

Franz Koglmann

NABOKOV AND JAZZ:  
ECONOMIC AND ELEGANT SOLUTIONS

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Nabokov's art of refining, his fantastic ability to combine, and his skilful (but never in the sense of commercial craft) deceptiveness had attracted me even in my youth. And yet I hesitated for a long time before "musicalizing" some of his protagonists (Martha Dryer, John Shade, and Vadim Vadimovich, among others), for I was too afraid of failing. I finally attempted a leap into Nabokov's unsentimental world of complex dishonesty and wrote several pieces for my Monoblue Quartet, established in 1990, in which Tony Coe (known for the soundtracks to *Superman II*, *Victor/Victoria*, *Leaving Las Vegas*, and for the sax solo in Henry Mancini's *Pink Panther*) took part. I drew inspiration for some of these compositions from Bob Harris's waltz in Stanley Kubrick's *Lolita*. These pieces are not merely "musicalized novels." They depict characters and a place: the *Montreux Palace Hotel*.

Because the work of the great magician is often "haunted" by a fate orchestrated from the other world, I inserted several "hereafter" pieces I played in a duet with the electronic musician Wolfgang Mitterer in between the quartet numbers.

Of course, I am aware that Nabokov was not particularly into music, certainly not jazz! But is not he, whose "prose is so passionate, even ecstatic, hot-blooded and so wonderfully poetic, yet at the same time also aloof and sceptical, cool and sober" (Marcel

Reich-Ranicki, *Vladimir Nabokov: Aufsätze*. Ammann Verlag, 1995), the greatest possible equivalence of what one terms cool jazz, an equivalent of Miles Davis, Jimmy Giuffre or Chet Baker?

This was why – with no intention of comparing myself with these giants – I dared to attempt this production. In an interview with Allain Robbe-Grillet, Nabokov spoke of his striving for “economic and elegant solutions.” And this was also my premise: there was not to be a tone too many, “Nabokov’s chamber music poetry in prose” (Reich-Ranicki) was to be translated into free-floating, delicate lines.

*Ed. Note:* Selected soundtracks available exclusively  
for the readers of the *Nabokov Online Journal*,  
Courtesy of Franz Koglmann.

