

Passing Glances Roy Haynes

One of the lights has gone out of the world. Roy Haynes has passed at 99 years old. One of my first inspirations and heroes, I was lucky to see him live a few times and even interact with him for a few precious moments. At once modern and timeless, he was an artist that could have existed during Sumerian times or been at the heart of NYC 2050...you could never 'put your finger' on what he was doing, but the joy and intricacy he brought to all of music told you immediately you were listening to an innate master.

Here is a piece I wrote many years ago published in an obscure Jazz monthly. I was informed by the editor, who rubbed elbows with Roy at a trade show, that Mr. Haynes loved the article and took a dozen copies with him(!) It came out of my deep love and respect for the man, and after searching for it an hour, am happy to share. The photo is used with permission from the Pat LaBarbera personal archives for my Elvin Jones coffeetable book in progress. L-R is Roy, Pat LaBarbera, Elvin Jones (circa early 1980's). R.I.P
dearest Roy!!! Haynes!!!!

ROY HAYNES - ANY ERA BY JAMES BENNINGTON

In 1996 when I was living in Houston, Texas, a friend calls me up and asks what I'm doing the next day. I say nothing and would he like to get together for lunch? Instead, he asks if I'd be interested in picking Roy Haynes up from the airport! Roy was coming in as the headliner for the Houston Jazz Festival and we were warned beforehand that he may be hard to deal with and to "watch out", so we were a little nervous. The day looked as though it would get off to a bad start as we had been given incorrect flight information and arrived late.

I saw Mr. Haynes sitting calmly by himself in the terminal and approached him with caution...immediately, I found that Roy was a kind and gracious person with a quick and, at times, cutting wit. At 71 he wore a very stylish casual outfit of khaki slacks, slip on dress shoes, and a striped sleeveless shirt. His head was shaved save for a "soul patch" in the back. As we assembled the group and got under way, I could see that Roy had more energy than the younger musicians he had with him, as well as a better attitude. Obviously, the rest of the band (except for pianist Dave Kikoski) was more excited about their next tour stop in New Orleans, treating Houston as a necessary evil. Roy, who's been doing this for 50 + years, was plainly excited not only about the night before them, but the sound check as well!

First, we went to their hotel and Roy goes to the bar while the band and the tour manager secure the lodgings. It turned out that the hotel had only reserved regular rooms for the band. While Roy sits at the bar (fully aware of what is

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going on), the tour manager tells the staff that Mr. Haynes must have a suite. He explains to them who he is, who he has played with, how many times he has played at the White House, etc. It's not until he mentions Miles Davis and Charlie Parker that the staff recognize a "name" -- one complimentary suite for Roy Haynes coming up (after much haggling and convincing)! Roy graciously asked my friend and I to join him and promptly offered to buy us a drink. I refused and bought Roy a Bacardi and soda and the three of us hung out while the rest of the group freshened up from their journey. An attractive waitress less than half his age focused her attention on Roy and flirted with him; she had no idea how old he was! Hell, I can't wear a sleeveless shirt and get away with it!

Once everyone was ready, we departed for the sound check. On the way, Roy talked to us about the old days (in the South especially) and the poor conditions for blacks then. How the band had to disinfect the beds and bathrooms, get their food from the backdoors of restaurants, etc. For a moment, we realized that Mr. Haynes has been around a long time. That feeling quickly disappeared though as we watched him rehearse his band; we watched and learned from a true master. How fresh his approach was! One thing I'll never forget is during one of the tunes in their set, a four-four swing tune, Roy did his famous triplet beat- the right hand playing the first two notes on the snare, the third on the bass drum with the left hand lightly muting the snare head. He did this rhythm for several choruses and took the music to another plane! Roy really went for it during the rehearsal; the show that night was more polished. That evening, when he was introduced he literally jumped from behind his kit exclaiming to the audience "I'm one of the last of the swing era musicians!"

As I recall, it was the fourth of July weekend and seeing Roy perform along with the colorful fireworks in the night sky was just beautiful...Though tired from the many events and the hecticism of the day, we watched from the wings that evening with a few smiles aimed at us from Roy himself, and we knew that being around and witnessing the timeless and uncanny magic of this man was a privilege in any era! Thank You Thank You Roy Haynes!

Post Script

I caught the perennial Roy Haynes several years later at the Jazz Alley in Seattle, and aside from watching him up close (by the high-hat), the night was especially memorable because after his set, I remember Roy sat alone at the bar eating oysters on the half shell and drinking beer. It was pleasantly surprising to see such a legend just sitting there along with everybody else. Only a few folks approached him, so I went up and reminded him of our meeting some years ago (I also got his autograph on *We Three*, one of my favorite records)... while we were talking, the bartender said he thought it was great that Roy was hanging out at the bar after his set and Roy looked surprised and asked what the other artists did. The bartender told him that most of them went back to the dressing room. Roy heard that and said, "Ah man, that's outta style!"