

Sunday, February 24, 2008

Where's the sleight-of-hand man's third hand?

Â This 2005 video shows how McCoy Tyner plays as if he had a third hand, including at the 6:45 through 7:40 minute mark. Â My inextricably intertwined connection to jazz and criminal defense practice is explained here. My related deepening fascination with John Coltrane and his music are covered here. Coltrane is such a big influence on me that he has been on my cellphone ringtones for several months, with A Love Supreme having been on there for the last several weeks. Â With that backdrop, yesterday my wife, son and IÂ stopped by a downtown D.C. hotel to check out its award-winning restaurant we want to visit soon. As my boy rode up and down the hotel's elevator and ran in and out of the building, a distinguished-looking man was standing outside talking to one of the staff. Later, my son and I passed him in the lobby, and I asked where he was visiting from. He said he is from New York and is a musician. He was beginning to look familiar, and I asked his name: "McCoy Tyner". To have that happen to me is like having a rock fan bump into Bono or Sting when no other fans are in sight. Â I was overcome with joy and emotion; this is no exaggeration. I have met several jazz greats -- usually in brief passing, aside from my two lengthyÂ meetingsÂ in 1999 with Cecil TaylorÂ (back at his hotel post-concert, along with our closeÂ mutual friend Trudy Morse and numerous others) and 2001 (more briefly, at Trudy's birthday celebration)Â -- but never have felt so overwhelmed in the presence of artistic genius. I suppose my reaction was a mix of McCoy being a true giant whose music nearly wore down my stereo turntableÂ needle (from the days before digital music), his amazing work for several years with John Coltrane (they're both on my cellphone ringer with A Love Supreme), and my deeper-than-ever appreciation of jazz musicians of his ability and sharing. Â Since the late 1970s, I would frequently play McCoy's amazing music while studying from junior high school through college. I was almost convinced that he had a third hand, because I could not believe that a mere ten fingers could accomplish his keyboard range and coverage. I first saw him perform in 1978 at Carnegie Hall during the Newport Jazz Festival, but saw no glimpse of a third hand. In 1985, I saw McCoy perform again at the Village Vanguard, delivering another great performance, but still with no third hand visible. Â At first yesterdayÂ I did not recognize McCoy; he shaved the thin mustache that graces his homepage. He is the real McCoy, of course. When I shook his hand, I saw those long fingers that could play four octaves seemingly without moving his palms. He seemed to take my emotional reaction in elegant stride, and mentioned enjoying seeing me interact with my son, who was stillÂ running everywhere. He agreed to take two cell pictures; the first one was overexposed and the second underexposed. I resisted the urge to ask for his autograph, lest my tribute to the man be spoiled by a focus on his celebrity. I also refrained from asking to see his third hand, but the third hand is still on my mind. Jon Katz.Â ADDENDUM: Here are some more McCoy Tyner links to check out: Â - A review of his 2007 CD McCoy Tyner Quartet, which I bought the night I met McCoy, and which I recommend. - A biography and interview from the Jazz Resource Center.- McCoy's biography on his official website. - McCoy was in town to play at the Kennedy Center on February 24. - Here is "Latino Suite", which was recorded for sale in 1986. - Here is a YouTube-posted interview of McCoy, probably from 2007. - Here, McCoy talks of living and music being the same thing; about being one with his instrument; about music being a "journey of the soul into new, uncharted territory;" He sounds like a t'ai chi musician.Â

Posted by Jon Katz in Persuasion at 19:00