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The “Jazz Chopin”: How Bill Evans’ Music Was Influenced by French Impressionists: Annotated Bibliography

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Annotated Bibliography

Dictionary/Encyclopedia Articles

- (1) Lesure, François and Roy Howat. "Debussy, (Achille-) Claude." *Grove Music Online*. Edited by Deane Root. Published online: 2001.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.07353>

An article in the highly reputable *Grove Online*, Lesure and Howat outline biographical information on Debussy, a summary of his musical style and its development and refinement over time, a summary of critical reception, and a works list and bibliography. In this fairly in-depth dictionary entry one can familiarize oneself with Debussy’s life and career and begin to understand his place in music history.

- (2) Murray, Edward. “Evans, Bill.” *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Edited by Stanley Sadie and J. Tyrrell. London: Macmillan, 2001. viii: 449-50.

Another article in the highly reputable *New Grove*, Edward outlines some brief biographical information of Evans, and a summary of his musical style and career trajectory. Here one can begin to situate Evans in the timeline of music history alongside the other biographical entries of the French Impressionistic composers.

Secondary or Tertiary Monographs

- (3) Mawer, Deborah. *French Music and Jazz in Conversation: From Debussy to Brubeck*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

In this chapter in her book, Mawer highlights the links between Bill Evan’s music and life to the music of French Impressionist composers such as Ravel, Debussy, as well as Milhaud and Messiaen. She uses two case studies—one on Evans and the French inspiration on the Miles Davis album, *Kind of Blue*, and one on the relations between Evans’ *Peace Piece* and music of Chopin and Messiaen. Mawer is a distinguished research professor in the UK and has done extensive research work on French music and culture, as well as Jazz. She cites a lack of scholarship on the topic of the influence of French music on Bill Evans’ music despite its relevance. Mawer also notes several of works by Evans that could benefit from analysis similar to hers.

Essays in Collections

- (4) Hopkins, G W. "Maurice Ravel." In *The New Grove Twentieth Century French Masters*, 151-96. London: Macmillan, 1986.

Being published under the "New Grove" name provides a high level of authority for this source. This chapter contains a section on pertinent biographical information on Ravel, then a section analyzing his musical style and characteristics, before finishing with a works list and a bibliography. This source goes hand in hand with the other biographical sources by situating Ravel in his part of history. It also contributes to the discussions of his musical style alongside the other *New Grove* articles and Palmer's *Impressionism in Music*.

Dissertations and Theses

- (5) Berardinelli, Paula. "Bill Evans: His Contributions as a Jazz Pianist and an Analysis of his Musical Style." PhD diss., New York University, 1992. PQDT.

This dissertation is cited by Deborah Mawer as one of the few scholarly contributions to the topic of the link between French Impressionism and Bill Evans music. The main issue addressed here is to understand the "specific nature of his contribution to jazz and jazz pianists" through musical analysis. Berardinelli outlines applications of her findings to jazz piano education, highlighting the importance of a knowledge and a competence in the music of French Impressionist composers, among others.

Journal Articles

- (6) Maury, Bernard, "Bill Evans: Modality and 20th Century French Composers." *Jazz Improv* 3, no.1 (2000): 179.

Bernard Maury personally knew Bill Evans and worked with him during his life. He is also the director of the Bill Evans Piano Academy in Paris. This article provides some information on modal music used in both jazz and French impressionistic music, and how Bill Evans was able to integrate it so flawlessly into his music. Maury, like Berardinelli, cites how Bill Evans influenced future pianists like Herbie Hancock, Keith Jarett, Chick Corea, and Brad Mehldau, showing a trend in the timelessness and universality of Evans' style.

- (7) Pamies, Sergio. "Deconstructing Modal Jazz Piano Techniques: The Relation between Debussy's Piano Works and the Innovations of Post-Bop Pianists." *Jazz Education in Research and Practice* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2021): 76-105.
<https://www.proquest.com/docview/2480420414/fulltextPDF/56380E5CA8284257PQ/9?accountid=14608>.

This article by Pamies provides an in-depth harmonic analysis of both works by Debussy as well as some of the prominent post-Bop pianists. The first section is on Bill Evans. The application of this work is towards jazz pedagogy and a better understanding of how to communicate the language of the jazz piano masters to students. Pamies is an active jazz pianist who is a recording artist, performer, and educator.

Music Scores

(8)Evans, Bill. *Bill Evans Omnibook*. Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard, 2020.

The *Bill Evans Omnibook* is a collection of 40 transcribed Bill Evans solos across his career. There is strangely no transcriber attributed, however, being published by a reputable company in Hal Leonard, the transcriptions are worth a look. Shortcomings in the source include the limit of 40 solos—not exhaustive—and the lack of transcriber information, while strengths include a helpful launching point for theoretical analysis of select songs. This source will go in conjunction with other published transcriptions, as well as my own.

Sound and Video Recordings

(9)Bill Evans Trio. *Waltz for Debby*. Recorded 1961. Riverside OJCCD-210-2, 1992. LP.

This album was the fourth and final album from Evan’s original trio of himself, Scott LaFaro and Paul Motian. It contains the title track, one of Evans’ most famous original tunes that represents a portrait of his niece. It comes later than *Portrait in Jazz*, and *Kind of Blue*, two examples of Evans finding and establishing his professional voice and his modal jazz style.

(10)Bill Evans Trio. *Portrait in Jazz*. Recorded 1959. Riverside RCD-30678, 2008. LP.

Coming in 1959, eight months after *Kind of Blue* was released, this album was the first of Evans’ collaborations with his favorite bassist, Scott LaFaro, and drummer Paul Motian. It contains “Blue in Green,” which was one of the tunes that Evans composed alongside Miles Davis, and one which represents many characteristics of the Impressionists, such as chord planning, modality, and an emphasis on extended chords that don’t necessarily resolve traditionally.

(11)Debussy, Claude. *Piano Works Vol. 4*. Performed by François-Joël Thiollier. Recorded September 25-27, 1996. Naxos 8.553293, 1998. CD.

This CD compiles performances of both books of Debussy’s *Preludes*. These are miniature pieces which are each given a title of the specific thing they are portraying in the

music, and are all very good representations of musical Impressionism. One can see the influence on jazz music easily in “Des pas sur la neige.” This prelude utilizes chord extensions, chord planning, and harmonic centers as opposed to keys, characteristics that are visible in Bill Evans’ music.

(12)Ravel, Maurice. *Piano Music*. Performed by Klára Körmendi. Recorded 1988. Naxos 8.550524, 1990. CD.

This CD contains *Gaspard de la nuit*, *Sonatine*, and *La Tombeau de Couperin*, 3 major piano works by Ravel which seemingly all had influence on Bill Evans. Evident in these pieces is an emphasis on sonorities which evoke images and poetry. One can find impressionistic elements in these pieces which can be traced to Evans’ music. One can also see the ways in which early 20th century jazz may have influence Ravel’s writing, particularly in *La Tombeau de Couperin*.