

Excerpts from what the press has said about collaborations between Steve Lacy and Roswell Rudd:

STEVE LACY-ROSWELL RUDD QUARTET

SCHOOL DAYS

EMANEM 1975 / HAT ART 1994 / HATOLOGY 2002

“School was in session at a small New York City café on a spring day in 1963. Soprano saxophonist Steve Lacy and trombonist Roswell Rudd, abetted by bassist Henry Grimes and drummer Denis Charles, were the teachers. ...Thelonious Monk served as textbook, and a small, extremely fortunate audience constituted the student body. ...Lacy’s affection and erudition toward Monk’s music is today widely known and lauded. But back in the early Sixties he was one of a modest minority who recognized the pianist/composer’s music as means of individual expression. ... Lacy and Rudd would reconvene at various points over the years to revisit Monk’s work... But something about this earliest surviving meeting surpasses all future endeavors. It’s a shared and palpable blend of youthful brio and daredevil risk-taking born out of a Zeitgeist that has yet to be equaled in creative improvised music. ...the collaboration remains one of the classics and should be savored by anyone with ears open to adventurous sounds.”
– Derek Taylor, *Dusted*, April 23, 2003, www.dustedmagazine.com

“Recorded in 1963 at the Phase Two Coffee House in New York City, this outing refers to the concept of ‘schooling oneself,’ originating from soprano saxophonist Steve Lacy’s previous stints with Thelonious Monk. Lacy and trombonist Roswell Rudd performed the music of Monk as a unit for approximately four years... many of these interpretations of Monk compositions are built upon lightly swinging grooves, topped off by the soloists’ upbeat call and response mechanisms. ...this solid effort withstands the test of time in a rather unassuming but altogether sprightly manner.”
– Glenn Astarita, *All About Jazz*, April 19, 2003, www.allaboutjazz.com

“During 1961-1964, soprano saxophonist Steve Lacy and trombonist Roswell Rudd co-led an unusual quartet that exclusively played the music of Thelonious Monk. Amazingly enough, no record label was interested in recording the band (despite their high profile) and the eventual breakup led to the group being largely forgotten. In 1975, Emanem came out with this LP, which is comprised of a decently recorded, privately taped live performance from March 1963. Lacy and Rudd are joined by drummer Dennis Charles and (on five of the seven numbers) bassist Henry Grimes. Because Grimes showed up late that day, there are versions of “Bye-Ya” and “Pannonica” that were played without a bass but they still hold together. On such songs as “Brilliant Corners,” “Monk’s Dream,” and “Skippy,” the legendary group lives up to one’s expectations and really digs into Monk’s music. 4 STARS”
– Scott Yanow, *All Music Guide*, www.allmusic.com

“...Now that this release – one of Lacy’s crucial early recordings – is back in circulation, one can almost hear sighs of relief coming from all corners of the world of improvised music... this recording in particular helps clarify one edge of the frame that establishes the parameters of Lacy’s career. Taken from a night during a March 1963...stand at the Phase Two Coffeehouse, this date of all Monk tunes found Lacy sharing the front line with the rambunctious trombonist Roswell Rudd and backed by the killer tandem of Henry Grimes on bass...and the snappy free patter of Denis Charles’ drums. ...there’s no denying the freshness and vitality of these performances. The tricky, quirky “Brilliant Corners” just grooves along, belying its complex structure; the quartet slaps some wicked counterpoint onto “Monk’s Dream”... Rudd is in fine surly form throughout, mischievously disrupting the music’s flow, sauntering through parallel lines with Charles, or blurting impatiently. ...Lacy has owned these tunes since day one, but he never fails to invest them with new purpose or to reveal new facets in the music. For these and other readings, this recording is an essential one both historically and musically.”
– Jason Bivins, *Bagatellen*, Sept. 2, 2003, www.bagatellen.com

“...Lacy and Rudd have big, wide, smeary tones which have more in common with the Chicago and New Orleans schools of jazz rather than the relatively slick, technique-obsessed cool and bebop styles prevalent at the time. Bassist Henry Grimes...played with a big, wide and rippling tone himself, and Dennis Charles provides snappy, deceptively easygoing propulsion. ...This group’s great love for Monk’s tunes is palpable throughout – they open up his tunes with all the geniality, droll humor and piquancy intact: you’ll laugh, you’ll cry, you’ll tap your foot and kiss your blues goodbye. This particular commemoration of *School Days* gets the ol’ Three Thumbs Up rating. ...”
– Mark Keresman, *JazzReview.com*, www.jazzreview.com

“...I had heard *about* the early 1960’s Steve Lacy/Roswell Rudd Quartet that performed the music of Thelonious Monk, but I had not heard it until recently. ...It is amazing to me that I hadn’t sought out this recording earlier in my life. I have a great affinity for Monk’s music, as well as piano-less quartets fronted by trombone and sax, so this CD is right up my alley. ...This doesn’t feel like repertory treatment of Monk’s material. It feels more like the compositions are the fifth member of a free improvisation. Monk’s tunes have an organic order that creates an inescapable gravity, that both keeps the performers in the spirit of the tunes, and allows them to wander about, knowing that they will be held in orbit around the core of the composition. The performances are buoyant and animated. I can hear the comfort and confidence that come from regular working relationships amongst the musicians. Lacy and Rudd set each other off in beautiful stylistic distinction. The rhythm section of Henry Grimes and Dennis Charles swings hard, and captures the spirit of the soloists and the tunes. ...”
– Jeff Albert, *Scratch My Brain*, Oct. 23, 2005, www.scratchmybrain.com

“...One of this album’s many virtues is its pianolessness; in addition to Lacy, it features trombonist Roswell Rudd, bassist Henry Grimes and drummer Dennis Charles. Lacy’s choice to focus on the melodies, rather than duplicating previous arrangements, frees the band from the need to play in an explicitly “Monkian” manner. Further, the absence of piano...gives the music a smooth flow that Monk’s own renditions of these tunes didn’t always possess. Each member of the quartet brings something unique to the group sound. The relationship between Lacy and Rudd is long-standing – the pair play together, off and on, to this day – but even in these early recordings, their roles are already defined. Lacy is the straight man, playing the melodies and soloing in an adventurous, but thoughtful, manner as befits a bandleader. Rudd, by contrast, cuts loose repeatedly, whooping and slurring his notes in a style that verges on the cartoonish on more than one occasion. The contrast is almost vaudevillian, but from a listener’s perspective, it works very well. ...This quartet was one of many bridges between the bluesy regimentation of hard bop and the screams of freedom that would be heard in 1964 and afterward. For this reason, *School Days* is an important record. But because of the source material (the compositions of Thelonious Monk) and the talents of all involved, not to mention the obvious joy playing this music gives them, it’s also exhilarating and beautiful at once – the combination that’s at the heart of all the best jazz.”
– Phil Freeman, *Culture Vulture*, www.culturevulture.net

"...The trombone seems especially unsuited for more adventurous compositions... Which is why the work of Roswell Rudd has always been so remarkable. Sultry, supple and full of intelligence, Rudd's work on the trombone makes one rethink the black sheep of the jazz family. In Lacy's characteristically exceptional soprano sax, Rudd has found...a perfect compliment to his inspired...playing. "Monk's Dream" shows that neither Lacy nor Rudd has slowed down even a bit since they first played together almost forty years ago in the School Days quartet and that, together, they can create music that is greater than the sum of their very substantial individual talents.

Monk's Dream is adventurous and exciting throughout, providing each player plenty of opportunities to show off their range. ...Lacy has channeled the spirit of Monk on so many occasions that it's surprising to hear how much energy and passion he can still get out of a standard like "Monk's Dream." Trombone and sax dart in, out and around one another perfectly, giving one of Monk's signature songs fresh legs. ...

Rudd and Lacy are both known as almost obsessive devotees of Monk's music. Indeed, the School Days quartet *only* played Monk's music, which at the time seemed to be (and indeed, was) financial if not artistic suicide. ...it would be great to hear Rudd and Lacy work together on future projects that explore (as Rudd did with the songs of Herbie Nichol's on *Regeneration*) some less canonical compositions, and which continue to move in the unexpected and exciting directions traced out here. RATING: 8/10"

– Imre Szeman, *PopMatters*, www.popmatters.com

"Having played together off and on for over 40 years, Steve Lacy and Roswell Rudd are hardly strangers to each other. In the early 1960s, when they led a quartet devoted to Thelonious Monk's music, they could barely find anyone to record them...today a Monk tribute album is a much more salable item. But despite its title and the presence of two Monk compositions...that's not what this is. Rather, it is a kind of newly recorded Lacy sampler, adding to the Monk tunes: one by Duke Ellington...three Lacy works that have been recorded previously...and three new Lacy numbers... Certainly, they sound comfortable with each other... They sound most comfortable with the Monk tunes and take some chances with the Ellington... *Monk's Dream* is a warm reunion of old friends... 4 STARS"

– William Ruhlmann, *All Music Guide*, www.allmusic.com

"...Both of their careers have been marked by continuing musical research and the quest for freedom through discipline they first learned playing Monk's tunes. Now the two have reunited for this important album, which shows that their virtuosity and incredibly deft interplay haven't been dulled by the passing years. From the first bars of the opening title track they display an almost telepathic connection, trading riffs and playing off each other in a way that can't help but recall the amazing exchanges between Monk and saxophonist Charlie Rouse on the original recordings. With the longtime Lacy rhythm section of Jean-Jacques Avenel (double bass) and John Betsch (drums), the album serves as an excellent survey of the paths Lacy has mapped out over the course of his career.

"Pannonica" is the only other Monk tune included, while Lacy standards "The Rent" and "The Bath" show how Lacy has adapted Monk's dissonant ideas to his own offbeat style. "A Bright Pearl" and "Traces," meanwhile, represent Lacy's continuing fascination with Eastern philosophy...They're also the only tracks on which vocalist Irene Aebi appears... These songs also display Rudd and Lacy at their most "out there," showing once again that Lacy's disciplined ear allows him to play with more freedom than most supposedly "free" musicians."

– David Cook, *SF Weekly*, March 15, 2000, www.sfweekly.com

"...Rudd's elastic – occasionally spastic – but always muscularly brilliant trombone playing is filled with a humor that brings out the playfulness in Lacy's sometimes cerebral offerings. Rudd plays the musical Laurel to Lacy's Hardy – a yin and yang that works to bring out the best in both men and their mutual affinities.

...Monk has no better interpreters than Lacy and Rudd and the two's music grows exponentially when they collaborate. The playful sparring on "Monk's Dream" reveals the telepathy the two hold, with Rudd underscoring Lacy's phrases like the underline key on my keyboard. "Pannonica" is taken as a slightly bouncing ballad and provides Rudd with some bittersweet soloing that beautifully segues into Lacy's plaintive horn. Lacy is a fine ballad player, able to remove the high pitched brittleness from his horn and emphasize a soulfulness that few can match. "KoKo" comes complete with the two growling the jungle opening in homage to Ellington's 100th year.

Lacy brings the best of his book to the session as well. "The Bath", "The Rent" and "The Door" he's recorded often, but I'm sure the opportunity to play them with Rudd was too tempting to resist. ...

But the new pieces are perhaps the most interesting. ... "A Bright Pearl" and "Traces" with Lacy's partner Irene Aebi on vocals are the first two parts of a projected ten-part suite setting the poetry of Zen Buddhist Monk Ryokan to music. It's a mix of jazz and art song... that rewards repeated listening. Lacy's theme for "Traces" sounds like cascading leaves in an autumn wind, each phrase sliding into the next. The solo passages are loose and limber. ..."

– Bill Smith, *JazzReview.com*, www.jazzreview.com

"...Lacy belongs to that rarefied class of musicians – along with trombonist Roswell Rudd – who can interpret the music of Thelonious Monk with authority.

...On each composition, be it a Monk, an Ellington, or a Lacy, the two masters glide with aplomb through the melodic structures and swing the counterpoints like Ginger Rodgers-Fred Astaire dancing. Lacy, known for his meticulous articulation, seems elegantly loose with Rudd as his confrere. ...

Throughout his career, Lacy's intellect and sentience have taken him to ancient sources of wisdom. On "Traces" he sets music to a poem by the Zen monk Ryokan. Irene Aebi, in her unique operatic dialect, sings the words beatifically to Lacy's precise melody. This art song format is one of the distinguishing features of Lacy's music. ..."

– Laurence Svirchev, *Misterioso*, www.svirchev.com

CONCERT REVIEWS/PREVIEWES

"Soprano-saxophonist Steve Lacy and trombonist Roswell Rudd have recorded together just once every decade since the early '60s, so *Monk's Dream* (Verve), their first recording together in nearly 20 years, is noteworthy for its rarity alone. But there's more to it than that. The chemistry between Lacy and Rudd is one of the most appealing in modern jazz, with Lacy playing the sly, acerbic Groucho to Rudd's more broadly comic, impish Harpo. It's a combination of sophisticated modernism and good humor that's even rarer than their albums. Little wonder they sold out the Regattabar a week ago Tuesday.

Lacy and Rudd... made their first big splash together between 1962 and 1964 in a short-lived quartet that dedicated itself exclusively to the music of Thelonious Monk. A commonplace today, repertory groups were unheard of at the time... Only one album by the quartet ever saw the light of day – *School Days* (recently reissued by hat Art), which Greenwich Village poet Paul Haines recorded on home equipment. ...

On *Monk's Dream*, Lacy and Rudd revisit Monk, play some Lacy chestnuts, and explore some new Lacy material. They share a sense of playfulness, though it manifests itself quite differently in their performances. On "The Bath," Lacy's look-before-you-leap delivery contrasts with Rudd's more mercurial and explosive style. Prodded along by Betsch's gentle scrubbing brush strokes, Lacy dawdles through a solo of leisurely melodicism. He advances by tiny steps, pushing and developing little phrases delivered in a pure, piping tone. ...there's a lyrical thread connecting everything and a seasoned understanding of what makes a solo hang together. Rudd's solo on "The Rent" incorporates passages of tender melody, punchy riffing, and daunting abstraction into a continuous flow of ideas. The quirky logic of Monk's compositions lies at the root of both players' modus operandi. On Monk's "Pannonica," Rudd never loses sight of the melody in a charmingly romantic solo. On "Monk's Dream," Lacy echoes Monk's method by toying with the rhythms of his own improvised melodic cells.

During their first set at the Regattabar, the quartet ran through familiar Monk and Lacy material, as well as a Rudd original... Lacy and Rudd are obviously so pleased and inspired to be working together again that everything...sounded fresh. This was especially true when they solo'd together. Lacy's homy warmth and Rudd's big, vital, back-slapping tone – a whole big-band brass section rolled into one instrument – worked together in a spirited give-and-take on the opening version of Monk's "Shuffle Boil." Rudd played the cut-up on "The Bath," quoting "Blue Moon" and using lighthearted comical low notes, tailgating slides, and New Orleans growls. Lacy's tidy solo was full of amusing conceits and paraphrases, shapely jagged lines and bemused whistles. Bassist Avenel did a superb job setting up Rudd's African-flavored "Bamako" with an unaccompanied introduction that plumbed the resonate depths of his instrument before digging into the vamp that propels the tune. Betsch was the star of this piece, with a polyrhythmic solo of jazzy Africanisms. The slow ballad "Longing" offered a great example of how Lacy builds a complex statement out of simple parts while Rudd concentrates on manipulating the timbre of his instrument in mournful slurs and moans.

It would have been easy for Lacy and Rudd to succumb to nostalgia in a setting so much like their *School Days* quartet. But they've graduated by now, and this was the most anti-nostalgic of reunions; both continue to find new things to say on their instruments."

– Ed Hazell, "Old and New Dreams: Lacy and Rudd get playful," *The Boston Phoenix*, March 28, 2000

PERFORMANCE WORKS – VANCOUVER, BC (CANADA), MARCH 26, 2000

"...While the duo has a similar devotion to Monk's music, their very different styles and manners of expressing it is the essence of what allows them to work together, and do it so well. It almost seems too easy to say that these two extremes complement each other, and forced to describe them as body parts, Lacy would be the head and Rudd the heart. ...the Buddha-like calm, determined grace that Lacy projects in both presence and playing is never really threatened by Rudd's out right exuberance... Instead of attempting to reign Rudd in...Lacy happily leaves Rudd to his own unrestrained devices, occasionally even following along down that wide-open road.

Rudd's full-on, larger-than-life style – featuring astonishingly constant blaring, brassy runs and frequent growling through his horn – is fascinatingly exhausting... He is certainly one of the wonders of the jazz world, and his enthusiasm and passion are clearly what propel this mid-'60s live wire along at such a breakneck speed for extended time periods. ...

At the Performance Works concert in Vancouver, Rudd's buoyancy...was blatantly apparent from the outset. ...He's an oft-hilarious, spontaneous foil to Lacy's more methodic, plotting straight guy. ...

Bassist Jean-Jacques Avenel laid down several solos with the quiet ferocity of a lion sneaking up on its prey. ...Avenel's precise bowing – frantically sawing low-then-high to produce resonating echoes, then tapping quick hits to bring it back up – nailed the ominous tone of it to the back of the listener's throat. Finishing off what Avenel started, Lacy's high, screeching wails, Rudd's long, controlled blasts, and Betsch's carefully chosen dynamic accents came on the attack all at once, leaving the listener thrillingly gasping for air. It's in...a song like this that...Rudd's true gift is revealed in his childlike openness and fearlessness to be a clown. To have fun with music that is often expected to be very serious can pick up everyone...it will never leave the listener indifferent. ...

Funny how the oft-quoted (by Lacy) words of Monk apply more and more: "You go your own way, and – eventually – people will catch up to you." Considering that Lacy and Rudd were among Monk's earliest (and few) devotees, it seems more than appropriate that they'd eventually revisit what brought them together in the first place, and at a time when it seems the world just might be catching up to them. Nice they're around to be appreciated."

– Josephine Ochej, *Coda*, July 2000

THE JAZZ STANDARD, NEW YORK CITY, 08-12 MARCH 2000

"This is the quartet...that recorded the current MONK'S DREAM... The news is that Rudd, a superb trombonist...turns in his best performance in years, while Lacy demonstrates a mellow lyricism...in addition to making his usual geometric abstractions. They complement each other, making occasional gestures toward the avant-garde, but preferring to blow smoky meditations that are witting and evocative. An event."

– Gary Giddins, "Voice Choices," *The Village Voice*, March 8-14, 2000

03-08 AUGUST 1999, NEW YORK CITY, IRIDIUM

"Not many people own a copy of "School Days," a recording made by a quartet including the soprano saxophonist Steve Lacy and the trombonist Roswell Rudd playing Thelonious Monk's music. It was made in 1963 on a cheap tape recorder at the Phase Two Coffee House in Greenwich Village, released in 1975 in a small quantity on a tiny label and again several years ago on a CD that has since passed out of print. So the significance of Mr. Lacy and Mr. Rudd's reunion, which started earlier this year on the West Coast and continues this week, may pass by even some fairly astute followers of jazz. But it's a warm, welcome combination, and it works as well as it ever did. ...

Mr. Lacy and Mr. Rudd studied and played Monk's music for several years as struggling young musicians in the early 60's, and the fruits of their research are still intact. But beyond that, the two make a good team because they're natural opposites. The soprano saxophone is a dignified little instrument, and Mr. Lacy plays it dryly; he swings lightly, and you can feel a breeze blowing through his improvising. The trombone has a rich bloodline of expansive impertinence, and Mr. Rudd can play it like a junkyard dog, with ripe growls and Doppleresque shouting effects. In Mr. Lacy's band, which essentially avoids group interplay, this charming, exaggerated contrast is the next best thing; it is a gift. ..."

– Ben Ratliff, "JAZZ REVIEW; Who Counts the Years? Opposites Still Attract," *New York Times*, August 7, 1999, www.nytimes.com

For more information, including discographies: *All Music Guide*, www.allmusic.com

Steve Lacy

<http://stevelacymusic.org>

<http://www.wnur.org/jazz/artists/lacy.steve>

<http://home.arcor.de/nyds-exp-discogs/index0.htm>

Roswell Rudd

<http://roswellrudd.com>

<http://www.mindspring.com/~scala/rudd.htm>