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► **Feature:** Inside the Resonance label's previous Bill Evans Trio revelation



► "Capable of the most propulsive, hard-nosed swing": Bill Evans

BILL EVANS

ANOTHER TIME: THE HILVERSUM CONCERT (Resonance)



With so many previously unissued trio recordings by Bill Evans crowding shelves and "the cloud," it's fair to ask whether another archival discovery adds anything of real significance to the piano icon's legacy—particularly since the latest, *Another Time: The Hilversum Concert*, comes on the heels of two other Resonance sets from 1968, *Live at Art D'Lugoff's Top of the Gate* and *Some Other Time: The Lost Session From the Black Forest*, as well as Fantasy's *On a Monday Evening*, from 1976.

The answer, in this case, is a decided yes, for completists and non-completists alike. Aside from Verve's *Bill Evans at the Montreux Jazz Festival*, which won a Grammy in 1969, and a few rarities, *Some Other Time* and *Another Time* are the only recordings to document Evans' short-lived trio with bassist Eddie Gomez and Jack DeJohnette. The young drummer, who had just left the Charles Lloyd Quartet, would soon move on to Miles Davis' band. More important, you have to dig deep into the Evans canon to find a set as cutting and concise as *Another Time*. Recorded before a studio audience in

the North Holland town of Hilversum (*Some Other Time*, recorded two days earlier in Germany, is an unattended studio effort), it shows off a side of Evans with which some listeners may not be familiar—or familiar enough.

If we had a penny for every time Evans' playing has been reduced to "lyrical," we would be able to buy a house full of Steinways. While few artists have equaled the heightened romanticism he brought to tunes such as his gorgeous waltz "Emily," featured here, he was also capable of the most propulsive, hard-nosed swing. Tearing through "Embraceable You" and the Broadway classic "Who Can I Turn To?"—two of the last tunes you would expect to hear as uptempo vehicles—he thumbs his nose at typecasting, speeding through traffic with the hard twists and turns of his hero Bud Powell.

The rendition here of "Nardis," long a litmus test for Evans' various trios, also reveals the kinetic strength of his playing. In 1980, shortly before his death, he mined the composition—credited to his *Kind of Blue* boss Miles Davis but said to be composed by Evans—for deep, drawn-out, probing reflections. Those epic performances, recorded at the Village Vanguard and included on the 1996 box set *Turn Out the Stars*, are masterpieces of tension and release, building and building to an explosive statement of the theme. At Hilversum, he gets to the melody in brusque fashion, giving it a tidy spin before generously yielding the spotlight to DeJohnette, whose handsomely textured strokes and the sheer variety of his melodic effects reveal a debt to New Orleans great Ed Blackwell.

Evans clearly thrives on the newness of this band, which does not have the interactive brilliance of his groundbreaking trio with Scott LaFaro and Paul Motian but boasts an easygoing chemistry of its own. DeJohnette's springy vitality levitates Evans even as the sonic weight of Gomez grounds the attack. Gomez, who came on board in 1966, says in the liner notes that Evans

COURTESY OF ROB RUINEKE, PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

had to talk him into playing his extended solo on “Embraceable You.” We’re happy he followed orders. With its thrumming and scampering brilliance, Gomez’s playing has an animated 3-D quality.

Gomez’s resounding tones sometimes steal a bit too much focus from stage left, and DeJohnette’s drumming could be brought forward a bit in the mix. But the vibrancy of the trio carries the day, and, in a way, the subtle imbalances make the recording more vivid than technically cleaner live recordings: You feel like you’re there. First released on vinyl last spring for Record Store Day, *Another Time* lives up to the classy Resonance label’s promise of exceptional sound.

The album runs only 47 minutes, short by today’s standards, but duplicates only three songs from the two-disc *Some Other Time*. (“Who Can I Turn To?” proves a great swap for “What Kind of Fool Am I?” and “Alfie” is a nice added bonus.) The set is so crisply paced and hangs together so well that the running time seems just right. Far from being more icing on Evans’ discography, *Another Time* is another cherry that’s well worth picking.

LLOYD SACHS

JD ALLEN

RADIO FLYER (Savant)



If *Radio Flyer* is tenor saxophonist JD Allen’s best album yet—and it is—it’s largely because of leading-edge guitarist Liberty

Ellman’s appearance. Allen has augmented the trio format before. But Ellman’s work alongside bassist Gregg August and drummer Rudy Royston is subtler and more atmospheric, adding to the music without altering the chemistry.

That chemistry tends toward sparseness, making Ellman’s deft attack that much more impressive. Allen is a player of small phrases, often (“Sitting Bull,” “Heureux”) stringing them together into longer lines. He’s also known for leaving space, and if August and Royston fill that space, they tint it rather than coloring it outright. Obviously, that’s even more true when Allen lays out for other solos: August spreads out on “Sancho Panza” and Royston is both relentless behind the bassist and careful not to step on him. And on “The Angelus Bell,” Royston, who has one of the busiest drum sounds in jazz, displays an uncanny knack for letting

the silence show through his veritable carnival of cymbals.

That’s where Ellman’s light touch matters. On “Radio Flyer,” he makes a wash, a psychedelic scrim behind the interactive trio. On “Sitting Bull,” he adds some soft chord fills during the saxophone solo that melt into halting single-note lines during Ellman’s own. (Ditto his improvisation on “Daedalus.”) There are traces throughout of Ellman’s trademark distortion effects (they’re particularly effective in “Heureux”), but that’s not his focus, including on the closing “Ghost Dance,” on the first half of which Allen maintains silence. It leaves Ellman, August and Royston room for a scintillating back-and-forth that, despite some jitteriness, still lets the spaces be heard.

MICHAEL J. WEST

BEN ALLISON

LAYERS OF THE CITY (Sonic Camera)



“Blowback,” the sixth track on bassist Ben Allison’s 12th album as a leader, is an object lesson in the transmutational

possibilities that a piece of music can contain. An Allison original, it first appeared on his 2008 disc, *Little Things Run the World*, where it came off like an exercise in severe temporal displacement, with each musician seeming to operate in his own time zone. The effect was ear-catching but a little disconcerting. In the new version, most of the rhythmic wrinkles have been ironed out, and Allan Mednard’s drum pattern is clearly waltz-derived (though Allison can’t resist adding some syncopation to his bassline). The result is that this somewhat discursive piece with an eerie, floating melody—rendered here by trumpeter Jeremy Pelt and guitarist Steve Cardenas—suddenly sounds like a jazz classic.

The other six cuts on *Layers of the City* maintain a similar mood of deep thoughtfulness with a touch of mystery. On the first two, the dreamy 11/4 meditation “Magic Number” and the more episodic “Enter the Dragon,” Allison makes his recorded debut on electric bass, adding warmth to the music’s bottom end. Pianist Frank Kimbrough provides many of the second track’s highlights; he starts out strumming his instrument’s strings, then lays into a manic solo as the

rhythm section builds to a free-blowing peak. At this moment of absolute tumult, Pelt re-enters, quietly playing the head in the background—a stroke of arranging genius. The completely improvised “Get Me Offa This Thing” closes the album in alluring fashion, as Pelt uses trippy wah-wah and delay effects to channel early-’70s Miles, and Allison responds with a series of simple but mesmerizing grooves.

MAC RANDALL

ALBERT AYLER QUARTET

COPENHAGEN LIVE 1964 (HatHut)



It takes all of two bars on the opening “Spirits,” from this Sept. 3, 1964 gig, for the Albert Ayler Quartet to establish

technical mastery. Gary Peacock’s bass is instantly embroiled in virtuosic cycling patterns, Don Cherry has traced a melody on trumpet, Sunny Murray’s drums have woven a path interconnecting the interests of the other players, and Ayler is clearly ready to reach for the planets on tenor.

That first cut is an exercise in constant extension, a number that seems to continuously go up rather than out, with a French melody transposed by Cherry—cut into jagged shapes, almost like jazz-quartet cubism. As the liners mention, this is a “customary set” by the band, which is like saying, “Well, here we are for a customary day on Neptune.”

“Vibrations” is more of a free-form exercise than “Spirits,” but the proceedings are always under control. Sometimes you don’t know where you want to direct your attention. Murray and Peacock are a wonder as a rhythm team that provides more in the way of counterpoint and color than rhythm and flow, while you never know what direction Cherry might move in next; the dude is fast, faster, fastest in formulating his ideas. Ayler sometimes has a full-bodied tone reminiscent of a midcentury tenor master like Sonny Rollins, but there’s nothing else remotely Rollins-like—or anybody-like—about his playing. That they work in strands of New Orleans funeral music to complement the interstellar stylings makes this a rogue outfit no other jazz band could touch.

COLIN FLEMING