

ALL THAT'S JAZZ

by Tom O'Neill



[This is the twenty-seventh article about legendary figures in the Jazz world, presenting little-known facts about those artists, about whom we thought we knew everything, or as time went on, had forgotten.]

HORACE SILVER

Horace Silver died this past June at age 85. He had been a musician, composer, and a huge influence to the world of Jazz for nearly 70 years. Yet his is not a household name. He lived a life of, in his words, "meaningful simplicity." Let me explain.

Horace Ward Martin Tavares Silva, born in Norwalk, CT on September 2, 1928, began his musical career as a tenor sax player, and became very proficient with the instrument. But his true love was the piano, which he took up in his mid-teens. Good move for Horace, or else when the great tenor saxophonist, Stan Getz, discovered him while playing in Connecticut in 1950, it may have resulted in unnecessary competition. But Stan loved Silver's piano trio and hired them for a tour. In fact, while on the road, Getz recorded three of Horace's compositions, with Silver making his recording debut on the *Stan Getz Quartet* album.

Moving to New York City in 1951, Silver played *Birdland* on Monday nights, and came to the attention of numerous Jazz stars, who would meet there and jam together. By 1954, Horace attracted the attention of the famous *Blue Note* label, and on November 13th, an epic recording was made, *Horace Silver and the Jazz Messengers*. Silver's first hit was on that album, a composition combining blues and gospel, *The Preacher*. Nothing fancy, just a nice, simple, catchy tune. To me, when I pick up my tenor sax and play this song, it strikes me that it's the epitome of what small combo Jazz should be. Nothing brash, no heroic arpeggios or impossible-to-play 64th notes that drift all over 3 octaves. As I said, simple – a tune you love to whistle or hum along with.

As Silver's time with the *Blue Note* label went on, he helped found a branch of Jazz known as "hard bop," an extension of Bebop, and incorporated influences from rhythm and blues and gospel music. It was often called "funky hard bop," referring to the rollicking, rhythmic feeling associated with the style. Out of this genre came Horace's most famous album, *Song for My Father*, which included his most popular song of the same title. It brought to mind his early childhood, influenced heavily by his family's Cape Verdean heritage and its folk music.

After his long tenure with Blue Note ended, he recorded under his own Silveto label, creating innovative orchestral pieces. In 2005, he was awarded the President's Merit Award by the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences, for his body of work.

If the reader would like to hear more from this fascinating, never-into-drugs, beautifully simple Jazz great, look at *Let's Get to the Nitty Gritty: The Autobiography of Horace Silver*, available on Amazon (University of California Press; 1 edition, August 1, 2007,

ISBN-10: 0520253922). That milestone album aforementioned can be purchased on Amazon (*Horace Silver and the Jazz Messengers*, Audio CD (March 1, 2005 remastered), label: Blue Note Records, ASIN: B0007M23AQ).



Two quotations to close this profile are apropos, the first from Jazz bassist Christian McBride: "Horace Silver's music has always represented what jazz musicians preach but don't necessarily practice, and that's simplicity. It sticks to the memory; it's very singable. It gets in your blood easily; you can comprehend it easily. It's very rooted, very soulful."

The second from the master himself: "Music is my life and I hope to be able to do it all my life, until the very last moment when my spirit leaves my body. I'm so happy that I was blessed with the gift of music. It has seen me through my life. When everything else gets down, when I get the blues, I always think 'well, I've got music.' I may have lost this and lost that, but I've still got music. Lady music has not left me. She's always my sweetheart ...She ain't never gonna leave me, because she loves me and I love her. This is forever. What's the song? 'This Isn't Sometimes, This is Always'."

Tom and his wife Cheryl perform locally as "Just Me 2", a live music duo specializing in songs from the Great American Songbook. They can be reached at (772) 532-5054, or at www.JustMeLiveMusic.com. See them on Facebook at www.facebook.com/JustMeLiveMusic