

ALL THAT'S JAZZ

by Tom O'Neill



STAN GETZ

[This is the second article about legendary figures in the Jazz world, presenting little-known facts about those artists, about whom we thought we knew everything, or as time went on, had forgotten.]

"My life is music, and in some vague, mysterious and subconscious way, I have always been driven by a taut inner spring which has propelled me to almost compulsively reach for perfection in music, often -in fact, mostly- at the expense of everything else in my life."

So said the much-troubled, often-genius Stanley Getz. His early life tells quite a story.

Stan, extremely bright, played harmonica by age 12, bass in Jr. High, could hum all of Benny Goodman's solos, had an instinctive sense of pitch and rhythm. He played all of the saxophones but loved the sound of the tenor sax, with which he would make his mark.

He quit school at 15, played with Roseland's Dick Rogers, then trombonist Jack Teagarden, then Stan Kenton, where one band member turned him on to heroin. Within weeks, at 17, Stan was addicted. After Kenton, he played with Jimmy Dorsey, then Benny Goodman. After missing four shows in a row while Stan looked for a street connection, Benny fired him.

Ralph Burns, arranger for Woody Herman's band, heard Stan and three friends play, and was blown away by this saxophone team. Woody hired all four on Burn's advice. The band was Herman's Second Herd, and the most famous song from the sax group was the historic "Four Brothers" (December, 1947, Columbia 38304). In 1950, Herman's "Early Autumn" was released, got a lot of airplay making Stan officially a star, based on one beautiful, inspired solo, and everyone wanted him to play. [I suggest listening to *The Definitive Stan Getz*, Verve 589950).

After Africa, Sweden and Denmark, he met guitarist Charlie Byrd in DC who played him tapes from a State Department tour of Latin America in 1961. Impressed with the sound of the jazz/samba hybrid, called 'Bossa Nova' in Brazil, Stan saw the potential. and set up a 1963 recording session with Brazil's Joao Gilberto and Antonio Carlos Jobim. The only Brazilian fluent in English at the studio was Gilberto's wife, Astrud. Stan asked her to sing two songs in English, but she had no professional training. Gilberto and Jobim objected. But Stan persisted. The result was the classic album *Getz/Gilberto* and those two songs were "Corcovado" and "The Girl From Ipanema." Right on, Stan!

For the next 30 years around the globe, Stan was the quintessential all-star, and became known as "The Sound," because of the pure, lyrical tone he achieved. He didn't think about chords; rather, colors to match the mood!

After dozens of bouts with alcohol and drugs and two m failed marriages, he was diagnosed in 1985 with cirrhosis and liver cancer. He toured Europe extensively, then returned home, where on June 6, 1991, he packed up his sax for the hereafter at only age 64.

The genius with demons. What a waste. What a talent. What a shame. Interestingly, while writing this article in a cruise ship piano bar sailing from Rome to Barcelona , I felt a certain presence. Looking over my shoulder, I spotted this photo on the wall behind me. Coincidence?



A beautiful story is attributed to Michael J. Simonetti in 2009:

One day God announced he wished to play a musical instrument and choose the tenor sax because to him, it sounded closest to the sound of an angelic voice. An angel suggested He listen to a Stan Getz recording. After hearing to a few tunes, He decided to choose another instrument. When the angel asked God why He had changed his mind, God paused, smiled broadly, and answered... "Because I have heard the voice of perfection."

Tom and his wife Cheryl perform locally as "Just Me 2", a live music duo specializing in songs from the Great American Songbook. They can be reached at (772) 532-5054 or at www.JustMeLiveMusic.com. See them on Facebook at www.facebook.com/JustMeLiveMusic