

Bill Evans was born in Plainfield, New Jersey on August 16, 1929 and began his music studies at age 6. Classically trained on piano; he also studied flute and violin as a child. He graduated with a degree in piano performance and teaching from Southeastern Louisiana College (now University) in 1950, and studied composition at Mannes College of Music in New York. After a stint in the Army, he worked in local dance bands, and with clarinetist Tony Scott, Chicago-area singer Lucy Reed and guitarist Mundell Lowe, who brought the young pianist to the attention of producer Orrin Keepnews at Riverside Records.

Evans' first album was *New Jazz Conceptions* in 1956, which featured the first recording of his most loved composition, "Waltz for Debby". It's follow-up, *Everybody Digs Bill Evans* was not recorded for another two years; the always shy and self-deprecating pianist claiming he "had nothing new to say." He gradually got noticed in the NYC jazz scene, for his original piano sound and fluid ideas, when in 1958, Miles Davis asked him to join his group (which also featured John Coltrane and Cannonball Adderley). He stayed for nearly a year, touring and recording, and subsequently playing on the all-time classic *Kind of Blue* album -- as well as composing "Blue in Green", now a jazz standard. His work with Miles helped solidify Bill's reputation, and in 1959, Evans founded his most innovative trio with the now-legendary bassist Scott LaFaro and with Paul Motian on drums. The trio concept of equal interplay among the musicians was virtually pioneered by Evans, and these albums remain the most popular in his extensive catalog. They did two studio albums together in addition to the famous "live" sessions at NYC's Village Vanguard in 1961. LaFaro's tragic death in a car accident a few weeks after the Vanguard engagement -- an event which personally devastated Bill -- sent the pianist into seclusion for a time, after which he returned to the trio format later in 1962, with Motian again, and Chuck Israels on bass.

His 1963 *Conversations With Myself* album, in which he double and triple-tracked his piano, won him the first of many Grammy® awards and the following year he first toured overseas, playing to packed houses from Paris to Tokyo, now solidifying a worldwide reputation. The great bassist Eddie Gomez began a fruitful eleven year tenure with Bill in 1966, in various trios with drummers Marty Morell, Philly Joe Jones, Jack DeJohnette and others -- contributing to some of the most acclaimed club appearances and albums in Evans' career. His recorded output was considerable -- (for Riverside, Verve, Columbia, Fantasy and Warner Bros) over the years, and he also did sessions (especially early on) with some of the top names in jazz. Musicians like Charles Mingus, Art Farmer, Stan Getz, Oliver Nelson, Jim Hall, George Russell, Shelley Manne, Toots Thielmans, Kai Winding /J.J. Johnson, Hal McKusick and others all featured Evans. In the seventies, he recorded extensively-- primarily trio and solo piano now and then, but also including several quintet albums under his own name as well two memorable dates with singer Tony Bennett.

His last trio was formed in 1978, featuring the incomparably sensitive Marc Johnson on bass and drummer Joe LaBarbera, which rejuvenated the often-ailing pianist, who was elated with his new line-up, calling it "the most closely related" to his first trio (with LaFaro and Motian). He suffered yet more family problems and upheavals in his personal life, (often due to bouts with narcotics addiction) and yet brought a new dynamic musical vitality, a surer confidence, fresh energy and even more aggressive interplay to the trio's repertoire. Evans' health was deteriorating, however, though he insisted on working until he finally had to cancel midweek during an engagement at Fat Tuesday's in New York. A few days later, he had to be taken to Mount Sinai Hospital on September 15, 1980, where he died from a bleeding ulcer, cirrhosis of the liver and bronchial pneumonia. He is buried next to his beloved brother Harry, in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

While Evans was open to new musical approaches that would not compromise his musical and artistic vision -- such as his occasional use of electric piano, and his brief associations with avant-garde composer George Russell -- he always insisted on the purity of the song structure and the noble history of the jazz tradition. It was a point the highly articulate Evans was quite forthcoming about in the various interviews he gave throughout his career. Consistently true to his own pianistic standards, he continued to enhance his own singular vision of music until the very end.

In his short life, Bill Evans was a prolific and profoundly creative artist and a genuinely compassionate and gentle man, often in the face of his recurring health problems and his restless nature. His rich legacy remains undiminished, and his compositions have enjoyed rediscovery by jazz players and even some classical musicians. Even twenty-five years after his passing, Bill Evans' music continues to influence musicians and composers everywhere and all those who have been deeply touched by his expressive genius and sensitive, lyrical artistry.

# TRIO 64

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## BILL EVANS



Joining Bill Evans (piano) on Trio '64 -- his initial three-piece recording for Verve -- is the compact rhythm section of Gary Peacock (bass) and Paul Motian (drums). The effort spotlights their communal and intuitive musical discourse, hinging on an uncanny ability of the musicians to simultaneously hear and respond. All the more interesting, Evans had not interacted in this setting before, having most recently worked with Chuck Israels (bass) and Larry Bunker (drums). The personable opener, "Little Lulu," features the aggregate melodically molding individual and distinct sonic characteristics. Evans' nimble and emphatic syncopation is not only ably supported, but framed by Peacock's expressive runs and Motian's acute sense of timing. "A Sleeping Bee" is one of the collection's most endearing selections as the groove playfully scintillates surrounding some hauntingly poignant chord

changes. Evans bandies back and forth with Peacock, the latter likewise providing a stellar solo. "Always" captures a similar effervescence as the instrumentalists ebb and flow in synchronicity. Since the December 18 session was held the week before Christmas 1963, they fittingly tote out "Santa Claus Is Coming to Town," creating a minor masterpiece of post-bop from what could easily have started as a spontaneous seasonal suggestion. Noël Coward's "I'll See You Again" bears a brisk waltz persona, enabling the unit to fluently weave its offerings without obstructing the otherwise affective tune. Concluding Trio '64 is Rodgers & Hart's standard "Everything Happens to Me," with an unhurried tempo lingering just long enough to embrace the familiar refrain. Evans sparkles, gliding around Peacock's full-bodied basslines and Motian's solid yet restrained beat.

# TRIO 64

**Piano Bill Evans • Bass Gary Peacock • Drums Paul Motian**

1. Little Lulu 3:40
2. A Sleeping Bee 4:39
3. Always 4:00
4. Santa Claus Is Coming To Town 4:22
5. I'll See You Again 3:52
6. For Heaven's Sake 4:22
7. Dancing In The Dark 4:35
8. Everything Happens To Me 4:35

**Recorded in New York City, Dec. 18, 1963 Verve Records**

**Engineer Bop Simpson - Engineer [Director] Val Valentin**



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