

Bud Powell Behind the Scenes: Highlights from the Francis Paudras Collection on Bud Powell

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Jazz enthusiast Francis Paudras (1935-1997) first introduced himself to the renowned American pianist Bud Powell (1924-1966) in 1957 during a chance encounter on the Paris metro. Their friendship developed two years later when Powell moved to France with his girlfriend Altevia “Buttercup” Edwards. When, in the early 1960s, Powell suffered a mental and physical health crisis, he moved into Paudras’s Paris apartment at which time Paudras served as Powell’s primary caretaker and benefactor. It was during this period that Paudras began filming his musical idol with a 16mm home movie camera.

The Francis Paudras collection on Bud Powell, donated to the Institute of Jazz Studies by Paudras’s son Stephane in 2001, contains over twenty hours of footage—approximately 41,000 feet of 16mm, 8mm, and magnetic film—of and relating to Bud Powell. This article will explore the major highlights from the collection and outline how archivists at the Institute are making the films more accessible to researchers.

COLLECTION HIGHLIGHTS

Before befriending the jazz legend, Paudras saw Powell perform live in Europe at the Blue Note, Club Saint-Germain, and as part of the 1956 Birdland Tour. In the decades following Powell’s death in 1966, Paudras conducted and filmed interviews with several musicians who performed with Powell at these European festivals.





Figure 1. Max Roach and Kenny Clarke being interviewed by Francis Paudras.

Max Roach and Kenny Clarke

Of particular note in the collection, is an interview with Max Roach and Kenny Clarke in which the two drummers discuss Powell's jazz legacy as well as their memories of working with him. Clarke, for his part, performed with the Bud Powell Trio at Minton's, a jazz club in Harlem, when he and Powell were both teenagers. He tells Paudras that the talkative and singularly focused Powell already had a talent for playing at fast tempos at that time. "And the thing about Bud is he would always say, *let's go upstairs, let's go upstairs*, which he meant faster," Clarke recalled, "the tempo was always fast with him."¹

Jimmy Gourley

Paudras also filmed an interview with Jimmy Gourley, an American guitarist who lived in France and performed with Powell at the Blue Note. In his interview, Gourley talks about the challenges that Powell faced, including addiction and a controlling girlfriend. He tells Paudras that despite these serious

¹ Francis Paudras collection on Bud Powell (IJS-0247), Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University Libraries, film 102Fb

personal issues, Powell's musical abilities remained sharp. His talent brought out the best in other musicians:

When I say he listened to the music, he really listened, because he made me sound much better than I was, believe me. Sometimes, I was playing, and Bud was there. I was like [pretends to play guitar]. It was so great. Everything I did, he had a little answer or the counter that made me sound better. It was fantastic.²

Other highlights in the collection include informal sound recordings, most likely created at Paudras's Paris apartment. For example, there is a recording of Powell singing "When I Fall in Love" a cappella and playing "I Wanna Go Now" on solo piano. On another recording, Powell and Paudras have a brief conversation at a party and can be heard laughing and joking with each other. In addition to the sound recordings, there is film footage in the collection of Powell and Paudras relaxing at the Paris apartment. In one of the clips at the apartment, Powell ascends a long winding staircase, while in another Powell speaks to Paudras and gently pats his arm.



Figure 2. Bud Powell and Francis Paudras in a café in Edenville.

² Francis Paudras collection on Bud Powell (IJS-0247), film 116F

The collection also contains 16mm amateur movie footage of Paudras and Powell vacationing in Edenville, a resort town in Normandy, France. Powell had been recently released from the hospital and went to the resort town to help lift his spirits. In the vacation footage, viewers can clearly see the optimistic and light-hearted side of Powell. For example, in one scene, he is seated in a local cafe and grins widely into the camera. In other scenes, Powell enjoys dinner at a local restaurant while he and his friends jokingly pretend to steal food from each other's plates.

Other significant moments in the collection include footage of Powell meeting Thelonious and Nellie Monk at Orly airport in France, filmed using a 16mm camera with no sound. The airport footage also shows other jazz promoters and performers greeting Monk, including producer George Wein, photographer Jean-Pierre Leloir, and musicians Kenny Clarke, Butch Warren, and Charlie Rouse.



Figure 3. Thelonious Monk and Bud Powell at Orly Airport.

The films in the collection also demonstrate how Paudras's interest in Powell continued even after the musician's early death in 1966. For example, Paudras obtained footage of Powell's funeral procession in New York, including scenes of the Lee Morgan quintet performing on the Jazzmobile and the hearse carrying Powell's casket. In addition to the funeral, there are several tributes to Powell in

the film collection. Most likely created by Paudras, these tributes contain clips of commercial films, documentaries, televised concert performances, and amateur footage which have been purposefully edited together to tell a story about Powell's life or genius.

Paudras's life-long fascination with Powell led him to travel to the United States with the express purpose of visiting some of the people and major sites related to his musical idol. The collection contains footage shot on 8mm film of Paudras visiting Powell's grave at the Willow Grove Cemetery in Pennsylvania with Powell's daughter Celia. Paudras also filmed the exterior of Powell's mother's home in Pennsylvania and the Creedmoor Psychiatric center where Powell was hospitalized. In addition, Powell conducts and films interviews with Powell's close friends and fellow musicians including Don Schlitten, Bertha Hope, Leonard Gaskin, and Jackie McLean. These interviews focus mainly on Powell's family relationships, early life, addiction issues, and his last days.

PRESERVING THE JAZZ LEGACY OF BUD POWELL

Noting that films in the collection were beginning to show signs of deterioration, archivists at the Institute initiated a project to preserve them. In May 2021, the Recordings at Risk program sponsored by the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) awarded the Institute of Jazz Studies a \$41,589 grant to reformat the films. The generous funding enabled the Institute to work with film experts at Colorlab in Rockville, Maryland to digitize all films in the collection and to create high-quality digital files which will be maintained in Rutgers University's digital repository. In addition, project staff at the Institute are creating transcripts of all the interviews and working with jazz experts to further identify and describe the contents of the films. When the project is complete in Spring 2023, researchers will be able to view the digitized films and read the interview transcripts via the [IJS research portal](#).

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTOR

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