

RICHARD KOSTELANETZ ON JONES STREET

AMENDED text received March 7, 2007

INSTRUCTIONS for Live Narration to “Hang Time 2 on Jones Street.” Start stopwatch when music audio begins, a few seconds after the picture starts. If screen is visible, music begins at fade-in of screen title ‘**on jones street.**’ Each paragraph should start at the time indicated. The reading should be leisurely. A moderate pace will allow pauses of 10 to 20 seconds between each paragraph. The time in parentheses is only a guideline of when the paragraph might end; the narrator is free to read faster or slower.

0:08 START:

On Jones Street, where my friend the videographer Reynold Weidenaar once lived, is a bucolic oasis within lower Manhattan—a street that, since it is only one block long, discourages traffic from passing through. Any taxicab seen on Jones Street must be delivering someone who lives there, as no taxi driver ever cruises Jones Street expecting to find an unexpected fare.

(0:34)

0:51 START:

At one end of Jones Street is Bleecker Street, at the other end is West Fourth Street, both of them no wider than Jones Street but nonetheless situated to funnel a single lane of traffic from west to east onto Sixth Avenue. This wide thoroughfare, Sixth Avenue, only a few hundred feet away from Jones, has, by contrast, always been crowded and noisy. Decades ago Sixth Avenue had an elevated train. Now also called Avenue of the Americas, which is what the street signs say though people

don't, this Sixth Avenue is the best route in the center of Manhattan for cars and, yes, fire engines wanting to get uptown.

(1:36)

1:53 START:

On Jones Street, no building is more than six stories high; only two have an elevator; none, a doorman; none, any sign. The buildings on Jones Street are inhabited as they were decades ago and will probably be inhabited as they are for decades hence, unless destroyed by some boorish developer. The exception with an elevator is an apartment house built in the early 1970s, in an empty lot that became available when an earlier building burned down, reportedly to collect on insurance moneys. Neither filthy nor spotless, Jones Street looks as it did decades ago, except for newer cars between the parking meters.

(2:37)

2:52 START:

Because small buildings have so few tenants, Jones Street often presents a picture empty of people, especially in the winter time. As it has few stores and fewer permanent restaurants or watering holes, so much in contrast to Cornelia Street only one block away and parallel, neighbors don't venture there either, unless to walk directly from West Fourth to Bleecker. From time to time someone attempts to install a restaurant in number 9, only to fail quickly until recently, probably because strangers don't cruise through Jones Street.

(3:30)

3:57 START:

Precisely because outsiders ignored Jones Street, idiosyncrasy was preserved, not only in the typography of numerals on the buildings but in the many unusual architectural juxtapositions that result when houses built at different times by different people are flush next to each other.

(4:15)

4:25 START:

As no one famous ever lived on Jones Street, tour buses don't go down its block; nor do tourists carrying guidebooks violate the oasis of a sort of this small town within that village called Greenwich Village that is in turn a more bucolic section of the island of Manhattan.

(4:47)

5:00 START:

Because so few lived on Jones Street, everyone knew everyone else, at least by sight. If a stranger is observed repeatedly walking into one or another building, neighbors would likely be curious to know whom he or she is. Too polite to ask directly, they would often inquire indirectly. And usually find out. If someone ominous were seen on the street, say from an apartment window, cops could be called.

(5:28)

5:40 START:

The aristocrats of Jones Street were those who had lived there the longest, sometimes condescendingly advising newcomers on this or that. Sometime in the 1970s came an architect named Jones, a pompous man who tried to persuade his friends, though not his neighbors, that the street was named after him. It was not. In the 21st Century, a young singer from Texas named Norah Jones made it her first New York address. While living there, she produced a compact disc that sold into the millions. Over two centuries before Norah Jones settled there, sometime just after the Revolutionary War, Jones Street was named after Dr. Gardner Jones.

(6:23)

6:30 START:

A short time later, very early in the nineteenth century, his brother-in-law, likewise named Mr. Jones, deserved a street name; but since the epithet Jones Street was already taken, another thoroughfare a mile or so to the east, only two blocks long but much wider, is named Great Jones Street. Mistakes about the two downtown Jones Streets are often made by taxi drivers who don't know better, sometimes with passengers, who don't know better either. The deliveryman pacing up and down Jones Street with a puzzled expression on his face should probably be directed to Great Jones.

(7:10)

7:38 START:

Reynold Weidenaar recalls that in 1978 he came from Ohio, stayed at the YMCA like many newcomers before him, and answered many apartment ads in a neighborhood newspaper. His last stop was number Five Jones Street, where he told the landlord he would like to rent. He recalls: "I sat across the street on a doorstep and over the next hour watched a parade of perhaps 75 apartment-seekers visit the place. I was surprised that the landlord selected me, but I did have an OK credit rating, good references, and teachers are reputed to be a non-troublesome class of tenants. I offered to sign a two-year lease, which they promptly set before me; but they would not give me the keys for two weeks because I paid them by check." That's how he got to Jones Street, where he lived and worked for twenty years, where this appreciative videotape, on Jones Street, was made.

(8:44)

8:54

End Credits. Narration must be finished by this time.