

Extraits d'une interview inédite du saxophoniste Steve Lacy par Jacques Siron Octobre 1994, Paris

Siron : What is the most important in the jazz legacy ?

Lacy : I would say : collaboration between musical partners; appetite and inspiration; stimulation; and research – go after your own thing, event if it's just one little thing. Go through what you have to go through, go for what you have yourself. Go for your own thing, whatever that is – everybody must have some thing (laughters).

Siron : Now that we can theorize many aspects of jazz, isn't it also necessary to give as well another kind of food ?

Lacy : Cecil Taylor told me something when I was playing with him. I was very young and I was playing so many things. He said : "Look Lacy, never mind things, go for *the* thing". That helped me. It confused me at first, it shocked me – but he was right. There is a certain *focus* to achieve, and once you have achieved it, the things come by themselves. There are various ways to get that focus, but that's what's all about : focus.

Siron : How would you practice that focus ?

Lacy : I would find someone stronger than myself, and attach myself to him long enough to understand what he's doing so it helps me get stronger. It's easy to say, but it's hard to find and hard to do. But there must be somebody stronger than you.

Siron : Isn't it more difficult now than it used to ?

Lacy : It certainly is. All the people that helped me are dead. I was lucky enough to be young when these older players were around. I learned from them all.

Siron : And you were able to play with them.

Lacy : To study with them, to be with them, to record with them. Now there are only fragments of this situation. There are good musicians here and there. Every young musician should get with an older wiser stronger musician to help him to get some guidance and to save him some time.

Siron : What is guiding ?

Lacy : One cannot be a passive disciple. You have to turn on the master, to find a way of satisfying him, to keep him happy and to contribute to his satisfaction. It has to be a two-way treat. Otherwise you can only pay him a lot of money... No ! It has to be for real. But these days, it seems very difficult, very fragmentary. There are a lot of theoretical and practical things you can buy. You can go to school and study, but it remains very difficult to get the real time experience with the living masters. A lot of them are in schools. But I don't know whether that's a good or a bad thing. It's somewhat like Indians in a reservation (laughters).

Siron : But what can we do with all these fragments ?

Lacy : It's the young musician's job to put these fragments together. They can see things differently than we can because they are coming up now. They got the benefit of all our experience, and they can start from where we left off. When I started with the soprano saxophone, I had no guide to use my instrument in a modern context. The only guidance I had was the material I played, in other words the pieces of Monk (...). If you can't find a living master, you can certainly study his work (...).

That's the trick too. Don't do boring exercises, don't study boring phenomenon. The appetite is very important. For me, it was always interesting even when I was doubting, because it was new, unknown, challenging, and I wanted it. I made my own exercises if I couldn't find any. For instance, I made my own interval exercises because none were available.

Siron : So if someone wants to study a specific aspect of music – for instance dynamics, color, attack – he has to make his own exercise.

Lacy : Not necessarily. He has to spend time on the phenomenon. He has to get to the bottom of it. He has to devote himself, to spend enough time on dealing with that phenomenon. He has to be clever enough to know how to examine it. Not everybody knows how to dig into something. You have to find a *method*.

Siron : It may be more important now with this fragmentary world – which has become more of a lifestyle. It can also be heard in today's music.

Lacy : Yes, sampling, little bites, nanoseconds.

Siron : But aren't there some very lively aspects in those fragments ?

Lacy : Sure. Everything is possible. It's another thing that Monk told me : "Whatever you think is impossible, someone will come and do it". You say "Oh, well, this door is closed. We've heard it. There is nothing more you can do with this". And somebody come along and does something completely new with it. There is always the hope that someone will *surprise* you. That's why we do improvisation. The main reason for it is because it's surprising. Something might emerge, something surprising.

Siron : And having fun in playing.

Lacy : Fun, play.

Siron : Playing games, like children.

Lacy : In a way, music is like children playing with blocks. There is a certain amount of blocks, and you can do whatever you want with them. Here is a table, here are some blocks and you have one hour to do whatever you want (laughters). That's the beginning of composition. But now we are in video games. The eyes are blinking. All the computer, TV and video games have sounds. We are going into a very strange sound period, I think (laughters).

Siron : A strange sound period.

Lacy : Yes, really fragmented. Little dots and bips. Hip hop.

Siron : But what is important to play about those fragments ? That's a young musician's background, what he sees, what he feels, what he hears. How to deal with those fragments ? How to make a meaning out of them ?

Lacy : He has to find his *own time* and his *own space*. Nobody can dictate them to him. His time is his own. He has his own hours, his own space, his circle of acquaintance. He is coming from a certain place – from a way neither you nor I come from. He is going toward another place. He doesn't even know where he is going, but if he is a serious musician, trying to find his own way, he'll eventually find his own thing. He has to experiment, spend his own time investigating the materials in the most interesting way he can, get help from stronger people, find partners to work with, study the fields, persevere and survive. Not easy !

Siron : How would you describe *finding your own time* in a more concrete way ?

Lacy : You have to work a lot in the dark when you're young. You go by instinct and you don't know what you're doing. You have to follow your inspiration, your appetite, your bend, your ear, what interests you, what you like. You have to go through it, really get to the bottom of it, and own it. Study it, and get so that you can deal it yourself. You have to live in it. The way to find your own time is to live in it. (...)

A musician has to find his own time. I should have said his own timetable – his own order of things. You must go through things in your own order : *this* is what I want to do – maybe it's fashionable, maybe it's not – but I have to go through this and then behind that there is another thing. You have a different history than anybody else because you come from a different place, you started at a different point, you are going in another place.