

Franz Koglmann

NABOKOV AND JAZZ:
ECONOMIC AND ELEGANT SOLUTIONS

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 Alain 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.

