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Documentary Sheds Light On Neglected Jackie Paris

Jackie Paris' voice transfixed filmmaker Raymond De Felitta, but it was the tangled mysteries in the singer's life that convinced the director to tell his story. De Felitta's new documentary, *'Tis Autumn—The Search For Jackie Paris*, is making the rounds of the film festival circuit.

Known primarily among hardcore jazz vocal enthusiasts, Paris recorded the popular "Skylark" in 1948, collaborated with Charles Mingus and Charlie Parker and was named the rising star male vocalist in DownBeat's 1953 Critics Poll. Paris made a few records afterwards (including *The Song Is Paris* on Impulse!), but enigmatically vanished from the music scene.

"The Mingus record 'Paris In Blue' blew me away," De Felitta said. "It was such a weird record, I thought they made up the name, because it's the sort of name a noir novelist would invent for a jazz singer. When I found out he was a real guy, how he fell into such obscurity became part of my fascination with him."

So De Felitta was caught off guard when Paris reappeared in New York's jazz clubs two years ago. Although the singer was terminally ill, he eagerly participated in the documentary. Paris died a few months later on June 17, 2004, at the age of 79.

"Jackie was pleased that I wanted to document him," De Felitta said. "He wanted to talk about a lot of the things that he was interested in and about how people misunderstood him. He wanted to expunge it all from his life."

While Paris and De Felitta only had a brief time together, *'Tis Autumn* delves deeply into the singer's unique vocal style and provides a compelling investigation into what the director calls Paris' "cycle of self defeat."

As De Felitta seeks wider theatrical distribution, he says that his goal is to boost Paris' reputation.

"I want a renaissance for Jackie," he said.

—Aaron Cohen