

bill
evans
live AT

Art D'Lugoff's

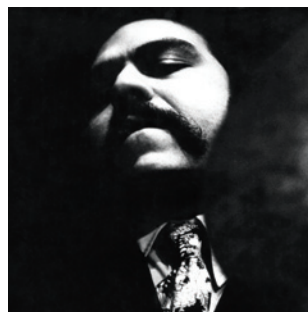
Top of The Gate

Resonance
RECORDS



BILL EVANS

LIVE AT ART D'LUGOFF'S TOP OF THE GATE



BILL EVANS piano **EDDIE GOMEZ** bass **MARTY MORELL** drums
Recorded October 23, 1968, Greenwich Village, NYC by GEORGE KLABIN

FIRST SET

- 1 EMILY** 4:44
(Mandel & Mercer) ASCAP
- 2 WITCHCRAFT** 5:41
(C. Coleman) ASCAP
- 3 YESTERDAYS** 5:04
(J. Kern) ASCAP
- 4 'ROUND MIDNIGHT** 6:21
(T. Monk) ASCAP
- 5 MY FUNNY VALENTINE** 4:41
(Rogers & Hart) ASCAP

- 6 CALIFORNIA HERE I COME** 5:38
(De Sylva, Jolson & Myers) ASCAP
- 7 GONE WITH THE WIND** 6:53
(Magidson & Wrubel) ASCAP
- 8 ALFIE** 5:05
(B. Bacharach) ASCAP
- 9 TURN OUT THE STARS** 4:38
(B. Evans) ASCAP

SECOND SET

- 10 YESTERDAYS** 4:45
(J. Kern) ASCAP
- 11 EMILY** 5:05
(Mandel & Mercer) ASCAP
- 12 IN A SENTIMENTAL MOOD** 4:03
(D. Ellington) ASCAP
- 13 'ROUND MIDNIGHT** 6:23
(T. Monk) ASCAP
- 14 AUTUMN LEAVES** 5:27
(J. Kosma) ASCAP

- 15 SOMEDAY MY PRINCE
WILL COME** 5:10
(Churchill & Morey) ASCAP
- 16 MOTHER OF EARL** 4:19
(E. Zindar) BMI
- 17 HERE'S THAT RAINY DAY** 5:15
(Burke & Van Heusen) ASCAP

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Produced by ZEV FELDMAN. Executive Producer: GEORGE KLABIN

Mixing and sound restoration by GEORGE KLABIN and FRAN GALA. Mastering by FRAN GALA

Cover photo by TOM COPI Above: Bill Evans photo ©RAYMOND ROSSARCHIVES—CTS Images;
Eddie Gomez photo by TOM COPI; Marty Morell photo courtesy of MARTY MORELL. Art direction & design by BURTON YOUNT

A MOMENT IN TIME

You're about to be transported to October 23, 1968, to Greenwich Village in New York City. Jazz in the 1960s was one of the music's greatest eras, and thanks to a gentleman named George Klabin, we have this important document of one of its leading talents. George was only 22 years old at the time, full of passion and engineering skill, when he took advantage of an offer by Evans' longtime manager, Helen Keane, to record Bill's new trio. George aired these two fully recorded sets of music one time on his radio show on Columbia University's WKCR-FM, and these tapes have been stored away all these years until now.

VILLAGE GATE, 160 Bleecker St. (GR 5-5120)—In the rustic upstairs you can drink or dine while listening to the polished, often intricate sounds of the Bill Evans trio. On Mondays, the trio is off, and new talent is auditioned. . . . **☛ Downstairs:** Friday and Saturday, Oct. 18-19, the Thelonious Monk quartet alternates with the Charles Lloyd quartet. On Thursday, Oct. 17, and then from Tuesday through Thursday, Oct. 22-24, Gordon Rose and the Generation Gap will perform.

upstairs, The Thelonious Monk Quartet & The Charles Lloyd Quartet played the downstairs Village Gate stage on a double-bill.

These days, it's not uncommon for a live recording to surface where one microphone was used, often stashed somewhere in the back of the room (or even hidden), often yielding horrendous sound. What we have here though is completely different. Klabin positioned microphones on each player. The concerts were mixed live, providing a superior source of the highest quality sound. In fact, these recordings are among the best sounding Evans recordings ever made. In addition, the performances contain some of the greatest playing ever documented by this trio.



Collectors will find it interesting to note the historical significance of this collection of songs. This recording of "My Funny Valentine"

is Evans' first documented trio version of the song. "Here's That Rainy Day" is possibly Bill's earliest recording of the composition. "Yesterdays" is his first trio and his first documented live version of the song. This rendition of "Witchcraft" is Bill's only recording of it other than his 1959 studio version on *Portrait In Jazz*. This may also be Evans' first trio version of "Mother Of Earl." Aside from the songs, this is Bill Evans' only known recording made at "The Gate" (the other club, whose deep association with Evans is often forgotten).

In 2009 when starting at Resonance, I was made aware of these rare gems in Klabin's archives. Upon starting at the label we were determined to find a way to bring this music to the world. It's been a long road, working on all of the necessary clearances (unlike some other labels or tape proprietors who just "put it out"). Through the process, we've had the good fortune of working with Evan Evans (Bill's son), Eddie Gomez, Marty Morell, and Art D'Lugoff's son, Raphael. We've provided writings and photographs that provide perspective into this golden era.

This project, aside from being a tribute to the great Bill Evans, also celebrates the memory of one of New York City's greatest jazz impresarios, Art D'Lugoff. It was D'Lugoff's vision to create a destination for great music (not just jazz, but even folk, world music, spoken word and Off-Broadway productions). We owe tremendous gratitude to him for having the insight to book Mr. Evans, but more importantly, for all he did to support this great music. Getting to know his son, Raphael D'Lugoff, has been a real honor.

George Klabin, thank you again for being there to preserve this amazing moment in time! 🏠 **ZEVE FELDMAN**, February, 2012

THE ONLIEST BILL EVANS by Nat Hentoff

Hearing Bill Evans in a club was also a memorable visual involvement. As he leaned ever closer toward and into the piano, it was as if he and the piano were one. This reminded me of Charles Mingus telling me of the years when he was insistently practicing his bass until "one day, I became the bass." These continually live (not studio) recordings also recall Bill Evans saying, with unusual exasperation, "It bugs me when people try to analyze jazz as an intellectual theorem. It's not. It's feeling."

Duke Ellington, one of my mentors in and out of music, agreed: "I don't want listeners to analyze my music. I want them to open themselves up to the whole of what they're hearing."

The late Gene Lees, who opened himself to the musician inside the music as an interviewer and historian, wrote what is for me the most concisely illuminating description of Bill Evans' conversations



in music, "He sounds like love letters written to the world from some prison of the heart."

But for such intimacy to be continually full of the unexpected, required the storyteller's command of the language he was speaking. As Bill himself put it with his customary lucidity:

Jazz is not a what, it is a how. If it were a what, it would be static, never growing. The how is that the music comes from the moment, it is spontaneous, it exists at the time it is created. And anyone who makes music according to this method conveys to me an element that makes his music jazz.

But as Bill well knew, this music of the moment came from the very life history of the creator, including his current experiences and what he felt from the ambience created by his audience.

As Duke Ellington told me, "When Johnny Hodges is playing a ballad of loss and yearning for fulfillment, there's sometimes a sigh from the audience. And that becomes part of his and our music." But that depth of spontaneity and receptivity to one's past and present all at once doesn't grow without constant study, and self-reflection.

In Fred Kaplan's book, *1959: The Year Everything Changed* (John Wiley & Sons), in a chapter, "The Assault on the Chord," he writes of Bill Evans:

He had a particular penchant for the French impressionist composers, like Ravel and Debussy, whose harmonies floated airily above the melody line. When Evans first started playing jazz, he tended not to play the 'root' of a chord; for instance, when playing a C chord, he would avoid playing the C note. Instead, he would play some other note in or hovering around the chord, suggesting the chord without locking himself to its restraints.



You can tell a lot about a singular jazz musician by how he himself reacts when he listens to his peers' quality. In Bill's review of Ben Webster and Joe Zawinul's Riverside LP *Soul Mates*, he noted:

It seems to me admirable that jazz, as an art and a discipline, demands of its practitioners to...be a sensitive follower as well as an authoritative leader. This spontaneous interplay of four or five creative voices is unique in musical performance today. Unlike composed music, which is the reflection of one personality, jazz performance is a constant document of a social situation.

This also includes the spontaneous emotional responses of the listener. In *The Jazz Review*, a magazine I co-edited, I asked Bill about the players who influenced him:

There are so many. You hear musicians all your life including 'unknowns.' I've been influenced by players in New Orleans, Chicago, St. Louis, and don't know their names. Bud Powell was an important influence for me; the way Lennie Tristano and Lee Konitz started thinking structurally; all classical music. Actually, all musical experience enters into you.

One evening between sets, I was talking to Eric Dolphy, when he was with Charles Mingus, about his "influences." He smiled. "This morning," he said, "I was awakened by birds who were singing outside my window and [they] became part of my music."

I expect it was Bill's similar openness to the ever-changing sounds of life that led Miles Davis to deeply admire him. There was a

considerable stir among certain black musicians back then when Miles replaced the swinging, energizing pianist Red Garland with Evans in the combo that created a number of jazz masterpieces.

Miles was acutely and bristlingly reactive to Jim Crow. Outside Birdland once, he so upbraided a racist cop that he came close to being busted for disturbing the peace. But when Miles chose Bill Evans, some black musicians were surprised and incensed. There weren't enough grooving black colleagues to handle the gig? Miles told me his response to them; "If Bill Evans was purple with green polka dots, I wouldn't care so long as he can play."

At that time, jazz was not nearly as racially integrated as it has come to be. But just as Benny Goodman made significant history when Teddy Wilson joined him, so Bill helped create a bridge when he accepted Miles' invitation to find more about himself musically and personally...same thing with Miles.

But where did this treasure of Bill Evans "live" recordings come from, with such vivid clarity and immediacy of sound that they make you feel you're right there at a table in the club?

First, about this highly distinctive label. Zev Feldman, General Manager of Resonance Records fills me in. The man who brings Bill Evans *Live at Art D'Lugoff's Top of the Gate* to the world is George Klabin. Klabin not only produces recordings but he's also a sound engineer. How many record producers in any genre are both? In my couple of years as a producer at the Candid label—the biggest kick I've had, sending jazz around the globe rather than just writing about it, I didn't know enough to even get the tapes rolling.

During Klabin's time in the 1960s at WKCR-FM in New York, where he was so ahead of the curve that he programmed such explorers as Albert Ayler, he also went to clubs and actually recorded such historic events as the opening night at the Village Vanguard of the Thad Jones & Mel Lewis Orchestra.

With the encouragement of Bill Evans' manager, Helen Keane, truly a model of what a personal manager should be, Klabin set up his equipment on October 23, 1968, and has preserved the two sets that night which you are now holding. I wish Klabin had been around to have invented the means to bring us live another highly individual swinger, Bach.

It was during this period that I brought my daughter Miranda (Mandy), who was beginning to play the clubs as a pianist and singer, to a Bill Evans date at the Village Vanguard in New York. The effect of hearing Bill's recordings had been beyond, far beyond, the conservatory education she'd had. Between sets that night, Bill, characteristically soft-spoken and gentle, encouraged Mandy to open herself to herself as she learned more and more of the storytelling capacities she shared with the piano.



She has become a premier piano teacher in New York and composer for network television programs. And as I hear her five-year old daughter Ruby, improvising on the piano with surprising personal presence for her age, I like to think that Bill Evans would have liked to join her there as a mentor. I think, or fantasize, that I hear some of him in Ruby.

He has been a mentor to countless musicians around the world, not only pianists, and these sessions will now be heard by generations of players and listeners whose lives will thereby be markedly enhanced. 🏠

When I first learned of the existence of a never-released Bill Evans' recording, a double-CD set no less, I admit I had mixed emotions. Bill was one of the most influential musicians of all time and a new recording would be major news to all serious jazz fans. On the other hand, so often in these cases when tracks surface decades later, it turns out to be something taped on a home recorder from the back of a club and the quality of both playing and recording is inferior. So when I was asked to write something about this historic Bill Evans release, I was more than a little bit hesitant as I awaited the arrival of the demo CDs. To my delight, when I first listened, it was so good it gave me goose bumps and made the hair on the back of my neck stand up.

These performances capture this particular Bill Evans Trio near the beginning of their time together. In fact, bassist Eddie Gomez had just started playing with Bill, embarking on what was ultimately an 11-year stint, though from the way he dives into each piece with strength and confidence here, you would never know he was new on the job. Drummer Marty Morell rounds out the group, providing



consistent swing and energy, though never taking any solos in the traditional sense. Bill's trios innovated in so many ways, it's impossible to point out everything they introduced to the jazz world. But certainly Bill's rhythm section concept was perhaps the most widely adopted. By treating the role of the bass as melodic and improvisational instead of being limited to time-keeping quarter-note lines, while relying on the drums to be the primary rhythmic anchor of the ensemble, Bill essentially liberated the rhythm section in modern jazz ensembles — a truly major innovation.

Additionally, for pianists and other melodic instrumentalists, Bill introduced a fresh and unpredictable style of phrasing in his solos, sometimes referred to as playing-over-the-bar-lines, allowing his melodic developments to stretch out and flow beyond the expected number of measures in a harmonic progression, providing a greater sense of freedom for the soloist. It's hard to think of any pianist coming of age in the '60s who wasn't influenced by Bill's melodic style, as well as his unique approach to chord voicing and his ability to so convincingly re-harmonize and arrange familiar standards. In fact, Bill was that rare kind of musician who could come up with a new arrangement of a familiar tune that sounded so "right," that his version often became the accepted way for most other musicians to play the song.

As I sat back and enjoyed hearing the trio play through this set of 17 tunes, my only regret was that just one of Bill's own compositions is included ("Turn Out the Stars"). Bill's work as a composer is often overlooked because of his great playing ability, but his original

songs make up a solid body of work ranking him among the very best of jazz composers. Nonetheless, he certainly made his name as a master interpreter of standards, and this collection is Bill at the top of his game.

Like most jazz musicians entering the scene in the '60s, I became a huge fan of Bill's music and was deeply influenced by his fresh approach to jazz piano. It was also during this period, shortly after I moved to New York, that I met Bill (coincidentally I moved into the same building where Bill was living at the time, and we were introduced by the building superintendent). Before long, I had several opportunities to play with him, starting with some recording sessions organized by Bill and Stan Getz in 1964 that were never released, unfortunately. Later on, I got to sit in with this very trio, with Eddie and Marty, on two occasions — first at a jazz festival held at Radio City Music Hall, and then a year or so later, at Carnegie Hall, a concert that featured both my quartet and Bill's trio. The few tunes I jammed with Bill on those occasions seemed to fly by in seconds, leaving me only some brief memories to savor.

In 1961, a few weeks after I moved to New York and first met Bill, I also met 17-year-old Eddie Gomez (I was 19 at the time). Somehow I got a call to be part of a group booked to play a steady gig on Long Island for the summer. When I showed up for the first rehearsal, Eddie introduced himself, and as the two youngsters in the room, we hit it off right away. After several rehearsals, we made the trip out to Long Island for the opening night, which quickly became the closing night, after a disagreement and near fist fight between the band leader and the club owner. For a new guy in town like me, it was bad news. The good news was I had gotten to know Eddie, and fortunately we have had the chance to play and record together from time to time through the years.

The drummers, like Marty Morell, who played in Bill's trios, are the unsung heroes in the group. Typically in Bill's group, the listener's ear is constantly drawn to the facile playing and interaction between the piano and bass, since they both carry on relentless melodic invention and create a rapid-fire musical conversation. The challenge for the drummer is to surround the melodic players with just the right level of intensity to fit the moment, and while the other two threaten to break free of the bonds of the time feel, the drummer keeps the groove in that perfect spot where everything feels like it is ready to take flight. No small task.

As I listen, I imagine myself being in the audience that night at the Village Gate, taking it all in, feeling all that energy and excitement coming from the stage. I would have been jumping out of my chair on several occasions — just give a listen to Bill's two different solos on Jerome Kern's "Yesterdays," version 1 and version 2. Such great playing!

I want to add a final comment about Bill's long struggle with addiction

that contributed to his premature death. We all wondered why? How could this genius, this superbly talented and very intelligent guy let this happen? It is a lesson to us all, I think. Someone this gifted and smart, who still battled with addiction through much of his life, means it can happen to anyone. We will always miss Bill and are grateful for his legacy. He changed jazz for the better in a number of ways, large and small. We would have liked to have had him around for a bit longer, but we have his recordings that allow us to relive his inspirational moments. Now with the release of *Live at the Art D'Lugoff's Top of the Gate*, there is more of Bill's inspiration for all of us to learn from and enjoy.  **GARY BURTON**



On a spring day in 1966, Bill Evans telephoned me and changed my life. He wanted to know if I could tour with his trio for a few weeks. Without hesitation I said "yes" and wondered if this might be a prank call. Bill had heard me play a month earlier at the Village Vanguard and had introduced himself. He was warm and complimentary, and expressed a desire to play together sometime soon. I was thrilled at the Vanguard and didn't think anything would come of it. So when he called, I was in a state of shock.

A week later, I set off to tour with the Bill Evans Trio (with Joe Hunt on drums). Our first stop was the London House in Chicago where many of the great trios of the day (Oscar Peterson, Ahmad Jamal, etc.) performed on a regular basis. The week in Chicago was surreal. I had always found Bill's music breathtakingly expressive and profound. His early recordings are full of marvelous improvisations that swing and weave thoughtfully constructed solos. His later work with Miles's band (Trane, Cannon, Paul, Philly Joe and Jimmy Cobb—all super



heroes of mine) was an important chapter in the history of jazz. And, of course, Bill's innovative collaborations with the stunning young phenom Scott LaFaro and the always musical Paul Motian are classic. To be on stage with Bill's trio was at once both ecstatic and terrifying that first week. I was on with the trio, interacting musically. Bill was supportive and seemed pleased while secretly I questioned whether I would, or could, rise to this occasion.

Next week at Shelly's Manne Hole in North Hollywood, CA, Bill and I sat down after the last set, and Bill asked me to join the trio on a permanent basis. I was astonished that he had decided so quickly. I said "yes" as I tried to stop my head from spinning out of control.

By 1968, when this live recording was made, I had begun to feel comfortable in my role as bass player with the trio. After Joe Hunt left the trio, we had the iconic Philly Joe Jones and Jack DeJohnette



for a while before the up-and-coming Marty Morell joined the trio permanently earlier in 1968. When Philly Joe was in the trio, it was sublime to have these two musical gods on the same bandstand with me.

This dream had come true for me, although I had never allowed myself the dream. When the opportunity arrived, the reality was slow for me to fathom, and I often worried that it could end as quickly as it had come. Bill had become a mentor to me. We often spoke about

music, and life's ups and downs. He was sincere and articulate, choosing his words carefully; he also had a great sense of humor that came out unexpectedly.

We often played in NYC at the Village Vanguard where audiences were generally avid, sophisticated and quiet, and increasingly at Top of the Gate. Top of the Gate was a large room where audiences dined and drank; it attracted a much different sort of listener. There would also be musicians stopping by (who were appearing at the same time in other Greenwich Village clubs—or, downstairs), as well as film and TV celebrities. And, finally, clueless tourists that wanted to sample the Greenwich Village scene.

This is the context in which you should listen to this recording. It is a throwback to another era that only barely exists today. It was the '60s, and it was lots of fun. Enjoy. 🏠 **EDDIE GOMEZ, NYC May 2011**

It was the most incredible time in my life. My first two weeks with Bill Evans were about to begin at the "Top of the Gate" in Greenwich Village, NY.

I started listening to Bill in 1961 and was immediately captivated by Bill's musical aura and his sense of beauty. Bill was such an incredible artist. When he touched the keyboard he touched your heart in an instant. For me, it was a dream come true to get the gig with the Bill Evans Trio, and for weeks, I was walking on air after finding out that I would be the new drummer. It was the beginning of the rest of my musical life. This CD is a wonderful journey that takes you back into the history of the group.

The Top of the Gate was such a great place to hang at that time and

to hear great music for the price of a beer, or if you so desired, you could get a great meal and enjoy the music as well. I remember so vividly the night that George Klabin came down to the Gate with his (at the time) state-of-the-art two-track tape recorder. This recording brings back so many memories of all the weeks that we played at the Top of the Gate. We would work there approximately 16 weeks a year, maybe it was more. My memory fails me at the moment, but it seemed like we were always working there.

So many musicians would come to hear Bill. When Miles was working downstairs at the Village Gate, he would always come up to check Bill out. They were good friends. Chick Corea, Jam Hammer, Steve Kuhn and many other great piano players would always come by to see and hear Bill and they would often sit in and play the last set with Eddie and me. Jeremy Stieg (flute) was a permanent fixture for many of the years that we worked there. He would always sit in on the last set whenever the Trio worked at the Gate and the Village



Vanguard. Indeed it was a very special time in the history and development of the Bill Evans Trio. If you were lucky enough to have been there, then you know what I am talking about.

Sadly, those days will never be back but, thanks to Zev Feldman and George Klabin, you have the music from that time on this recording and it will take you back to that wonderful period in the history of the Bill Evans Trio.

🏠 **MARTY MORELL**

BEHIND THE SCENE WITH THE RECORDING ENGINEER

for a 22 year old to be allowed to record the great Bill Evans, what a thrill and a privilege! I had met Bill's manager, Helen Keane, in 1965, when as a sophomore at Columbia University I booked one of her acts, Sheila Jordan, along with Freddie Hubbard, at a college concert.

In 1966, as Director of Jazz Programing at WKCR-FM, I interviewed Bill for a program on bassist Scott LaFaro. By 1968 I was regularly recording jazz artists at various venues in New York City, presenting the recordings one time on my radio show, and giving them a copy that they could use for non-commercial purposes. In the Fall of 1968, I called Helen to ask if I could record Bill live for broadcast.

Top: Bill Evans Trio, 1970. L-R: Bill Evans, Eddie Gomez and Marty Morell with the Danish TV Studio Orchestra conducted by Palle Mikkelborg, Copenhagen June 1970. Photo ©Jan Persson—CTS Images.

Left Column: Eddie Gomez, Newport Jazz Festival, 1967. Photo by Tom Copi. **Right Column:** Marty Morell. Photo courtesy of Marty Morell.

She soon agreed, since Bill had a regular gig with his new trio, with drummer Marty Morell and bassist Eddie Gomez, at the Top of the Gate, a lovely restaurant/jazz venue located on the second floor in the same building as the famous Village Gate Jazz Club. Looking back now, I suspect Helen wanted these recordings as a demo for this new trio, which had only been together for a few weeks. Whatever her reason, I was happy to be allowed down there on Wednesday night, October 23, 1968. I recorded two sets, and all the music I recorded that night is on this release, including two takes each of three different tunes.

My recording setup consisted of a very heavy (50+ pounds) Crown two-track tape recorder which ran at both 7½ and 15 ips speeds (which I lugged around by myself) along with four microphones, a single Ampex 4 input tube stereo mixer, assorted cables and mike stands, and a Beyer stereo headset for monitoring.

The mikes, as I recall, included a Neumann U67, a Beyer dynamic, a Sennheiser condenser, and an Electro-Voice dynamic mike which I used to wrap with foam and place directly in the bridge area of the acoustic bass.

What you are hearing on this recording is a live direct-to-stereo mix, with the piano in the center miked with the U67, and the drums split left and miked with both the Sennheiser condenser and the Beyer, and the bass split right with the Electro Voice dynamic. I was quite used to recording in this manner, as often there was no place for me to set up speakers in another room. It was great ear training to get the mix right during the recording. You may notice that the bass and drums are a bit louder on the first two tracks—“Emily” and “Witchcraft,” than on the rest of the recording. That is because I was not allowed any time to get a sound balance before the first set started, so I had to “wing it” and made some adjustments after each of the first two tunes until I got the balance where I wanted it.

Perhaps most interesting about my approach to recording jazz, was that I liked to get close to the instruments. In the '60s, many recordings of jazz that I heard lacked presence and definition, since the mikes tended to pick up too much room sound and leakage of the other instruments. However, there is always a risk of distortion when placing a mike close to a loud instrument like drums, which is one reason that engineers during this period preferred to mike at a distance. The intimacy and detail that you hear on this recording are due to my close mike choices, and I think the recording compares favorably with today's recording techniques.

I remember that the room was large, and the trio was set over to one side, nearer to the cocktail bar, and then behind were many dinner tables. People close to the trio came to listen, but those further away did talk, as you can sometimes hear a rumbling of their

voices in the background. Bill Evans had not yet attained the level of respect among jazz fans that he would soon thereafter. But those who recognized his greatness, his unique and new approach to jazz piano, including many of the most important jazz musicians, would drop by this Top of the Gate gig, and check out the Master.

Musically, this is two sets of Bill Evans at his lyrical best, on a good night, in a very good period, playing with the bassist who I feel best carried forward the great tradition of Scott LaFaro, and took it to new places, and a drummer whose sensitivity was perfect for his role with this trio.

Hope you enjoy these special moments that I was fortunate enough to capture. 🏠

GEORGE KLABIN, *Engineer, President Resonance Records*

ART D'LUGOFF's TOP OF THE GATE

by Raphael D'Lugoff

For a jazz musician in the mid 60's/early 70's, a gig at the Top of the Gate was a month long stint- six nights a week—Mondays being new talent night. The room was L-shaped with high ceilings and chandeliers with frosted yellow globes. The food was steak house fare. As you entered, on your left was a banquet hall facing away from the stage; and, closer in, smaller café tables for more adventurous listeners. There was also this exquisite carved-wood paneling done by the brilliant Bob Doak—a hard-core jazz fan who seemed to know a lot about Clifford Brown. Serious listeners short on cash—like the young Gary Giddins—could avoid the \$3 cover charge by sitting at the bar and drinking slowly.



For artists like Bill Evans and Thelonious Monk, the Top of the Gate was a home base gig between concerts and European tours—a place where they could hone new material in a low-key setting. Often, two artists were on the same bill plus an opening solo pianist—often Bill Rubinstein or actor/musician Michael Moriarty. Some typical bookings over the years:

Jan. 1967 Jaki Byard and Roland Hanna
Feb. 1967 Teddy Wilson and Bob Dorough
Apr. 1967 Blossom Dearie and Tete Montoliu
July 1967 Willie “The Lion” Smith and Don Ewell
(Chad Mitchell & Richard Pryor were in the downstairs room)
Mar. 1968 Toshiko Akiyoshi and Monty Alexander
Dec. 1967 Mose Allison and Ahmad Jamal
Mar. 1970 Gary Burton and Junior Mance

My father, Art D'Lugoff opened the Village Gate in 1958 with his brother, Burton. He started construction on the Top of the Gate around 1964 with a \$300,000 loan from air conditioning mogul Sy Kaback. In 1974, after the tragic fire at Barney Josephson's Blue Angel the NYC Fire Department ordered us to shut down until we got rid of all the woodwork interiors. When we reopened, the room lost some of its lustre. Art decided to scale back the steak house and went for more ambitious bookings like Charles Mingus, Jon Lucien, Sivuca, Norman Connors, Lonnie Liston Smith, Joe Pass, Larry Coryell, Bu Pleasant and Art Blakey (who stored a spare drum kit in one of our closets). I remember seeing a double bill of Art Blakey and Elvin Jones play for about 50 people.

The Top of the Gate also hosted many Off-Broadway shows like *Bee Hive*, *Scrambled Feet*, *Tom Foolery*, *Mayor*, and many more that no one remembers. Between 1989 and 1994 (when we closed for good) Manny Roth and I booked stand-up comics in that room, including Bill Hicks, Jon Stewart, Ray Romano, Larry David, Jay Mohr, and Dave Attell and many more.

In those, our final years, Art gave me the privilege of booking music on our sidewalk café (which we called “the terrace” for some reason). Among them were Top of the Gate stalwarts like Bob Dorough, Junior Mance, and Jaki Byard as well as a newer generation of artists including (forgive my indulgence here) Larry Goldings, John Medeski, Brad Mehldau, Leon Parker, Jacky Terrasson, Mulgrew Miller, Gerry Gibbs, Dave Kikoski, Joe Locke, Kevin Hays, Bill Carrothers, Peter Bernstein, Scott Colley, Jeff Williams, Allen Mezzquida, Bill Stewart, Dave Fiuczynski, Bill Charlap, John Hicks, Kenny Barron and—the last artist to play the Gate—the late Thomas Chapin.

I contacted Michael Moriarty hoping for a nice Bill Evans anecdote. “Did you ever speak to him?” I asked, hoping for a heart-warming story of the veteran pianist encouraging the newbie.

—“Yes, once.”

—“What did he say?”

—“He asked me, ‘Do you have any nail clippers?’” 🏠

This recording is dedicated to
the memory of Bill Evans,
Art D'Lugoff & Helen Keane

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

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Above: The awning of the Village Gate, and a sign at the entrance. Photos by Herb Snitzer. **Next page:** Art D'Lugoff's Village Gate/Top of the Gate at corner of Thompson and Bleecker Streets in Greenwich Village, New York, 1967. Photo courtesy of the D'Lugoff family.



VILLAGE GATE
22 WEST 11TH STREET
GREENWICH VILLAGE

LIQUOR

STEVENS

STEVENS

TOP OF THE GATE - VILLAGE GATE

GREENWICH HOTEL
RESTAURANT

TOP OF THE GATE TOP OF THE GATE VILLAGE GATE