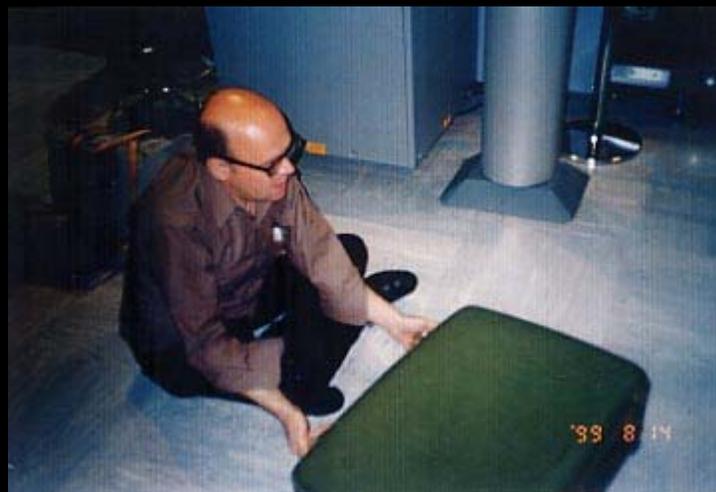


Perfect Sound Forever

online music magazine presents...

Robert Quine



Quine complying with airport security, 1999

by Robert Christgau

To me the most striking thing that Robert Quine has done in two decades is to die. I liked him tremendously and, as an uxorious man, think the story of his last year unspeakably tragic. We got to know each other in the wake of Lester Bangs's death, always as mutually respectful casual acquaintances. I ran into him on the street every few years, although it occurs to me that the last time I saw him something in me held back and I didn't greet him; I don't know whether he saw me, but his body language must have told me not to approach. So the last time I spoke to him was in the Village two or three years ago, I think his wife was with him, and he told me nobody wanted to play with him anymore. I said I'd spread the word to the few musicians I know, and I did, but nothing came of it. When I first heard of his death I wondered whether he'd even get an obituary anywhere. Yet here two days later is a big one with a photo in the Times, and the next day someone on Fresh Air is playing "Waves of Fear" and telling listeners what DVD's they can buy to see him in action. I think Quine would have been astonished by this response, and sardonic about it. But it's clear that those who were touched by him were touched deeply. I would say that his tiny body of work makes him one of the great rock guitarists, kind of like Pete Cosey's work with Miles, and that many many people know that. Moreover, quite a few of them are intelligent and articulate people with media connections. So he won't pass unnoticed. Good.

The other thing I would mention is that Quine, while a very decent man, was also a very dour one--more dour than I think

the state of music or the world ever fully justified. He was bitter with me about both Richard Hell and Lou Reed. And indeed, these were and are difficult and egotistical men, as artists with something to say tend to be. To make your mark as a sideman, which was clearly Quine's appointed role, you have to be able to shrug off the temperament and selfishness of those whose role is to be leaders. Quine couldn't do this. On one level you say, Good for him, he was better than them anyway. But on another level it's also temperament, and an important part of why he left this world the way he did. Now the way is open for him to become a legend. Oddly enough, he may just make it.

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