

ALL THAT'S JAZZ

by Tom O'Neill



[This is the sixteenth 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.]

THIRD STREAM

To quote John Cleese, that distinguished-looking comedian from *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, "and now for something completely different!" For the past 15 months, I've been profiling legendary people in the jazz world. Let's take a break from that and examine a fascinating musical genre of the late 50s and 60s, known as Third Stream.

The first "Stream", or mainstream if you will, is Classical Music, which is a broad, somewhat imprecise term, referring to music produced in, or rooted in the traditions of, European art, ecclesiastic and concert music, particularly between 1000 and 1900. Tightening up that definition somewhat, we are most familiar with the classical music "Masters" from approximately Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach to Beethoven -- roughly, 1730-1820.

A second "Stream" of music is Jazz, which is even more difficult to define. The Merriam-Webster dictionary gives us "American music developed especially from ragtime and blues and characterized by propulsive syncopated rhythms, polyphonic ensemble playing, varying degrees of improvisation, and often deliberate distortions of pitch and timbre." It covers about 100 years, from Ragtime to present day.

Can the two mainstreams coexist? Most definitely; they already have! Did your mom, as mine did, ever insist on piano lessons for her little prodigy? If so, remember the etudes, the exercises, the scales ... the Classics ... the "perfect" foundation for advanced musical education! "But, Mom (or our teacher, Sister Mary), I want to play the popular songs, or [God forbid] ... Jazz!!! Those of us who migrated to Swing or Jazz secretly thanked Mom, and Sister Mary, for their persistence. We were able to "ace" the chords, the discipline to stay with the tempo, and the feeling that we should never drift too far from the "main theme." But, finally, we had to freedom to improvise.

Examples of the marriage of Classical to Jazz began in the early 1900s. Some Ragtime music drew upon Classical music, and symphonic pieces such as George Gershwin's 1924 *Rhapsody In Blue* blended jazz and symphonic music. Igor Stravinsky drew upon jazz for several compositions, such as

"Ragtime", "Piano-rag Rag Music" and "The Ebony Concerto" (the latter composed for jazz clarinetist Woody Herman and his orchestra in 1945).

Another important jazz-classical coupling was *Interlude in B-flat*, recorded in 1935 with the most unusual ensemble of a string quartet, a jazz rhythm section, and Artie Shaw (profiled in my fifteenth article) on clarinet and saxophone. A similar example between visionary saxophonist Stan Getz (see my second article) and arranger Eddie Sauter, resulted in the album *Focus* (Verve/Polygram label, available on Amazon, ASIN: B00000E5II) in 1961 with Getz improvising over a symphonic band rendition of Sauter's beautiful tone poems.

Third Stream is a term coined in 1957 by composer Gunther Schuller, in a lecture at Brandeis University. It lent credibility to the marriage of the two genres, which later became the foodstuff of Milt Jackson's and John Lewis'



Modern Jazz Quartet, which I was personally thrilled to witness, often playing in Cleveland, in my relative youth. But isn't Classical "as written by the composer?" And isn't much of Jazz improvising?

"Improvisation," Schuller had realized through his own embrace of jazz, "is really instantaneous composing." Thus, the marriage was inevitable.

Over the years, Delius, Debussy and Ravel incorporated Jazz in their compositions, while Ellington, Tatum, Brubeck and Mingus imported Classical into theirs. The fact is that the elements of music are always in a state of flux, evolving from one form to another just slightly different. That's what keeps it fresh. Even today as we now settle into the 21st century, contemporary crossover chamber groups as the Turtle Island String Quartet, Kronos Quartet, and Quartet San Francisco keep this concept very well-illuminated. It really is, to me, the best of both worlds.

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.