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14 June 2004 18:42

Steve Lacy

11 June 2004

Possibly, when a musician friend dies, one's ears prick hyper-sensitively for the tone of the obituaries, **writes Tom Raworth**. Steve Lacy seems destined to be considered the acceptable face of some monster called "the avant-garde": "anti-highfalutin" was one description. Steve Voce's generous obituary [8 June] mostly avoids this stance; but Irène Aebi "intoning" the work of "a multitude of poets" and his surprise at "abstruse work" attracting full houses show his sympathies.

Lacy was well, and widely, read. His settings of the work of writers in many languages run into the hundreds and range from Melville and Creeley to one of his favourite poets: Philip Larkin. He and Irène lived and worked in Europe for 20 years because people there enjoyed his playing and her singing. Here, we read of his death in the newspaper: in Italy it was announced on the radio news.

Steve Lacy was a musician whose career bridged not only the history of jazz, but the gaps between his music and the other arts. As Nate Dorward wrote: "He's gone, and jazz as a music is suddenly starting to feel more part of a past rather than a present."

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