

Perfect Sound Forever

online music magazine presents...

Robert Quine



Letter from Andy Schwartz- June 8, 2004

By now you may have heard the sad news: Over Memorial Day weekend, Robert Quine died at age 61, reportedly of an intentional heroin overdose. He was preceded in death by his wife Alice Sherman, who suffered a sudden fatal heart attack in August 2003. Friends say that her loss sent Bob into a deep depression from which he never emerged.

Because Bob Quine was one of the most original and innovative electric guitar players of the past 30 years, I knew about him long before I ever had an extended conversation with him. I never met his wife, never visited their Grand Street apartment, never even shared a meal or listened to records with him. We had just begun to get acquainted in the three years prior to Alice's death, but the combination of his playing and his personality left a deep, indelible impression on me. I'm going to miss those infrequent but prolonged phone conversations marked by Quine's acerbic humor, passionate enthusiams, withering critiques, even his wry, Akron-bred tone of voice.

Bob was eight years my senior and had been thunderstruck by rock & roll in 1955 at age 12. Consequently, he had seen a

lot of amazing music ranging from Buddy Holly at a civic auditorium in Ohio (where Holly was the only white act on the bill) to the Allman Brothers Band in a college dorm lounge in St. Louis. Once, when I worked at Sony Music in the late Nineties, I sent him the Sony Legacy box set *The Complete Miles Davis Quintet - Live at the Plugged Nickel - 1965*. Bob called to thank me--and casually mentioned that he'd been in the audience for two nights of Miles' run. He followed the Velvet Underground so devotedly that, in 2001, Polygram/Universal issued a three-CD compilation of live VU performances recorded by Bob in 1969 (*Bootleg Series Volume 1: The Quine Tapes*).

It was my privilege to see him play with three different live groups: Richard Hell & the Voidoids, the Lou Reed band (with bassist Fernando Saunders and drummer Fred Maher), and the short-lived Deadline (with bassist Bill Laswell and the late drummer Philip Wilson). I remember one middle-period Voidoids set at C.B.G.B. where I thought the walls would cave in from the combined playing of Quine and Ivan Julian. They were putting out so much music that night, at such a ferocious level of engagement, that it didn't seem possible for the building to contain it all.

Although Bob himself didn't own a computer and had never used email, Steve Caratzas has created an [excellent Quine website](#) including a career discography. Bob did multiple recordings with Richard Hell, Lou Reed, Matthew Sweet, Lloyd Cole, and John Zorn. Other Quine credits include Tom Waits (*Rain Dogs*), Marianne Faithfull (*Strange Weather*), and Andre Williams (*Bait and Switch*).

In a [lengthy 1997 interview](#) with Jason Gross of Perfect Sound Forever, Bob states that he made "two weeks of tapes" with Brian Eno in 1980, none of which have ever been released; and that Richard Hell's Blank Generation album was recorded twice in its entirety, with the first version (from the spring of '77) still in the can. One of my personal favorites is Hell's *Destiny Street* (1982), on which album producer Alan Betrock cut Quine loose to lay down "backwards guitar, feedback guitar, speeded-up guitar...I got that out of my system for once and for all."

Other Bob Quine quotes from the PSF interview:

"There have been good and bad years in rock but the best years were '55 to early '61."

"A turning point for me was in 1966 when I was in San Francisco. I saw John Coltrane with Alice Coltrane, Pharoah Sanders, Rashied Ali. I'm trying to analyze this stuff and figure it out. I'm in the front row and all of a sudden, these two horns are right in my face. I said 'yes, I understand this.'"

"'He Loved Him Madly' [from *Get Up With It*, 1972] is like my favorite Miles Davis track of all time...[E]motionally, when the smoke has cleared, that will be regarded as one of his most profound statements. You could listen to it when you're depressed, when you're having sex or whatever."

"I play with singers/songwriters and one thing that's crucial is that I listen to the lyrics. Like with Lou Reed's 'Waves of Fear'--if it had been about making an egg cream, my solo would be different than a guy having a nervous breakdown."

"I'm in situation where I've accomplished something. Half the time, I can't believe that people care about me."

Well, we did care. And although he'd probably be embarrassed to hear it, I'll say it anyway: Thank you, Bob Quine.

See the rest of the [Quine tribute](#)

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