
Jazz piano legend

Ben Sidran

The original hipster



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The Modern Hipster

“Don’t Cry for
No Hipster”



- Ben Sidran



It’s late. Tuxedoed servers are lighting candles on glass-topped tables scattered throughout the club. Jazz artist, Ben Sidran, looks out into the audience—a mix of men and women of all ages wearing everything from expensive suits and heels to second-hand skinny jeans and loafers. It’s almost time to start.

It’s a scene he’s lived hundreds of times but hasn’t tired of yet, even after more than 30 solo albums and 50 years as a successful musician. His fingers touch the keyboard, launching into what sounds like a jazz standard in the

smooth style of the late American saxophonist, John Coltrane.

“Don’t Cry for no Hipster,” the 70-year-old croons, his voice showing no evidence of the years of smoky clubs and late-night recording sessions with Diana

Sidran on working with Diana Ross



Ross, Van Morrison, and Dizzy Gillespie. “When young becomes old, and cool turns to cold, that’s when we’ll see if that truth set him

free,” he sings, the shimmer of brushes on cymbals creating a slow and steady rhythm underneath him. He’s not singing about the younger generation of oversized sunglass-wearing and beard-sporting hipsters. Instead, he’s talking about the 1940s, ‘50s and ‘60s hip-

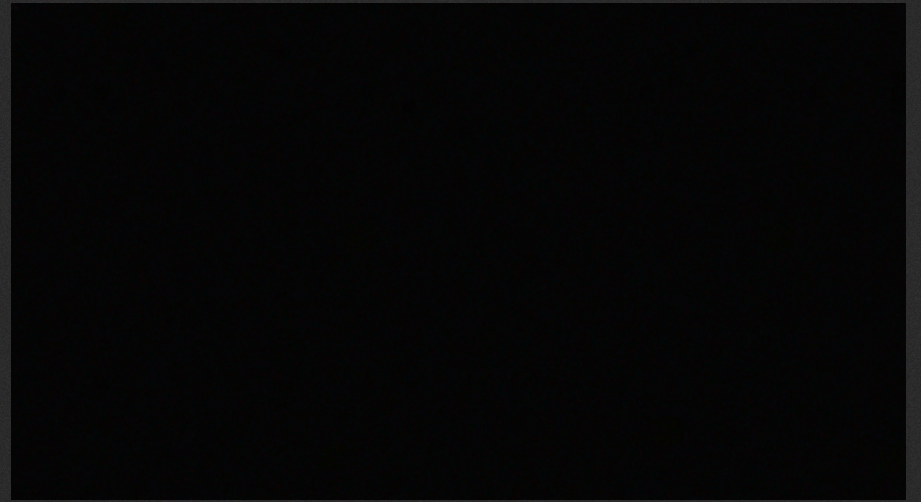


sters—lovers of art, literature, and the exotic experience of jazz. He’s singing about himself.

To Sidran, modern hipsters are replicas of the original version—the post-

prohibition era, fun-loving, hipflask-wearing, jazz-loving, “now-or-never” Americans such as himself who believed in showcasing an original style, devouring modern culture and respecting the past. In the 1960s that meant hipsters loved jazz. “By the end of the ‘60s everybody wanted to be a musician, to find a style, and to connect to a richer tradition,” Sidran said in an interview.

Sidran live in Germany



"You Can't Judge A Book By Looking At The Cover / A Great Rhythm Section" (2003).

Now, with a sense of nostalgia, modern day hipsters are rediscovering their musical heritage. They come to his shows to hear new music in the classic jazz style of “standards”—music so well known that any jazz novice could play them at the drop of a hat—but written by an original



hipster 50 years after the inauguration of the style.

The next generation's hunger for smooth jazz doesn't surprise him. That type of music is food for the soul, Sidran says.



“The '50s was really about romance. The '60s was love. The '70s was sex. But the '80s and '90s were about violence.” To him, the rap, electronic music, and even some pop music of the last two decades are all about money. “They're like candy—no nourishment.” Sidran says his music is for people who like to laugh and swing, and for those who have some romance left.

Sidran on the original hipster



Jazz music is all about your sound, says Sidran. “People know Miles Davis and John Coltrane, but my favourite trumpet player

was Blue Mitchell and he had this wonderful, warm, open sound and you could

“The Back Nine”



from the album, “Don't Cry for No Hipster”

hear two or three notes of him and say, ‘It's Blue Mitchell’.”

Once you have a sound, says Sidran, you can play any standard and make it your own. You can even re-

cord an entire album of Bob Dylan covers, which is what he did in 2009.

Sidran's unique sound is clean, with the voice forward in the mix, a little Tower of Power-style funk thrown in, and a light, rhythmic piano.



Being a successful hipster and musician, however, isn't as easy as it used to be, admits Sidran. Nowadays it's harder to develop a unique style and sound. In the '40s, '50s and '60s, jazz musicians grew up in clubs, learning onstage as they went. “You developed because everybody was making their mistakes in public and

Let's take it from the top...



Sidran first big gig with Steve Miller and Boz Scaggs in Madison, WI in 1962.



learning from that. Now everyone is learning in schools.” There, he says, the academic point of view is thrust upon young musicians. It’s a less spontaneous way of learning with room for only one “right” sound and technique.

“It Don’t Get No Better” from the album, “Don’t Cry for No Hipster”



And style aside, the music business is hard. “I wouldn’t encourage anyone to go into the business of music unless they had no choice,” he says. The politics of making an

album, working with labels only interested in money, and getting people to listen to your music in the first place are big deterrents to young artists. Even hugely talented musicians struggle. “It’s easy to become disillusioned. You can still love music and earn your living another way.”

He was lucky, though, Sidran says. There is no one left on his bucket list of musicians with whom he’d like to collaborate. From the penning of Steve Miller’s “Space Cowboy” to the day Diana Ross of the Supremes called him out of the blue to record her 1990’s album, “The Lady Sings Jazz and Blues,” to interviewing over 60 jazz greats on his national radio

show “Sidran on Record,” he has already worked with all his heroes.

Sidran performing “Space Cowboy” with the Steve Miller Band



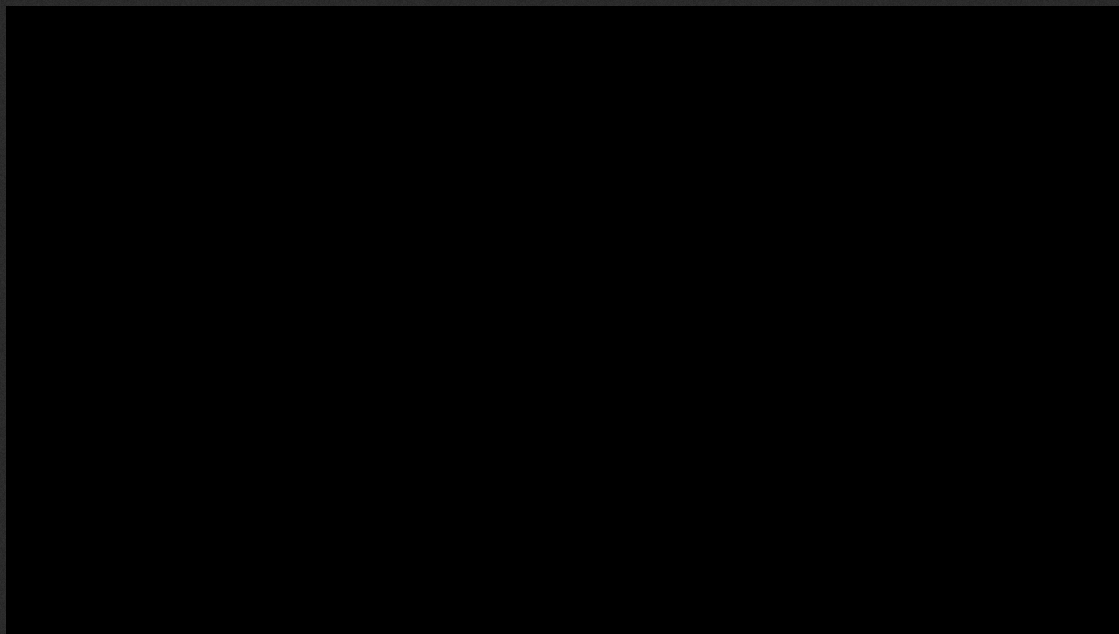
Steve Miller and Sidran co-wrote the song.

In 1982, the commercial success of his 11th and 12th solo albums, *Bop City* and *Get to the Point*, made him realize that he “didn’t have to worry about the business side of music anymore. He had the freedom to make the music he wanted to make. And people liked it. “What I really had to think about was my sound, my voice, the music, the people I loved, and just do that. At a time when people were scrambling to score in the record business I could do what I loved.”

And even after 44 years as a solo artist, he’s still passionate about performing. “The problem as you get older is wanting to play. When you’re young you’re full of

desire, but as you get older that's worn smooth by daily life. You have to wake up every morning and say, "Today I want to do the following things," and go do it."

On Loving a Lifetime in Jazz



"If You're Not Having Fun You're Doing it Wrong" lecture in June 2007.