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BILL EVANS

PORTRAITS AT THE PENTHOUSE

LIVE IN SEATTLE

EDDIE GOMEZ | JOE HUNT





Photo by Jean-Pierre Leloir





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★ for ADMIRAL ★

AL PORCINO
★ for GENERAL ★



BILL EVANS PORTRAITS AT THE PENTHOUSE

LIVE IN SEATTLE



BILL, EDDIE
& JOE -
THE
FIRST
TOUR

I'M EXTREMELY PLEASED TO PRESENT OFFICIALLY — FOR VERY FIRST TIME — recordings of the Bill Evans trio from May 12 and 19, 1966, at the Penthouse jazz club in Seattle, Washington. Over the last thirteen and a half years, I've been lucky to work with the Puzzo family and radio host-engineer Jim Wilke in releasing numerous recordings from the club's archives, tapes that were recorded all those years ago in the 1960s.

These recordings are quite special because the performances are from the very first tour of Bill's trio with the recent additions of legendary bassist Eddie Gómez and drummer Joe Hunt. The connection with Gómez is no secret as it's the longest tenure by a trio member in the history of Evans's career, a period that stretched from 1966 through 1977. These Penthouse performances go all the way back to the beginning, constituting the earliest known recordings where we're able to hear Gómez and Evans together.

I'd like to thank the terrific recording and mastering engineer Matthew Luthans for the remarkable job he did on the audio, enhancing what were already great-sounding broadcast quality recordings from the original broadcasts on KING-FM on May 12 and 19, 1966.

For this release it's always an honor to have renowned author and journalist Marc Myers on board to tell this story. As you'll read in his essay, "Mr. In-Between Gets His Due," Marc describes in great detail the connection between Evans, Gómez and Hunt. Then, I had conversations with Gómez and Hunt to discuss their recollections from this first tour, and also talked to Jim Wilke about his memories of this amazing 10-day run at the club with Evans. All of their recollections are included here in the form of written statements.

Lastly, as anyone who follows Resonance's Evans releases knows, we always love speaking with an artist of note who has been impacted by Evans and his legacy. This time we were happy to speak with jazz icon Bob James, who shared his feelings about Evans and his music over the course of a very compelling conversation.

It's never lost on me how fortunate I am to once again join forces with Evan Evans of the Bill Evans Estate to present officially, and incredibly enough, my 14th Bill Evans production in cooperation with the family. I take great pride in these releases and couldn't be happier with how it turned out. I hope you feel the same.

ZEV FELDMAN

May 2025

Montgomery Village, MD



BILL EVANS



LIVE AT THE PENTHOUSE

MR. IN- BETWEEN GETS HIS DUE

BY MARC
MEYERS

WHEN RADIO HOST JIM WILKE recorded the music on this album at Seattle's Penthouse jazz club in May of 1966, pianist Bill Evans had just started working with bassist Eddie Gómez and drummer Joe Hunt. Just a month earlier, on April 12, Gómez and Hunt had joined Evans for the first time at

Chicago's London House for a two-week tryout. Both musicians came recommended by guitarist Jim Hall, who had just recorded the first half of the *Intermodulation* session with Evans. Hall thought Gómez and Hunt would be ideal for the pianist, having worked with them earlier in the year at Lennie's on the Turnpike just outside of Boston and then at New York's Village Vanguard. So the album you're holding is not only the first known recording of this trio but also Evans's first known recording with Gómez, who would remain with Evans for 11 years, until 1977.

By the time Gómez arrived for his first gig with Evans in Chicago, the 21-year-old bassist had come up through the Newport Festival Youth Band, attended Juilliard and recorded with pianist Paul Bley, the Jazz Composer's Orchestra and the New York Art Quartet. Hunt, at age 28, had worked and recorded extensively with George Russell, Don Friedman and Stan Getz. Evans was 36 and had led two celebrated trios — the first with bassist Scott LaFaro and drummer Paul Motian and the second with bassist Chuck Israels and drummer Larry Bunker. As Israels told me for these notes, he left the trio in March of 1966 to study with composer-pianist Hal Overton. Bunker, he added, departed at around the same time to be at home in Los Angeles with his wife, who was caring for her ill father. Bunker also wanted to stay put and earn a steady, solid living there as a first-call studio musician. Evans needed replacements.

"Prior to Chicago, I had met Bill a couple of times," Hunt recalled in an interview for these liner notes. "Chuck Israels and I had played

together in the summer of 1960, backing clarinetist Tony Scott and Bill in concert at Indian Hill, a music camp Chuck's parents ran in Stockbridge, Mass. That summer, Chuck also introduced me to Bill's new album, "Portrait in Jazz." Four years later, I recorded for Verve with Bill and Chuck, when I was in the Stan Getz Quartet with Gary Burton. We recorded only three songs. The chemistry wasn't great and the tracks have never been released."

After the Chicago tryout in 1966, the new trio set out on a multi-month tour with stops along the way to the Pacific Northwest before they headed south along the coast to Los Angeles. The 10-day Penthouse engagement in May came early in the tour and the new trio required an adjustment along the way. "Eddie and I had some exposure to free jazz and brought that open feel to our playing, especially Eddie on his solos," Hunt recalls. "Bill wasn't a fan of free jazz and initially didn't know how to accompany Eddie's free-free solos. At this point, Bill didn't play much during Eddie's solos, so I became a facilitator — a Mr. In-Between, if you will — laying down straightforward rhythms that let Bill figure out how to sneak in with chords as Eddie soloed using flurries of notes."

Downtime collaboration was key. Roommates on the road, Gómez and Hunt would play together in hotel rooms. "I'd take my brushes and play on a wastebasket, and we'd practice together. Eddie is such a fantastic musician. He'd listen like a hawk and even cover my mistakes. We got pretty good at playing together, allowing us to work in tandem without Bill. Then it was just a matter of me giving Bill a rhythmic pathway during gigs to meet Eddie's approach until he grew accustomed to it."

That path was gradual, with Evans wondering from his piano bench if the two musicians were going to work out. In this regard, Gómez and Hunt's hotel-room jams were essential, since their survival hung in the balance. "At the London House, I felt that Eddie and I were under Bill's microscope. I'd never played gigs in a piano trio before, so it was tough. In Chicago,

if Bill liked what he heard, he'd chime in with chords and a few notes. If he wasn't happy, there would be silence, so if I heard nothing from him, I figured I was on the wrong track."

Evans adapted to Gómez gradually, Hunt recalls. At first, he didn't play at all during the bassist's solos. "Little by little, Bill figured out what to do — cautiously — and began to accompany him with chords and then added notes. By the time we reached the Penthouse, Bill was more comfortable." Hunt was familiar with the club, having played there with Getz. "It was a friendly space with brick walls, a great sound and cool management. Audiences listened intently and reacted. By contrast, the London House was a steak place where audiences had been noisy. Bill had to tell them to be quiet one night, which was rare."

As you can hear, by the time the trio arrived at the Penthouse on May 12, they had pretty much gelled. Gómez plays largely in his style, but you can hear in places where Evans's participation during solos was light and how Hunt's brushes functioned as a bridge for Evans to cross. Also interesting is that Hunt didn't take a long solo on the songs, which is particularly noticeable on "Nardis," which had already become a drum-solo showcase at clubs and on stage. "I didn't especially want to solo," Hunt recalls. "In that trio, I felt I was an accompanying drummer. It's not a matter of technique; it's a matter of concept. I think when a drummer has that solo mindset, people sense it. Philly Joe Jones, of course, had that, and his playing was much more dramatic. It was fabulous, too. My playing didn't have that 'here I am, take it or leave it' approach in the trio."

Overall, the music on this album features Evans in his percussive-poet period, his fame already established. By 1966, he had been nominated for four Grammy® awards, winning one for "Conversations with Myself" (1963), and he was receiving critical praise both at home and abroad. His playing on this album is fluid, joyous, introspective and, for the most part, perfectly paced, particularly on the May 12 tracks.

It's also exciting to hear Gómez's earliest work with the trio as he meets Evans's needs but insists on being himself. And Hunt lays down a brush style unlike any of Evans's other drummers, who tended to be more pronounced and conversational. Instead, Hunt's brushwork was more subtle, delivering hiss and shimmer with a tender, determined touch.

The album kicks off with an introduction by Wilke, who hosted and produced twice-weekly live broadcasts from the Seattle club on KING-FM, starting in 1962, thanks to the cooperation of owner Charlie Puzzo and a dedicated phone line from the club to the radio studio, which was nearby. Fortunately for us, Wilkie made tapes of his programs and archived them so he could listen the next day to evaluate his announcing style, microphone placement and the music.

The opener is Earl Zindars's "How My Heart Sings," first released on Evans's 1964 album of the same name, with Israels and Motian. At the Penthouse, we have a joyous, relaxed version, notable for how Gómez picks up on and interprets Evans's figures in his accompaniment and during his bass solos, and for Hunt's shift from a pronounced snap with the trio to a more subtle brush spray under Eddie's solo.

Evans first recorded Thelonious Monk's "Round Midnight" in a leadership role on *Conversations with Myself* (1963). On the Penthouse album, Evans plays the nocturnal ballad with gripping suspense and sensitivity, picking up the pace in places for drama and contrast. Gómez's solo is equally compelling as he shadows Evans's taut approach with Evans accompanying him with chords. A bit of audio feedback seeps in before Evans adds a moving build on the final chorus fed by Hunt's drums.

Harold Arlen's music for "Come Rain or Come Shine" was first recorded by the Bill Evans Trio on *Portrait in Jazz* (1960), with LaFaro and Motian. Evans's 1966 rendition is measured and Gómez's plays it straight, in keeping with LaFaro's approach. The song swings and Hunt's

brushes stay ahead of the beat, flicking at the snare drum and cymbals.

"Nardis" is spectacular. The composition had already become a staple of the trio's performance repertoire. Even Evans's live rendition at New York's Birdland in 1960, with LaFaro and Motian, featured an extended drum solo. The fact that the Penthouse's version features a brief drum solo rather than an extended one makes it unusual. "I studied classical music in college, I was in a symphony orchestra for three years, and I was fascinated with orchestral music, performing as an accompanist," Hunt said. "I also had a wonderful jazz background, living in Detroit for a year and playing with pianist Barry Harris and other great beboppers there. With Bill's time and feel, you've got to put it right where he wants it or he won't buy in. In this role, a drum solo was unnecessary. I preferred to be free to come and go in support of the music."

The May 12 closer, Zindars's "Elsa," was named for the lion in "Born Free." The late Anne Zindars, the composer's wife, told me a few years ago that Earl loved the book and the movie. Evans rolls through the song with sensitivity and gusto. Gómez's solo is particularly engaging, with Evans's accompaniment busier than on other tracks. On the song's back end, Evans sails along, clearly pleased with Gómez's playing, lightening up toward the end to let the bassist in again before winding down.

The May 19 set opens with one of Evans's most moving compositions, "Time Remembered." The Penthouse rendition is played with poise, rising and falling artfully before Gómez takes a scampering solo. Given Evans's busy accompaniment, the pianist clearly loved what Gómez was playing and had a full understanding of his singular approach. The back half is particularly lush, with the song quietly disappearing at the end like a pleasant memory.

Evans jumps right into the popular Broadway song, "Who Can I Turn To" without an introduction, similar to how he treated Leslie

Bricusse and Anthony Newley's tune on *Trio '65*. On *Bill Evans at Town Hall* recorded three months earlier, the pianist had already begun using a dramatic run-up to open the song. The Penthouse version swings lightly, and Hunt's brushes play fragments to nudge it along. Gómez's and Evans's exchanges during Gómez's solo are stellar. When Evans returns following the bassist's solo, his playing is flawless and spry, weaving in block chords while exchanging figures with Hunt's drums. On this track, all three players become one.

This tender version of "Detour Ahead" — a song credited to Herb Ellis, Johnny Frigo and Lou Carter while they were in the Soft Winds trio together in 1948 — hearkens back to the rendition on "Waltz for Debby," the famed second album of live material recorded in June 1961 at the Village Vanguard. That version, with LaFaro and Motian, was notable for the musical interchanges between the pianist and his bassist. At the Penthouse, Evans plays the first chorus soft and gentle, with Gómez's bass pulsing to lend Evans support. Then Evans shifts into double-time, with Hunt's brushes stirring him along before Gómez plays a straight-ahead solo, a fitting tribute to LaFaro.

Traditionally taken at a fast tempo by all Bill Evans trios, as if to emulate dried fall foliage rustling in the wind, "Autumn Leaves" here is played even faster and is noticeably brief. Judging by Evans's decision to lay out completely during Gómez's solo, we can assume the pianist wasn't sure how to jump in at that pace or wasn't thrilled with the rocketing tempo. "Autumn Leaves" didn't work well," Hunt acknowledged. "Once we started, I got a bit on top of the beat, which I liked to do sometimes. But when I did, Eddie started playing faster, which lit a fuse under Bill. It got crazy. Going forward, I'd be more careful about getting on top of the beat. Once Bill and Eddie took off, there was no bringing them back."

The May 19 version of "How My Heart Sings" is taken at a brighter clip than the earlier version. Of note is Evans's introduction, which may be

the shortest and shrewdest of his career — a three-note downbeat and two-note upbeat (listen again, because you probably missed it). The song's feel rocks from side to side, like a canoe, and Evans's solo is chirpier and more rambunctious. It also picks up speed, with Evans laying down magnificent chords and improvised runs. Eddie's solo is equally spirited, riding atop Bill's accompanying chords. Coming out of Eddie's solo, the trio dashes to the finish. "Once the three of us were in sync as a trio," Hunt said, "I found I didn't have to keep playing all the time, which was cool, since Bill and Eddie were comfortable on their own. I think there's a little bit of that on the May 19 Penthouse tracks."

The album closes with "I Should Care," a 1944 song with music by Axel Stordahl and Paul Weston. Evans began playing it during the recording session for *Moon Beams* (1962) and had recorded a perfectly paced version on *Bill Evans at Town Hall*. The Penthouse rendition moves like a dart, with Gómez and Hunt hanging onto Evans's proverbial bumper.

After the Penthouse stay, the trio gigged its way south to San Francisco and Los Angeles, where they played at Shelly's Manne-Hole. "One night, a kid and his friend came back during a break to tell us they were fans and dug the music," Hunt remembered. "Bill wasn't around. After they left, somebody said to me, 'You know who that guy was? That was Bob Dylan.' I said, 'Gosh, I wish I'd known that. I'd have told him, 'Hey, I dig your music, too.' I'm sure Bill would have loved to have met him. He loved stars.'"

Hunt's departure from the trio in 1967 came after a series of unfortunate events that began in the fall of 1966, when Evans, Gómez and Hunt went into Rudy Van Gelder's New Jersey recording studio. "Bill wanted to record new music, but he'd only written one or two new songs," Hunt said. "But he didn't have a strong repertory planned. In addition, producer Creed Taylor came up to me and said he wanted us to record 'Lara's Theme,' from the 1965 movie *Doctor Zhivago* [MGM owned Verve at the time and co-produced and distributed the film]. I thought that was nuts. I said to Creed, 'We're not going to do it. This is Bill's session and it

should be his choice of music. You shouldn't ask him to play that.' Creed was pissed off and the next thing I knew, I was fired."

As Hunt's replacement, Taylor brought in Shelly Manne. "Instead of recording what would have been *Trio '66*, with me on drums, Taylor and Verve released *A Simple Matter of Conviction*, with Shelly. I learned my lesson. Don't mess with producers. Later, in Hollywood, Shelly apologized to me and took two nights off and gave me the weekend subbing for him with his band — Shelly Manne and His Men. I had a ball."

After recording *A Simple Matter of Conviction*, Evans and Gómez left for a tour of Scandinavia. Evans hired Danish drummer Axel Riel rather than take Hunt. "When Bill returned, he apologized and said it was an economic thing. But back in New York, in early 1967, he started using other drummers, as well as me, including Arnie Wise. He still hired me for gigs at the Vanguard in January, February and March of 1967."

But by then, Evans was looking for Hunt's replacement. "During our dates at the Vanguard," Hunt said, "Bill would have drummers show up to audition using my drum kit, which pissed me off. I was already angry about not going to Scandinavia. Then Philly Joe Jones regularly sat in on my gigs, which was a great lesson for me. He wound up with the job. Bill loved his in-your-face style of playing."

Perhaps most disappointing of all for Hunt was that he never appeared on a commercially released album by the trio, despite being the drummer, on and off, for just over a year. Now that has changed with the release of the Penthouse recordings. "I'm glad this recording is out with great fidelity so fans can hear what we sounded like. It's a solid representation of what I was doing with Bill and Eddie." [April 8, 2025]

Marc Myers is a music and arts contributor at The Wall Street Journal, the founder of the award-winning blog JazzWax.com and the author of Why Jazz Happened.

Jim Wilke ON RECORDING BILL EVANS AT THE PENTHOUSE

RECORDING SHOWS AT THE PENTHOUSE: fiddling around with EQ and working with other recording values was as much of the experience of actually being there as you could get, I think. People

commented, "I remember being at The Penthouse that night. I can feel the audience me." That was always great to hear.

Listening to this material, it's a real good feeling. It really brings back that feeling, that intimate small club association that jazz artists of that era excelled at. We were lucky to have a club in Seattle that was booking the kind of talent we booked. We had everybody from Bud Shank to Art Blakey.

The Penthouse was a small club, 180-seat capacity or so. But no one was farther than 40 feet from the bandstand and the bandstand was only one step up from the floor, so it wasn't like there was a big stage. It was more like being in a living room with the people wrapped three sides around the band, as many on the wings as up front. It was an intimate, small-group experience that really got you front and center.

Bill Evans's shows were beautiful. I had such admiration for him. We all did. He was such a beautiful player. We had so much anticipation for his appearances at The Penthouse, not only because of his work with Miles and others, but because he'd made those beautiful trio albums. For him to have 10 days in the club was tremendous for the jazz community in Seattle.

Most of our bookings were for 10 days — two weekends and the weekdays in between. We had blue laws, so clubs could not serve alcohol on Sundays. Consequently, the schedule was Thursday, Friday, Saturday, then Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday. And that was a 10-day stretch with Sunday off. I did our first broadcasts on Thursdays. I didn't want to do them on weekends because of the extra strain on the club; they needed every seat for some of these artists who drew particularly well and also there was the question of getting in and out and doing the broadcast. It was just easier to do it on a

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weeknight than on the weekend. That's why we chose to do them on Thursday nights because that way, we had just a skosh more elbowroom.

Bill Evans wasn't a terribly conversational person, so I didn't really have occasion to speak with him. Also I constituted the entire technical crew — I brought in the mic stands and set up my microphones, my broadcast mics, which were better than just the house club mics, and these RCA 77s were just marvelous mics. They were my principal recording mics from that period. So to have those mics as my principal mics and being able to do this live mix, I knew that this would be my one chance to get it right. There's no going back for remix or EQ or anything like that. It was live on the air. This is right now, and there's a thrill to that too. So I really didn't have the opportunity to speak with many of the artists, I'm sorry to say.

Excerpted from an interview conducted by Zev Feldman on May 7, 2025

A DREAMLIKE EXPERIENCE:

Eddie Gomez
REFLECTS
ON PLAYING
WITH
BILL EVANS
AT THE
PENTHOUSE

1965 WAS A GOOD YEAR FOR ME.

I got to work with Gary McFarland's small group, a really good band. I was young — 20. I'm still young, but then, I was *really* young.

In the band were Gábor Szabó, a wonderful Hungarian guitarist, drummer Joe Cocuzzo. Sadao Watanabe played alto. Later that year,

I got to work with Gerry Mulligan's small group,

another great band with Art Farmer on trumpet and flugelhorn, Dave Bailey on drums and Warren Bernhardt on piano.

That was a fun small band to play with. We did some gigs and recorded an album, *Something Borrowed — Something Blue* with Gerry, Warren, Dave and Zoot Sims. We played around including at the Village Vanguard. I was excited about performing in New York with that band.

At the time, the Vanguard featured two bands every night during the week. One week, it was Gerry's band and Bill's trio. I was aware that Bill was in the audience listening. One night, Bill's manager, Helen Keane, approached me after our set and said, "Bill would like to say hi. Would you like to come over?" I said, "Of course."

Bill was one of my huge heroes, and there weren't that many. He was definitely one. He was very kind. He said nice things about my playing and then added, "Maybe we'll get a chance to play sometime." I thought that'd be great, but I never thought I'd actually hear from him. It was enough for me — the opportunity to talk to him and get a compliment from him. I carried that with me a long time.

Maybe two or three weeks later, he did call to ask me to go out West to do a tour. We started in Chicago at the London House and worked our way to the Coast. That first tour was the first time I'd worked at Shelly's Manne-Hole in Los Angeles and the first time I worked at the Penthouse, too.

It all worked out beautifully for me. I was fortunate. I was prepared enough to get through the first few months, which got me to where I felt that maybe I actually did belong in the trio. In the beginning, though, I felt like I was on thin ice. I got over it. All in all, I was lucky. I was living a dream.

I'd met Joe Hunt in Chicago. He'd been playing with Stan Getz. We'd crossed paths and had a nice vibe together as friends. He was a really good player and it was clear he'd be nice to hang out with. When you're traveling in a group, small or large, the relationships you form with the other members are important. They get you to the bandstand where the music happens and if you have good vibes off the bandstand, it usually translates into good vibes on the bandstand. We both joined Bill's trio at the same time. Getting to know Joe a little, I knew it was going to work, that it was going to be good.

Starting out with Bill was a dreamlike experience. Bill had a book, a loose-leaf black book that had all his repertoire in it. The pages mostly had melodies notated with chord changes. I'd have the book on stage to refer to. If he called a tune or started playing it, I'd just frantically try to find the page. It must have looked ridiculous from the audience, this guy up on stage hurriedly leafing through a book, but that's what I did. I wanted to make sure I'd play the right notes and that I was even playing the right tune.

Looking back, that wasn't a great thing to have done. Today, I encourage students to have an awareness of the music they're going to play and not to look at the music all the time, not to be dependent on it; to let their ear and instincts go to work. Of course, that's exactly what I didn't do, but it's what I should have done. Anyway, I had this book and I was dependent on it.

Still, I was lucky. Bill was generous — he'd yell out encouraging things to me while we were playing, sometimes during one of my solos. That helped a lot, to hear that from Bill early in the first tour. As we went on, I slowly came to feel more and more

comfortable, but even later in the tour at the Manne-Hole when he'd asked me to join the trio in earnest, even then, it took me a year or two to get my footing, to feel like I knew the music and that I could really maneuver in that world that Bill had created; that I belonged in the trio, that it wasn't just a fluke.

Bill wasn't particularly gregarious. He wasn't antisocial; nothing like that. When we were playing, we would maybe have dinner together and have some conversation. He was always friendly, jovial. But at the end of the night, the last phrase he played, the last chord and he'd be gone. He'd just disappear. Philly Joe Jones used to call him the Phantom because he'd be there one moment and suddenly, he was gone, like he became this wisp and just disappeared. He didn't hang out. He didn't stick around.

Bill was always the rock. It was great that he was that really strong anchor because it gave me and the drummers something solid to latch onto. Bill's style and way of playing were so powerful. I'd listened to Bill's trios on record before, but to be there and actually doing it was a whole different world for me. He really was the Rock of Gibraltar.

All the songs on these Penthouse recordings were the crux of Bill's repertoire at that time. They're all in my head and my heart because now I remember the way Bill played them and remember being there when he played them. It's really heartfelt, beautiful, poignant to hear them again. His playing was always magnificent and always very emotional.

Excerpted from an interview conducted by Zev Feldman on April 8, 2025

HE WANTED THE
MUSIC TO BE
STRONG AND
INDEPENDENT:
Joe Hunt
REMEMBERS
PLAYING
WITH
BILL EVANS

I met Bill in the summer of 1960. I'd just joined George Russell's sextet and we were rehearsing at the Lennox Jazz School. Chuck Israels was our bassist. That was when I met Chuck. We became friends immediately, both musically and personally. During that summer, Tony Scott came up to Indian Hill, a music camp Chuck's parents ran in Stockbridge, Massachusetts,

to play and Chuck asked me to play with him. Bill was the pianist.

It was an easy gig, very relaxed. That was my first time playing with Bill. The next time I met him was back in New York working with Stan Getz in the summer of '64. We recorded a couple of tunes for Verve, but they were never issued.

Bill called me in 1966 and asked me to join him. I didn't recognize him over the phone. I'd forgotten he had that funny voice. I thought it was one of my friends putting me on. But then I realized, "Holy cow, it's Bill Evans. He's calling me for a gig," so I took it and we went to the London House in Chicago — Bill, Eddie and I. That was early 1966.

The London House was a steak house. The music there was more or less background music. It was a big room. Noisy. People talked. That bothered Bill quite a bit. But we made the gig work. I do remember feeling as if I was under a microscope with every sound I made. I never had that intense scrutiny before. It was nerve wracking. Eddie felt the same way. We were roommates and we talked about it. It was spooky, but it was great, of course. It was exciting and wonderful at the same time.

The three of us were from different generations. Bill was the oldest, I was eight years younger and Eddie was seven years younger than I. There was a difference in style and approach too. Eddie and I had been involved in free music, which Bill didn't care for much. One time I'd been with

him for a while, I made a suggestion on "Nardis," if we could play the head free and then go into time. Bill didn't like that idea. Of course I had a lot of nerve. It was his composition. In hindsight, I should have kept my mouth shut.

Adjusting to playing with Bill wasn't easy. At first, he didn't accompany Eddie's solos at all. He didn't play a single note behind Eddie for the first few weeks. Eddie and I both had a free background. We could get a little faster or slower. We were elastic, but Bill wasn't used to that. He was used to Philly Joe Jones and Chuck and Paul Motian and Scotty.

Playing with Eddie was different for me because I'd had a pretty straightforward background. I'd played with Stan Getz for almost two years. That was straightforward bebop four-four drumming. I was playing with really good players like Chuck Israels. I worked a good bit with Ron Carter, Steve Swallow, those guys. They were really good basic four-four time players. Eddie was different. He didn't have that in his playing. His time feel in those days was loose, different.

I also had little bit of a problem adjusting because I'd never worked in a piano trio before. When I was with Stan, Gary McFarland or Gary Burton played vibes. I hadn't played with pianists. And suddenly I'm with Bill Evans. I had all his records. I was his biggest fan. I had all the Vanguard recordings. I used to go there and hear him with Scotty and Paul. I was down there many nights just in awe of that trio.

Playing with Bill, he never said much of anything. The first night in Chicago, he did complain because we were rushing. Bill said, "The tempos are coming up," and we got it. Once in a while, he'd come up to me and say, "Those were some pretty nice fours you played on that last set, Joe. I really dug it." He'd be complimentary. He never really complained much. I felt that he probably had opinions, but he didn't share them. He just let us alone and we worked things out.

Listening back to these recordings, I have good feelings. My God, it was exciting. And of course

he was Bill Evans! The guy was fabulous. I took so many things away from playing with Bill. He demanded an individual voice. He wanted total independence. He wanted something to happen and then we'd go from there.

Philly Joe would sit in with us sometimes. It was intimidating because he would just play so strong and loud, too loud, I thought, but it was swinging like crazy. Bill was all smiles. He loved it. He didn't care if it was loud or not. He was swinging and loved it. He wasn't looking for another Paul Motian and Scotty like what I'd heard at the Vanguard, which so amazed me. Paul would hit a sizzle cymbal at the perfect moment. Bill wasn't looking for that. He wanted the music to be strong and independent.

That was hard for me because I was such a big fan and I wanted to play like Paul Motian or Larry Bunker. But I finally developed my own voice; I had to. Eddie and I had a really good hookup. We were almost telepathic in our communication. And it all worked. We worked things out. When at first, Bill wouldn't comp for Eddie, I became his accompanist, but by the time we got to The Penthouse for these recordings, Bill was comping quite a bit. I'm very proud that I was at the beginning of that relationship between Bill and Eddie, which lasted years.

Listening back to these recordings, a couple of times I wished I hadn't done certain things. As I've gotten older, I've learned to not do those things. I guess we were young. We were just trying stuff. We didn't know where we were going. We'd just try things and see what happened. Bill was cool with it. He was patient. He didn't criticize much. He was generally quite positive.

I consider myself lucky to have been Bill's drummer and his friend. We were very good friends. We were neighbors in the Bronx. We used to ride-share to the Vanguard for our gigs. And he was a buddy. I'm really honored to have known him both in both as a leader and as a friend.

Excerpted from an interview conducted by Zev Feldman on April 1, 2025

IF YOU'RE GOING
TO BE A BILL
EVANS-TYPE PIANO
PLAYER, YOU CAN'T
WIN FIRST PLACE:

Bob James
ON
BILL EVANS

I HEARD BILL A LOT WHEN I WAS IN COLLEGE. I was at University of Michigan from 1957 to 1962. I listened to him a lot because that was really when I was forming my love affair with jazz, shifting over from my classical background. I had the opportunity to play in jazz groups at the university and formed a

trio; the instrumentation normally associated with jazz piano players. Bill Evans's trio was one of the most prominent trios I listened to. My interest resulted in my competing in a college jazz festival contest run by Notre Dame. I took my trio there, bravely playing original music, which was very influenced by Bill. My album, *Bold Conceptions*, came out 1963 as a result of my trio, winning that competition, with Quincy Jones being one of the judges. It was a big deal for me, and motivated me to move to New York in the fall of 1963.

One of the first phone calls I received even before I'd had any jobs in New York was from Chuck Israels. I don't even know how he'd gotten my number, but somehow, he'd found out about the competition. I freaked out because I knew already Chuck's recordings with Bill Evans. I thought to myself, "Oh, my God, he's actually calling. Bill Evans didn't call me, but Chuck Israels did." We became friends and I ended up playing quite a bit with him.

For young pianists, it was possible to sound like Bill. Many did. But I realized early on that I didn't want to come in second. If you're going to be a Bill Evans-type piano player, you can't win first place. You could be the best copier and I wasn't even that. I was in the game, and I could do a reasonably good version of Bill Evans. As time went on, I'm grateful that I powered my way through the imitation stage and was inspired by Bill to carve out my own path. My goal was to do what Bill did — he created a unique approach to the piano, developing a completely his personal

style that comes out of the music, but my own personal style.

Jazz is improvised and because it's spontaneous, that's where the real personality comes out. When you can hear two seconds' worth of music and can say, "That's Bill Evans," it's great and powerful. That's what I was going for myself.

In those days I really looked forward to *DownBeat* coming out and seeing the Blindfold Test. The editors always gave a variety of artists a chance to put the blindfold on and then talk about who it was. Probably the easiest person to identify would've been Bill Evans.

He's a major, major influence. In my College days, I tried to learn his voicings and how I could develop my own. In those days, I think people who heard me thought I reminded them of Bill Evans.

Bill's voicings were iconic to his style, the way he took standards and voiced them. For me, that was his biggest strength. He wrote some interesting originals, but he was more known for his interpretations of other people's songs or standards. He would find a way to be loyal to Gershwin or Cole Porter or whoever the composers of those songs were, but his own musical personality was always front-and-center, but he was loyal to what the composers intended. He'd do these left-hand stabs of his altered substitute chords, but they were respectful of the more conventional chordal voicings the original composers wrote.

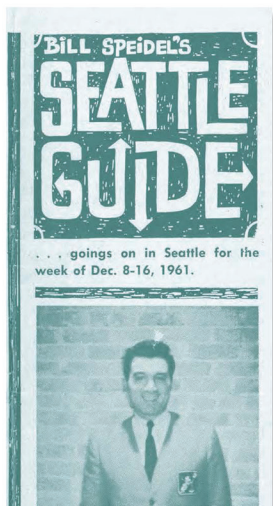
Sometimes substitutions like that in other artists' hands are so obscure that the original song becomes virtually unrecognizable. Bill was respectful. I believe he made songs better by virtue of voicings that the composers would never have thought of; songs that became so iconic and identified with Bill like "Haunted Heart" or "My Foolish Heart." You could say he owned them. He certainly owned them in the jazz way.

Bill made me realize that piano is a percussion instrument, that in order to play melodically on it, you can't just blow into it. It's not a breathing thing. You have to pretend that you're singing.

I never got to see Bill Evans in person, live. I had many opportunities. I was living in New York and Chuck Israels and I were friends. He had a big band of his own and was playing some of his own original music. I played piano in that band often. Because Chuck and I were friends, he'd call me and say, "Hey, I'm playing with Bill at the Vanguard next week, can you come?" Very, very regrettably, I never went.

Bill's legacy is big. If there's somebody worth talking about as a legend, it's Bill. Being legendary and changing the approach to playing jazz piano, he's as influential as any name that I could think of, or at least he's on the very, very short list. Oscar Peterson, Erroll Garner, Count Basie would be on it. I have my very short list of legendary pianists that shaped jazz and influenced all of us.

*Excerpted from an interview conducted by
Zev Feldman on May 7, 2025*



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LIVE IN SEATTLE

- 5 **Time Remembered** 4:46
B. Evans / Folkways Music Publishers, Inc. (BM)
- 6 **Who Can I Turn To?** 4:40
L. Brufese, A. Newley / Musical Comedy Productions (BM)
- 7 **Detour Ahead** 5:29
L. Carter, H. Ellis, J. Frigo / Woodrow Music (ASCAP)
- 8 **Autumn Leaves** 3:05
J. Kosma, J. Mercer, J. Prevert / Enoch and CIE (SACEM), Mores Music Co. (ASCAP)
- 9 **How My Heart Sings** 3:46
E. Zinders / Zinders Publishing Company (BM)
- 10 **I Should Care** 2:51
S. Cahn, A. Storchahl, P. Werten / Cahn Music Company, Hanover Music Corp., Storchahl Music, Inc. (ASCAP)

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