

The Passing of Paul Motian

(March 25, 1931 ~ November 22, 2011)

I'd just hit send on an e-mail to my friend, Adrian, when, from another friend, an e-mail dropped onto my in-tray, the content of which was as brief as it was surprising ... Paul Motian had passed away.

Among other things I'd talked about in the e-mail to Adrian was some discussion about Sarasvati. Adrian had recently given me a gift, a beautiful tanka depicting Sarasvati, who, for Buddhists, is the goddess of melodious sounds. A coincidence? I think not.

For those interested in jazz music, and particularly jazz music as made by musicians of a more inventive, exploratory, expressive, and innovative frame of mind, Paul Motian is no secret. At eighty years of age he'd been pretty much as active as he'd been during the '50s, always pursuing new avenues with different creative people and these both young and not so young. I'll not go into a protracted discographical list here. But If you're interested you may like to visit [Paul Motian](#)

By the late-'60s early-'70s Paul Motian was a familiar name to me, largely because of the recordings he'd made with Bill Evans. Though I wasn't an ardent fan, Paul had made an unusual impact on my perceptions and my slowly growing understanding of what it might mean to engage with the act of playing music creatively. This observation might be understood in several ways. For me though, it meant one thing, to wit, engaging with music in the terms one determines for oneself while concurrently being conducive to collective musicality. Although, at the time, I was an aspiring drummer, drummers, generally speaking, did not predominate my listening habits. I tended to gravitate more towards saxophone players, pianists, and bassists. But Paul had caught my attention in no uncertain terms, largely because, as I heard it (though wouldn't have expressed it in quite these terms at the time) he brought to the music a sonic offering that was not restricted by role playing and rhythmic servitude. It seemed to me that Paul offered the music a sense of sound and of color that enhanced and fulfilled the creative potential of the moment and for which rhythmic components were, among other musical considerations, naturally intrinsic. I think this is particularly significant as, by and large, western drumming, and no less jazz drumming, was in the process of assuming a much higher profile on the musical topography. Paul Motian was different. And perhaps nowhere was this more patent than on that marvelous Keith Jarrett album, *Life Between The Exit Signs* (Vortex (vinyl) – stereo/2006).

Jarrett not only contextualizes his collaborators' contribution but sums up their creative relationship when he says in the album's liner-notes: "About the beautiful beings named Charlie Haden and Paul Motian, so much is said in the music they play that I will refrain from giving you mere externals."

Thank you, Paul, for giving us all so much. Our lives are the richer for your having visited. You have given us cause to consider the *musical* of music and in the doing, given us cause to celebrate life. In this there is no end but rather, endless continuity.