

= Tommy Flanagan =

Thomas Lee Flanagan (March 16 , 1930 ? November 16 , 2001) was an American jazz pianist and composer . He grew up in Detroit , initially influenced by such pianists as Art Tatum , Teddy Wilson , and Nat King Cole , and then by the newer bebop musicians . Within months of moving to New York in 1956 , he had recorded with Miles Davis and on Sonny Rollins ' landmark Saxophone Colossus . Recordings under various leaders , including the historically important Giant Steps of John Coltrane , and The Incredible Jazz Guitar of Wes Montgomery , continued well into 1962 , when he became vocalist Ella Fitzgerald 's full @-@ time accompanist . He stayed for three years , then returned to be her pianist and musical director in 1968 , and stayed for a decade .

After leaving Fitzgerald again , Flanagan attracted praise for the elegance of his playing , which was principally in trio settings when under his own leadership . In his 45 @-@ year recording career , he recorded more than three dozen albums under his own name and more than 200 as a sideman . By the time of his death he was one of the most widely admired of jazz pianists and had influenced both his contemporaries and later generations of players .

= = Early life = =

Flanagan was born in Conant Gardens , Detroit , Michigan , on March 16 , 1930 . He was the youngest of six children ? five boys and a girl . His parents were both originally from Georgia . His father , Johnson Sr , was a postman , and his mother , Ida Mae , worked in the garment industry .

At the age of six , his parents gave him a clarinet for Christmas . He learned to read music from playing that instrument , but within a few years he preferred the piano . The family had a piano in the house , and Flanagan received lessons from one of his brothers , Johnson , and Gladys Wade Dillard , who also taught Kirk Lightsey and Barry Harris . Flanagan graduated from Northern High School , which he attended with other future musicians , including Sonny Red .

Flanagan 's early influences included Art Tatum and Teddy Wilson , both of whom he heard on radio and playing in the Detroit area , as well as Nat King Cole and local pianists Earl Van Riper and Willie Anderson . These , however , played in an earlier style , and the young Flanagan and his friends were more interested in the newer bebop , including that played by pianist Bud Powell , who had a strong effect on Flanagan 's musical thinking and improvising .

= = Later life and career = =

= = = 1945 ? 1955 ? Around Detroit = = =

Flanagan 's first concert was around 1945 , with trombonist Frank Rosolino . Flanagan 's age meant that he could not stay in the bar area of the club , so between sets he went to another room and did some homework . As a teenager , he played in a band led by Lucky Thompson that also contained Pepper Adams and Kenny Burrell . Still in his teens , Flanagan also sat in on piano for some appearances by Charlie Parker in Detroit . During 1949 Flanagan had his first residence , at the Blue Bird Inn in Detroit . In 1950 he played with Rudy Rutherford , until the clarinetist returned to the Count Basie band . Flanagan then played jazz and rhythm and blues with saxophonist George Benson in Toledo , before being drafted into the army in 1951 .

After basic training in Fort Leonard Wood , Missouri , Flanagan auditioned as a pianist for an army show . He got the role , which prevented him from being sent to the Korean War at that time , but around a year later he was sent to Kunsan , with the war ongoing . There , he worked as a motion @-@ picture @-@ projector operator . After two years ' service he was discharged and returned to Detroit , where he soon became pianist at the Blue Bird again . He again worked with Burrell , as well as Donald Byrd and Yusef Lateef , among others .

= = = 1956 ? early 1978 ? After move to New York = = =

Flanagan moved to New York in 1956 . He was unsure of how long he would stay , having been persuaded to go by Burrell ; the pair initially stayed with Burrell 's aunt in Harlem . Flanagan soon found work in clubs and studios , including recording Detroit ? New York Junction with Thad Jones in March . Later the same month he returned to recording , this time with Miles Davis and Sonny Rollins , for tracks released on Collectors ' Items . Rollins was leader for another session three months later : Saxophone Colossus , which was labeled an " undisputed masterpiece " by The Penguin Guide to Jazz .

Flanagan also first accompanied Ella Fitzgerald in 1956 , for around a month , including at the Newport Jazz Festival . Later that year he joined trombonist J. J. Johnson , with whom he recorded several albums in 1957 and then toured Europe . While in Sweden , Flanagan , with bassist Wilbur Little and drummer Elvin Jones , recorded his first album as leader , Overseas . Late in 1957 he was part of Miles Davis ' band for a short period , before returning to Johnson early the following year , for another stay of 10 months . A period leading his own trio in 1958 was followed by joining trombonist Tyree Glenn .

Throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s Flanagan made frequent appearances in recording studios , for a large number of leaders and record labels . In May 1959 he was part of a groundbreaking recording : John Coltrane 's Giant Steps , described by The Penguin Guide to Jazz as the saxophonist 's " first genuinely iconic record " . The technical complexity of the music , particularly of the title track , meant that there were numerous false starts and rejected takes , and the initially released take of " Giant Steps " is a rare instance on record of Flanagan sounding uncertain . Another appearance on a landmark recording came in January of the following year : Flanagan was a member of the quartet that made The Incredible Jazz Guitar of Wes Montgomery ; his playing complemented that of the guitarist , using controlled force on bebop numbers and delicacy on a ballad track .

Flanagan was with trumpeter Harry Edison in 1959 ? 60 , and tenor saxophonist Coleman Hawkins in 1961 ? 62 , including a UK tour . In this period , Flanagan recorded albums for several leaders from an earlier era , including Lionel Hampton , Jo Jones , and Pee Wee Russell , as well as one with Edison and around 10 with Hawkins . Flanagan then played with guitarist Jim Hall and bassist Percy Heath as a trio in New York .

In 1962 , he was asked by jazz impresario Norman Granz to become Ella Fitzgerald 's full @-@ time accompanist . Flanagan was looking for steadier work than was available with Hawkins , so he accepted . He worked with Fitzgerald from 1962 to 1965 . They toured internationally , including to Japan in 1964 . He also played with other bands when not required by the vocalist ; these included a brief reunion with Rollins in 1965 . Later the same year , Flanagan left Fitzgerald and was part of Art Farmer 's short @-@ lived New York Jazz Sextet , which recorded Group Therapy . Flanagan then became accompanist to Tony Bennett for part of 1966 , and lived on the West Coast .

Flanagan returned to working with Fitzgerald in 1968 . In addition to being her pianist , mostly as part of a trio , he was her musical director . Her popularity meant that a lot of touring was required : 40 ? 45 weeks a year , including at least one tour of Europe a year (29 cities there in 1970 , for example) . During these concerts , Flanagan often played a set as part of his trio , without the singer . Beginning in 1974 , he again began to perform and record as a leader : his 1975 trio release , The Tommy Flanagan Tokyo Recital , was his first as leader since 1960 . Prior to these performances , he had felt that his technique was inadequate for a soloist , but he enjoyed the extra exposure of being a leader , so decided to continue . Flanagan ended his role with Fitzgerald in 1978 , after he had a heart attack and had become tired of extensive touring . After the heart attack , he stopped smoking , reduced the amount that he drank , and exercised by walking more than he had previously .

= = = Late 1978 ? 2001 ? After Ella Fitzgerald = = =

Soon after leaving Fitzgerald , Flanagan played solo piano in New York . In 1979 he was a guest on the first series of Marian McPartland 's Piano Jazz radio programs . He continued to work with other

players , including as a trio with Tal Farlow and Red Mitchell in 1980 . For much of the 1980s he led a trio that featured bassist George Mraz and various drummers . By around 1990 Flanagan was concentrating on his own appearances and recordings rather than sideman activities . In the early 1990s Mraz was replaced by Peter Washington , whose heavier bass lines added urgency to the trio 's sound .

Flanagan 's reputation gradually grew after he moved on from being primarily an accompanist : in a 1992 article , critic Leonard Feather suggested that " Flanagan is the pianist most likely to be named a personal idol by other jazz pianists , whether they be swing veterans or avant @-@ gardists " . This made him more in demand ; the workload may have contributed to his collapse in 1991 and subsequent quadruple bypass heart surgery . He returned to playing within weeks , but also returned to hospital for treatment for an aneurysm . Flanagan was awarded the Danish Jazzpar Prize in 1993 . Three years later , he was selected for a National Endowment for the Arts Jazz Masters Fellowship . In 1990 , 1993 and 1997 , Flanagan toured Japan , where he was very popular , with 100 Golden Fingers , a 10 @-@ pianist group .

Flanagan continued to be praised for the elegance of his playing ? critic Ben Ratliff commented in 1998 that the trio with Washington and drummer Lewis Nash was , " in its controlled , elegant way , [...] one of the more extraordinarily coordinated piano trios in jazz 's history " . Despite the near @-@ unanimous praise from critics and musicians for Flanagan 's recordings and concert performances after he left Fitzgerald , he did not secure a recording contract with a major label for more than one album .

In late October 2001 , Flanagan played in a John Coltrane tribute at the San Francisco Jazz Festival . The following month , he was admitted to Mount Sinai hospital in Manhattan ; less than a fortnight later , on November 16 , he died there , from complications related to the aneurysm he had suffered a decade earlier .

= = Personality and family life = =

Flanagan first married in 1960 , to Ann . The couple had a son and two daughters , and divorced in the early 1970s ; Ann was killed in a car accident in 1980 . Flanagan 's mother died in 1959 , and his father in 1977 . Flanagan married Diana , his second wife , in 1976 . He was survived by Diana , the three children from his first marriage , and six grandchildren .

Flanagan was usually self @-@ effacing , reserved and amiable . His personality was summarized by his second wife : " His gentleness and quietness are deceptive . He is a strong man , and he has a lot of spirit and firmness . "

= = Playing style = =

Whitney Balliett stated that Flanagan was the most consistent of the pianists influenced by Wilson , Tatum and Cole , and invariably created something new in his playing : he " often states the melody with dissonant , levering chords played offbeat or staccato . Never decorative , they [...] reveal both a respect for the melody and an intense desire to alter it " ; during his main improvising , he used " interval @-@ filled descending figures [...] charging rhythmic phrases whose accented first notes make the succeeding notes snap , double @-@ time phrases that race ahead to clear the way , and legato phrases that form sauntering rear guards . " In a review of a 1989 concert , Feather commented that Flanagan used " subtle dynamic shadings " , while " bursts of upsweeping chords sometimes lent an element of surprise , with a nimble left hand offering graceful filigree fills " and occasional musical quotes that added humor . Other techniques he employed were , in Stanley Crouch 's description , " crooning effects achieved by manipulating the pedals , holding down keys long enough to sustain notes in decisively different ways , and working out inflections that evoke the voice ? sighs , moans , swells , purrs " . Critic John S. Wilson described Flanagan 's solo piano style on ballads in 1978 : " He drifts through ballads with a dreamy langourous flow , but it is not a soft or flabby style . There is , beneath the surface , a vitality that gives it a lean , swinging character " .

Although he acknowledged the influence of other pianists , Flanagan stated that , " I like to play like

a horn player , like I 'm blowing into the piano . The sound of a piece ? its over @-@ all tonality ? is what concerns me . " In concerts , Flanagan typically played a range of composers ' works and , once he had become established as a small @-@ group leader , he often played songs by Tadd Dameron , Duke Ellington , Benny Golson , Thad Jones , Tom McIntosh , and Thelonious Monk .

= = Awards and legacy = =

During his career , Flanagan was nominated for five Grammy Awards . The first occasion was in 1983 : The Magnificent Tommy Flanagan for Best Jazz Instrumental Performance , Soloist ; and Giant Steps for Best Jazz Instrumental Performance , Group . Two years later , Thelonica was nominated for Best Jazz Instrumental Performance , Soloist . The next nomination was in 1998 , for Best Jazz Instrumental Solo for his solo on " Dear Old Stockholm " from Sea Changes . The last , in 2003 , was in the same category , for Flanagan 's solo on " Sunset & the Mockingbird " , from A Great Night in Harlem .

Flanagan 's influence on pianists extended from his contemporaries to later generations . Contemporaries included fellow Detroit players Barry Harris and Roland Hanna . Lightsey was influenced by Flanagan 's musical creative thinking and pianistic fluidity . Alan Broadbent also acknowledged Flanagan as an influence , as did Helen Sung , who changed from being a classical music pianist to a jazz one after hearing the swing and logic of a Flanagan solo . Kenny Barron described Flanagan as his " hero " and stated that he admired the older man 's touch and phrasing from when he first heard it at junior high school : " He became an influence and continued to be an influence till the day he died ? and he still is . "

= = Discography = =