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RIVERSIDE

Moon Beams The Bill Evans Trio



Photo: Peter Sando

OJC-33718

Moonbeams

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Re: Person I Knew 5:44
(Bill Evans) Folkways Music Publ. Inc.-BMI | 7. In Love in Vain 5:00
(Kern-Robin) Robin Leo Music c/o Music Sales Corp./Universal
Polygram International Publ.-ASCAP |
| 2. Polka Dots and Moonbeams 5:01
(Burke-Van Heusen) Bourne Co./Marke Music Publ. Co. Inc.
c/o WB Music Corp c/o Warner Chappell Music Inc./My
Dad's Songs Inc./Pocketful of Dreams Music
Publisher/Reganesque Music Company c/o Spirit Two Music
Inc.-ASCAP | 8. Very Early 5:06
(Bill Evans) Folkways Music Publ. Inc.-BMI |
| 3. I Fall in Love too Easily 2:42
(Styne-Cahn) EMI Feist Catalog c/o EMI Music Publ./
c/o Kobalt Songs Music Publ.-ASCAP | BONUS TRACKS |
| 4. Stairway to the Stars 4:53
(Parish-Malneck-Signorelli) EMI Robbins Catalog c/o EMI
Music Publ., Inc.-ASCAP | 9. Polka Dots and Moonbeams (Take 3)* 4:17
(Burke-Van Heusen) Bourne Co./Marke Music Publ. Co. Inc. c/o WB
Music Corp c/o Warner Chappell Music Inc./My Dad's Songs
Inc./Pocketful of Dreams Music Publisher/Reganesque Music
Company c/o Spirit Two Music Inc.-ASCAP |
| 5. If You Could See Me Now 4:29
(Dameron-Sigman) EMI Robbins Catalog c/o EMI Music
Publ., Inc./Music Sales Corp.-ASCAP | 10. I Fall in Love too Easily (Take 3)* 2:48
(Styne-Cahn) EMI Feist Catalog c/o EMI Music Publ./
c/o Kobalt Songs Music Publ.-ASCAP |
| 6. It Might as Well Be Spring 6:05
(Rodgers-Hammerstein) Williamson Music-ASCAP | 11. Very Early (Take 10)* 3:35
(Bill Evans) Folkways Music Publ. Inc.-BMI |

* PREVIOUSLY UNRELEASED

This program of ballads recalls Miles Davis's impression of Bill Evans's playing—"like crystal notes or sparkling water cascading down from some clear waterfall." Davis also wrote in his biography that Evans had "this quiet fire that I loved on piano." Crystal notes, quiet fire, flow of rhythm, depth of harmony, adoration of melody; Evans melded all of that to create beauty in this recording despite the distractions of grief, illness, and a powerful need for drugs that shared with music dominion over his life.

When *Moonbeams* was recorded in the spring of 1962, the pianist was recovering from depression over the death of bassist Scott LaFaro in an automobile accident the previous June. The Evans group with LaFaro and drummer Paul Motian had arrived at a way of playing as if they operated from one consciousness. They were changing the very nature of the jazz trio, and LaFaro's role was crucial to their development. For months after LaFaro died, Evans seldom played the piano. He and Motian discussed how and whether to reform the trio with another bassist, but it wasn't until December of 1961 that Evans called Chuck Israels for an engagement in upstate New York.

Evans and Israels had met in 1957 at Brandeis University during the festival at which Evans recorded his celebrated solo on George Russell's "All About Rosie." Evans, Russell, Charles Mingus, and other festival musicians heard Israels in a trio with pianist Steve Kuhn and drummer Arnie Wise, all students at universities in the Boston area, all with important careers ahead of them. They played in the Brandeis student union cafeteria, where the festival musicians had lunch.

"The trio was very good," Israels recalled in 2012. "So, when these guys walked into

the student union, here were these kids playing well, and they forgot about being hungry and just sat down and listened. That was the entrée for me into almost everything that happened in my musical life.”

Now, four years later, LaFaro, a friend of Israels, was gone, and Israels got the call from Evans. “I had a pretty different approach to playing with Bill, a lot less competitive,” Israels said. “Scotty was a competitive guy, and as much as that combination created great things, there was stuff going on that was very different from the way I felt like integrating myself in that music. I just wanted to be the part that was left out, not a part that would necessarily push it in other directions. There was room in there for me to be absolutely, completely myself, without being in any intentional conflict with any of the directions that Bill was going. Anything I did, I felt intuitively. I embraced his music.”

In his notes for *Bill Evans: The Complete Riverside Recordings*, producer Orrin Keepnews wrote that his desire for an all-ballads album was leavened by concern that “a steady dose of slower tempos might over relax the group to the point of lethargy.” Keepnews warded that off by interspersing faster pieces, enough of them to come up with a second album, *How My Heart Sings*. In any case, Israels explained, lassitude needn’t have been a concern.

“Bill’s playing, no matter what tempo, is brilliantly rhythmic,” he told me. “It’s a largely unnoticed quality of his. The rhythms are more sophisticated, more inventive, more creative than almost any other jazz musician I know. When he plays slow things, it doesn’t mean that all the notes are slow. There are plenty of fast notes, and

subdivisions of the beats and overlays of different rhythmic patterns, different feels, and he goes from one to the other seamlessly and with absolute integrity of the pulse.”

“If You Could See Me Now” contains examples of the variety of rhythmic treatments Evans uses as his lines unfold. There are others throughout the album, including an extremely slow “Polka Dots and Moonbeams,” which also illustrates that with Evans, rhythm and harmony often function in the same plane. His meticulous preparation of each piece assured that the only element left to chance would be spontaneity arising out of performance. The architecture and harmonic structure of an Evans arrangement gave him and his bassist all the information they needed, without dictating how to use it. Evans made sure that he set up every piece so that each turn of phrase, each emotional emphasis, was supported by the harmony needed to make it effective. Alone, he worked out his pieces at length, and then presented his bassist a lead sheet with chord symbols, trusting that the bassist would create a part that fit.

That means, Israels said, “the only risks are how well you are going to do it and whether you will have the spontaneous relationship to what you’re doing to bring it to life. That’s a composer at work. He imbues the music with the illusion that it is spontaneous. But it’s not, not in the way people imagine it is.”

At the time of the *Moonbeams* recording, Evans was intensely addicted, married to a heroin addict, and recovering from a hepatitis attack. He was about to leave Riverside Records for the Verve label, and he needed large amounts of money to

satisfy his chemical urge and pay bills. Accordingly, he recorded often. That spring, he had a flurry of sideman recording engagements with Herbie Mann, Benny Golson, and Tadd Dameron, and made a United Artists duo album with guitarist Jim Hall. Nonetheless, he thoroughly prepared the Riverside dates with Israels and Motian.

After the change from LaFaro's virtuosic, sometimes gladiatorial, playing to the solid, more conventional bass work of Israels, Evans moved from the equal-partnership concept to the front of the trio, where he remained during Israels's nearly six years. Motian left in 1964, to be succeeded by Larry Bunker, followed by Arnie Wise. Under the guidance of new management, Evans's career stabilized, then blossomed. His life had glorious artistic highs and dreadful personal lows mostly connected with the addiction that he never managed to shed. He died in 1980 at the age of 51. The power of his influence not only on other pianists but on players of all instruments and on composers and arrangers makes him one of the primary creative models in jazz.

—Doug Ramsey

February 2012

Doug Ramsey is a winner of the Lifetime Achievement Award of the Jazz Journalists Association. He is the author of *Take Five: The Public and Private Live of Paul Desmond* and blogs about jazz and other matters at *RiffTides*, www.dougramsey.com

This album represents two firsts for Bill Evans. It is the first recording of the trio he has led since Chuck Israels replaced the late Scott LaFaro at the beginning of 1962; and it is his first all-ballad collection.

These two circumstances interact to produce some interesting results. It is inevitable that a trio such as Evans's—subtle, complex, and tightly knit—would shift in emphasis with any change in personnel. LaFaro was an extraordinarily dominant bassist in a way that Chuck Israels does not attempt to be. Israels, who has played for such diverse contemporary pianists as Bud Powell, Cecil Taylor, Don Friedman, and George Russell, tends to sublimate himself to the pianist, whereas LaFaro and Evans often played what amounted to duets. The result of this change is a fascinating one. In 1959, when Evans was still perhaps better known for such things as his remarkable solo on George Russell's "All About Rosie" than for his own LPs, Martin Williams wrote that "there is an easy but forceful terseness in the playing of Evans the sideman that Evans the leader is not always in touch with." That was, I think, an accurate remark then, and remained so until the death of LaFaro forced Evans to dominate his own group.

Prior to that time, there was a strange dichotomy in Evans's work. The force he was capable of as far back as the middle fifties was replaced, on his own recordings, by a wistful impressionism, that, charming and delicate as it was and is, seemed to be coming from an altogether different pianist than the one who had been functioning as a sideman. Eventually, the reputation as a player of ballads began to outweigh the former one.

It would be good news at any time to learn that Evans had recorded an album of ballads, because he is one of the most sensitive interpreters of slow and lyrical tempos in jazz, and has been widely recognized as such. But this album would seem to have come along at a particularly fitting time. For here one finds (on "Stairway to the Stars," for example) that the muscular force that made his up-tempo work as sideman so notable has now become an integral part of his ballad playing, giving him the delicate strength of silk thread. Whether or not this is actually due to Israels's presence, is, of course, a matter of sheer speculation, but the new quality is there, and it makes Evans a more impressive pianist than he has ever been before. Emotions and impressions which once seemed almost too delicate and ephemeral to be captured by tape are now firmly and forcefully stated.

One thing Evans has always done superbly is choose material, and he has done that again here. Of the eight pieces played, only two have much currency among jazz musicians. One of these, of course, is “Polka Dots and Moonbeams.” The other comes from within jazz and is one of the loveliest ballads ever to do so, Tadd Dameron’s “If You Could See Me Now.” Probably Evans was moved to include this piece when he recorded it shortly before these present sessions as a member of the Tadd Dameron Orchestra on *The Magic Touch* (Riverside 419). The performance with Dameron, incidentally, offers a rare glimpse of Evans in the role of vocal accompanist. “Stairway to the Stars” and “It Might as Well Be Spring” are both among the most durable standards we have, but neither has been widely employed as a jazz vehicle. “I Fall in Love too Easily” is, unfortunately, considerably less well-known, and “In Love in Vain” is one more example of Evans’s seemingly inexhaustible capacity for finding and reintroducing songs that one assumed everyone had unaccountably forgotten.

There are also two Evans originals. The title of “Re: Person I Knew” is an anagram referring to the producer of these sessions, and contains an inaccuracy in tense (“knew” for “know”) in order to make it come out right. The piece itself, which has no such problems in coming out right, is a modal one. In that sense, it might be said that Evans’s habit of nodding in Miles Davis’s direction once in every album has been continued, for he first became involved in the possibilities of that form of expression while working with Davis.

Evans is unique both as a composer and player of waltzes, and proves it again, simultaneously, with “Very Early.” Unlike many musicians, he is not at all tempted to turn $\frac{3}{4}$ into something hard or harsh, but chooses to concentrate on the possibilities for delicacy.

These remarks have contained no mention of drummer Paul Motian, which is in itself a tribute to his skill, for he is more felt than heard on these tracks, thus allowing the quiet subtlety of the other two players to proceed unimpeded. That Evans is quiet and subtle, which having found a new force in his playing, provides the unusual combination of qualities that makes this album completely fascinating beneath the surface of one of the most highly enjoyable piano ballad sets in a very long time.

—Joe Goldberg

These notes appeared on the original album liner.

Bill Evans—piano
Chuck Israels—bass
Paul Motian—drums

Produced by **Orrin Keepnews**

Recorded in New York; June 2, 1962 (#2, 3, 4, 6, 7);
June 5, 1962 (#10, 11); May 29, 1962 (#1, 8);
May 17, 1962 (#5, 9)

Recording engineer—**Bill Schwartau**
(Sound Makers, Inc., New York City)

REISSUE:

Produced by **Nick Phillips**

24-bit Remastering—**Joe Tarantino** (Joe Tarantino Mastering,
Berkeley, CA)

Booklet Notes by **Doug Ramsey**

Editorial—**Rikka Arnold**

Project Assistance—**Abbey Anna, Chris Clough, Michelle Tremblay**

Design—**Andrew Pham**



- 1 **RE: PERSON I KNEW** 5:44
- 2 **POLKA DOTS AND MOONBEAMS** 5:01
- 3 **I FALL IN LOVE TOO EASILY** 2:42
- 4 **STAIRWAY TO THE STARS** 4:53
- 5 **IF YOU COULD SEE ME NOW** 4:29
- 6 **IT MIGHT AS WELL BE SPRING** 6:05
- 7 **IN LOVE IN VAIN** 5:00
- 8 **VERY EARLY** 5:06

BONUS TRACKS

- 9 **POLKA DOTS AND MOONBEAMS (TAKE 3)*** 4:17
- 10 **I FALL IN LOVE TOO EASILY (TAKE 3)*** 2:48
- 11 **VERY EARLY (TAKE 10)*** 3:35

* Previously Unreleased

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Bill Evans was left reeling by the accidental death of his brilliant bassist Scott LaFaro in mid-1961 and didn't feel ready to record with his new bassist until nearly a year later. When he did go into the studio in May and June of 1962 with Chuck Israels and drummer Paul Motian, the "second trio" produced material for two albums that were to be among Evans's most popular. *Moonbeams* included ballad material from the sessions. The rest of the music from the sessions is in *How My Heart Sings*. In *Moonbeams*, Evans did some of his most introspective playing, his sense of loss apparent but relieved by Israels's power and empathy. "Polka Dots and Moonbeams," "If You Could See Me Now," and the others represent Evans at his best, his lyricism under laid with rhythmic firmness even in the extraordinarily slow "Love in Vain." The Original Jazz Classics Remasters series edition features three previously unreleased alternate takes.



www.concordmusicgroup.com

Moonbeams: BILL EVANS Trio

BILL EVANS, piano; CHUCK ISRAELS, bass; PAUL MOTIAN, drums.

SIDE 1

1. *Re: Person I Knew* (5:42) (Bill Evans)
2. *Polka Dots and Moonbeams* (4:57) (Burke-Van Heusen)
3. *I Fall in Love too Easily* (2:39) (Styne-Cahn)
4. *Stairway to the Stars* (4:48) (Parish-Malneck-Signorelli)

SIDE 2

1. *If You Could See Me Now* (4:24) (Tadd Dameron)
2. *It Might as Well Be Spring* (6:03) (Rodgers & Hammerstein)
3. *In Love in Vain* (4:56) (Kern-Robin)
4. *Very Early* (5:04) (Bill Evans)

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—JOE GOLDBERG

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Explorations (RLP 351; Stereo 9351)
Portrait in Jazz (RLP 315; Stereo 1162)
Everybody Digs Bill Evans (RLP 291; Stereo 1192)
New Jazz Conceptions (RLP 223)

PRODUCED BY ORRIN KEEPNEWS. RECORDING ENGINEER: BILL SCHWARTAU (SOUND MAKERS, INC.; NEW YORK CITY). ALBUM DESIGN: KEN DEARDOFF. BACK-LINER PHOTO BY STEVE SCHAPIRO.