

HOW DID I BECOME A LIVING LEGEND?

A few days ago I began to wonder how I had become a Living Legend. It's happened in the last five or six years. Before that I was an Old Master. I'm not sure what a Living Legend is. I've also become an Elder Statesman. I don't know what that is either. I don't do much anymore, so I think about these things. That last sentence, by the way, is a good example of what an Elder Statesman (or Living Legend) does.

When I first became an Old Master, it worried me. I knew it meant the end was in sight, but I didn't know what to do about it. I know who's behind it though. It's the jazz critics.

I picture a secret meeting of Jazz Critics International, held in upstate New York, where the Mafia held their ill-fated session. It's getting near lunch time and most of the important things such as, what the new trends are and what Ira Gitler says they mean for jazz, have been taken care of. Then someone says,

"What are we we going to about the old guys like Raney?"

"Who?"

"Raney. Raney. Don't you young guys ever listen to anything but Fusion?"

"Oh yeah, now I remember. He played with Bix Beiderbecke."

"No. No. No. That's Eddie Condon--way back in the

twenties. Raney came up in the fifties. He played with Stan Getz or somebody. You're going to have to do some homework or you're in serious trouble. You can't get away with doing all your writing with old Leonard Feather articles, a pair of scissors and a pot of glue."

"Why do we have to do anything?" somebody says, "I hear he's dead anyway."

"He's not dead, he's deaf. That was a typo."

"Well, then he doesn't play anymore, so what's the problem?"

"No, he still plays once in awhile. He played at Bradley's and Zinno's a couple of years ago, and Ira didn't cover it, so I didn't know what to say. He seemed to be doing the same sort of thing, but I'm not sure. I finally had to fall back on that old saw about 'crystal clear, logical lines, stretching to infinity.' You know the one; you've all used it. Geez, we can't keep doing stuff like that. People are beginning to catch on."

"Hey guys." a fellow pipes up, "Have you seen the new Aftran software? I mean it's really great. It doesn't just give you synonyms. It's really creative. I fed in 'crystal clear, deft and logical lines,' and I got 'taut, luminous and penetrating structures.'"

"Listen Tony, I thought we agreed to take up the new technical equipment after lunch. OK--we're all getting tired and hungry. Let's get this thing over with. Does anybody have any ideas?"

"I think I've got it," someone in the back says. "It's right here on page 23 of Braintree's new book 'Jazz and Jazz

Criticism.' It says, 'When you have to review an older musician who hasn't done much lately, you call him an Elder Statesman, or a Living Legend. It makes further comments unnecessary. It becomes a truism.' Don't you get it? Now the ball's in the readers' court. He feels like a dumbbell because he's never heard of him. It's a master stroke. You know, 'The elder statesman played in his usual, deft, creative and sure-footed manner.' You can write your piece in five minutes flat, and still have time for the Rangers game on TV." There is a general round of agreement and idle chatter.

Here, I think is a good place to tiptoe off and leave them.

I was still stuck with what Elder Statesman and Living Legend means. Then I found it in a book about George S. Kaufman. Elder Statesman (or Living Legend) means:

"Forgotten, but not gone."

Jimmy Raney

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