

The Sound. A film about Stan Getz.



Stan Getz — High Priest at the temple of Cool

Stan Getz. The jazz great. And for many years he was indeed *the* high priest of the jazz saxophone. Of course John Coltrane, Charlie Parker, Coleman Hawkins, Lester Young, Paul Desmond, Wayne Shorter — and others — have their own claims to the priesthood. But Stan Getz is something else again.

At the age of 20 he shot to the top of the jazz world like a meteor with just one 8-bar solo on a Woody Herman tune, ‘Early Autumn’ — that was in 1948. Then, starting in 1950 he won just about every jazz magazine poll there was for the next decade — he won the *Down Beat* readers’ poll 10 years in a row, the *Metronome* poll 11 years in a row (famous jazz critic for the *New Yorker*, Whitney Balliett, pointed out he would still be winning if the magazine had stayed in business — he called him the “poll winners’ poll winner”) — all this when jazz magazines held considerable sway.

So. *Down Beat*’s readers thought Getz was a better saxophonist than Coleman Hawkins, John Coltrane, Dexter Gordon, Zoot Sims, Lester Young, Ben Webster, and anybody else who played tenor sax. And all that for 10 years straight.

He was a force.

And then with *Jazz Samba* and *Getz/Gilberto* and “The Girl from Ipanema,” he became a million seller.

But popularity in jazz is a two-edged sword. You couldn’t possibly be good if you were too popular. Critics who had loved his playing now found fault, accused him of being too slick, an imitator, an adaptor, a follower — or worse: not deep.

Here’s Whitney Balliett in *The New Yorker* again — “Like many other white musicians, he shows the strain of trying to keep up with the Joneses when he plays. . . . The exterior is flawless, but the guts are missing.”

Yet 30 years after Balliett wrote that, his opinion had changed — writing for *The New Yorker* again in a two-page hymn of praise that began, “What a monstrous angel the tenor saxophonist Stan Getz was!” Balliett produced a portrait of a complete and serious artist, with plenty of personal flaws and troubles, but who could play like the dickens — or rather, as Balliett put it:

‘He could play rings around God.’

So what happened — ? And what can a film made about the man do to bring the rest of the world around to Balliett’s opinion — ? Not to mention, tell a whole generation of people who have never heard of Stan Getz just who he is and why he’s important.



The Arc of the Story –

The facts of Getz's greatness — and of his sorrows — will be at the center of the film. But we will also take on the mystery of why one hears about Coltrane and Miles and not so much about Getz. Is it the popularity problem, and reaction to it — ? Perceived triviality, compared to the real thing? Is it that he was white, and therefore somehow didn't have the cred, in some kind of reverse racism à la early Balliett, unconscious or otherwise? (We'll be careful about that!) And at the heart of the mystery of his diminishing fame is this: the playing was some of the best anyone was going to hear anywhere.

The film will dive into all of it head-on. The 130 albums, the Grammys, the adulation, the drama, the heartache, the passion, the trouble, the hurt — and the playing. Above all, we want to give the sense that there is this amazing music and it came out of a guy who was both a nightmare and an angel. And there is this incredible part of musical history that you either know nothing about or might think you know, but you don't — and through the film you discover it — and it is extraordinary.

And when you do, that discovery lights the thing up, buoys you along, and you participate and feel a part of it. And the thing must give you time to be awestruck, moments that a movie stuck in the weeds can never give and that we can't miss.

The Film –

It will be all about Stan Getz, from his beginnings, through all the ups and downs, to the end — and the fact and meaning of his legacy. And we won't sugar-coat his flaws and endless woes — his struggles with addiction, his legal, personal, and family troubles, his physical abusiveness, his massive ego. There were a lot of parts to Stan Getz — as Zoot Sims said, "He's a nice bunch of guys." And we will visit all of them.

The personal story, the family story, is so dramatic and sad and wonderful and such an intrinsic part of who he was that it must play a prominent part. So we will talk to all his surviving children and his second wife, Monica — who is very much alive and kicking — and the grown-up children, Beverly and David, from his first marriage, and Nick and Pamela, from the second.

And his violence toward his family has to be dealt with and not excused. (A recent film about Miles leaves out some of the worst stuff and seems to say that in the end, he was an artist and it was ok — we have to be better — and clearer — than that.)

But of course, there were good times and we need to hear about those and how he was absolutely wonderful — when he was.

And then there will be the people who can tell us about the music — the ones who knew him and played with him like Kenny Barron, who Getz called "the other half of my musical heart" — and the others who loved him — some will be famous, like Bill Clinton, Kenny G., George Clooney, Herb Alpert — others, not. And of course if someone has difficult or critical things to say — and they will — they won't be brushed aside. We want to get the whole picture.

Their voices, their story. Compelling throughout, never dull, never shy.

More, on the unexpected –

And there will be surprising stuff — things like this, from John Coltrane, when asked about Getz's playing:

'Let's face it – we'd all sound like that if we could.'

Or from Miles Davis, who didn't like anybody's playing much:

'I like Stan, because he has so much patience, the way he plays those melodies – other people can't get nothing out of a song, but he can. Which takes a lot of imagination, that he has, that so many other people don't have.'

In a blindfold test with Leonard Feather for *Down Beat* in 1964, Miles panned all the records Feather played him except Getz/Gilberto — he gave that 5 stars. (He hated the ones by the other guys — called them sad shit.)



The Takeaway –

Terribly flawed and terribly great. A complicated fellow. And if some jazz critics were in reaction to his popularity for a while, that has changed in a massive way. He is and was an acknowledged master — not just a star, but an immortal. That was Stan Getz.

And yet, somehow, he has all but disappeared from big parts of the public consciousness.

We gotta bring him back.

'The Sound' and Stan Getz –

Following up on John Coltrane talking about what Getz sounded like, we have Stan's nickname, "The Sound."

That's what they called Stan Getz. Really more than a nickname, it became a way to talk about him and what made him special: the Stan Getz sound that filled a room and was all his own.

Nicknames are for people who know you. "The Sound" was what everyone called him.

So that's what we'll call the documentary about him:

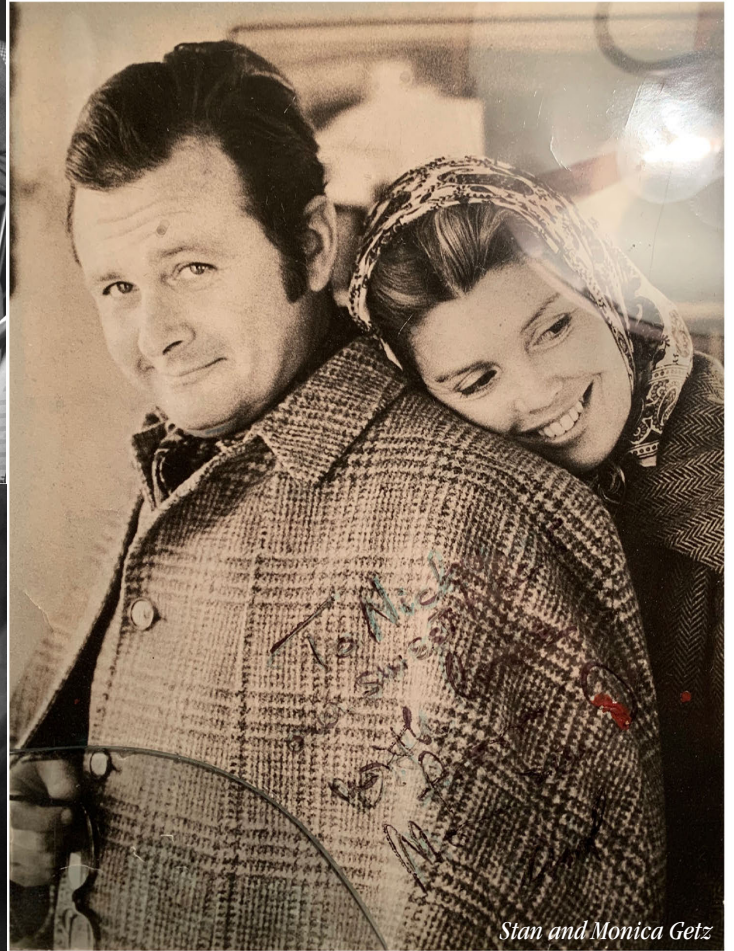
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With Miles Davis



Stan and Monica Getz



With son, Steve Getz



With Benny Goodman