

Prologue

I'm writing this after a trip to Vienna, and while I was there I had the opportunity to hear an Austrian tenor player, fifteen years old, who really played the instrument very well, and wowed the audience with his expertise. And a few days ago I heard an Italian alto player of the same age who was really unbelievably accomplished, instrumentally and musically—and he really got the audience shouting approval. When I was fifteen years old I was playing, but no one had really inspired me like these two guys have obviously been inspired. These two talented people were not aware, as yet, of a true musical statement, without the sensationalism—something they will learn, we hope.

I got my inspiration from Lennie Tristano, and also Lester Young and Charlie Parker. Tristano demonstrated for me a way to play that went deeper than virtuoso musicality—as John Updike wrote, “Virtuosity can seem a distraction—as when you find that you are thinking about how great the musician is instead of listening to the music.” I never wowed an audience in my whole life like those two young players did, so I can't help but feel I missed something. But in a more modest way I've been able to continue playing, in private and in public, with occasional comments from people after a concert telling me they like the way I played through the years. So I am grateful to find a place in the improvising neighborhood, and can only wish those two virtuosos a good and real musical life.

Mike Zwerin, who writes a column for the *Herald Tribune* every couple of weeks, just wrote a great piece headlined “Murdering the silence with bad music”—a quote from Joseph Conrad. While in Vienna, I went to the cemetery and saw Beethoven's tomb, next to Schubert's, next to Brahms's, in a small area. They replaced the silence with beautiful music. Jazz is often too concerned with exhibitionism and emoting nonstop, but there have been many beautiful players. Coleman Hawkins's “Body and Soul”; Lester Young's “Lady Be Good” with Basie; Charlie Parker's “Don't Blame Me”; Warne Marsh with Paul Chambers and Paul Motian, four beautiful trio tunes on Atlantic Records; Wayne Shorter at the Plugged Nickel with Miles—and many others . . . Keith Jarrett, Brad Mehldau, Chick Corea, Bill

Evans, Lennie Tristano, and so on. That's the tradition and the intention that hopefully will get to these young players.

I would like to say how much I appreciate working on this project with Andy Hamilton. Left to my own efforts, I would not have written it down, or up! Andy, with great interest and patience, was willing to meet with me a number of times with lists of questions. For instance, we spent a few days together as adjudicators at a big band contest for arrangers in Barga in Italy, and had a few opportunities for discussion.

I also want to thank all my musical colleagues for their great words, in the short interviews Andy did.

Gradually over many months and years, Andy organized the material. I read it, and changed many things, and added much. The last step, after reading, and deleting, and adding; and rereading, and redeleting and re-adding (a few more times) is to get the book published and released. I welcome the opportunity to go public with this musical part of my life, for the people who like my playing. I hope they appreciate the music a little more after getting a look behind the scene—we hope that there are a few insightful moments ahead!

With appreciation for your support,
Lee Konitz