

Perfect Sound Forever

online music magazine presents...

Robert Quine



One of the Quine's early groups (circa high school) with RQ sporting a mustache

by **Procter Lippincott**

I first met Bob Quine in 1961 at Earlham, a 1,200-student Quaker liberal arts college in Richmond, Indiana where we both went. After identifying our mutual passion for discovering great, often obscure recordings, we spent endless hours listening to records, ranging from old rockabilly and r&b singles to jazz LPs.

We never listened to whole tracks together – in fact, on most occasions, as I recall, we listened only to that particular instant on any track that we felt made it great, even breathtaking, in its impact.

It might have been in "A Thing of the Past," for instance, where Shirley of the Shirelles' voice cracked on the first word of the phrase, "Thi-i-s-s is the moment to decide" [my choice], a syncopated line on "Waltz for Debby" (Bill Evans' Live at the Village Vanguard) [his], or the pregnant pause right after the head in "Power to Love" on Jimi Hendrix's wildly uneven Band of Gypsys album, before Jimi cranks up the volume to take another unearthly solo [mutually appreciated]. Quine typically was not as accepting of my choices as I was of his, but we kept at it endlessly, searching for our secular epiphany.

Surprises were important. One I remember was Lonnie Mack's version of Chuck Berry's "Memphis," heard for the first

time on a little portable radio in the middle of the night when we were both on foreign study in Spain in 1963. Not having a record player over there was tough (hard to pin down the surprises), but it didn't stop us from buying a few records. Most stores had listening booths, so in fact we were able to make pretty good choices, a couple of Gerry Mulligan LPs among them. I got one Mulligan album with Johnny Hodges; I think his was with Lester Young. Over time, incidentally, he bought every Pres record he could get his hands on, even the bad ones.

Later, back in the U.S., after Bob got his law degree from Washington University in St. Louis, we both ended up in New York, drawn to the music scene. At some point, I found Quine a studio apartment in my building across from the Brooklyn Botanic Gardens, and we sort of resumed sharing our musical obsessions where we'd left off. The place wasn't much -- I remember a single mattress on the floor and a well-attended TV -- but there was time for record listening and a lot of woodshedding.

Thinking about it now, our mutual passion for the great finite musical moments also characterized my most unforgettable playing experience with Quine. One night he, Jody Harris and I were messing around, all playing guitars with the tape running. Later, judging from numerous listenings, it seemed we had serendipitously created a perfect moment, a blend of inputs during which I apparently stumbled onto some chord change that redirected our improvisations, and thrilled Quine. He called me in to listen to it the next time I came over, and it thrilled me, too. I think he had the only copy; I have no idea what's become of it but I can still kinda hear it in my mind.

At one point, I introduced him to my friend Andy Martin's band, although no one quite remembers whether it was then called Thunderduck or Spaces, and Bob ended up playing with the group for 3-4 months. What Andy remembers today is that Quine would easily start an amazing solo on command but that, as Quine himself admitted going in, he didn't know when to stop, how to get out of a solo and back to the head of the tune. To compensate, and to facilitate a more seamless presentation, an elaborate signaling method was developed between them.

I believe it was a bit later, after Quine had moved to St. Marks Place in the East Village, that he managed to get a few lessons with guitarist Jimmy Raney, one of his heroes. Raney may have been a bit past his prime by then but Quine was deeply gratified by these sessions. Better known is how much he also revered the work of Lou Reed and the Velvet Underground, so getting to play and record with Lou on the heels of the visibility Bob achieved with Richard Hell and the Voidoids, difficult though these associations inevitably were at times, was also a thrill.

Creem reporter and bookwriter Lester Bangs was another important associate who, in his aspiration to make a dent as a vocalist, got Quine's musical assistance as Lester screamed his way through numerous sets on the stage at CBGBs.

Quine was also a very giving guy, passing along everything from a fabulous little tube amp with a broken switch (which, to my dismay the repairman threw out because he couldn't find the right replacement) to numerous discs with his name written on them, including Ray Charles and Milt Jackson playing together (the excellent Soul Meeting, on Atlantic, one of two discs they made together).

I no longer remember how Bob met Alice Sherman, the woman who would become his wife, but as a colleague of mine at

Scholastic Books, she clearly demonstrated that extraordinary loyalty to, and protectiveness of him. I know he depended on her moral support. Undoubtedly, Alice's importance to Bob and the shock of her loss last August took a heavy, perhaps decisive toll.

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