

Bemerkungen zu „Jazz on a summers day“

Regie: Bert Stern 1960

Der Film beginnt mit Aufnahmen zum Admirals-Cup-Segelrennen, das parallel 1958 zum Jazzfestival in Newport stattfand. Das Jimmy Giuffre Trio mit Jimmy Giuffre am Saxophon, Jim Hall an der Gitarre und Bob Brookmeyer (Posaune) beginnt mit **“Train and River”**. In einer Zwischensequenz sieht man die Dixieland Band **“Elis Chosen 6”** mit dem Titel **“When the Saints goes marching in”**. Melancholisch und traurig mutet der darauf folgende Film mit Theolonius Monk an, der **“Blue Monk”** intoniert. Der Saxophonist Sonny Stitt und der Gitarrist Sal Salvador präsentieren Modern Jazz mit ihrem Titel **“Loose Walk”**. Anita O’Day präsentiert die beiden Jazz-Standards **“Sweet Georgia Brown”** und **“Tea for two”** in vollkommenem neuen Arrangements, die irgendwie cool wirken. Interessant wirkt die Garderobe von Anita O’Day. Sie scheint mir der Garderobe von Audrey Hepburn in **“Funny Face”** nachempfunden. In einem Zwischenspiel auf einem Kirmesplatz wird wieder von **“Elis Chosen 6”** Dixieland intoniert. Fröhliche kubanische Rhythmen werden von dem George Shearing Quintett mit dem Rondo dargeboten. Das Thema erinnert an den späteren Rock-Titel und -Hit **“Better move on”**. Einer meiner Lieblingsängerinnen Dinah Washington bietet den ausgelutschten Jazzstandard **“All of me”** an (wahrscheinlich die zehntausendste Version). Bemerkenswert aber die Leistung des Vibraphonisten Terry Gibbs bei dieser Nummer. Machtvolles Bariton-Saxophonspiel, gepaart mit dem virtuosen Trompetenspiel von Art Farmer, bietet das Gerry Mulligan Quartet mit **“Catch as Catch can”**. Besonders eindrucksvoll sind die Unisono-Passagen von Mulligan und Farmer. Einen starken Kontrast zum Jazzprogramm bieten die beiden nächsten Beiträge. Big Maybelle bietet R&B mit **“I ain’t mad at you”**. Musikalisch schwach wirkt Chuck Berry mit **“Sweet Little Sixteen”**. Mein Eindruck war, dass ich in letzter Zeit auf mehreren Stadtfesten bessere Gitarristen live gesehen habe, als Chuck Berry an diesem Abend bot. Die musikalische Aufnahme wirkt amateurhaft und unausgewogen. Schade, ich verehere

Chuck Berry als einen der Gitarristen, der rauh und unverfälscht spielen kann. Vollkommen deplatziert ist die Klarinette von Rudy Rutherford. Begleitet wurde er bei diesem Auftritt vom langjährigen Count Basie- Schlagzeuger Jo Jones. Rudy und Jo waren Swing-Größen, Chuck ein begnadeter R&B-Sänger und Gitarrist. Meiner Meinung nach passte das an diesem Abend nicht zusammen. Ich gehe davon aus, dass die drei Musiker so gut wie nie zusammen geprobt hatten.

Boogie-Woogie-Musik bietet mit ihrem ersten Titel die Gospel-Sängerin Mahalia Jackson an. Auch der zweite Titel "**Didn't** it Rain" ist Boogie-Woogie-lastig. Voller Emotionen singt die Queen des Gospels ihre Lieder. "The Lords Prayer" ist ein klassischer Gospel-Song, der das Herz berührt.



Anita O'Day beim Newport-Festival 1958



Cover der DVD zu „Jazz on a summer's day“

Anmerkungen K.H.

Ich mag diesen Film sehr. Er bringt die Stimmung dieses Festivals gut zum Ausdruck. Wenn auch manchmal lausige Tonaufnahmen im Film zu hören sind, tut dies dem Film keinen Abbruch. Eigentlich enttäuscht bin ich nur über den misslungenen Auftritt von Chuck Berry. Eine R&B-Band hätte mit Chuck Berry seinen Auftritt beim Festival zum Erlebnis werden lassen können. Ich wage die These, dass Swing-Musiker nichts von R&B verstehen bzw. sich nicht dafür interessieren. Und so klingt dann auch die Musik, uninspiriert und irgendwie langweilig.

Bert Stern hat einen Meilenstein in der Geschichte des Jazz-Dokumentarfilmes abgeliefert. Der Regisseur, der eigentlich erfolgreicher Mode- und Werbe-Fotograf ist, hat hier erstmals in seiner Laufbahn mit dem Medium Film experimentiert. Ein Meisterwerk ist hier zu

betrachten. Spike Lee, der Filmregisseur (u.a. **Moø better Blues**), wurde gebeten, zum 50. Jubiläum des Newport Jazz Festivals einen Dokumentarfilm zum Festival zu drehen. Als er den Film von Bert Stern gesehen hatte, lehnte er den Auftrag ab und formulierte sinngemäß seinen besseren Film kann es nicht mehr zu diesem Festival gebenö.

The following film notes were prepared for the New York State Writers Institute by Kevin Jack Hagopian, Senior Lecturer in Media Studies at Pennsylvania State University:

Young Bert Stern was already one of the leading fashion photographers of the 1950's when he resolved to shoot his first film before he was thirty. He made it, with two years to spare. The result, *Jazz on a Summer's Day*, is a luminously breezy film that brings the rich color palette of *Vogue* or *Harper's Bazaar* of those years into the world of the documentary cinema. Along with *Monterey Pop*, and *Woodstock*, and *The Last Waltz*, Bert Stern and his co-director, the equally well-regarded jazz connoisseur Aram Avakian, created one of the great concert films, but *Jazz on a Summer's Day* is more than that: it is a meandering summer stream of a film, always ready to glance away from the music for a minute, to take in a girl in a red sweater, or a fat guy in his swimming trunks, or kids playing, always ready to let the incredible music it captures take the film into new flights of improvisation and imagination.

But, oh, that music. *Jazz on a Summer's Day* captures the 1958 Newport Jazz Festival, a summit meeting of jazz greats we'll never see the like of again. The Festival had been started in 1954 on the greenswards of Newport, Rhode Island, the brainchild of a young impresario and jazz lover named George Wein. It seemed a strange match, as the seaside home of American old money became, for a few days every summer, the home of a music that had grown from anonymous, working class roots. But soon Newport rang to the brilliant sounds of the jazz aristocracy. The Duke Ellington orchestra's performance on the night of July 8, 1956, of "Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue," with solo saxophonist Paul Gonsalves taking an incredible *27 straight choruses*, typified the electricity that Newport generated. By the late 1950's, the festival quickly became the gathering place for the greatest musicians, and their adoring fans came in the thousands. Newport sired dozens of jazz festivals that to this day circulate the jazz gospel to the faithful, and to a new generation of fans, all summer long in cities and towns across the country.

Wein had wanted to document the festival for years, but despaired of ever getting releases from

all the acts, who were under contract to a dozen or more record labels and who knows how many managers. It was Stern who said, "Why don't I just shoot it, and I'll get the releases later?" Stern reasoned, with the brashness of youth, that if he made a great film, the artists would gladly allow their images to be used. He was right. As a fashion photographer, Stern was used to meticulously lighting his subjects. Fine, but it's a lot easier to light a professional *haute couture* model in a studio than the entire playing field of a Rhode Island high school, which was the setting for the 1958 festival. At his own expense, Stern trucked in lights, and shot the film on the richest, most saturated of color stocks. Stern said that he wanted to bring jazz out of the cellars and into the sunlight, and he succeeded. Stern's biggest cinematic influence, he said, were not so much other documentaries as the great English cinematic colorist Michael Powell, whose *The Red Shoes* had made an indelible impression on a teenaged Stern. The result is that *Jazz on a Summer's Day* has more in common with, say the previous years Richard Avedon-Stanley Donen collaboration, *Funny Face*, than with most documentaries of the period. Stern's Kodachrome aesthetic makes *Jazz on a Summer's Day* a harbinger of the expressive color documentaries of recent times such as *Winged Migration* and *March of the Penguins*. Stern was a major contributor to a small but vital tradition of abstract documentary portrayals of jazz, beginning at least with *Life* magazine photographer Gjon Mili's lyrical 1945 short film, "Jammin' the Blues," and extending to fellow fashion photographer Bruce Weber's moody 1989 film about trumpet player Chet Baker, *Let's Get Lost*.

But the music was the reason for Newport, and for this film. Stern memorialized some of the finest jazz artists of midcentury. Stern concentrated his energies on photographing a single day of the four day festival, but because of Wein's extraordinary programming, that meant that Stern's cameras captured Louis Armstrong, Gerry Mulligan, Buck Clayton, Thelonious Monk, Jack Teagarden, Dinah Washington, Sonny Stitt, Jo Jones, Chico Hamilton, Jim Hall, Jimmy Giuffre, Bob Brookmeyer, Terry Gibbs, Urbie Green, Max Roach, Art Farmer, George Shearing, Eric Dolphy, all on one musically miraculous Saturday... If there's a star of *Jazz on a Summer's Day*, it is surely the exquisite Anita O'Day, dressed like one of Stern's *Vogue* models in white gloves and an outrageously elegant hat in the single recorded performance which came to measure her entire career. Anita's swingin' renditions of "Sweet Georgia Brown" and "Tea for Two" perfectly capture the insouciant, almost weightless feel Stern aimed for. Wein was also an eclectic programmer, so you'll also see Mahalia Jackson in a passionate take on "Didn't It Rain?", and even Chuck Berry is in attendance.

Jazz on a Summer's Day has been called a "snapshot of a day in Eisenhower's America,"

though that designation suggests artlessness; another critic compared the film to Robert Frank's *Americans*, an influential photographic suite of life in the USA in the 1950's. The America's Cup trials happened to be going on off Newport on that summer Saturday in 1958, and Stern's camera watches the audiences watching the boats, as well as watching the music. Stern's glimpses of the crowd creates momentary but unforgettable characters in the passing scene. His soft-spoken, observational camera and *plein-air* shooting style give the film a lightness of being that is the perfect visual correlative of the cool jazz greats of the day, like Mulligan. This is Degas at the races, in 4/4 time.

If *Jazz on a Summer's Day* doesn't look like a "typical documentary," that's because there is no such thing, thanks in part to films like this. (The grandfather of documentary cinema, John Grierson, loved *Jazz on a Summer's Day*, and in the early 1960's used to excerpt it regularly on his BBC program devoted to the documentary art in the 1960's.) One of Newport's real aristocrats, Duke Ellington, used to say that his music was "beyond category." So it is with *Jazz on a Summer's Day*, a film as warm as a summer's day, as light as a smile.

Der Film wurde 1999 in die National Film Registry aufgenommen.