

Thelonious Monk

Jazz Musicians

Scott #2990

Issued Sept 16, 1995 in Monterey, CA

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Thelonious Sphere Monk was born in Rocky Mount, North Carolina on October 10, 1917. His family moved soon after he was born and Thelonious grew up in New York City. He began playing the piano at age five and learned the Stride Piano Style from one of his neighbors, James P. Johnson the great Stride pianist.

Thelonious has very little formal music training. He was essentially a self-taught musician.

Thelonious Monk, along with other great Jazz innovators, such as Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, Kenny Clarke, and Charlie Christian were largely responsible for establishing the modern or BeBop Jazz sound.

From 1940 to 1943 Thelonious played for the house band at Mintons. It was here that he first began experimenting with the irregular rhythms and jarring harmonies that characterized his later years. He also played occasionally at Monroe's Uptown House. In 1944 Monk joined the Cootie Williams band and although the band soon broke up, they did record his most famous composition, Round Midnight.

In 1945 Thelonious became the pianist for Coleman Hawkins and gained some recognition. He later played with Dizzy Gillespie, but his piano stylings were still to far from the mainstream for most listeners and he remained an obscure player while lesser talents became well known. From 1947 to 1952 he recorded several compositions for the Blue Note Record Company that were later to become classics; Ruby My Dear, Well you Needn't, Round Midnight, and Straight, No Chaser.

Thelonious Monk's BeBop style of Jazz did not begin to catch on until the mid 1950s. In 1955 he began recording for Riverside Records and in 1956 he recorded the album that is still considered a Jazz masterpiece, Brilliant Corners.

Thelonious played the Five Spot Club in 1957. One of the newcomers with his quartet was a Saxophone player named John Coltrane. John learned a lot from Thelonious and later went on to become a Jazz celebrity in his own right. During the 1960s, Thelonious and a new quartet he had formed with Charlie Rouse on the saxophone recorded for Columbia Records.

During the late sixties and early seventies Thelonious began to suffer from psychiatric problems and was forced to retire in 1973.

Thelonious Monk died in Weehawken, New Jersey on February 17, 1982.

Sources:

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Atlanta Music Group (AMG)