

# PORTRAIT IN JAZZ BILL EVANS TRIO



RIVERSIDE

# *Portrait in Jazz:* **BILL EVANS Trio**

**BILL EVANS, piano; SCOTT LaFARO, bass; PAUL MOTIAN, drums. New York; December 28, 1959.**

1. Come Rain or Come Shine (3:17) (*Mercer-Arlen*)
2. Autumn Leaves (5:22) (*Mercer-Kosmo-Prevert*)
3. Witchcraft (4:30) (*Leigh-Coleman*)
4. When I Fall in Love (4:50) (*Heyman-Young*)
5. Peri's Scope (3:11) (*Bill Evans*)
6. What Is This Thing Called Love? (4:33)  
(*Cole Porter*)
7. Spring Is Here (5:01) (*Rodgers & Hart*)
8. Some Day My Prince Will Come (4:48)  
(*Morey-Churchill*)
9. Blue in Green (5:18) (*Davis-Evans*)

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For quite some time now, we at *Riverside* have been unshakably confident of the correctness of our strong belief that BILL EVANS is a jazz artist not only of immense importance but also of tremendous appeal. A great many musicians have shared this opinion, and a steadily growing number of critics. The only question was just how long it would take the jazz public at large to sense and respond to this appeal, to succumb to the magic of this young pianist's deep, lyrical beauty and remarkable inventiveness.

By the end of 1959, when this album was recorded, this question was beginning to be answered quite clearly. As one indication, Evans, who had twice been named "New Star" pianist in Down Beat's Critics Poll, catapulted past any number of established 'names' as he rose from a far-out 20th place in 1958 to a close-in 6th in that magazine's 1959 Readers Poll. Equally impressive was the rapid success of the trio that Bill formed late in 1959 and took on cross-country tour early in '60. There would seem to be a definite feeling in the air, that almost-mystical aura that marks the *arrival* of an artist. And if there are any lingering doubts about his stature or any remaining barriers to widespread general acceptance and recognition of Evans, this album should supply the clincher, should make it obvious that 1960 is Bill Evans time.

Much evidence of the growing Evans tide is to be found in the reactions to his previous *Riverside* album: "*Everybody Digs Bill Evans*." Looking back on it, it now seems rather frighteningly dangerous to have pinned so extravagant a title on an LP by a comparative unknown. Actually, the title was validly based on the fact that the album cover features strong pro-Evans comments by Miles Davis Cannonball Adderley, Ahmad Jamal and George Shearing. (To which the diffident Mr.

Evans, perhaps a bit embarrassed by our approach, commented: "Why didn't you ask my mother for a quote?") Nevertheless, we were surely leaving Bill wide open to all sorts of caustic remarks from clever-penned critics. But apparently the considerable talents of Evans overrode this danger: although the album was extremely widely reviewed, not a single unfavorable reaction has come to light. The general tone was a rather awed admission that the "everybody digs" claim was not out of line. As the Kansas City *Star's* reviewer put it: "The immodest claim . . . is justified." And when before this has any artist, without benefit of previous buildup, drawn raves from both McCall's *and* The Jazz Review, and from (to get even more extreme) both Scholastic Magazine *and* Rogue!

All this is highly impressive, and so are the authoritative quotes that are readily available ("brilliant . . . one of the most interesting pianists in several years" — Ralph Gleason; "important . . . most inventive" — Nat Hentoff; and so on). But all of this should not lead anyone to expect to find on this LP a dramatic, shouting, obvious crowd-pleaser. Evans is above all a melodic, probing, rich-toned artist; his playing is deceptively calm, and (in the very best sense of a much-abused word) *charming*. Such qualities are very much in evidence here.

As in his previous albums, Bill takes great delight in reworking familiar material to his own design. You may have heard several of these standards until you were ready to bet your life that nothing fresh could ever again be extracted from them. If so, you were wrong. The 'singing' Evans touch, the "long, supple melodic lines" (to quote Hentoff), and the rare ability "to make his conception of a number seem *the* definitive way to play it" (to quote Cannonball) combine give such staples as *Come Rain or Come Shine* and *What Is This Thing Called Love?* new and fascinating vitality and richness. There is also something as unlooked-for as his treatment of the waltz *Some Day My Prince Will Come* (from Disney's "Snow White," yet); and there are examples of Evans' skill as a composer in the rhythmic *Peri's Scope* and in the moody *Blue in Green*, jointly credited to Bill and his ex-leader, Miles Davis.

The other members of Evans' present trio offer him effective, close-knit and most understanding support, which is not always limited to the conventional rhythmic backing. Worthy of particular attention in this respect is *Autumn Leaves*, in which Evans and the remarkable young bassist, Scott LaFaro, point towards an innovation close to Bill's heart. He has noted that "I'm hoping the trio will grow in the direction of simultaneous improvisation rather than just one guy blowing followed by another guy blowing. If the bass player, for example, hears an idea that he wants to answer, why should he just keep playing a background?"



BILL EVANS, born in New Jersey in August, 1929, is a thoroughly schooled musician (private study; Southeastern Louisiana College; the Mannes School of Music in New York) whose varied jazz experience includes most importantly a 1958 stay with Miles Davis' sextet. Bill credits that association with having done much to increase his self-confidence, a point that takes on added significance when you consider that for quite a while it looked as just about the only person who *didn't* dig. Bill Evans was Bill Evans. Intensely self-critical and self-demanding, Bill let two years intervene between his first and second LPs because, he insisted, he "didn't have anything particularly different to say." However, only *one* year separated that second album from this third one, which seems a hopeful indication. And, now that he is meeting with such gratifying success as a leader, it is perhaps fairly safe to hope that we can all look forward to the pleasure of hearing Bill Evans on record at more normal intervals.

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