

Bill Evans: Rare Interviews

THE FENDER-RHODES PIANO

An non-acoustic instrumental approach was the development in 1965 of the Fender Rhodes Piano. Bill Evans released in 1970 his first 'electric' album *From Left To Right*, well before Chick Corea, Herbie Hancock and Joe Zawinul worked on it. Bill Evans playing the electric piano is rather controversial. Some purists disapprove Bill Evans playing the Fender Rhodes piano, whereas he should deny his recognisable touch on the acoustic grand piano with his characteristic chord voicings. On the album he swaps effortlessly back and forth from the acoustic piano to the Fender Rhodes electric piano.

The second release was *The Bill Evans Album* in 1971, where he plays all his own compositions on acoustic and electric piano with Eddie Gomez on bass and Marty Morrell on drums. He released the albums *Living Time* (1972) with George Russell and *Symbiosis* (1974) with Claus Ogerman where he plays long passages on electric piano. *New Conversations* (1978) is the third and final recording of his overdubbed solo albums with monologues, dialogues and triologues alternating between the acoustic and electric piano. Finally on some titles of the duo album *Intuition* (1978) with Eddie Gomez he plays the Fender Rhodes.

Bill Evans: "I don't think too much about the electronic thing, except that it's kind of fun to have it as an alternate voice. Like, I've used the Fender- Rhodes piano on a couple of records. I don't really look on it as a piano— merely an alternate keyboard instrument, that offers a certain kind of sound that's appropriate sometimes. I find that it's kind of a refreshing auxiliary to the piano— but I don't need it, you know. I guess it's for other people to judge how effective it's been on my records; I enjoyed it, anyway. I don't enjoy spending a lot of time with the electric piano. I mean, if I play it for a period of time, then I quickly tire of it, and I want to get back to the acoustic piano."

(From an interview with Bill Evans in 1972 by Les Tomkins (1930). He is an English journalist, singer and jazz aficionado. He was a freelance contributor of magazines like *Melody Maker*, *Jazz News* and *Crescendo*, interviewing jazz musicians, especially famous Americans visiting England).

From an interview in *Jazzwise* (Sept 2012) by Brian Priestly from 1972, when Bill Evans was playing one of his Ronnie Scott's residencies. Brian about the *Bill Evans Album* (Columbia): " I notice, playing the new album through very quickly, there's quite a bit of electric piano."

Bill Evans: "Yeah. It's kinda fun. I would like to straighten out the fact, because the public certainly loves the sound of the electric piano.

And I think with a lot of the electronic music coming into the scene, and electronic instruments versus acoustic instruments, there's a lot of confusion about the inherent quality of the electronic instrument as opposed to the acoustic instrument. That is, the Fender bass as opposed to the acoustic bass, and the electric piano as opposed to the acoustic piano, and so forth. I might begin by saying I have only positive feelings about the electric piano, or I wouldn't have used it. But it, to me, is not even really a piano.

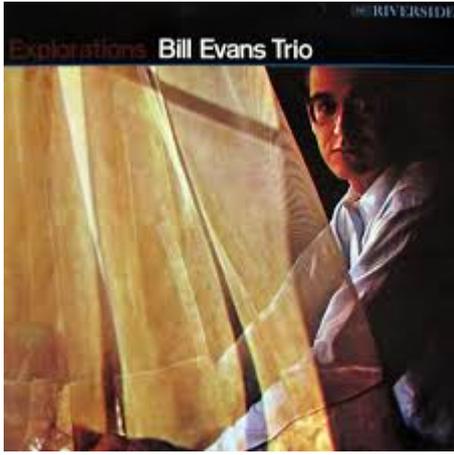
You know, it' s constructed differently, and it has a really different sound. It functions something like a piano, and it's fun to use in certain places, and very appropriate and has certain qualities that the piano doesn't have. But to speak of it in the same breath as having the scope or the depth, as a medium of musical expression, as the acoustic piano would be to make a real big mistake. I think possibly electronic instruments will eventually become very musical and maybe have a greater scope.

But so many people ask me – it seems like, every interview, someone asks me about electric piano, because I've used it a few times now and maybe they're curious and all. But I would like to straighten it out that, from my professional viewpoint, it's still a very limited instrument. And I think it's tragic that, because of the fact that acoustic pianos are in miserable condition in many clubs, pianists are forced to use electric pianos. And that the sound is novel and consequently. in the pop field and so on, the electronic instruments are very popular, and it tends to confuse the issue. So that's all I have to say about that."

(Brian Priestley, *Jazzwise*)

"I am interested in other keyboard sounds, but basically I'm an acoustic pianist. I've been happy to use the Fender-Rhodes to add a little colour to certain performances but only as an adjunct, he later explained. It's hard for people to recognize individuals on an electric piano. Because it is an electric instrument, it's hard for a personality to come through".

A small part of an interview with Bill Evans by Chris Albertson on the stage of The Jazz Set, 1971.



BILL EVANS PREFERENCE FOR A PARTICULAR BRAND ACOUSTICAL PIANO

