

George Avakian Remembers Timme Rosenkrantz

George Avakian, “Mr. First-In-Jazz” — first to produce a jazz album (the 10” 78-rpm *Chicago Jazz* for Decca in 1940), first to write jazz liner notes (for same), first to produce an LP of a live performance, first to produce a 12” jazz LP and first to create a double-LP set (these last three for Benny Goodman’s 1938 Carnegie Hall concert) — needs no introduction. His seminal work at Columbia Records (including signing, producing, and promoting Miles Davis, Dave Brubeck, Louis Armstrong and Erroll Garner), his co-founding of Warner Brothers Records, and his numerous lifetime achievement awards (from NARAS, the NEA, ASCAP and *Down Beat* magazine) speak for themselves. We therefore consider ourselves lucky that George, now 93, took time to chat with us about jazz baron Timme Rosenkrantz and the new translation of his memoirs, *Harlem Jazz Adventures*.

JJ: How did you know Timme?

GA: I met Timme when I was a Yale freshman in 1938. He was a fantastic guy, warm and friendly and knew his jazz.

JJ: What did you think of the book (*Harlem Jazz Adventures*)?

GA: This book is a marvelous read and an absolute delight. A great book to keep on the shelf and take down every so often. You can’t put it down. The chapters are short and packed with fun and information.

JJ: Do you have any Timme-related stories you’d like to share?

GA: In 1951, my younger brother Aram, who later became a filmmaker and photographer, was a student at the Sorbonne in Paris. Fresh out of the Navy, he went to Paris to study French Literature under the G.I. Bill. He spent most of his time studying the Paris scene, especially Django Reinhardt, Stephane Grappelli, Bud Powell and Don Byas.

He ended up supporting himself taking a job as a waiter at Inez’s¹ restaurant/club Chez Inez. One evening while he was waiting tables there, in walks Doris Duke, the richest woman in the U.S. at the time, and heiress to a tobacco fortune. She was very famous and very fond of jazz. She was with her boyfriend, Porfirio Rubirosa, son of a dictator² causing a lot of trouble in the Dominican Republic. He was the biggest playboy on the face of the earth, and an obnoxious person.

One night, Aram waits on the couple, and Rubirosa orders soup. Aram brings the soup and carefully dumps it on Rubirosa’s head. He hated his guts — everybody did. There was a big fuss, with apologies and so forth. Rubirosa left with Duke, and people burst into cheers. Inez, who was very fond of my brother, and Timme never forgot this event.

Aram became famous in Montmartre for pouring soup on Rubirosa. People would come to the restaurant and say they wanted to meet the man who poured soup on Rubirosa. He never had to buy another drink in Montmartre.

JJ

¹ Timme’s lifelong companion

² He was, at the time, actually the ex-son-in-law of the dictator — Ed.

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Fran Kaufman photo

Tenor saxophonist Lew Tabackin goes over the drill at a sound check for “Tenor Madness,” produced by pianist Ted Rosenthal at the Da Capo Theater in NYC on February 5, 2009. Listening intently are bassist Martin Wind and drummer Tim Horner.

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