

Interview by Jean-Pierre GOFFIN

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Jacky Lepage: an encounter with the photographer



Auto-portrait © Jacky Lepage

Musicians, singers and vocalists, we watch them, we listen to them, but who has ever paid attention to those who stare at their performances. Jacky Lepage has been on the circuit for nearly 40 years. We felt this was more than worth meeting.

Did jazz lead you to photography or vice versa ?

Jacky Lepage : When I was a kid, I already wanted to take photographs, and one day a friend lent me a camera because I couldn't afford to buy one. I started learning from books. At the same time, I was crazy about music, classical, rock, blues, jazz... And it was at a concert in Dinant, in January-February 1985, that I took my first photos of musicians: it was Michel Herr. I sent him the photos I'd taken, he liked them and invited me to his place. It was a combination of two passions. And Michel introduced me to the scene. And then it happened very quickly : I met Toot Thielemans, then Philip Catherine, whose house I often visited at weekends. I photographed his wife, his children, his parents... I created his website and I still manage it today.

Then you went on to photograph a lot of big names

When I met **Jean-Michel Debie** (jazz agent and organizer of the Belga Jazz Festival), I got access to all the greats: **Keith Jarrett, Chick Corea**... I had backstage access, it was amazing.... Unfortunately, it doesn't happen like that anymore. These days, you are allowed to take photos for five minutes at the beginning of the concert, and I don't want to work like that....

You mainly photograph at concerts, but you also visit musicians at their homes....

I really enjoyed meeting the musicians, having a good relationship with them. It's nice to see them in concert, but I also enjoyed photographing them at home, talking to them. I made portraits of **Lester Bowie**, **Chick Corea**, **Chet Baker** and others, to whom I sent the photos by post at the time and they replied. It's not like that any more.

Many of the photos were taken at the Pelzer house ...

I used to go to Jacques Pelzer's house a lot; I liked him very much. And **Chet Baker** often stayed there. The picture where he is lying on the table is after dinner. I asked him to take some photos with his trumpet and he said, "Wait a minute" and lay down on the table for the picture!



Chet Baker & Jacques Pelzer © Jacky Lepage

Things have changed a lot today....

There are a lot of photographers at festivals these days. With digital it's much easier, you shoot and you see the result immediately, whereas with film you had to wait until the film was developed and then print on paper to get the result. There is also more aggressiveness these days.

I bought a new camera: if I'd had this 30 years ago! But the fact that I learned with film does help though.

How did it work with the musicians ?

The musicians bought the photos from me if they liked them. Later on I had photos published in newspapers and magazines: "Jazz in Time", "Jazz'halo", "Jazz Hot", and still do, also for labels like IGLOO and even twice for ECM. Some of my photos have been used in books, such as the book about Chet Baker published in South Korea, which has one of my photos on the cover. I have done many such things, in France, the Netherlands, Germany, the United States, England also.

Have you had musicians who refused to be photographed ?

It only happened once with a musician who wasn't feeling well. Even with **Keith Jarrett** it went well, he accepted me taking photos, I even went to his dressing room with Eric Legnini and Stéphane Galland, in 1991. He signed a record for me, with Jack DeJohnette and Gary Peacock, who I also got on well with: I had sent him two photos for a biography someone was writing about him, but he died shortly afterwards.

Back then, was it difficult to take photos during a concert ?

In those days, cameras were noisy. When I photographed **Michel Petrucciani** in Antwerp and he asked me to step aside because he was bothered by the noise of the camera. At a concert of **Egberto Gismonti** in the Theatre 140, I stood on stage behind the curtain in front to take photos, but I didn't photograph because the music was so beautiful.

Are there any moments that inspire you more during a concert ?

It can be the movement, or the music itself, how to explain ? It's so meaningless, it passes in a split of a second. It's also a matter of luck : **Jacques Henri Lartigue** said it's like fishing, sometimes you catch a big fish, sometimes you don't get anything on the hook at all. With digital photography it has become very different, you tend to keep shooting. When I used to go to the Middelheim festival years ago, I took about twenty films of thirty-five frames for the five days; now we take as many for just one concert.

Since two years I haven't made any photographs at concerts. Nowadays there are so many photographers in front of the stage that I don't feel like going anymore. I'm archiving everything for a future exhibition, but it takes a lot of time.

There is a link on the site with photos of clouds and another with photos of the sea....

The photos of the sea are not mine. I had a 'clouds' section on my site, which I'm going to put back up one of these days. I often photographed the clouds from the window of my old flat in Dinant. Two or three were published by the site "[Nuages](#)". And two photos have also been published in "NUAGES", a book on clouds by Editions du Rocher in Paris.

You have also been involved in designing artists' websites

I made the website of **Philip Catherine** and of **Nathalie Lories**. I also worked on **Ivan Paduart**'s site, but now it's someone else's. For ten years I was responsible for **Richard Galliano**'s website, I often went to Paris to photograph him. But I don't brag about it. I have never been a businessman. I don't even consider myself an artist, when we look at a photograph (which is a snapshot of what was there at a particular moment) our gaze is juxtaposed with that of the person who took the picture.

Gallery : www.jackylepage.com

Comments on photos :



Chet Baker 1987 Antwerpen



Miles Davis & Kenny Garrett, Anvers 1987 © Jacky Lepage

The one of **Miles Davis** with **Kenny Garrett** and the one of Chet playing were taken on the same night in Antwerp, at the Queen Elisabeth hall for Miles and, at around 1 am this one of **Chet Baker** at the Riverside jazz club. What a coincidence to see these two trumpeters on the same evening! I told Chet that Miles had played in the same town earlier that night and he replied: "*Maybe he'll come here and we can jam together.*" But Miles never came.



Chet Baker Liège 1986 © Jacky Lepage

The one where **Chet** is lying on the table, he did that especially for me. It was just him and me at Jacques Pelzer's house and I was taking pictures of him sitting at the table in Jacques' living room. At one point he says "*Wait*" and he lay down like that. A wink to prove that he was capable of self-mockery. I took this as a gift from him. He also wrote me a letter after the pictures.



Keith Jarrett 1989

The one of **Keith Jarrett**, that's unique! He looked at me and agreed to let me take photos during the soundcheck at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels in 1991.



Reggie Workman

Those of **Reggie Workman** : I love them, the expressions speak for themselves.

Text © Jean-Pierre Goffin, 02/2023 – photos © Jacky Lepage