



Stopping Time: Paul Bley and the Transformation of Jazz

By Paul Bley, David Lee

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This presents the story of a piano prodigy and his odyssey through the most turbulent years in modern jazz.

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Editorial Review

Review

...One could wish for more detail of Bley's charmed life, but even this much of a glimpse is indispensable. -- *Cadence, Sept. 2000*

Mr. Bley has recently published a memoir in which he proves to be a perceptive jazz critic as well as an engaging storyteller. -- *The New York Times - February 13, 2000*

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This book is a little jewel: sparsely written and edited, it is beautifully packaged, exquisitely illustrated, equipped with an index and bibliography, and has a thorough discography with over 100 references. It was produced and crafted with love ... In the same manner that jazz music transcends all borders, this book will be circulated off this island as far and as wide as Paul Bley tours. -- *l*

What ties this sprawling story together is Bley's storytelling - anecdotal, humorous, opinionated and given to plain-spoken philosophical sidetrips into the nature of jazz... The photos, especially the Montreal-era ones, are a vivid complement to the text. -- *The National Post, December 18, 1999*

About the Author

Paul Bley was one of the subjects of Ron Mann's award-winning feature documentary "Imagine the Sound." Now in his sixties, Bley is touring more than ever, and recording with everyone from Kenny Wheeler to Charlie Haden. He lives with his wife, artist Carol Goss, and their family in upstate New York. David Lee is a former editor of the jazz magazine *Coda* who also ran his own publishing house for several years. As a jazz musician himself he has played with Kenny Wheeler, Julius Hemphill, Roscoe Mitchell, and was a founding member of the Bill Smith Ensemble. He lives in Pender Harbour, BC.

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I was working with Pete Brown in Brooklyn on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, until midnight. Dick Garcia asked me if I'd come Saturday night and play with Bird in an armory up in Harlem beginning at one a.m. So I worked until 11:30 and then went up to play with Bird.

Bird was nowhere to be found at two a.m. We played the second set. At three a.m. exactly, Bird walked into the Armory, unpacked as if it was midnight, and of course no one said a thing, because sixteen bars into his first chart, it WAS midnight. Nobody remembered that he was late.

That was the kind of self-test that the great musicians gave themselves in that period. They always came very late to gigs. Other than the fact that they might have had trouble getting to the job on time, that was a test of their abilities: to play so well when they began that the audience forgot that they were two hours late. Just as several decades later, you could be allowed a hostile attitude about yourself and your work and everyone around you, provided that your great playing justified your attitude. But if your playing did not justify the attitude then you were dismissed as being a fake. In short, you have to be able to afford your attitude.

With Bird's concept, he would be playing a thirty-two bar tune and in the second eight, he would already be

starting something that was going to get him into the bridge. Meanwhile, I was busy on bar three-and-a-half of the second eight, and in my conception of it, the bridge was a long way off.

That was a very important lesson to learn. You never play where you are. You play where you're going. Thinking ahead. Some could think ahead 16 bars, some could think ahead four choruses. Now I've gotten to the point where I can hear a whole solo in advance - not note for note, but structurally. I get an idea, facing a rhythm section or a particular instrument in a particular environment, of what can be done in what length of time.

In hearing Bird's ability to anticipate what was coming and always thinking ahead, I've tried to extend the idea to listening to three things before I start playing a phrase:

One: What was the last phrase that was played, and what was the last note of the last phrase that was played, and what should follow that?

Two: What music has been played throughout the history of jazz that has to be avoided, leaving me only what's left as material for the next phrase?

Three: Where would I like to get to by the time my playing is finished? All that in a split second during a pause in my phrasing.

Users Review

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