

STEVE COHN

by LUDWIG VAN TRIKT



Steve Cohn by Abby Cohn

CADENCE: *Where and when were you born? Is it fair to say that you were a child of the '60s?*

STEVE COHN: I was born in San Francisco in the fifties and was a teenager in the sixties and it was "Magic Carpet Ride" by Steppenwolf that convinced me I had musical talent. I bought a conga drum at 13 and played with Santana records, blew harmonica a la Johnny Mayall and later guitar and singing a la James Taylor, Cat Stevens, and Simon & Garfunkel. We saw all the acts at the Fillmore West and we grew our hair long and we had VW vans and traveled across the USA. We loved Motown, the Supremes' "Baby Love" and "25 Miles to Go," Edwin Starr. In 1971 I became a boogie woogie piano player and a little gospel and was simultaneously introduced to the shakuhachi at UCLA ethnomusicology department. After two years I went to Japan and lived on farms and learned Japanese. When I came home from Japan I got into the real book and Jazz and my friend had introduced me to Mose Allison and Les McCann—that expressed a jazzy/bluesy trio format. As a child my father had big band influences like Glenn Miller and Al Hirt and played a lot of opera; my mother steered me into Classical music—but it was a very sheltered and predominantly White community so I didn't get heavily into Jazz until later. During that period of time I was introduced to Japanese culture and the sounds of Hebrew from singing the Jewish bar mitzvah or confirmation. World music was more prevalent than ever and easily crept into my consciousness.

Is it then fair to say that you are largely self-taught, as far as Jazz/Improvised music is concerned?

I took piano lessons at the age of eight for two years and a little in high