

# OVERTURE

Dr. BILLY TAYLOR is an anomaly. He possesses the scholarly, well-mannered, articulate traits of a university professor and the practical knowledge and humanity of a man who has moved through life with the wealthy and the destitute spreading the word of America's classical music, jazz. He is not a jazz piano player. He is a jazz pianist, a title that can only be associated with players of the caliber of Art Tatum, Oscar Peterson, and very few others. Born the son of a dentist in North Carolina, TAYLOR is a formally educated artist who graduated from Virginia State University at the beginning of World War II, moved to New York and was privileged to have moved into the ranks at the forefront of the bebop revolution. He worked with the finest musicians at the time including Ben Webster, Stuff Smith, Dizzy Gillespie, Eddie South, Slam Stewart, Billie Holiday, among others. His career has taken him to radio, television, dozens of universities and colleges and to the artistic advisor and spokesman on jazz for the JOHN F. KENNEDY CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS IN Washington, D.C. BILLY has performed worldwide for millions of jazz lovers. He played at state dinners for Presidents Nixon, Ford and Clinton and before royalty in many countries. Thousands of jazz musicians and teachers have heard him perform throughout the world and as he has performed and introduced the annual awardees of the National Endowment for the Arts at the annual conferences of the International Association for Jazz Education. Millions have seen him on the CBS SUNDAY MORNING television program introducing music guests and commenting on their talents. His excellent book, JAZZ PIANO, is the bible for students and professionals in that field.

A cursory look at his chronology gives you an insight into how he arrived.

1921 – July 24. Born in Greenville, North Carolina to a musical family. His father was a dentist who sang, played piano, various brass instruments, and was a choir director

1926 – Moved to Washington, D.C. and entered Lucretia B. Mott elementary school

1928 - Studied saxophone, guitar and drums; began piano lessons

1932 – Entered Shaw Junior High school – uncle played recordings of FATS WALLER and ART TATUM

1934 - Earned \$1 playing first gig at age 13 – Billy attended Dunbar High School – studied classical piano with Elmira Streets and Henry Grant

1938 – Graduated from high school – enrolled in Virginia State University – studied piano with Professor Undine Moore who also served as his advisor

1942 – Received the Bachelor of Science degree from Virginia State University

1943 – Moved to New York City – studied piano with Richard McClanahan

1944 – Played with Ben Webster at the Three Deuces – appeared in the Broadway Musical “Seven Lively Arts” – played with Billie Holiday, Stuff Smith, Eddie South, Dizzy Gillespie and Foots Thomas

1946 – Played with Machito, Slam Stewart at the Three Deuces – married Teddi Castion in New York City – toured Europe with the Don Redman Band

1947 – Freelanced in Paris, France

1948 – Played in a duo with organist Bob Wyatt

1949 – Formed own quartet; which Artie Shaw fronted

1950 – Wrote articles for Down Beat magazine, Saturday Review, Esquire and others

1951 – Continued as house pianist at Birdland working with Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Georgie Auld, Roy Eldridge, Slim Gaillard, Terry Gibbs, Gerry Mulligan, Howard McGhee, Lee Konitz, Oscar Pettiford, Kai Winding, and others

1952 – Led own trio which included Earl May, bass and Charlie Smith, drums

1953 – Won the New Star Award from Down Beat magazine

1955 – Began own music publishing company, Duane Music, Inc.

1958 – Began “disc jockey” career on WLIB in New York City – was Music Director for the NBC TV Series “The Subject Is Jazz”

1961 – Began long tenure as pianist at the Hickory House in New York City

1962 – As “disc jockey”, switched to station WNEW – began doing concerts in schools

1964 – Returned to station WLIB – initiated workshop series for George Wein at the Newport Jazz Festival and Hunter College – appointed to the advisory board on Jazz for Lincoln Center in New York City – appointed to an officers position with the National Academy of Arts and Sciences (NARAS)

1965 – Co-founder of the Jazzmobile in Harlem – lectured at Yale and the Music Educators National Conference (MENC)

1966 – Hosted Jazz TV show on channel 47 in New York City

1969 – Began four-year tenure as Music Director for the David Frost Television Show – awarded an honorary doctorate from Fairfield University

1970 – Co-Founder and Officer of Black Communications Corporation that purchased radio station WGOK in Savannah, Georgia – awarded an honorary doctorate from Virginia State University

1972 – Appointed to a six-year term to the National Council On The Arts by President Richard Nixon

1973 – Formed new trio with Larry Ridley, bass and Bobby Thomas, drums – founded BILLY TAYLOR Productions

1974 – Led band for the New York Repertory Company – played at the White House State Dinner for President Nixon

1975 – Received the doctoral (DME) degree from the University of Massachusetts; the doctoral dissertation was “The History And Development Of Jazz Piano: A New Perspective For Educators” – replaced Harold Arlen on the ASCAP (American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers) Board Of Directors – began a lecture series at Howard University – played at the White House State Dinner for President Gerald Ford

1977 – Began directing the Jazz Alive program for National Public Radio

1981 – Received the honorary degree, Doctor of Music, from the Berklee College of Music in Boston

1982 – TAYLOR’S book, “Jazz Piano” (from his 1975 doctoral dissertation), was published by Wm C. Brown Co. BILLY TAYLOR was named art correspondent for the television program “CBS Sunday Morning”

1986 – Received the honorary degree, Doctor of Fine Arts, from the University of Massachusetts

1987 – Received the honorary degree, Doctor of Music, from St. John’s University, New York

1988 – Named an Arts American Jazz Master by the National Endowment For The Arts. Received the honorary degree, Doctor of Humane Letters, from Carleton College, Minnesota

1989 – Received an honorary doctorate from Clark College

1990 – Received the honorary degree, Doctor of Arts, from Long Island University, New York

1991 – Received the Tiffany Award from the International Society of Performing Arts Administrators (ISPAA) and the Award of Merit from the Association of Arts Presenters (AAP). Received the honorary Doctor of Music Degree from the State University College of New York at Fredonia

1992 – Began to serve annually as Master of Ceremonies for the Jazz Masters awards by the National Endowment For The Arts at the annual IAJE conference. President George Bush presented Dr. Taylor with the National Medal of Arts, the nation’s highest award for accomplishment in the arts. Received the honorary degree, Doctor of Humane Letters, from the University of North Florida, Jacksonville

1993 – Named Artistic Advisor and Spokesman on Jazz for the John F. Kennedy Center For The Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. Received the honorary degree, Doctor of Music, from Temple University, Philadelphia

1994 – Received the honorary Doctor of Musical Arts Degree from the University of Illinois. Received the George Peabody Award from Johns Hopkins University. Received the honorary degree of Doctor of Fine Arts from Rutgers University, New Jersey

1995 – The Kennedy Center commissioned BILLY TAYLOR to compose a work for jazz and symphony orchestra. The work, “Theme and Variations for Jazz Trio and Symphony Orchestra” premiered at the Kennedy Center on April 23, 1995 with the BILLY TAYLOR TRIO and the National Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Leonard Slatkin

1997 – Florida Memorial College in Miami, Florida awarded BILLY with an honorary doctorate

1998 – Two distinguished institutions, The University of Florida and The University of Delaware awarded honorary doctorates to BILLY

2000 – Honorary doctorates were awarded to BILLY from Bard College and The Pennsylvania State University

2001 – Received an honorary doctorate from The University of North Carolina

2003 - Received honorary doctorates from the University of Michigan at Flint and George Washington University

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BILLY TAYLOR grew up musically at a time when the depression was waning in the US. Many jazz pianists had to play solo at rent parties or sporting houses in order to survive. This solo playing, sans bass and/or drums, forced the keyboardists to create rhythm with their left hands, resulting in stride playing. This, of course, preceded early bebop pianists who grew up with the left hand “claw” style of playing. BILLY experienced both styles and, as a result, developed a much more functional left hand technique than many of his contemporaries. One only needs to hear his left-hand-only version of “Body and Soul” to appreciate this competency. Ergo the complete jazz pianist.

As an international ambassador for jazz, Dr. TAYLOR performed during the Third International Music Festival in Leningrad and visited the Soviet Union as a member of the International Commission of Distinguished American composers and Educators formed by the American Council of Learned Societies and the Union of Composers of the USSR. At the music conservatories of Shanghai and Beijing, China, he was a guest of the Chinese Cultural Commission as a lecturer and performer. In addition, he opened the International Arts Festival in Hungary, toured seven Middle Eastern countries and was the artistic consultant to the American delegation to UNESCO in Mexico. Taylor’s trio represented the U.S. at the international gala in Hungary for the thirty-three signatory countries of the Helsinki Agreement. As on-air correspondent for CBS-TV’s “Sunday Morning” where he recently celebrated

his 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary with the show, Dr. TAYLOR has profiled such jazz artists as Ella Fitzgerald, Quincy Jones, Sarah Vaughan and Peggy Lee. On BRAVO TV, Dr. TAYLOR hosted the series “Jazz Counterpoint.” And his radio series “Taylor Made Jazz” on National Public Radio was winner of the Peabody Award.

Dr. TAYLOR was the recipient of two Peabody awards, a Tiffany Award, an Association of Arts Presenters Award of Merit, an Emmy, twenty-three honorary doctoral degrees and the National Endowment for the Arts Masters Fellowship Award. He was the recipient of the first Certificate of Recognition given by the U.S. Congressional Arts Caucus.

Dr. TAYLOR was a Presidential appointee to the National Council on the Arts (one of only three jazz musicians to be so honored) and has been a guest artist at the White House on five occasions. He acts as consultant and advisor to music schools, civic and cultural groups and serves as mentor to jazz organizations across the United States.

He has been artist-in-residence at the University of Massachusetts (where he holds the prestigious Wilmer D. Barrett Chair), the University of California at Berkeley, Notre Dame, and Vassar, and has given an annual series of sold-out lectures at the Detroit Montreaux Jazz Festival and is Jazz Consultant of the Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center as well as serving on numerous boards and commissions. His experience as a performer and an educator has inspired him to create a number of innovative programs that strengthen the bonds of both students and teachers in the music that they share.

BILLY’S passion for jazz has never diminished during his more than six decades of productive participation. His role as performer/teacher will continue to expand as he discovers more and more ways to bring America’s classical music to the fore.

William F. Lee III, Ph.D., Mus.D.  
2007, New Smyrna Beach, Florida