

# MARCEL FLEISS : MY JAZZ YEARS

## PARIS - NEW YORK / 1951-1954

Before he started Gallery 1900-2000 with his son David, Marcel Fleiss spent time with some of the leading jazzmen of the 50s.

As a privileged witness of the New York and Paris scenes, in the years 1951 to 1954, he took a large number of photographs, many of which were published in *Jazz Hot* and other jazz magazines and books.

32 of these photographs have been selected by Marcel Fleiss.

“ I was lucky enough to live in New York in the early 50's, the New York of Jazz. My parents had found a room for me in the house of some friends', so that I could learn English at the same time as the family fur trade. So I had the chance to discover the jazz clubs of the time, and to photograph musicians such as Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, Erroll Garner, Billy Taylor, John Lewis, Lester Young, Ella Fitzgerald, Lee Konitz, Stan Getz, Milt Jackson, Art Blakey, Nat King Cole and Sarah Vaughan.

At the time of my first stay I was only 17. Since Birdland served alcohol, I was at first refused entry. I promised the boss, Oscar Goodstein, not to make any trouble and to drink only Coca-Cola, and then he agreed to let me in.

My passion for jazz had started in Paris. I had often been to the Tabou and at the Club Saint-Germain (the "rue des Lombards" jazz scene did not yet exist).

### THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME

In New York, I was overwhelmed. I was able to observe (and photograph) the post-war jazz revolution, to know legendary places, and to attend concerts and extraordinary jam sessions. Seizing the opportunity, I asked for and got permission to take pictures at Birdland and other jazz clubs. There was no real competition. There were some other photographers, but they quickly understood that I wasn't trying to supplant them. I even stood in for the official Birdland photographer when he was off sick.

On Sundays, I would often go to the Apollo, in Harlem. The musicians, as well as most of the audience there were black, unlike in the clubs on 52nd Street, which we were not far away (all these clubs were less than ten minutes away each other). The Apollo had a large stage allowing for big orchestras, while some Downtown clubs just had no stage at all, such as the Down Beat, which mainly had jam sessions (boeufs in French). The best concert I ever went to brought

together Miles Davis, Charlie Parker and Roy Haynes at Birdland; one of the pictures in the exhibition shows this extraordinary evening.

### PHOTOGRAPHY AND JOURNALISM

I had the good luck to know Charles Delaunay - son of Sonia and Robert Delaunay and director of *Jazz Hot*, which is the oldest French jazz magazine still going - and I offered him my pictures. He went further and offered me the column "Les Nouvelles d'Amérique" in his magazine, in which I presented and illustrated the news of jazz in New York. I was not paid. I didn't need the money and I would have been ashamed to be paid for something that made me so happy.

These articles brought some musicians into the spotlight. My article on Charlie Mingus was the first to be published in France on this great double-bass player and composer, and I was one of the first - if not the first - to write about Gigi Gryce, George Wallington and Charlie Smith. Some of my articles were co-signed by a certain Jacques Henry, who was none other than Ny Renaud, Henri Renaud's wife: she wanted to stay anonymous, but now, after nearly sixty years, I can reveal the secret.

### A JAZZ GO-BETWEEN

Intrigued by the interest I showed in them, some jazzmen asked me to try to get them signed up for concerts in Paris. My photographs that appeared in *Jazz Hot* sometimes served as a springboard for their careers in France. They were strongly drawn to Paris, and particularly to Saint-Germain, where the good clubs were. The trouble was that the clubs did not have the means: they could not afford to pay the musicians' travel expenses, and just had to take advantage of their occasional presence in Paris. I tried to help whenever I could but, it must be said that, it would have been very difficult without Henri and Ny Renaud. Henri was playing at the Tabou, as for Ny, she was the brains. I was also very close to the director of Vogue Disks,



© Marcel Fleiss : Lester Young & Jimmy Gourley, Paris, Club Saint-Germain, 1954.

Leon Kaba, and I tried to have him record the musicians while they were in Paris.

Roy Haynes also became a friend. I was able to invite him to record at the Studio Parisien, in the Champs-Élysées, but I gave the tape, without keeping a copy, to someone very close to the musicians - Marcel Romano - who first wanted to sell it to Eddy Barclay and then told me he had lost it. That was my only experience as a music producer!

### THELONIOUS, ZOOT, MILT, SACHA, RENÉ AND THE OTHERS...

Another incredible opportunity: I was one of the few photographers admitted to Thelonious Monk's concert at the Salle Pleyel in 1954. Monk was grumpy and taciturn. I invited him to my parents' apartment with the Renauds, Sacha Distel, Jean-Louis Viale, Jean-Marie Ingrand and some others, to listen to records. At some point, he asks for the loo. A few seconds later, we hear the door slam, and I saw him get into the lift, hiding a bottle of cognac in his duffle coat. A week later, he invited me for dinner in London and apologized.

During my "jazz years", I got particularly close to George Wallington, Ny and Henri Renaud, René Urtreger, Milt Jackson, Benny Powell, Gigi Gryce, Lester Young, Charlie Mingus, John Lewis, Zoot Sims, Roy Haynes, Jay Jay Johnson, Jimmy Gourley. The others, I just photographed.

René Urtreger is still alive, but many French friends are no longer with us - Sacha Distel, Jean-Louis Viale, Jean-Marie Ingrand, Henri Renaud ... I am left with the pictures, the articles, the records and the catchy riffs of "Marcel the Furrer", the piece that Henri Renaud dedicated to me and which was recorded in New York in 1954.

I still have the original manuscript, but it is not for sale! ☺



© Marcel Fleiss : Apollo Theater, Harlem. New York, vers 1952.

## List

1. Apollo Theater, Harlem. New York, c. 1952.
2. Art Blakey. New York, Birdland, early 50's.
3. Bobby Jaspar & Sacha Distel. Paris, 1954.
4. Bud Powell, Miles Davis, Lee Konitz & Art Blakey. New York, Birdland, 1952.
5. Dave Brubeck & Paul Desmond. New York, Birdland, c. 1952.
6. Duke Ellington & Joe Louis. New York, early 50's.
7. Dizzy Gillespie. New York, Birdland, c. 1952.
8. Dizzy Gillespie. New York, Birdland, c. 1952.
9. Ella Fitzgerald & Ray Brown. New York, Birdland, early 50's.
10. Ella Fitzgerald. New York, Birdland, early 50's.
11. Erroll Garner & Art Tatum. New York, Birdland, early 50's.
12. John Lewis. Paris, at M. F., 1954.
13. Jimmy Raney, Charles Mingus, Phil Brown & Stan Getz. New York, Birdland, 1952.
14. Lester Young & Jimmy Gourley. Paris, Club Saint-Germain, 1954.
15. Lester Young, un spectateur & Gene Ramey. New York, Birdland, 1951.
16. Max Roach. New York, studio, c. 1954.
17. Max Roach, Curly Russell & George Wallington. Paris, Birdland, c. 1954.
18. Miles Davis, Roy Haynes & Charlie Parker. New York, Birdland, 1951.
19. Nat King Cole. New York, early 50's.
20. Ny Renaud, Jean-Marie Ingrand, Frank Isola, Thelonious Monk & Sacha Distel. Paris, at M. F., 1954.
21. Percy Heath, Dizzy Gillespie & Joe Carroll. New York, Birdland, c. 1952.
22. Percy Heath & Dizzy Gillespie. New York, Birdland, c. 1952.
23. Ray Brown. New York, Birdland, 1952.
24. Sarah Vaughan, Billie Holiday & Slim Gaillard. New York, Birdland, 1952.
25. Thelonious Monk & René Urtreger. Paris, backstage, Salle Pleyel, 1954.
26. Thelonious Monk. Paris, backstage, Salle Pleyel, 1954.
27. Thelonious Monk. Paris, backstage, Salle Pleyel, 1954.
28. Thelonious Monk. Paris, Salle Pleyel, 1954.
29. Thelonious Monk. Paris, Salle Pleyel, 1954.
30. Thelonious Monk. Paris, Salle Pleyel, 1954.
31. Zoot Sims, Max Roach, Oscar Pettiford, Jay Jay Johnson. New York, Blue Note, 1952.
32. Zoot Sims & Red Rodney. New York, Birdland, 1951.