

**ALBERT BOVER - WALTER NORRIS**  
 FOUR-HANDED CONVERSATION

 t albert bover  
 f manel lladó

**Walter Norris** (Little Rock, 1931) and **Albert Bover** (Barcelona, 1964) dazzled the public of Girona with their four-handed concert in the frame of the Onyar Jazz Festival. The uneasiness of the disciple, though, went beyond that and is translated in this interview that **Albert Bover** gave to JAÇ, in which he reveals the musical ideas of one of the most versatile and personal pianists that the jazz scene has had in the last forty years.



**ALBERT BOVER:** What defines jazz? Is it a *feeling*, a sensation, a style, an air, an attitude, improvised music, music with a certain rhythmic energy, with swing?

**WALTER NORRIS:** Yes, it is a *feeling*, obtained when a ternary *feeling* (12/4 or 6/8) is combined or superimposed with the 2/4, 4/4, 5/4 compasses... This creates an energetic sensation of rhythmic swing. When we improvise, the music emerges from the subconscious to the conscious mind and fits in with the harmonic progressions on which we are improvising. This generates a melodic solo on top or is weaved into the harmony or the structure of the chords.

**A.B:** Your definition of jazz starts off more from the rhythmic energy than the fact of being improvised music. What do you think of free jazz and the so-called European jazz, that doesn't 'swing'?

**W.N:** Free jazz can have physical energy, but if it is only played at random there is no responsibility with respect to what you are playing: You can play free jazz in a



convincing way if you have a contemporary classical music training. The type of improvisation you choose and the energy [swing] you demonstrate with your way of playing comes from the cosmic energy of the universe you have been born in.

**A.B:** Do you think of your way of playing as a style?

**W.N:** I've never looked for a style, I've only ever played every time I've had the chance, day and night, and that is how my style and musical expression has developed. On the basis of doing it for many years, my style has become a reflex of my energetic strength, of my character and of my personality. This style is not the result of a conception, or thinking about it, but has grown organically.

**A.B:** The style develops starting from personal study, but, doesn't it also come from playing with other musicians, especially if they are very good or have great experience?

**W.N:** It's true that style forms if you play with very good musicians, but stylistic growth is much more marked by work and struggle in solitary.

**A.B:** Despite music being a language made from sounds, instead of from words, can we speak of poet musicians and prosaic musicians? Do you look for this poetic or artistic quality in your way of playing?

**W.N:** Some musicians are poetic and expressive, fortunately for the listeners. But I don't look for it, I do my homework and what happens, musically, is the result of the cosmic energy with which I was born, because it forces me to do it as I do. It is my digital fingerprint, my stamp.

**A.B:** You have studied a lot of classical music and you have a lot of experience playing jazz. What do you think are the differences and similarities between jazz and classical music?

**W.N:** Jazz is an emotional music, in which the tuning of the notes is changed [bending] -even the tonality- as is also done with Mediterranean music, but it is also an intellectual music. By intellectual I mean that the musical idea or theme is not only developed but also makes use of this fact to create its own musical form. In classical music, the intonation of the notes never changes. I did this with the song "Hues of blues" on the record for Concord Records, and also with "Blue Lester", on *Love Every Moment*. Jazz musicians, also when they improvise, think and express music with notes slightly more lowered than the composers of classical music. In any case, all music ought to sound as if it were composed and executed from the right side of the brain, the aesthetic, and never from the left: it's true that jazz has no form but, on the other hand, an excess of form inhibits any improvisation. Although I only find a small percentage of the improvisation of jazz interesting, I'm sure that jazz represents an evolutionary development in music.

**A.B:** Who are your jazz or other music musicians and why? What is the extraordinary characteristic you find that moves you?

**W.N:** Everyone should listen to and see *Celebrating Bird: The Triumph of Charlie Parker*, based on the book of the same title

by Larry Giddins. The CD *Now's the Time (Charlie Parker Quartet)* by Verve recorded in 1953 is essential and one of the places where he plays best. I think what impresses me is the quality, greater than life, that he manages to reveal. Where does so much energy come from? I'm sure he was born to play like that.

**A.B:** What do you think gives Charlie Parker or Miles Davis such an unmistakable voice, sound? What makes them into such powerful musicians?

**W.N:** It is said that Miles, when he was twenty something, sat on his bed and played, and that he only got up to go to the kitchen or the toilet and went back to bed with the trumpet.

**A.B:** Tell us how you learnt from your classical piano teachers or from your experience with jazz musicians. Is there an idea or method in classical music that is complementary to the world of jazz?

**W.N:** Some, definitely. Like doubling tempos as many times as possible -from very slow to very quick- with the metronome; playing or counting each beat as one. The equivalent to counting the whites, or expressing repeated notes in various ways -in jazz we would say "giving it something more" [mustard, ketchup?] in this note, and in classical music, treating each repeated note with "different golden tones" - It's true that the digital electronic world has a mechanical, automated influence on our sensitivity. Despite this though, with an education focused on self expression from an aesthetic sensitivity, we won't be so dominated by the technological world.

**A.B:** How do you practice each day? What is your daily programme?

**W.N:** I begin singing notes to wake up my ears: I play a ninth major and sing a second minor, after a third minor on the lowest note, and do other exercises that represent a challenge. Then I construct some intervals, a series of notes, and sing them and play them in all their tonalities, also moving the bar of the compass, always accentuating the first note of each compass, in different metrics. That way I programme the notes in my subconscious. After I try to incorporate some of these "notes" in some theme or in a blues.

**A.B:** It is said that in this modern world, with so much noise and so little silence, it is much more difficult for our brain to compose music. Do you think that, generally, the way of living, the country or the surroundings where one lives is fundamental for the sound and the creativity of the musician?

**W.N:** The musicians, although they are affected by the surroundings, ought to go and live in two or more countries, because this experience makes the musical identity, the personality and the character develop more than if they stay in their own country or city of origin.

**A.B:** What would you say or recommend to the students of jazz and/or the professionals that are not very well known to the public?

**W.N:** Study, practice and compose, but you need a friend who will go to the market of work and to programme you at the clubs, concerts and recordings, so that you can live as a musician working fifteen hours a day. If you don't have this friend, then work

for these fifteen hours daily and with a little luck they will discover you. But if you try and find yourself work and you have little time for the daily work of musician, perhaps you'll play well, but not well enough to produce artistic music. With conviction and determination, be faithful to yourself and your music. Write and play only for yourself and never to please the managers, record producers, media, etc. Never sign a contract without the advice of a lawyer.

#### records

**JOAN DIAZ**

*Dalirògena*

Satchmo Jazz Records

simon norris



One of the multiple objective forms of verifying that the jazz practiced by the new generation of Catalan musicians has come of age, is when the fans have the chance to find a reference of the country with the musical characteristics of *Dalirògena* edited by a Catalan label on the shelves of the record shop. After a debut record that went almost unnoticed and having actively participated in the ambitious project *Deriva* by David Mengual, the pianist Joan Diaz has launched himself and has materialised his particular homage to the painter from the Empordà through an elaborate audiovisual work which unfortunately we can only enjoy through its exclusively sound support. Even while moaning that in full irruption of the DVD, the modest economy of the Lleida label Satchmo hasn't allowed the publication of this work, faithful to the combination of images and sound with which it was conceived, the truth is that this difficulty does not steal force from the musical content of some compositions that have body in themselves and that are divided into the four basic basic elements founding life - "Water", "Earth", "Air" and "Fire" -. They confirm the condition of Joan Diaz as one of the firmest, most imaginative and personal musicians of the present panorama in Catalonia.