



Rachel Z: knows a thing or two about advanced harmony

MINOR IS MAJOR

Dan Greenblatt. Sher Music Co., pb, 150pp, \$28. ISBN 1-883217-77-6.

This excellent 2013 publication is accompanied by endorsements from, among others, keyboard player Rachel Z (who has played with Wayne Shorter amongst many others, so she knows a thing or two about advanced harmony and improvisation) and the noted jazz-education author and saxophonist Jerry Bergonzi. The title threw me a little initially, but once I got past that and into the content of the book, it made sense in terms of a snappy and eye-catching title for the subject in question. It's an important book, which for around half of its duration addresses the use of the harmonic and melodic minor scales in jazz improvisation, which is sometimes overlooked in jazz education and professional playing. There are lots of examples providing considerable detail of the use of these scales over e.g. minor ii-V-I chord progressions, including actual examples of usage on standards by a selection of jazz "greats" including Parker, Adderley, Coltrane, Getz, Clifford Brown, Kenny Dorham and more.

Greenblatt then takes us in some detail through chord-scale theory, chromaticism and substitute chords, and offers a series of etudes showing numerous notated examples of how to improvise (by using his theories) over minor key chord progressions which are based on *Softly As In A Morning Sunrise*, *Woody 'N You*, and a minor-blues chord progression. The final chapter covers the use of the diminished, whole tone, minor blues, hexatonic and pentatonic scales, again with numerous examples, and the appendix provides advice on practising scales, interval leaps and broken chords (triads) in such a way as is most useful for jazz improvisation.

The book is clearly not aimed at newcomers to jazz, but it will no doubt be extremely useful for intermediate and advanced students and professionals alike. Greenblatt's

introduction helps to explain the title, but more importantly raises the issue of how musicians have historically learned musical theory in the Western world, which is often to learn the major keys first (usually the easiest of these initially) because they appear easier to understand, and then learn about the minor keys by relating to the relative major in each case. This often results in over familiarity with the workings of the major, particularly those major keys with the fewest sharps and flats, and consequently there's a lack of time spent on understanding the more complex minor, with its three accompanying scales for each minor key.

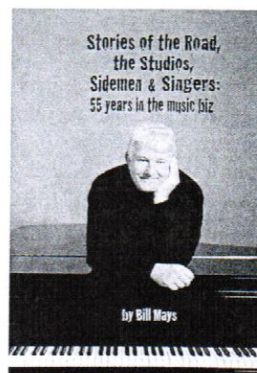
Summing up, this is a very well written, extremely useful, and thought provoking book that deserves investigation by musicians whether they are jazz orientated or not, because the author contextualises his thoughts and refers to the worlds of western classical and non-western music, which after all are the places of origin of the keys and scales which the book discusses.

Dave Jones

STORIES OF THE ROAD

The Studios, Sidemen And Singers: 55 Years In The Music Biz, by Bill Mays. No Blooze Music, sb, 172pp, 46 photos, \$30 including post & packing.

To survive the travails of the music business over a long career demands a well developed and enduring sense of humour. Pianist Bill Mays (featured in JJ September 2010) has laughed his way through 55 years, even in the face of adversity, and along the way has collected a rich stock of hilarious anecdotes. He's able to see the funny side even when he happens to be on the receiving end.



As the title suggests, Bill's stories emanate from the studios, road tours, club and concert work and a host of unscripted, surprising situations. In an amusing chapter on booze and drugs and their impact, he leads off with the following exchange between a fan and Zoot Sims: Fan: "How do you play so great, drunk?" Zoot: "I practice drunk." Fan: "Who'd you study with?" Zoot: "Johnnie Walker!"

Like many a jazz pianist, Bill has had his problems with club pianos, but the problem with the instrument at Los Angeles' Sportsman's Club was decidedly unusual and extreme. Playing his set opener, Bill was puzzled that in the lower range of the piano the keys were sluggish, became stuck, and none would come back up. When he opened the lid he found that covering about two octaves of piano strings was a huge, overturned plate of spaghetti with meatballs and red sauce. "It looked like it had been there for weeks."

Record producer Albert Marx was renowned for his tight-fisted way with money. Drummer Shelly Manne summed him up neatly: "The missing Marx Brother - Cheap-o!" People talking during performances are the bane of musicians' lives. Bill grew tired of hearing a couple chattering throughout his set at a Houston club. Eventually he delivered this caution: "If you're talking... louder than I'm playing... then you're talking... too... fucking... loud!" That did get their attention...

Amid all the fun and frolic, Bill has some serious points to make, not least about the lack of musician credits on most movies. Composers get billed, but what about the players who contribute so much to the best soundtracks? As Mays says, it is a situation that needs to be rectified - even at the expense of making even longer "credit crawls".

Bill Mays has worked with an incredible 164 singers including Sinatra, Vaughan, Tormé, Fitzgerald, Christie and O'Day. He shared a stage with Tony Bennett only once, and recalls that Tony once performed a tune associated with Al Hibbler. After the ovation, Bennett shouted: "Al Hibbler, Al Hibbler!" But local papers reported next day that the singer, with right arm outstretched, had yelled, "Heil Hitler, Heil Hitler!"

There is plenty more to keep readers chuckling in this witty collection, but, importantly, all net proceeds from the book will go to the Musicians' Assistance Program of the American Federation of Musicians, a most worthy cause. Copies of the volume can be obtained direct, at the above price, from Bill Mays, 142 Birch Drive, Shohola, PA 18458, USA, or visit Bill's website, bill-mays.net and click on "Discography" to find the book title and PayPal button.

Mark Gardner

BASS WORLD

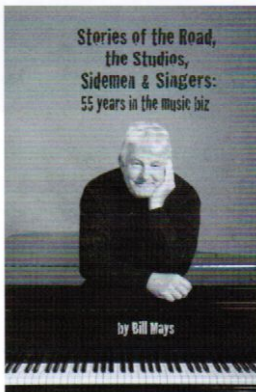
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Stories of the Road: 55 Years in the Music Biz

By Bill Mays

www.billmays.net



Finally! A book about the wonderful (and occasionally incredible) road stories of a working musician. Many of us have wanted something like this for years. Bill Mays has a fantastic 55 years plus in the music business and he takes us along with him on a most interesting journey.

The tales he tells of travel to and from many faraway places are humorous, a little scary or both. Air travel has become so difficult that Bill, like many professional musicians, will drive 500 miles rather than take a flight that could become delayed or cancelled. As we all know, air travel for bassists and cellists has a real problem. Far too often the bass player is told he cannot take his bass on the flight, or a cellist is forced to pay full fare for a seat for their

instrument (and no free drinks!) Bill's tales on this topic are not reassuring!

"The Singers" chapter lets us in on Bill's time with some notable talents. He was Sarah Vaughan's musical director and pianist for a good while. On a live recording she introduces him as "Willie" Mays!) Bill also worked with Frank Sinatra, Andy Williams, Barry Manilow and Ann Hampton Callaway, to name only a few.

Bill Mays has worked with more bassists than any pianist on the planet, from Red Mitchell, Ray Brown, Rufus Reid, Ray Drummond, John Clayton, Richard Davis, Bill Crow, John Goldsby to the many young bassists who get to work with him at the ISB Conventions. Let me recommend, in particular, *Two of a Mind* with Red Mitchell and *The Ellington Affair* with John John Goldsby, two of this reviewer's favorites.

Bill has spent a good deal of time in the studios and on some major film projects, including *Superman*, *Godfather II*, *Julia & Julia*, *Analyze This*, *Sleepless in Seattle* and many more.

Bill has played and recorded with more jazz giants than can be listed here. Just a few worth mentioning include Gerry Mulligan, Bud Shank, Phil Woods, Ron Carter, Benny Golson, Shelly Manne, Art Pepper, Sonny Stitt, Marv Stamm and Bob Brookmeyer.

Bill's credits include much more than "pianist." He is a noted composer, lyricist, arranger and vocalist. Perhaps the finest tribute to Bill is paid every two years by those who attend the ISB's conventions. It is here that Bill is in his element, surrounded by bassists, young and old, all who have come to enjoy the extraordinary keyboard artistry of a true jazz master over the two decades he has served as the convention's house pianist.

Highly recommended reading! You can get your copy by ordering it from his website, and best of all net proceeds from sales go to the Musicians Assistance Program of the American Federation of Musicians. Thank you, Bill, for another outstanding work of art!

— Review by Paul Pearce

BOOK REVIEW: STORIES OF THE ROAD, THE STUDIOS, SIDEMEN & SINGERS: 55 Years in the Music Biz

By Joe Lang

It is not unusual to find jazz musicians who are chock full of interesting, and often humorous stories about their experiences. Naturally some are more articulate than others, and we are really fortunate when one of those cats takes the time to put those remembrances on the printed page. Bill Mays is among the most creative, intelligent and versatile of jazz piano players. He is as dexterous with words as he is with notes as you will find if you get yourself a copy of *Stories of the Road, the Studios, Sidemen & Singers: 55 Years in the Music Biz*.

This is not a biographical work, although after reading it the reader has a pretty clear idea of the chronology of his career. He is primarily concerned with giving an understanding of what life as a jazz musician involves, and doing so in a way that is highly entertaining while being deeply informative.

Mays has various aspects to his career in music. He's primarily a jazz pianist, working as a leader, sideman and accompanist for vocalists. He is also a fine composer and arranger of jazz, music for films, and occasional works that form a bridge from jazz to classical music.

As a format, Mays has chosen to group his stories around subjects like "The Road," "Airports & Planes," "Booze 'n Drugs," "Pianos," "Apartment Living," "The Arranger's Corner," "You Can't Make This Stuff Up Dept.," "Family Matters," and "Pet Peeves... Or: Channeling Andy Rooney." There are 26 chapters varying in length from one to fourteen pages.

Within the chapters there are memorable portraits of individuals like Jimmy Rowles, Red Mitchell, Sarah Vaughan, Bud Shank, Gerry Mulligan, and many, many more. Here is a sample of the Rowles sense of humor when speaking of bassist George Mraz:

Mraz, originally from Czechoslovakia, worked a lot with Rowles, who nicknamed him "Bounce." I asked Jimmy why the nickname, and he drawled, "Because he's a baaad Czech."

The book is replete with neat little gems like that, making the reader keep turning pages and grinning. In addition to the appealing humor, Mays also provides insight to many of the subtleties of the jazz life that would escape a casual observer. This is one of those books that is hard to put down once you start reading. The pages fly by as you carom from one delicious tidbit to another. By the time you finish you will find yourself impressed by Bill Mays the man and musician, consistently entertained, and much more aware and understanding of the full life of a jazz musician.