

INTERVIEW WITH MARVIN STAMM - - APRIL 1995

Born in May, 1939 in Memphis, Tennessee, Marvin Stamm began playing the trumpet in the seventh grade. He joined Stan Kenton the day after getting his degree on the instrument from North Texas State. Marvin has worked with Woody Hermann, the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra, Duke Pearson, and recorded with many jazz greats. Since the early '80's he has traveled the states and abroad, concertizing extensively as a soloist. In 1992 and again in early April, 1994 Marvin was featured as soloist with Dave and trio at Cezanne.

In New York I got very involved with studio work, and that kind of took over my life for a while. Eventually in about 1987, with the synthesizers taking over the studio work, that turned out to be a blessing for me. It's funny, because how does something that changes your life in a negative way impact you positively? It really brought me back to the reason that I started playing music: to play jazz, not to make music for dog food and beer and stuff like that. So since 1987 I've been out working as a journeyman jazz trumpet player, and that's what I do. I'm on the road about six, seven months a year as a soloist. It's been very rewarding to get back into it again, I guess particularly so since I feel like my growth during this period of time has been so pronounced. And I'm very happy with the music I'm getting to play and the people I'm getting to play with. That makes a big difference.

I actually met Dave late in his career. I had become aware of him through Bob Morgan, who has been part of the Houston jazz scene for a long time, and he knew Dave and was a great supporter of Dave and Cezanne. Bob kind of set things up for me to get together with Dave and discuss a date in Cezanne. I believe the first time I actually played there as an artist was in '92. I played with Dave, Carl Lott on drums and David Craig on bass. I had known Carl Lott from early years when I was in school and used to go into Houston to hang out and play. He was and still is a marvelous drummer. We had a great time.

I remember when Dave came to get me. He was such an open and nice person, so in tune with people and seemed to be so in tune with himself that it was nothing to feel that you knew this guy. It was just a joy. The job was great. He was a wonderful, creative player, and yet when you were soloing he was an extremely supportive piano player. He would be really in tune with where you were going and try to be totally aware of everything you were doing at all times. So it was really one of those fun things where all you had to do was put the horn up to your mouth and play. That's it. You didn't have to worry about anything else, which is phenomenal; an absolutely phenomenal feeling.

The club is of course very conducive to playing music, and the people who come there really come there to listen. It's not just a trendy, "in" place to be. It's a place that has a purpose, and I think the people realize what that purpose is, and try and respect that. And that's the kind of environment that Dave wanted to create and pretty much--I feel--insisted upon. I think it was just wonderful.

I think at that time I did just find out, before I went down there, that Dave was sick. I think Bob Morgan had apprised me of how he was at that time making a very successful fight against the disease. He had changed his diet, vitamins ... He was really doing the natural approach, and the disease had pretty much gone into a state of remission, and Dave was feeling really good. So when we played together that weekend everything was really on a good track for him and he was able to really just think about playing, not about the physicality of having to deal with the disease every day. So we just had a ball. Everybody just relaxed and played, and Dave was a perfect host. He really knew how to talk to the people.

It was his home, his living room, and he treated it like that. And the people who came there, regardless of who else happened to be playing there, still came there as much to hear Dave as to hear whoever the guest artist was; which was a rewarding thing to see, because you see the success of what a young guy like Dave had been able to accomplish in the amount of time that he had the opportunity to do so. It was great.

I remember that on the second night he was driving me home and I said, "Boy, I'm really hungry. Let's hit somewhere." So we stopped at a little Mexican restaurant that was still open 'til 2:00--where all the Mexican people went who were out late that night--and just sat around and talked. It was really nice. In the course of the conversation he got to talking about things and how he was feeling, and how good he felt, and he really felt he had a handle on the disease and all.

We didn't keep in touch all the time. Musicians don't write every month or two. It's like when you know you're going to get together then you get in touch, and it's like picking up where you left off. "Oh, you were just over at my house yesterday"; the feeling of just having visited together is retained. It seems to be just the way we are.

When I next talked to Dave we had started to plan our next gig together out several months ahead of time. I usually work these jobs around the time that I've gone to Houston to do a workshop at Bob Morgan's school, at HSPVA. There's a dear friend of mine who was a schoolmate of mine at North Texas who's a lawyer, Bill Habern, who every year sponsors me--pays my fee--to have me come to HSPVA to work with the students for one day. It's a very, very generous thing that he does, and he does it because he really believes in jazz education and music. It's his contribution to the young people. He knew Catney as well.

So we had started planning this rather early and we had decided that we were going to ask Ed Soph to come down. Ed and I had started playing together recently and were trying to do some things together, and Ed had gone down many times and played with Dave at the club. So it was kind of a natural thing, and then we asked David Craig to join us.

This gig was the first weekend of April in '94. I had gone down early to Houston--I was doing some things in the area--and I happened to be there while Milt Hinton was in town. He was in town doing a concert at HSPVA and he also had a photography exhibit at an art museum there. Milt was also playing at Cezanne that weekend with Dave, so I went. It was Sebastian Whittaker and Milt and Dave. Milt was one of the first guys I worked with when I went to New York, so Milt asked me to sit in and play a couple of tunes on one of the sets. It was a ball. It was great, and Dave was feeling very good. Of course David and I talked about, "Well you know, next weekend, and everything's set, and Ed Soph will be in, and all we have to do is get on the bandstand ... "

So that's basically what we did the following week. We worked on Friday and oh, it was just exciting. It was just wonderful. Dave had also talked to me a bit about his eye troubles, where the blood vessels were hemorrhaging some. This had started to happen, and we had not really discussed his health so much beforehand, but when I got down there he started discussing it with me. I guess he wanted me to know what the progress of things was. But he was still totally upbeat about everything, although things had progressed much further at this point. He was still working with the people on some new experimental medicines and so on.

We had a great time that night. It must have taken a lot out of him because when we got to the club on Saturday night, Eddy Hobizol was there. He explained that David had really not been feeling well that day and felt very weak, and he had

sent Eddie in to work for him. I was leaving the next day and I tried to reach David at his home. A lot of times David—regardless—would let his phone machine take the message and he would call back. I told him how much I enjoyed Friday, and how much we missed him last night, that I would be going home, and he had my number; to give me a call when he had a chance. When I got home I called him again a couple days later because I wanted to let him know that I was thinking about him. That was good enough; if he needed to speak to me he would, otherwise I would call him the next time.

Unfortunately I didn't realize how far the AIDS had gone because there wasn't a next time. I mean it was something that we knew at some point was a great possibility, but you never want to face the fact that it can be nearer than you think it is. You just kind of go with the flow. I was not able to fly down for the funeral, but Bob Morgan kept me apprised of everything that was going on, and Bill Habern faxed me all the articles from the newspaper.

It was a great loss, one of many that we've had to face in the last ten years, of marvelous and wonderful people that have gone. The tragedy about Dave was that he was so goddamned young. I don't know anyone that I've spoken with who knew Dave who wasn't touched very deeply by the loss, but even more-so, touched so deeply by his life. Words are meaningless in describing someone like that. He was a real spirit, not only for the music; he really made jazz come alive in Houston, and that was very important because that's a gift that's so everlasting. But along with that, his spirit in fighting all of the adversity of this disease and all the things that he did, and the spirit that he showed--the positive nature right up to the end--was something very special. There are very few people who have that kind of spirit, who can do that. I look in the mirror when I say that and wonder... Do I have that kind of courage? I just don't know, but he sure did, and it was beautiful; a beautiful thing to see.

Dave was such a sweet guy. He was just really a nice person and he was just so into the music. There was such a sincerity there; you couldn't mistake that. There wasn't any BS about any of it. So I think once you recognize that and you see that, you can't help but be impressed by someone's sincerity when it reaches that particular point like Dave's did. I think that's what drew the musicians who are, shall we say, on more of the national or international level to Dave. It was because of the fact that his sincerity was so right out there. There just wasn't any question about it.

Dave had really started to develop his own style. In jazz music today we talk about all these young geniuses, and most of the time in discussing this we're talking about young people who have talent who are at a developmental stage which is still based on a tremendous amount of imitation. It's been that way with everyone. Dizzy copied Roy Eldridge, and Roy Eldridge copied Pops. I copied everybody I could get my ears on. Until you reach a point in time through playing with mentors where you start to develop your own style--it usually starts to happen anywhere between your late twenties and your mid thirties--and then your style continues to evolve through the rest of your life. But that's when you really start speaking with your own voice.

Dave had really started to develop. During the two or three years that I had known him I believe he was really starting to come on. I remember when I first heard him I would hear a lot of influence, anywhere from Bill Evans to the things that McCoy Tyner and guys like that would do. And then I started to hear another side of David the Friday night that I played with him the second time where there was something different, and it was really his starting to develop his own voice. And I think that had David had the opportunity to live a full life time-wise, we would have seen Dave develop into this

marvelous, very personal style player like Tommy Flanagan and Kenny Barron and Hank Jones and people like that who have developed their own style of playing. That takes time, and that's what I saw Dave doing, really developing.

The uniqueness of his playing is, of course, in the hearing. The thing about Dave as a musician that was very unique was not only was he an excellent soloist, he was an excellent accompanist. He was very aware, very sensitive to what you were doing and tried to pick up everything you did--the intensity, the warmth, the softness, when you really wanted to get hot--and he was just right there for you. He was into it. He was just an excellent, excellent player who had all of the natural stuff that you get from years of playing with the right kinds of people, and he was just at that point where he was starting to really soar. He had done his homework. He had listened and played and listened and played and listened and played for years, and he had done a lot of it. He spent a great deal of time in developing his talent and it was really starting to pay off.

We've unfortunately seen a lot of great talents go way too soon who've been in the category of Clifford Brown and Booker Little, even Phineas Newborn, who lived long after he had that nervous breakdown in New York and was never the same. We've seen people's lives cut short like that, and who knows why? You can ask the question, and it's been asked since the beginning of time and I'm sure it will be asked long after you and I are gone, and there will never be a real answer. There just won't be. We just have to live with it, that's all.

If you loved music, particularly if you were a player, you could just go sit down and hang with Dave. There was nothing exclusive about him. He just dug it. He dug everybody. Like most musicians he was just a natural in being what he was. He was one of the cats, as we say. You know it doesn't make any difference whether you're in New York or Los Angeles or whether you're famous or not, as long as you're making your music and developing it doesn't make any difference where you are. The giants are there, and I think Dave would have developed into one of those giants.

The atmosphere at Cezanne was created by Dave, this environment that is so nurturing of the music, and so there's a legacy there when you walk into the room. There are people who still respect this, and Ken Ward is just great for his support of this whole thing. It's fantastic to have someone who cares about the music so much that they're going to really keep this thing alive no matter what. Hopefully we can all contribute to keeping this alive.

One of the things that I remember most of all, just picturing in my mind ... I'm one of these guys who, when the horn is away from my face, I'm completely into what the players I'm with are doing. It's not like I play nothing and then I'm looking at the crowd and ignoring what's going on around me. I'm really into the music that the guys are playing and I just remember this great, great smile on Dave's face. It said everything. He was just beautiful. That's all I can tell you. He was just beautiful.