

STEREO 3399 RIVERSIDE

Waltz for Debby
Bill Evans Trio

with Scott LaFaro, Paul Motian

Waltz for Debby: BILL EVANS TRIO



This is the fourth album to be released by the Bill Evans Trio composed of Evans, bassist Scott LaFaro, and drummer Paul Motian. The unit was one of the most inventive and consistently satisfying of the last few years, and it is a great loss that with LaFaro's death (in the early summer of 1961) there can be no more from this specific group. But this is a peculiarly fitting set with which to conclude the series. It is the equal of any of their other albums, and has moments which are, I feel, superior to any of them. It is a performance before a live audience, which is a more accurate picture of any group's work than a studio recording. And, finally, it contains selections that Evans had played and recorded before LaFaro joined him, so that it can serve as the most accurate index of the bassist's great contribution to the trio.

This is a further collection of material recorded at the same in-person session that resulted in the trio's previously-issued LP, "Sunday at the Village Vanguard". But it is in no sense a gathering of scraps from the cutting-room floor. For the earlier compilation, assembled shortly after LaFaro's death, was not designed as a selection of the day's "best" work, but instead tended—through Evans' choice—to feature LaFaro's solos and compositions. Nor does that mean that there is not some brilliant work by the bassist on the present record. All it means, if anything, is that this album is perhaps more representative of the overall repertoire of the group than was the preceding one, assembled with a special purpose in mind.

I find this a fascinating album in several respects. One of the most intriguing certainly is the way in which it demonstrates how Evans, who came to prominence largely through solos played or recorded with such men as Miles Davis and George Russell, abandons, to a great extent, the muscular rhythmic excellence of such performances when he is leading his own trio, and gives expression to the more romantic side of his nature. He reveals himself as an Impressionist; and the man who wrote the brief and lovely *Epilogue* (included in the album "Everybody Digs Bill Evans") must have been influenced by the English pastoral composers. In some respects, Evans shares identity with the Modern Jazz Quartet: both groups could probably play all night long, and a drunken listener would never know that he had heard anything more than quiet, pleasant cocktail music.

A word about LaFaro: at his death, he was one of the supreme jazz bassists. There were very few men who have seemed to consider it as some other instrument. The Blanton-Edgington duets (which are in some ways the

spiritual progenitors of these recordings) achieved much of their effect through Blanton's bowed passages, which sounded like violin or cello work. The work of LaFaro (which at one time stemmed quite directly from Charles Mingus) often sounds as though he were playing a large guitar; one solo he has recorded is astonishingly like Django Reinhardt. Like Mingus, LaFaro's ideas could only be played by a virtuoso; also like Mingus, the virtuosity is never more than a tool to convey the idea. But they are exclusively virtuosic lines, requiring complete technical mastery to execute. Aside from the guitar conception, there is a much more basic advance which LaFaro (and other bassists such as Willbur Ware and Charlie Haden) are helping to initiate: prior to them, most bassists were so steeped in their roles as timekeepers that, during their solos, they would simply continue to keep time, only with a more interesting choice of notes. LaFaro had completely freed himself from that construction, and it undoubtedly took a sensitive, unobtrusive drummer like Paul Motian to help him do it.

About the material: two of these pieces, *Waltz for Debby* and *My Romance*, were recorded in 1964, on Evans' first LP, "New Jazz Conceptions". In that incarnation, though, they were short unaccompanied piano sketches, lasting only a little more than a minute each. It is interesting indeed that both have remained in Bill's personal repertoire at this time, developing into these full-bodied versions.

My Foolish Heart is another of those neglected ballads which Evans revives from time to time. I must take exception to those who say that in doing so he is reworking "trivia and banality"; for I find that the tunes he chooses to play often have lovely, if sentimental, melodic lines. *Detour Ahead* was written by musicians Lou Carter, Herb Ellis, and John Frigo, who called themselves the Soft Winds, and was first and most poignantly sung by Billie Holiday.

The altered harmonic pattern with which Bill and Scott begin Leonard Bernstein's *Some Other Time* will be instantly familiar to many Evans followers. He first planned to record this tune in 1958, for the "Everybody Digs . . ." album, which contains another Bernstein song from "On the Town", *Lucky To Be Me*. But at that time he became so involved with one figure he created for it that he expanded that into a free improvisation—*Peace Piece*—which has become perhaps his best known work. Here, three years later, is the germ of that idea, and there is, I think, a general similarity in improvisational approach, although it should be noted that *Peace Piece* was not an "original" based on the Bernstein chord.

The final track is Miles Davis' *Milestones*. Those who

BILL EVANS, piano; SCOTT LAFARO, bass; PAUL MOTIAN, drums. Recorded live at The Village Vanguard; New York; June 23, 1961.

SIDE 1

1. My Foolish Heart (4:56) (Washington-Young)
2. Waltz for Debby (6:54) (Bill Evans)
3. Detour Ahead (7:55) (Carter-Ellis-Frigo)

SIDE 2

1. My Romance (7:11) (Rodgers and Hart)
2. Some Other Time (3:02) (Carmen-Cohen-Bernstein)
3. Milestones (6:37) (Miles Davis)

recall the original recording by the composer, with its use of scales, its crisp, staccato attack, and the sharp, accenting Philly Joe Jones rim shots, will know that it is one of the most influential recordings of the last few years. That record was made before Evans had ever played with Miles, and the way Bill plays the tune here—*legato, and with a different sense of time*—can to a degree be considered a capsule definition of the differences in approach between the two men. But it also points up the fact that theirs are by no means opposed approaches. Bill unquestionably gained much from his working with Davis, and those elements that stand as uniquely Evans' in this version of *Milestones* might well be the sort of things Miles referred to when he once said: "I sure learned a lot from Bill Evans."

—JOE GOLDBERG

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Portrait in Jazz (RLP 315; Stereo 1162)
Explorations (RLP 351; Stereo 9351)
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