

Book review: Three Wishes: An Intimate Look at Jazz Greats

Written by Kam Williams

"I didn't know the Baroness Pannonica de Koenigswarter, other than to nod hello on those occasions when I saw her at jazz clubs... Mutual friends told me she was press shy... What little we know of her life tantalizes... I heard stories about the fabled Rothschild heiress and friend to such musical titans as Thelonious Monk, Art Blakey and Charlie Parker...

I revere the memory of the Jazz Baroness (1913-1988), the race blind heiress who championed the rights of sometimes powerless jazz musicians against the powerful establishment, who recognized genius when she heard it, and whose loyalty was by all accounts unstinting... In 1961, Nica began to ask musicians she encountered to name their three pet wishes. This book collects three hundred responses, along with dozens of previously unpublished, often startlingly candid Polaroids."

- Excerpted from the Foreword by jazz critic Gary Giddins (pages 9-10)

As a journalist who regularly conducts interviews, I am always wracking my brain for what to ask that might help reveal intimate aspects of a celebrity's personality. For this reason, I really can appreciate *Three Wishes*, a marvelous, posthumously-produced opus which manages to achieve that goal with hundreds of jazz greats, and ever so effortlessly, via a combination of private Polaroids and honest answers to just one probing inquiry, namely, "If you were given three wishes, to be instantly granted, what would they be?"

Posing the question, recording responses in her journal and taking photographs of her very famous subjects was the late Baroness Pannonica de Koenigswarter, aka Nica, the enigmatic Rothschild heiress who risked not only her reputation but her life as well as a patron of jazz from the early Fifties until her death in 1988. As one musician recalls, "She often got herself in trouble just for being white and hanging out with us." For example: "When she happened to take Monk's arm while accompanying him to a concert in the South, people spit on the sidewalk as they walked by."

Is it any wonder then that Nica then would have earned their trust, and that they would open up about their dreams when she asked them to share their wishes? Some answers found on the pages of this enlightening tome are quite shocking, such as that of Miles Davis who said he wanted "to be white." Other icons evidence a sensitive vulnerability, like John Coltrane, who asked for "immunity from sickness" and for "inexhaustible freshness in my music," admitting "I'm stale right now."

Eric Dolphy merely wanted his basic subsistence needs met, wanting, "A home and a car in New York. That's all!" Then there's Art Farmer: "To like myself." Stanley Turrentine: "For my children to have a chance in life." Duke Ellington: "I just want nothing but the best." Lee Morgan: "To make a wonderful husband and father." Cannonball Adderley: "I wish that racial discrimination would be eliminated from the face of the earth, in all directions."

A priceless collection of personal portraits baring the souls of the titans of jazz!

Three Wishes: An Intimate Look at Jazz Greats
by Pannonica de Koenigswarter (nee Rothschild)
Foreword by Gary Giddins

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