



Jean-Baptiste Frédéric Isidor, Baron Thielemans
(29 April 1922 – 22 August 2016)

Known professionally as **Toots Thielemans**, was a Belgian and American [jazz](#) musician. He was known for his harmonica playing, as well as his guitar, [whistling](#) skills, and composing. According to jazz historian [Ted Gioia](#), his most important contribution was in "championing the humble harmonica", which Thielemans made into a "legitimate voice in jazz".^[4] He eventually became the "preeminent" jazz harmonica player.^[5]

His first professional performances were with [Benny Goodman](#)'s band when they toured Europe in 1949 and 1950. He emigrated to the U.S. in 1951, becoming a citizen in 1957. From 1953 to 1959 he played with [George Shearing](#), and then led his own groups on tours in the U.S. and Europe. In 1961 he recorded and performed live one of his own compositions, "Bluesette", which featured him playing guitar and whistling. In the 1970s and 1980s, he continued touring and recording, appearing with musicians such as [Oscar Peterson](#), [Bill Evans](#), [Dizzy Gillespie](#), [Kenny Werner](#), [Pat Metheny](#), [Jaco Pastorius](#), [Elis Regina](#) and [Paquito D'Rivera](#).



Among the film soundtracks that Thielemans recorded are [The Pawnbroker](#) (1964), [Midnight Cowboy](#) (1969), [Cinderella Liberty](#) (1973), [The Sugarland Express](#) (1974) and [Looking for Mr. Goodbar](#) (1977). His harmonica theme song for the popular [Sesame Street](#) TV show was heard for 40 years. He often performed and recorded with [Quincy Jones](#), who once called him "one of the greatest musicians of our time."^[6] In 2009 he was designated a Jazz Master by [The National Endowment for the Arts](#), the highest honor for a jazz musician in the United States.

You haven't heard the smoothness of Jazz if you haven't heard Toots. I first heard him on the Quincy Jones Smackwaterjack and You Got It Bad Girl albums. His tone was so clear; you thought he was playing a crystal harmonica (if there was such a thing). Toots sound would make you dream, make you remember the better times of your life. His runs were so smooth and clear as well. There was no doubt when you here Toots, you knew there was a master at work. He was like a fine wine, better with age and he never looked back. He didn't have too. His sound made sure of that. I will truly miss him. Yes there are many other harmonica players out there. Some of them are pretty darn good, but to reach Toots level you have to reach his level. With the devotion you put down in history as the best Jazz Harmonica player.

darn good, but to reach Toots level you have to devote a life time. Even then it won't be enough to reach his level. With the devotion you heard on every note he blew, Toots Thielemans will go down in history as the best Jazz Harmonica Masters to Ever Live.

Bill Sommerville

Reference:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toots_Thielemans