



Thelonious Monk

(October 10, 1917^[3] – February 17, 1982)

Cut from a special cloth indeed, in name alone, Thelonious, you knew this was going to be one special ride in the Jazz archives. His whole name (Thelonious Sphere Monk) told you yes, here we go, to the edge of space with him at the helm.

Monk was not only a part of the Bebop days he laid the foundation of it with Charlie Parker, Dizzie Gulespie, Art Tatum, and a host of others. Second only to Duck Ellington, no one has been recorded more in the Jazz world. With only 70 compositions, Thelonious took the Jazz world by storm. His [improvisational](#) style was in a world no one could come close to in the playing aspects, but as far as listening is concern, all were invited. His popularity widen in other areas link in his clothing and other habits. Thelonious felt that when he entertained, there is no need for the audience to have all the fun, so from time to time he would take a short break from the keyboards and dance himself.

Thelonious (German/Latin: meaning ruler of people) ruled the piano. Like many other Jazz artists, he was not fully appreciated until he was gone. During his tender, he was criticize for his playing style from simply those whom did not fully understand. I guess their heads are really spinning now. With his playing style criticized, Thelonious marched on. What a match it was. He not only played it, he dressed it, and literally lived it.

In the mid sixties, the invention of new words for the Jazz world was born. Cool, Slick, and Cats were just a few that were used to describe Thelonious (and others) living, dressing and playing style at times.

Monk had disappeared from the scene by the mid-1970s, and made only a small number of appearances during the final decade of his life. His last studio recordings as a leader were made in November 1971 for the English [Black Lion](#) label, near the end of a worldwide tour with "The Giants of Jazz," a group which included [Dizzy Gillespie](#), [Kai Winding](#), [Sonny Stitt](#), [Al McKibbon](#) and [Art Blakey](#). Bassist [Al McKibbon](#), who had

known Monk for over twenty years and played on his final tour in 1971, later said: "On that tour Monk said about two words. I mean literally maybe two words. He didn't say 'Good morning', 'Goodnight', 'What time?' Nothing. Why, I don't know. He sent word back after the tour was over that the reason he couldn't communicate or play was that [Art Blakey](#) and I were so ugly."^[19] A different side of Monk is revealed in [Lewis Porter's](#) biography, *John Coltrane: His Life and Music*; Coltrane states: "Monk is exactly the opposite of Miles [Davis]: he talks about music all the time, and he wants so much for you to understand that if, by chance, you ask him something, he'll spend hours if necessary to explain it to you."^[20]

The documentary film [Thelonious Monk: Straight, No Chaser](#) (1988) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JfoTv-08KHg> attributes Monk's quirky behavior to [mental illness](#). In the film, Monk's son, [T. S. Monk](#), says that his father sometimes did not recognize him, and he reports that Monk was hospitalized on several occasions due to an unspecified mental illness that worsened in the late 1960s. No reports or diagnoses were ever publicized, but Monk would often become excited for two or three days, pace for days after that, after which he would withdraw and stop speaking. Physicians recommended [electroconvulsive therapy](#) as a treatment option for Monk's illness, but his family would not allow it; [antipsychotics](#) and [lithium](#) were prescribed instead.^{[21][22]} Other theories abound: Leslie Gourse, author of the book *Straight, No Chaser: The Life and Genius of Thelonious Monk* (1997), reported that at least one of Monk's psychiatrists failed to find evidence of [manic depression](#) or [schizophrenia](#). Another physician maintains that Monk was misdiagnosed and prescribed drugs during his hospital stay that may have caused brain damage.^[21]

As his health declined, Monk's last six years were spent as a guest in the [Weehawken, New Jersey](#) home of his long-standing patron and friend, Baroness [Pannonica de Koenigswarter](#), who had also nursed [Charlie Parker](#) during his final illness. Monk did not play the piano during this time, even though one was present in his room, and he spoke to few visitors. He died of a [stroke](#) on February 17, 1982, and was buried in [Ferncliff Cemetery](#) in [Hartsdale, New York](#). In 1993, he was posthumously awarded the [Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award](#),^[23] and in 2006, Monk was posthumously awarded a [Pulitzer Prize Special Citation](#).^[24]

[Art Blakey](#) reports that Monk was excellent at both chess and checkers (draughts).^[25]

Monk was inducted into the [North Carolina Music Hall of Fame](#) in 2009.^[26]

Theioniou's music at the time was considered different and not main stream. Today, his music is one of the most sought after pieces of Jazz for anyone's collection. Again not truly appreciated until your gone. It seems that death makes those whom are left behind, to truly appreciate what an artist has left them and only then does it become a treasure.

Bill Sommerville