

Bill Zavatsky

Live at the Village Vanguard

For forty years now, ever since the recordings were released, I have wanted to track down the people who attended the afternoon and evening performances of the Bill Evans Trio at the Village Vanguard in New York City on Sunday, June 25, 1961. Sometimes I've thought that instead of the extraordinary music of pianist Bill Evans, bassist Scott LaFaro, and drummer Paul Motian, these live recordings featured the audience that talked, laughed, jabbered, and clinked their silverware and glasses throughout.

Maybe some of them know that LaFaro was killed not two weeks later in a car accident, leaving behind on those tracks improvised solos of staggering beauty on the bass violin. But then everybody knows that these were "classic" sessions—Evans at one of his peaks, a trio still unmatched.

Maybe today some of those who were there put on the CDs (or their scratchy old LPs) and listen to what they didn't listen to then. Or maybe they point to their voices chattering under and around the music, exclaiming, "Hey, honey—that's *me!*"

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One writer claims that he can decipher some of the dialogue as Evans works his way through the melody of “Alice in Wonderland”:
“I got a new TV—color!” “That brunette over by the cigarette machine, I think she has something to say to you...”
“Maris will never top Ruth, but Mantle might.”
“The colored bartender waters down the Scotch.”
In the introduction to “I Loves You Porgy”
I can hear a guy saying, “Uh, it’s something By Gershwin...*Porgy and Bess*.”
Hey, at least they’re listening...

What if I could find some of those people and interview them—*What were you doing then? Who were you with that night? Why had you gone to the Village Vanguard? What did the music of Bill Evans mean to you?* And there must be some brilliant sound technician who could “erase” the playing of the musicians and pull up the table noise and conversation of the audience. What an interesting recording *that would make!—Live at the Village Vanguard: The Audience, Accompanied by the Bill Evans Trio.*

They who yelled for waiters, scraped chairs, one whose cackle ripped across the music like a dragged phonograph needle, oh, I’ve wanted to find those people and, no, not murder them; no, not smack their faces. I’ve wanted to be the one to sit them down in my living room and play for them these recordings made a few feet from where they sat.

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I wanted them to really *hear*
what they coughed through, for which
they offered smatterings of applause.
I've wanted to see them stiffen and cry out,
"Oh, my God! You mean *that, that* was going on
across the room from my martini?"
"I *missed* the whole damn thing
for that worthless man I spent twenty
of the worst years of my life with!"

Too late. Too late for apologies.
Listen. I'm putting on the first track
now. Hear it if you couldn't hear it then,
wherever you are, whoever you were that day.

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