Birth of the Film

There was a crystal moment when you knew for certain this Bill Evans movie was going to

happen. And it was all due to drummer Paul Motian.

Well, I thought I better go down and see Paul Motian (at the Village Vanguard), Bill’s great drummer and the 3rd part of Bill’s classic trio with Scott Lafaro. I was grateful and got his number. He was a tough nut, aggressive, explosive, and a musician friend told me he could get weird and unpredictable at times. But I was not going to be deterred. I called Motian, the 2nd week in January, “ Oh yea it’s fuckin you...stop pestering me with this shit.” He said, “I’m really busy; call in another month in February.” It was a brief

conversation. I thought until he tells me no I am still going to call.

In February I called again “Yea, yea, okay, I’m playing at the Village Vanguard next Thursday night” he said, “be there at 6’oclock you got an hour of my time.” Click the phone goes dead. Okay I have an hour!

Thursday in February I arrive with my cameraman Gary at the Vanguard and we looked around to find a good place to do the interview. Luckily Lorraine Gordon the owner was not there, and the guys just let me go around and make myself at home. I took the opportunity to quietly shoot around the club.

We set up a nice shot from when Paul came thru.

At about 6 o’clock, Paul Motion comes down the narrow staircase into the club. He’s got an

alligator coat, baldhead and dark sunglasses on. Totally hip. He takes a look at me, doesn’t say

much, nods and then goes into the back room. I look at Gary and Gary looks at me. And I

thought not a good sign. This was going to be a “yes” no” “maybe” interview, not much in the

way of conversation. I was very nervous, like how I am before I got into the interview.

Paul comes out, and asks where he wanted me to sit; kind of thing and we hook up the microphone and start. He remembered the stuff like it was yesterday. His days in 1955, scuffling, hanging out with

Bill brought me to that moment in time. Bill and Paul were good friends, rehearsing in Bill’s apartment, going to movies, shooting pool, going bowling. Bill was good at everything. It was two young

musicians trying to get over and make a life in jazz.

His remarks were always precise, hard-edged, and got to the point quickly. It felt like he was unburdening himself, the time of his life was important to him. He wanted me to know that it was a special time, that it was deep and precious to him. The flow about Paul and Bill’s relationship got a bit

deeper.

With so many people that I interviewed, they were very happy to talk of Bill, and Paul wanted to

tell me more. Something magical and truly beautiful happened that Sunday. The interview was

just about over. Paul couldn’t have been nicer. He even set me up with another date to come

back and shoot some of his current band. I thanked him for being so generous with his time. I could tell he felt good about it. We packed up and left the club. I was on cloud nine. Walking down 7th Avenue, I told Gary, “Hey, I am going to make this movie. I am definitely going to make this movie.”

And that was the defining moment, when this movie had its jumping off point. Paul was the real deal, he took me back to his time with Bill and said things, which resonated with me, and was able to bring me back to that time almost 50 years ago! Paul did it effortlessly, like it was just yesterday.

I’ll end with this: I was going to call this movie ***Bill Evans: Everybody digs Bill Evans***. A good friend thought that was more “commercial” than ***Bill Evans, Time Remembered***. But, I thought again and said

no man, its ***Bill Evans, Time Remembered***. This is the reason. Paul Motian, Chuck Israels and so many people who I interviewed gave me the real remembrance of their time with Bill. A lot of the guys were pretty old when I first talked to them and they wanted to make sure their memories of Bill Evans were good and heart felt. This is the story of a great American artist and they wanted to make sure they had it right the first time. But it was this interview with Paul Motian that got me inside Bill’s story and made me want to tell it. Paul Motian died of cancer complications a few years after I talked to him in 2006.