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*'Tis Autumn: The Search for Jackie Paris (review)*

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Notes, Volume 66, Number 3, March 2010, pp. 649-650 (Review)

Published by Music Library Association

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/not.0.0279>



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promptly leads the band to an early finish before providing the crowd with some comic relief while the technical issue is resolved.

In contrast to the exuberance and humor of Terry's group, Jordan's trio proceeds quietly and casually, whisking through their set while appearing, at times, unrehearsed. Despite the set's aloof tempo, the veteran pianist (also in his mid 60s at the time of the taping) offers some inspired moments of intimate and lyrical playing, especially during the Ellington ballad medley ("Lush Life"/"Solitude"). The trio is most impressive in Jordan's hard bop anthem "Jordu," featuring a funky piano introduction that reminds audiences about Jordan's formidable role in shaping the sound of jazz piano during the 1950s.

Audiophiles and video enthusiasts will not be overly impressed with this digital transfer of the original VHS recording. Although the sound editors have noticeably reconciled the overall balance, EQ, and compression problems of the original live

audio (there is also a 5.1 Dolby Digital option), the DVD unfortunately preserves some of the lines, skips, and jumps of the original VHS video. The bulky VHS video cameras of the 1980s used here—noticeably present throughout the concert—also contribute to create awkward camera angles and a few inconsistent shot series (although there are several revealing close-ups of Terry). While the DVD's production quality is less than stellar, the value of this footage lies in its quasi-documentary aesthetic. Consequently, and as the Naxos-distributed Storyville Films has done with earlier releases (*Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis Live in Copenhagen and Lennie Tristano: The Copenhagen Concert, 1965*), the DVD provides an illuminating snapshot of the Copenhagen's historicizing jazz scene while documenting the late careers of two jazz legends.

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**'Tis Autumn: The Search for Jackie Paris.** DVD. Directed by Raymond DeFelitta. Los Angeles, CA: Outsider Pictures, 2008. 897873002015. \$19.99.

In the documentary film *'Tis Autumn*, writer and director Raymond DeFelitta examines the life of crooner Jackie Paris. Early in his career, Paris was the singer of choice for Charles Mingus, he toured with Charlie Parker, and *Down Beat* voted him best male vocalist in 1953. Yet, Paris never achieved widespread fame, an apparent mystery that DeFelitta sets out to explore, ultimately concluding that, among other factors, Paris hit his creative peak just as what he had to offer was going out of style.

DeFelitta's archival digging has resulted in a film laden with period photographs, stock footage of 1950s New York, a wonderful soundtrack filled with classic Paris numbers, and a variety of interviews with musicians, industry luminaries, and jazz historians including Billy Taylor, James Moody, Ira Gitler, Phil Schaap, and others. The film is also packed with "what ifs," as interviewees speculate on what Paris might have achieved if he had been given the chance. Guided by skillful editing, Paris' talent is unfortunately framed as irrefutable truth, obscuring other important elements

of the singer's life that are glossed at best. In particular Paris' relationship with his son and the singer's role as a music educator are briefly touched upon but largely overlooked in favor of the more easily told story of a singer trying to make it in the music business, a story that DeFelitta pursues perhaps a bit too eagerly.

Though commendable for its transparency, DeFelitta's reflexive approach is somewhat distracting as he narrates throughout the film and makes regular appearances in front of the camera. As a result, Paris often comes across as a passive subject who is analyzed and explained by DeFelitta rather than allowed to really speak for himself. Other shooting and editing techniques are also somewhat puzzling. At various points, for example, actors engage in dramatic readings of period newspaper and magazine articles meant to literally bring to life the scant print coverage of Paris' career. Yet, these scenes contrast sharply with the character of the film and actually disrupt the story's intimacy. More constructive, however, is the filmmaker's

use of 8mm film as B roll for some scenes, a technique evocative of home movies that reflects the poignancy of Paris' saga.

Despite some problems with presentation, *'Tis Autumn's* most important contribution is its record of Paris' last months before his death in 2004. DeFelitta and his crew became quick friends with Paris, as is evident in their on-screen interaction and in the filmmaker's commentary in the DVD's special features. A film like this could not have happened without the close cooperation of Paris and his friends and

family. The special features also include some live video of Paris performing at the Jazz Standard, in addition to extra interview footage and a photo gallery. Aimed at a general audience and jazz aficionados, *'Tis Autumn* might also be useful in classroom discussions of jazz, celebrity, and the inner-workings of the mid-twentieth-century popular music industry.

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**Bob Dylan Never Ending Tour Diaries: Drummer Winston Watson's Incredible Journey.** DVD. Written and directed by Joel Gilbert. Thousand Oaks, CA: Highway 61 Entertainment, 2009. MVDV4855. \$14.95.

Bob Dylan's volatile personality, that ensured a number of totally unexpected turning points throughout his career, has always been a challenge for film directors. A wide range of visual and narrative techniques have been used in trying to portray his life on screen, ranging from documentary to fiction. The novelty of Paul Gilbert's work is his attempt to catch a glimpse of this complex figure through the personal accounts of musicians who toured with the artist, with extensive interviews edited with non-professional footage taken by group members themselves as private keepsake. His first film of this type featured the home movies of 1966 electric performances made by drummer Mickey Jones (originally issued as *Bob Dylan World Tour 1966: The Home Movies*, Highway 61 Entertainment E120783 [2004], DVD, and reissued with bonus material in 2006). Now with this new title devoted to drummer Winston Watson, who appeared on stage with Dylan from 1992 to 1997, the director focuses on another seminal moment in the recent evolution of the singer: the first steps of the so-called "Never Ending Tour," the still uninterrupted series of live shows around the globe he began with his band in 1988.

Following a loose chronological sequence, Watson's account of his years with the singer starts from the films he made with his Video 8 camera, which are the springboard for a large amount of memories, funny anecdotes and personal remarks about his former employer. In this "per-

sonal history" of Dylan's live performances in the mid nineties both the perspective of the fan, as a younger musician coming face to face with one of the most prominent characters in popular music history, and of the session man are organically intertwined to provide a genuine and lively, although sometimes slightly self-indulgent, recollection of his more than 400 shows with the band.

Unfortunately, as this is an unofficial release, the images collected by Watson are without sound, and one of the most tantalizing features of the video is the pseudo-dylanque soundtrack provided by his cover band Highway 61 Revisited, which replaced the original audio for copyright reasons. Clearly a product conceived for hardcore fans and collectors, the *Never Ending Tour Diaries* are also a precious document for popular music scholars and lovers, especially when they focus on the private relationship between the singer and his musicians, or on the organizational structure behind his live performances around the world. The image of Dylan which comes out from Watson's video diaries is a musician still thrilled by his songs and by the opportunity to play them every night in front of his audience, a real jokerman caught up in a sort of symbiotic connection with the people he has charmed and ravished in the last four decades.

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