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| Monk, Thelonious (1917-1982) |
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| Thelonious Monk was an American jazz pianist and composer. One of the earliest performers in the bebop movement of modern jazz dating from the mid-twentieth century, namely the 1940s in New York City, Monk performed original compositions in neighbourhoods there such as Harlem and Greenwich Village, as well as the thriving 52nd Street district of jazz nightclubs. The pianist performed with other leading figures in modern jazz including bebop progenitors Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, and avant-garde saxophonist John Coltrane, all of whom performed and recorded Monk’s compositions. Monk’s compositions are some of the most commonly performed jazz standards today. Giddins and DeVeaux (2009) argue that Monk’s compositions are the second most frequently performed standards written by any one composer in jazz today, after those of pianist and big-band leader Duke Ellington. |
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Thelonious Monk, born October 10, 1917 in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, moved to New York City at the age of four. Monk was primarily self-taught on piano, although he did study music in 1939. He wrote approximately seventy musical compositions in the course of his artistic career. One of his earliest compositions, the ballad ‘’Round Midnight,’ became a jazz standard almost instantly. Monk performed and recorded with modern jazz trumpeter Mile Davis on several occasions, including an album Davis released as a bandleader, *Miles Davis and the Modern Jazz Giants* (1954). His composition ‘‘Round Midnight’ was the theme song of Davis’s Quintet album *‘Round About Midnight* (1955), released on Columbia Records and featuring saxophonist John Coltrane as a band member.  Earlier in the 1940s, Monk had frequently performed at after-hour jam sessions of bebop jazz at the nightclub Minton’s Playhouse in Harlem, experimenting with the music’s new harmonies along with other leading figures in modern jazz such as alto saxophonist Charlie Parker and trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie, once Monk had become the nightclub’s house pianist in 1941. Monk’s quartet work with tenor saxophonist John Coltrane at the Five Spot Café in Greenwich Village in the 1950s, a venue frequented by the beats, writers, poets and artists, is regarded by some as the beginnings of avant-garde jazz in New York City. Monk performed his eccentric composition ‘Epistrophy’ with Coltrane at the Five Spot and on his studio date with him in 1957.  Monk’s Two Volume album *Genius of Modern Music* was released by modern jazz label Blue Note Records in the early 1950s, and features original compositions of Monk’s that have been regarded by jazz historians and critics alike as ahead of their time, including the atonal ‘Off Minor,’ quirky ‘Thelonious’ (*Volume 1*), and the intricate ‘Criss Coss,’ ‘Four In One,’ and ‘Skippy’ (*Volume 2*). Monk’s composition ‘Straight, No Chaser,’ is one of the most frequently played ‘blues’ form standards in jazz, and his ‘52nd Street Theme’ is often performed by jazz musicians at concerts to mark the end of the their live performance, in that they then immediately walk off the stage once they stop playing the composition’s melody. Monk named the composition after the district of jazz nightclubs he frequently performed at in New York City’s Midtown Manhattan, those that were integral to the performance of bebop in the movement’s early years, especially as the spreading of the musical movement began to represent a transition into a distinctly ‘modern’ phase of jazz in the 1940s and 1950s.  Monk struggled with mental illness for a large portion of his life, preferring to spend the later years of his life in relative isolation in his Riverside Drive apartment on New York City’s Upper West Side of Manhattan. He spent the last six years of his life as a guest in the home of Baroness Nica Pannonica de Koenigswarter, who was a patron and supporter of other leading figures in modern jazz, such as Charlie Parker. Monk died of a stroke on February 17, 1982 in Englewood, New Jersey. In 1993, he was posthumously awarded the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award. In 2006, Monk posthumously received a Pulitzer Prize Special Citation on the basis of a body of musical compositions that significantly impacted the evolution of jazz. His influence had always reached beyond music, with Robert Rauschenberg and other modernists creating art in his honour in the 1950s. List of Works: *Genius of Modern Music, Vol. 1*  *Genius of Modern Music, Vol. 2*  *Brilliant Corners*  *Monk’s Music*  *Underground*  *Criss-Cross*  *Thelonious Monk*  *Thelonious Monk with John Coltrane*  *Thelonious Monk and Sonny Rollins*  *Thelonious Monk – The Unique*  *Thelonious Monk Plays Duke Ellington*  *Monk’s Dream*  *Thelonious Alone in San Francisco*  *Solo Monk*  *Thelonious Monk Quartet: Misterioso*  *Monk*  *Thelonious Himself*  *Monk’s Dream*  *Straight, No Chaser*  *Monk’s Blues*  *Miles and Monk at Newport*  *Thelonious Monk at the Blackhawk*  *5 By Monk By 5*  *Mulligan Meets Monk*  *Thelonious in Action: Thelonious Monk Quartet with Johnny Griffin – Recorded Live at the Five Spot Café, New York City*  *The Thelonious Monk Orchestra at Town Hall*  *Big Band and Quartet in Concert*  *Standards*  *Monk in Tokyo*  *Monk in France*  *Monk in Italy*  *Live at the It Club - Complete*  *Live at the Jazz Workshop - Complete*  *Live at the 1964 Monterey Jazz Festival*   Compiled Box Sets: *The Complete Blue Note Recordings of Thelonious Monk*  *The Complete Riverside Recordings of Thelonious Monk*  *The Thelonious Monk Quartet: The Complete Columbia Studio Albums Collection*  *Monk Alone: The Complete Columbia Solo Studio Recordings - 1962-1968*  *Thelonious Monk: The Complete Prestige Recordings* Posthumously Released Live Recordings: *The Thelonious Monk Quartet featuring John Coltrane – Live at the Five Spot: Discovery!*  *Thelonious Monk Quartet with John Coltrane at Carnegie Hall* |
| Further reading:  (Appel)  (Bliek)  (Fitterling)  (Giddins and DeVeaux)  (Gourse)  (Kelley)  (Solis)  (Zwerin) |