox. If it is impossible through mere imitation for anyone to recreate Evans' style without his internal engine which invested every musical gesture with his emotional content; then by taking Evans' route, by playing no music without an investiture of emotion, the student would necessarily formulate a unique musical personality different from that of Evans.

Of course, this is what Evans, the teacher, wanted. We didn't need any more Bill Evanses. His teaching approach challenged the student to be as deep and as original as he was.

Effects of Evans' Style

But having said this, what can Bill Evans' music accomplish, given its expansive emotional charge and infinitely fine nuances of touch? In a word: intimacy. His music manages to address an attentive listener's inmost private thoughts, so close to the thinking and feeling organ that you are not sure if you are producing the effects or if the music is. When you emerge from the intense and delicate reverie the music has induced the rest of jazz piano may sound unbearably coarse—even Evans' followers. It may take you a while to reset in order to be able to appreciate the separate musical personality of a different player. But you will have felt the power of Evans' aesthetic purity, and when appreciated under the proper conditions, it is awesome.

Many people have had this experience and become devoted fans, wondering all the while if anyone else knew what they were experiencing. Yet this is the paradox of music that achieves intimacy. It offers the illusion that it is addressing itself solely to you. Lees describes it at the beginning of his article.

Evans Meets His Long-Term Manager

Jazz writer Gene Lees, a personal friend of Evans, was in 1962 leaving an editorial post at Down Beat. He had recently met

manager Helen Keane and formed a h4 personal relationship with her, insisting that she hear Bill Evans. But Evans already had managerial contracts, in fact, two of them, which constituted an official mistake by the musicians' union. First Lees brought Keane to hear Evans. He was playing at the Village Vanguard. Marlon Brando and Harry Belafonte owed their starts to her, and Lees realized Keane could work wonders on Evans' career. As soon as she heard the first few seconds she said, "Oh, no, not this one! This is the one that could break my heart." But she was willing to do it.

Then Lees set up lunch with the president of the union, a personal friend of his, and presenting the conflict, asked him to cancel both of the existing contracts.

His Drug Habit

Evans had been sinking into a heroin habit in the late 50s, and by the time Helen Keane entered his life in 1962 it was in full bloom. He was married, and his wife Ellaine was an addict too. Evans habitually sought to borrow money from friends, every day calling a string of his friends in his address book from a telephone booth on the street outside his apartment, since his phone had been disconnected. Many became infuriated at being contacted again and again for money. One day when Lees blew up at him, saying he didn't even have enough for himself to eat, Evans called back an hour later to say he now had enough for both of them to eat.

His friends were afraid to withhold all money from him, because then he'd go to the loan sharks who'd threaten to break his hands if he didn't pay. At one point his friends, including Lees, Helen Keane, Orrin Keepnews, and his new producer Creed Taylor decided to withhold cash from him, while directly paying his bills, and they appointed the reluctant Lees to break the news to Evans.

Lees found Evans in his apartment, where the electricity had

been shut off, but he got around that by running an extension cord from a hallway light under the front door. Evans was furious at his friends' scheme and angrily described the importance of his habit to him, as Lees relates:

"No, I mean it," he said. "You don't understand. It's like death and transfiguration. Every day you wake in pain like death and then you go out and score, and that is transfiguration. Each day becomes all of life in microcosm" (Lees, *Meet Me*, 156).

It was an elegant, aestheticized account of the process that was destroying him. Lees says that later after Evans was clean he claimed to have learned something valuable from his addiction: tolerance and understanding for his father's alcoholism. This leaves volumes unsaid, of course, namely the devastating effect on Bill's confidence of having an alcoholic father, and the unmet childhood needs which resulted in his own self-destructive addiction. At least he didn't have children during the time he was hooked.

Orrin Keepnews found it difficult to turn down Evans' request for money because of "the sweetness of his nature and his immense moral decency," unlike certain other musicians whose turpitude made him easy to turn down. But Bill would just wait there in the Riverside office until Keepnews would relent and give him some cash.

But when Helen Keane got Evans signed to Verve and negotiated a large advance from producer Creed Taylor, Bill took the money and meticulously paid back everyone what he owed them. He came by for Lees in a cab and went from apartment building to apartment building, with Lees holding the cab, armed with his cash and card file, and took care of all his debts. At the end he reimbursed Lees \$200 for pawning his record player and some of his records. He had even went so far as to find Zoot Sims in Stockholm and gave him \$600, a sum which Sims had simply forgotten about.

Overdub Albums

In the winter of 1962-63 Evans came up with the idea for his first multi-track solo piano album. Although overdubbing had been used before, specifically by guitarist Les Paul and Mary Ford (Paul had also pioneered the electric guitar), and by Patti Page, it had never been used quite like this. Neither producer Creed Taylor, nor Lees or Keane-who constituted the Evans inner circle at the time-knew quite what Bill had in mind. But Evans knew exactly. Nowadays, overdubbing and digital editing are standard procedure and are used to produce most popular music. Today the techniques are used to build a piece bit by bit, permitting numerous takes of each track and minute editing changes. But back then, with analogue tape running at 30 ips, the artist had to have a complete global grasp of everything before he laid it down. Evans was used to this level of conception. Once he had the session the way he wanted it, his friends were amazed:

The four of us in the control booth-Ray [Hall, the engineer], Creed, Helen, and I-were constantly openmouthed at what was going on. On the second track Bill would play some strangely appropriate echo of something he'd done on the first. Or there would be some flawless pause in which all three pianists were perfectly together; or some deft run fitted effortlessly into a space left for it. I began to think of Bill as three Bills: Bill Left Channel, Bill Right, and Bill Center.

Bill Left would lay down the first track, stating the melody and launching into an improvisation for a couple of choruses, after which he would move into an accompanist's role, playing a background over which Bill Center would later play his solo. His mind obviously was working in three dimensions of them simultaneously, because each Bill was anticipating and responding to what the other two were doing. Bill Left was hearing in his head what Bill Center and Bill Right were going to play a half hour or so from now, while Bill Center and Bill Right were in constant communication with a Bill Left who had

vanished into the past a half hour or an hour before. The sessions took on a feeling of science-fiction eeriness.

When Bill had completed the first two tracks, Creed and Helen and I all thought that he shouldn't do a third-that another one would only clutter what he had already done. We were wrong.

As the end of the track neared, the "third" Bill took the opening figure and extended it into a long fantastic, flowing line that he wove in and out and around and through what the other two pianists were playing, never colliding with these two previous selves. That final line seemed like a magic firefly hurrying through a forest at night, never striking the trees, leaving behind a line of golden sparks that slowly fell to earth, illuminating everything around it. I think Helen and Creed were close to tears when he completed that track. I know I was (Lees, Meet Me, 160).

Evans left for Florida, where he successfully kicked his habit for a while, then returned to New York in time to receive a Grammy Award for Conversations with Myself. Later Evans created two more overdub albums, Further Conversations in 1967, also on Verve, produced by Helen Keane, and New Conversations in 1978 on Warner Brothers, which opens with his tribute "Song for Helen," includes a tribute to his second wife Nenette ("For Nenette"), reinforced by the Cy Coleman standard "I Love My Wife," and the Ellington rarity "Reflections in D." It is generally considered to be the best of the three.

Evans' Fortunes on the Rise

Evans became better known and sold more records as the decade went on. He was soon making enough money for him and his wife to move out of Manhattan to a comfortable section of the Bronx called Riverdale. Meanwhile Creed Taylor had left Verve and started his own label CTI, and it fell to Helen Keane to take

on the role of producer. Gene Lees helped set up the Montreux Jazz Festival and arranged for Evans to play in it in 1968 and thereafter, recording his performances from that year and 1970. When Evans left Verve he spent some time briefly recording for Columbia, but did not consider it very productive. At one point its president, Clive Davis, tried to get him to make a rock album, which Evans flatly turned down.

After that Evans went to Fantasy, which turned out to be a much more fruitful association. He produced some of his most mature satisfying work there. His fame only continued to grow as he acquired more fans among music lovers and disciples among pianists everywhere. Lees tells the story of a piano-playing Toronto dentist he had called when Evans had a toothache there. Lees had been turned down by the nurse because the call had come in after hours. When the dentist heard about it, he was appalled. "What," he said, "Do you realize you turned down God?" and rushed down to the Town Tavern where Evans was playing, tools in hand, to fix his ailing tooth (Lees, *Meet Me*, 166).

Personal Tragedy

It was also around this time, 1970, that Evans' wife Ellaine committed suicide by throwing herself under a subway train. As a result, he went back on heroin for a while, then got into a methadone treatment program, and stayed away from drugs for almost the last decade in his life. He married again, to Nnette, and had a child by her, whom they named Evan. His son became the inspiration for the beautiful tune "Letter to Evan." The marriage did not last, however, and soon he was living by himself in Fort Lee, New Jersey, right across the George Washington Bridge.

Last Decade of Recording

Evans' last decade of recording showed him growing even more as an artist. His 1974 live LP, *Since We Met*, is one of his very best, containing new versions of his ruminative ballad in

memory of his father, "Turn Out the Stars," his radically beautiful "Time Remembered," the Earl Zindars beauty "Sareen Jurer," performed in both 3/4 and 4/4 time, and Cy Coleman's waltz "See-Saw," among others. In 1979 he gave a magnificent concert in Paris which Helen Keane later turned into two LP releases on Musician, called simply Paris Concert, Edition I and II. They reveal him with an unmatched rhythmic drive, summoning up all his stylistic resources, filling the entire musical space with an expanding energy. He takes fruitful risks, such as when he opens his classic "Nardis" with a solo piano improvisation, a kaleidoscopic exploration of figures and forms, finally landing on the familiar middle-Eastern sounding melody, bringing in the rest of the rhythm section in a triumphant release of suspense. The audience was ecstatic.

Last Addiction and Death

In 1980 Bill Evans began using cocaine, the fashionable drug that he imagined was "safe." But actually it demands replenishment in the bloodstream every few hours rather than just once a day like heroin, and as a stimulant, it wears you down that much faster. At the end of summer of that year, Bill asked his drummer Joe LaBarbera to drive him to the hospital, since he was having severe stomach pains. He calmly directed Joe to Mount Sinai, checked in, and died there the 15th of September.

The tributes poured in, and by 1983 a double album had been assembled with pianists who had been influenced or touched by Evans, each contributing a single piece. His stature has only continued to grow, with a newsletter devoted to his music and followers edited by Win Hinkle in North Carolina, and now on the Internet. He has become, along with Oscar Peterson, one of the major enduring forces in jazz piano.

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