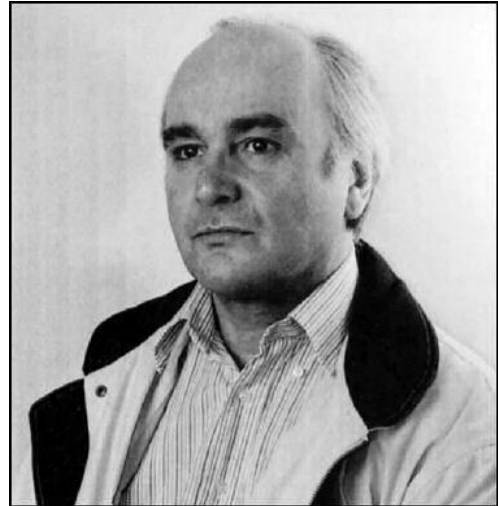


Isabelle Leymarie a Franco-American musicologist talks to BERNARD MAURY

A talented pianist and a fine teacher, Bernard Maury is a spiritual son and disciple of the American jazz pianist Bill Evans¹. He hails from southwestern France, where he grew up in a music-loving family.

You have often said that if rhythm is the body of music, then harmony is its soul. Could you enlarge on this?

Bernard Maury: When I first became interested in jazz, as a teenager, it was almost impossible to get hold of scores . I'd trained as a classical pianist, but since I hadn't studied harmony, I was incapable of playing jazz without a score. Sure, I could always retranscribe certain melodies by ear, but I also had to find the accompaniment, and my rough and ready chords didn't sound anything like those I heard on records by Erroll Garner or Oscar Peterson, pianists whose tone colours I admired a lot. After a bit of practice I managed to make sense of certain solos, but learning chords out of their context wasn't good enough. I wanted to know the reason for certain harmonic configurations. For me a chord is not an isolated thing but the result of a progression. I became



interested in counterpoint as well as harmony because it deals with the movement of voices. As Debussy knew, a chord has its own intrinsic colour, which creates a particular climate, and I wanted to construct chords in my own way, by controlling their tonal colour. When I was twenty I had a few elementary harmonics lessons , but mostly I studied alone, soaking up textbooks, following my own lines of research and analysing classical works. It's very rewarding to find out basic principles by yourself. Playing jazz taught me to see harmony in a different way from that usually taught in music schools. Harmony is a matter of logic and ear, but it shouldn't be made too abstract. It must live.

How did you come to jazz?

B. M.: When I was around twelve or thirteen, I went to a lecture given by the musicologist Hugues Panassié. It was an eye-opener. I'd already heard about jazz, but until then no one had told me anything about its history and it's part of a very different culture from my own. In Toulouse, where I went to study later on, jazz bands always played at university dances. I began to paraphrase around themes, then I took the plunge. I've got a fairly analytical mind, and I tried to understand how the phrases were built; I imitated the great musicians, and I chose my masters.

How did you meet Bill Evans?

B. M.: In 1972 he came to Paris for a concert with his bass player Eddy Gomez and his drummer Marty Morell . Bill had been my idol for several years, and I was dying to meet him. At the time I was playing in a Paris club with the saxophonist Johnny Griffin. One night after our set, a couple of Americans who'd been sitting at the bar came over and started chatting. Pretty soon I realized they were Gomez and Morell. The next day a friend invited me to have lunch with Bill Evans himself! And we hit it off right away. I had some great times with him. When he sat down at the piano I never missed a note. He was one of the great names of jazz, try as he might to deny it he was a very modest man. "It didn't come at all naturally," he told me. "I had to work darned hard." He would

play certain sequences again and again so I could really understand them. He never gave lessons, but if he felt someone was receptive to his music and could see what he was up to, he would go out of his way to explain. I had already been trying to analyse his music for quite a while. Two years before, I'm not sure I would have had the faintest idea about what he was doing.

You spent two years in Brazil. Have you been influenced by Brazilian music?

B. M.: I loved Brazilian music before I went to live in Rio de Janeiro the samba, of course, but above all the jazzy bossa nova because of its harmonic wealth and its poetry. Its unobtrusive rhythm brings out the melody and the harmony, and the different elements balance beautifully. Brazil has produced extremely talented musicians and lyricists such as Antonio Carlos Jobim. While I was there I accompanied the singer Maria Creuza, and when I was playing in a club in Copacabana I teamed up with the great pianist Johnny Alf, one of the precursors of bossa nova.

What qualities does a student of jazz need to have?

B. M.: You've got to be highly motivated. It's fringe music and rarely brings fame or riches. It's more like evangelism than a profession. You need to be stubborn and take the hard knocks in your stride. You need a musical ear and sensibility, although it's true that the ear can be trained. You've got to be rigorous, but you've also got to know how to let your imagination take flight, be logical at certain times and not at others, and know how to forget the academic side of jazz and let creativity take over.

What about teaching jazz?

B. M.: Most of all you have to love music. It's a bit like religious faith, which often goes with evangelism; you want to share something you love. You learn a lot from teaching because you have to dismantle mechanisms that are sometimes unconscious. You can play interesting ideas intuitively, but you need to analyse them in order to pass them on to others, and this opens up new horizons. Teaching is very rewarding, but it's primarily a matter of giving. I think if I hadn't taught, there are pieces I'd have been quite incapable of playing because I wouldn't have understood them.

What are your current plans?

B. M.: As a tribute to Bill Evans, I've just founded the Bill Evans Piano Academy in Paris. We don't only teach the piano. Bill was one of the most important jazz pianists of the second half of the century, up there with Bud Powell and Thelonious Monk. Modern jazz musicians owe him an enormous debt. In the world of jazz he's also a direct descendent of the French school of Fauré, Ravel, Debussy, Lili Boulanger and Henri Dutilleux. The Bill Evans Piano Academy aside, I've got two recording projects : one solo and the other playing unpublished compositions by Bill Evans that I'll be choosing with the help of his family.