

Silent scores

Ryan Truesdell was eight years old when Gil Evans died in 1988. But for the past five years this New York composer-producer has devoted his career to bringing to life the unheard music of one of jazz's greatest composers and arrangers. His efforts resulted in Evans winning a posthumous Grammy in 2013 for an arrangement on *Centennial: Newly Discovered Works Of Gil Evans*, the album released by Truesdell in 2012 under the name The Gil Evans Project. This month Truesdell releases a second album of unheard Evans scores and arrangements, *Lines Of Color: Live At Jazz Standard*, via Blue Note and the crowdfunding website ArtistShare.

As a composer and arranger Evans remains most famous for his 1950s collaborations with Miles Davis (*Miles Ahead*, *Porgy And Bess* and *Sketches Of Spain*). In the 1960s he became a band leader and recording artist in his own right, performing up until his death at 75. Truesdell first learned of Evans when he was a 14 year old saxophonist obsessed with Cannonball Adderley. "I had bought [*Milestones*] to hear Cannonball Adderley, and he never solos on the whole thing at all," he recalls. "I found all the CDs that Adderley did with Miles Davis. I was completely floored because this was like no other big band I had heard. I went back the next day and bought all the things that Miles and Gil did together, and also *Gil Evans & 10* and *Out Of The Cool*."

Evans became the new object of Truesdell's obsession. The young saxophonist was entranced by his linear and melodic touches. "Every little part has a

melody more than voice weaving. Everything is kind of conceived as its own original line," he explains. There was an historical connection too: Truesdell received his master's degree in jazz composition at the New England Conservatory of Music, where he studied with Bob Brookmeyer, who played trombone in the early 1950s in The Claude Thornhill Orchestra. In the 1940s, Thornhill gave Evans his start as an arranger.

Five years ago, Truesdell was asked to organise a New York concert celebrating Evans's music. Preparing for that event, he became close to the Evans family. "I wanted to do it from his manuscripts," he explains. "The family let me come in with a big scanner. I scanned about 5000 pages. I started realising none of this stuff had been recorded or heard." Subsequent research from the family, as well as other sources, such as a library in Missouri where the Thornhill scores were stored, unearthed 60 such pieces.

"Gil was extremely meticulous in the studio," Truesdell continues. "I talked with singers and musicians he worked with, and the consensus was out of a three hour session, they spent two and a half hours rehearsing, and they would never get to doing a take. So I think a lot of those pieces went unrecorded because they just ran out of time."

"It was so fascinating to find these lineages of his writing from past arrangements, filling in the tiny holes in his discography."

Truesdell notes that Evans's Thornhill-era material was meant just for the dance band's live repertoire:

"Brookmeyer told me about one piece that they were still playing four years after Gil had written it."

In May 2014, The Gil Evans Project played a series of shows at New York's Jazz Standard club, performing 40 tunes over six nights. The resulting live album features 11 of them, with no tracks repeated from the first album. Among the new CD's cuts are previously unheard compositions, Thornhill material, as well as compositions from the mid- to late part of Evans's career, such as "The Time Of The Barracudas" and "Concorde" from *The Individualism of Gil Evans* from 1964, and his 1965 arrangement of the English folk song "Greensleeves", a piece also famously recorded by John Coltrane.

Over the two albums, Truesdell has still only tackled roughly a third of the newly found Evans material. "The bummer is that at certain points Gil threw a lot of music away, so it can't be complete. But I have a lifetime's worth of his music at my fingertips. It'll take me a lifetime to figure every single detail."

One wonders what Evans would think of Truesdell's work. "I've had that conversation with myself whether I should do this, and whether it would be something that Gil would want," he reflects. "His family has been extremely supportive in me doing it. I tend to want to paint Gil in the best light possible. I wouldn't want my own pieces that weren't that great played after my death. I'm not going to do that to Gil either." □ *Lines Of Color: Live At Jazz Standard* is released by Blue Note/ ArtistShare. gilevansproject.com
Larry Jaffee



Ryan Truesdell conducts The Gil Evans Project, Jazz Standard, New York, May 2014

Saxophonist **Ryan Truesdell** excavates the unheard music of composer, arranger and Miles Davis collaborator Gil Evans

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