

Bio information: **STEVE LACY - ROSWELL RUDD QUARTET**
Title: **EARLY AND LATE** (Cuneiform Rune 250/251)

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FILE UNDER: JAZZ

“The way that things happen in this music you can say by accident, pre-destination, by chance. And you get something called a profound situation or a profound ensemble. It just happened that way. You could say that because Steve and I, we really love Thelonious a lot, we just had to play this stuff and we found out that just two of us playing it was fantastic. It just worked out that way. All the orchestration, the material, everything was so clear and kind of universal...” – Roswell Rudd, in an interview with Laurence Donahue Green in *All About Jazz*

“Circumstances can be very important. Find the right people to work with.” – Steve Lacy (www.brainyquote.com)

The name of **Steve Lacy** is synonymous with the term **Modern Jazz**. One of the greatest soprano saxophonists in the history of jazz, he is responsible for popularizing that instrument in the post-WWII years, resurrecting it from Dixieland and introducing it, liberated and free, into the modern world. His career as a musician, improviser, composer and arranger was international, spanning New York and Paris, and long lasting, spanning more than half a century without interruption until his death at 69. It was also astoundingly prolific. During it, Lacy concentrated solely on soprano sax, playing thousands of concerts, making several hundred recordings ranging from traditional to free jazz, composing hundreds of songs (including some setting **Robert Creeley**'s poetry to music), and, in the course of arranging and performing dozens of songs by **Thelonious Monk**, becoming that modern composer's foremost interpreter. In recognition of his achievements, Lacy won a MacArthur “Genius” Award, was elected to the Jazz Hall of Fame, and had the most prominent magazine in New Music – *The Wire*, founded as a voice for “Jazz, Improvised Music and...” – named in his honor. Lacy had written a tune, “*The Wire*,” in Albert Ayler's memory; in its mission statement, the magazine said:

“... The Wire has taken its name from a composition by saxophonist Steve Lacy to whose musical farsightedness the magazine is dedicated. Lacy – though standing at midpoint in jazz's evolution – has always looked back at the past and forward into the future when shaping his own music. This will broadly be the approach of The Wire.” – Anthony Wood, Editor, *The Wire*, 1982

One of Lacy's most significant contributions to modern jazz was done in collaboration with trombonist, composer and ethnomusicologist **Roswell Rudd**, who, paralleling Lacy, had transformed a Dixieland instrument into a modern performance weapon. In a quartet during the early 1960s, Lacy and Rudd pioneered the notion of modern jazz repertory by devoting themselves solely to the music of Monk, **Herbie Nichols**, **Cecil Taylor** and other modern, living composers – a radical concept at the time. They insisted that each generation should honor its own masters, and that ‘jazz standards’ should grow exponentially – a “jazz process” – and not be a hermetically sealed, closed set. In doing so, the Lacy/Rudd Quartet opened the doors for future jazz repertory groups dedicated to contemporary composers; the **Ed Palermo Big Band**, who perform **Frank Zappa**'s music, are among the notable jazz repertory groups today. Lacy and Rudd's intense collaboration in arrangements and performance, particularly over the works of Monk, forged a friendship that would last a lifetime and span an ocean.

Lacy and Rudd first met when Rudd was a Yale student in the 1950s, studying the history of European Art music while playing trombone and recording in **Eli's Chosen Six**, Yale's Dixieland band. Lacy, a native New Yorker, filled in on reeds for a Yale reunion gig, possibly in 1956, and the next year Rudd began going regularly to NYC to hear music and play in pick-up bands, sleeping on the floor of the East Bleecker Street loft that Lacy shared with bassist **Buell Neidlinger**, Rudd's friend from Yale. At the time, Lacy was ensconced in Dixieland circles, playing traditional jazz with **Pee Wee Russell**, **Miff Mole**, **Max Kaminsky**, and others. He was also playing avant-garde jazz in radical pianist and composer **Cecil Taylor's** quartet (with Neidlinger and drummer **Dennis Charles**), appearing on Taylor's 1955 debut LP, *Jazz Advance!*. Taylor, “so far ahead of every-body that the few of us that appreciated what he did just marveled at him,” introduced Lacy to avant-garde music, especially Monk:

“When I played with Cecil Taylor in 53, we were playing a Monk tune, “Bemsha Swing”. And then Cecil took me to hear Monk's quartet in 1955. From that point on, I was really into it. I started learning as many of his pieces as I could. ...Monk's music is the right hand of the piano, those melodies. ...his music fitted the horn.” – Lacy, in *The Wire*, 2002

In 1957, he played the **Newport Jazz Fest** in Taylor's quartet, and began working with **Gil Evans**, recording on *Gil Evans Plus Ten*. Lacy also recorded his own debut album, *Soprano Today* (Prestige, 1958), featuring Lacy with Neidlinger, Charles, and pianist **Wynton Kelly**. Lacy's 2nd album quickly followed: *Reflections: Steve Lacy Plays Thelonious Monk* (Prestige, 1958), which was not only Lacy's first all-Monk album, but the first album *ever* to focus entirely on Monk's music.

Lacy and Rudd began working together after Rudd graduated from Yale and, in 1960, moved to NYC. An exciting year, 1960 began with both men working with their composer/pianist heroes: Lacy played in Monk's band (and would again in 1963) and Rudd began working (1960-62) with pianist **Herbie Nichols** (who died in 1963, leaving Rudd as steward of his unrecorded works). Rudd and Lacy began rehearsing together and first appeared together in 1960/61 on recordings for Neidlinger (*New York City R&B*), Taylor (*Jumpin' Punkins*), and free tenor saxophonist **Archie Shepp**.

In 1961, Lacy and Rudd formed a quartet to perform jazz repertory. It also included drummer **Dennis Charles** and an ever-changing cast of bassists. In an interview taped in NYC in 2000, Lacy recalled:

*“The original concept of that band was repertory, repertory jazz band – and at that time there was no such thing, but Roswell and I thought that there was a body of material in jazz and in music in general that was neglected and part of it was **Monk** of course and part of it was **Ellington** and part of it...**Kurt Weill**, and **Billy Strayhorn** and the possibility of **Louis Armstrong** and there was a whole body of...unplayed material. ...little by little it focused more and more on Monk and we wanted to play all of Monk. And there were 55 pieces we had in our book at that time so everything else was kind of etched out.” – Steve Lacy, stevlacymusic.org*

As Rudd related to *All About Jazz*:

“We started out and played a bunch of things that we both liked. I had some scores with Kurt Weill tunes I liked, some Strayhorn, and a couple of Cecil Taylor’s pieces. But...we kept on adding another piece by Monk every week...or so, according on how long it took us to decode. The process was to follow Monk around and listen to the little changes he would make from one live performance to another and his interpretations of his own music and then we had the recordings. And...we...made these arrangements. It was such a great learning experience for us doing this ...Every time we did another one of his pieces, it was like opening another window on the musical universe. ...eventually the other stuff kind of slid into the background, and Monk’s pieces became the focus.”

This early 60’s Quartet played everywhere it could. In a memorial he wrote after Lacy’s death, Rudd recalled: “When Steve found a flea-ridden, dark basement beneath Harut’s Restaurant in the West Village, I went home, got my hammer, nails and saw. We cleaned up the place and built a platform out of scrap lumber to play on. This was where we first played out in 1961.” Playing the jazz, loft (basement!) and coffeehouse circuit, Rudd met **Paul Haines**, a poet whose writing was inspired by jazz and would later be set to jazz music on albums by **Carla Bley** (and later by **Kip Hanrahan**, **Curlew**, **George Cartwright**, & more). By March 1963, when Haines used borrowed equipment to tape their show at the **Phase Two Coffee House**, the quartet (with bassist **Henry Grimes**) had an all-Monk repertory. In 1963/1964 the Lacy-Rudd quartet broke up, and, in 1965, Lacy moved overseas. Ten years later, **Emanem** released Haines’ tape as the album *School Days* (1975); it was critically acclaimed. *Dusted* noted that “the collaboration remains one of the classics,” while *Bagatellan* called the recording “an essential one both historically and musically.”

Remaining in New York after Lacy moved, Rudd pursued his own music, continuing to compose while working increasingly with such free players as **Archie Shepp** and the bandleader/composer **Carla Bley**, participating in the **October Revolution**, an early free-jazz festival, and eventually earning the title “father of free jazz trombone.” In 1964, Rudd co-founded the **New York Art Quartet** with saxophonist **John Tchicai**, and in 1965, released his first solo album, *Roswell Rudd*. Rudd played on numerous recordings in the 60s and 70s, including *Escalator Over the Hill*, the groundbreaking 1968 jazz opera composed by **Carla Bley** with a libretto by **Paul Haines**. Rudd also pursued his interest in ethnomusicology, joining **Alan Lomax**’s Cantometric Project staff in 1964, and working with Lomax intermittently until 1992. Leaving NYC, Rudd taught musical anthropology at **Bard College**, served as Professor of Musicology at the **University of Maine**, and lived in the Catskills in the 1980s. Rudd re-immersed himself in the international free jazz scene during the 1990s, working with saxophonist **Elton Dean** and other British improvisers (including playing on **Dean/Dunmall/Levin/Rogers/Rudd/Tippett**’s *Bladik*, Cuneiform, 1996) and the Dutch **Ab Baars Trio**, and reuniting with past musical collaborators in a blizzard of performance and recording activity that continues today. In addition, Rudd formed the **Roswell Rudd Trio**, which released two albums of **Herbie Nichols**’ unrecorded works in 1996, and participated in several music+words projects, including **Kip Hanrahan**’s *Darn It* (Haines), and **Glen Hall**’s *Hallucinations (William Burroughs)*. In 2001, Rudd recorded *Malicool* with **Toumani Diabate** (Universal/Sunnyside, 2002/2003). Including recordings under his own name, Rudd has appeared on nearly 100 releases.

Moving overseas, Lacy stayed in Copenhagen, Paris, Rome, Buenos Aires, and elsewhere before settling in Paris in 1970 with **Irene Aebi**, his Swiss wife. He and Aebi lived in Paris until moving back to the US in 2002. Lacy was astoundingly prolific during his decades as an ex-pat, and immediately began composing music as well as playing free. His original music first appeared on his 1965 album, *Disponability*, along with Monk tunes; in 1966, Lacy released his first free jazz recording, *Sortie*. The following year he wrote “**The Way**” for Aebi, the first of hundreds of songs he’d write for her; her vocals appeared on numerous Lacy albums. Lacy played with numerous musicians, including **Don Cherry**, **Carla Bley**, **Enrico Rava**, **Louis Moholo**, **Mal Waldron**, **Misha Mengelberg**, **Derek Bailey’s Company**, and countless more, and recorded throughout Europe and in Japan for scores of labels, including FMP, Denon, Black Saint, Emanem, hatHUT, Saravah, Soul Note and more. Lacy began playing solo, recording his 1st solo album, *Lapis* in 1971. He also formed his own groups, most notably, a Sextet formed in 1980 that included bassist **Jean-Jacques Avenel** (who had worked with Lacy since 1975) and **John Betsch** (a member since 1988/89), both of whom would also play in Lacy’s Trio. His recordings included a number of collaborations with poets, including **Robert Creeley (Futurities, 1985)** and **Brion Gysin**. Critically acclaimed, featured on the front pages of the jazz press, Lacy received numerous awards during his years abroad including the Grande Prix de L’Academie Du Jazz (1980, for *Shots*). Throughout, Lacy continued to pay tribute to Monk, recording numerous Monk albums in solo and various groupings.

During the decades that Lacy and Rudd lived on two separate continents, they stayed in contact, and played and recorded together when opportunity allowed. In March 1976, the two reunited in a NYC studio to record on each other’s solo albums of original compositions: Rudd played Lacy originals for the first time on Lacy’s *Trickles* (Black Saint, 1975), and Lacy played on Rudd’s *Blown Bone* (Philips, 1979). In 1978, Rudd and Lacy recorded in Rome with **Laboratorio Della Quercia**. In 1981, they toured Canada as a duo playing the music of Monk, and performed Monk’s music with **Don Cherry**, **Muhai Richards Abrams** and others at Columbia University in NYC; some tunes from that tour later appeared on *Duets: Associates* (Musica Jazz, 1996) and *Interpretations of Monk* (Koch, 1997/8). In a Milan studio in 1982, Lacy and Rudd recorded Rudd’s *Regeneration*, an album split equally between Monk and Nichols tunes and released by **Soul Note** on the 20th anniversary of Nichols’ death.

After living on separate continents for more than 30 years, in April 1999, Rudd and Lacy reunited in California during the **Steve Lacy Trio's** (Lacy, Avenel and Betsch) North American tour, and played several shows on the West coast with Rudd as the trio's "Special Guest." At some point, Lacy asked Rudd to join with his trio to make a co-led quartet. The four were in Europe in June, where they played in Amsterdam on June 19th; spent June 21-22nd with **Aebi** in a Parisian studio, recording *Monk's Dream* as the **Steve Lacy-Roswell Rudd Quartet**; and played a five-night engagement (June 26-30th) at Paris' **Le Duc des Lombards**. In addition, on June 24th, Lacy and Rudd played as a duo before a display of **Alain Kirili's** sculpture at Paris' **Saint Chapelle**.

A month later, the Lacy-Rudd Quartet was back in the USA, and played at the **Caramoor Jazz Festival** in NY on July 31st. In the audience, **Gilles Laheurte** noted that: "...this reunion was in no way a nostalgic return to the past. ...the usual intimate Trio sound was metamorphosed by the playful and extroverted trombone... The result is an energetic band..." From August 3-8th, 1999, the band played a six-night engagement at NYC's famed **Iridium**. Reviewing the shows, the *New York Times* noted that Lacy and Rudd:

"...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 could 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, *NY Times*

Verve released *Monk's Dream* in 2000, and the Lacy-Rudd Quartet toured to support it; featuring compositions by Lacy as well as one **Duke Ellington** and two Monk tunes, the CD would be nominated for two Grammy Awards. When the Lacy-Rudd Quartet played a five-night engagement at NYC's Jazz Standard, from March 8-12, 2000, the *Village Voice* devoted the entire cover of its Voice Choices section to a photo of Lacy and Rudd and called their appearance "An event." Besides playing from the album, the quartet premiered Rudd's new composition, "Bamako," written during his February trip to Mali with **Verna Gillis**. On March 26th, the quartet played at Vancouver's Performance Works; *Coda* lauded the performance, noting that:

"...calling Lacy's and Rudd's return to Monk full circle doesn't quite cover it. Everything that happened...before and since...has had the chance to permeate and influence the music of these two very different musicians who are a nearly perfect example of opposites attracting... To have fun with music that is often expected to be very serious can pick up everyone and take them along for the ride. ...Combine Rudd's wild spirit that strikes with the unpredictability of lightning, with Lacy's quick-witted, expressive lyrical beauty, and you come up with a lot more territory to explore."

In a 2000 interview, Lacy expressed interest in moving back to the US. While Lacy pursued a future move, the quartet continued to tour both continents, playing at Europe's **Vaulx Jazz Fest** on March 22, 2001, and later in San Francisco, as a quintet with Aebi. Invited to join the faculty of the **New England Conservatory**, Lacy and his wife moved back to the USA in the summer of 2002. On August 9th, the Lacy-Rudd Quartet played at the Iridium. Lacy began teaching in Boston the next month. In 2003, the Lacy-Rudd Quartet added trumpeter **Dave Douglas** to their fold to become **Monksieland**, a quintet intended to merge Lacy and Rudd's interest in Monk and Dixieland, their present and their past. In August 2003, Lacy was diagnosed with liver cancer. Monksieland's March 2004 concert at the Iridium was the last show Lacy and Rudd played together; Lacy died June 4, 2004.

This double CD release by Cuneiform, titled *Early and Late*, provides a 40-year overview of **Lacy's** and **Rudd's** collaborations in the **Steve Lacy-Roswell Rudd Quartet**. The earliest recordings on this release date from October 9, 1962, one year after Lacy and Rudd formed their quartet; the latest tracks date from August 9, 2002, two years before Lacy died. None of these recordings have been previously released – they are heard here for the first time. **Jason Weiss**, editor of *Steve Lacy: Conversations* (Duke University, 2006) compiled and produced the release and wrote the liner notes. Consisting of both studio and live recordings, *Early and Late* compliments and illuminates other releases by the Steve Lacy-Roswell Rudd Quartet, helping to complete the Lacy-Rudd story.

The four tracks from 1962 on this release are the earliest recordings ever released by the quartet, whose lineup at the time consisted of Lacy (soprano sax), Rudd (trombone), **Charles** (drums) and **Bob Cunningham** (bass). They are professional studio recordings made for a demo, and capture the group when its repertory was still open-ended and included **Cecil Taylor** and other composers in addition to Monk. The only other recordings from the early 60s quartet are those on *School Days*; which are live recordings made after the repertory shift to all-Monk.

Early and Late contains two live tracks recorded early in Lacy's and Rudd's 1999 reunion, when Rudd first joined the Steve Lacy Trio (Lacy, Avenel and Betsch) on the West Coast. Recorded on April 4, 1999 in Tucson, Arizona, at a concert at the **Mat Bevel Institute**, these tracks show the musicians as they explore working together anew, discovering changes that had occurred in each others' music and playing during the intervening decades since they last had played as a quartet. Both tracks are written by Lacy.

Five tracks on *Early and Late* were recorded live in a concert at Amsterdam's **Bimhuis** on June 19, 1999, a mere two days before the Lacy-Rudd Quartet went into a Parisian studio and recorded *Monk's Dream*. Two of these live tunes – "The Bath" and "The Rent" – were later recorded in the studio and released on the album.

The latest tracks on *Early and Late* date from August 9, 2002 – the summer that Lacy and Aebi moved back to the US – and were recorded live at the Iridium. One of the tracks is Rudd's "**Bamako**" and the other is a **Herbie Nichols** tune. Just as Rudd and Lacy together helped keep Nichols' legacy alive, Rudd today helps keep Lacy's music alive, while also continuing to pursue his own art.