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BEBOP & BEYOND

Bill Evans: *At the Top of the Gate*

BY ARMAND LEWIS

I N THE LAST DECADE, THERE has been a steady stream of "new releases" by major jazz artists who are no longer with us. Often, these CDs consist of poor quality recordings of club performances; resulting in the inferior sound quality one would expect from such situations. But occasionally, when the recording itself is as good as the artist's performance, the results can rank with the best albums released during the artist's lifetime.

While attending Columbia University in the 1960s, recording engineer George Klabin also served as Director of Jazz Programming for station WKCR-FM in New York, where he would often record jazz artists at local venues for his radio show. These professionally recorded tapes were aired only once and then stored away all these years. Now, some of them are finally being released on Klabin's Resonance Records label — which has just released an extremely rare 1968 performance from pianist Bill Evans.

At what turned out to be a unique moment to record the pianist, *Bill Evans - Live at Art D'Lugoff's Top of the Gate* (Resonance HCD 2012) catches Evans right after one of his trio's periodic changes in personnel. Just weeks before this recording was made, Evans had recruited drummer Marty Morell after losing Jack DeJohnette to Miles Davis. This trio featuring Morell would be the longest lasting of any of Evans' groups. A perfect fit for Evans, Morell would work with the pianist for the next six years — providing a clean



Pianist, Bill Evans.

straight-ahead rhythmic anchor to the melodic interplay between the pianist and his long time bassist Eddie Gomez.

The two CD package — each disc presenting one of the two sets performed that evening — was recorded in the upstairs restaurant above the legendary Village Gate club in New York. Evans was always at his best live and his melodic treatments of "Round Midnight" and "Emily" as well as his propulsive rendition of "Yesterdays" allow for a rich level of musical invention that Evans and his band mates easily sustain over multiple performances. These three compositions must have been part of the trio's then-current repertoire as they were in fact performed during both sets. Listeners may want to play the two versions of each tune back to back to hear the depth of sustained musical creativity the trio brings to them.

The biggest surprise for lis-

continued ☛



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Continued

teners not familiar with Evans' ability to reinterpret a composition is his rich introspective rendition of "California Here I Come" Stripping out the brass, tin pan alley aspects normally associated with the tune, Evans keeps just the barest hint of the original melody, filling the performance with extended passages of musical invention one would not think possible from the source material.



Other tunes that will be more familiar to Evans fans include "My Funny Valentine," "Turn Out the Stars," "Someday My Prince Will Come" and "Autumn Leaves," which provides bassist Eddie Gomez with his best extended solo of the evening.

Made using multiple microphones, the recording itself has the sound of a professional studio session. With the mikes placed very close to the instruments, though not close enough to distort, the music was captured with clarity, presence and (very important for a Bill Evans recording) a surprising minimum of background and room noise.

The CD booklet features rare photos of both the musicians and the club itself as well as extensive liner notes, including reminiscences by Gomez and Morell. Also available in a deluxe vinyl edition, this package is not only an essential release for Bill Evans collectors, but also a complete document of a moment and a place in jazz history. **LFH**

Armand Lewis buys and sells rare jazz LPs. He can be reached at mrluenote@peoplepc.com

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