

jazz pianorama

Side 1:

Sam Goold

Whipping the keys (Goold) - OK 4850 A

James P. Johnson

Weeping blues (James P. Johnson) - CO 81099

Fats Waller

Muscle shoals blues (Thomas) - OK 70949

Lemuel Fowler

Blues mixtures (Meller) - CO 81108

Meade Lux Lewis

Honky-tonk train blues (Lewis) - CO 20246

Hersal Thomas

Hersal blues (Thomas) - OK 9166

James P. Johnson

Riffs (Johnson/Bradford) - OK 401565 B

Side 2:

Earl Hines

My Monday date (Hines/Robin) - OK 402211

Art Tatum

Sophisticated lady (Ellington/Mills/Parish) -
Br 13165

Joe Sullivan

An armful of you (Waller) - CO-XLP 14515

Teddy Wilson

Between the devil and the deep blue sea
(Koehler/Arlen) - Br 22026

Art Tatum

Willow weep for me (Ronell) - CO-XLP 36717

Bud Powell

Bouncing with Bud (Powell) - Font. 680 207.1 L

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Fats Waller

photograph Melody Maker files

The piano is one of the most complicated western musical instruments: it has a highly developed mechanism and to play it makes great demands upon the musician, because the keyboard offers the possibility of producing so many notes at the same time.

Although the first pianos were developed a little after 1700, the instrument as we know it now was perfected only in the 19th century.

In North America about that same time the prototype of jazz arose: the brass band music, especially as it was played in New Orleans — music that was still very different from what was later called jazz. The bands provided for an important part of the instruments of the jazz band: the trumpet (originally the cornet), the trombone, the clarinet, the saxophone, and the drums. Between 1870 and 1920 the brass band music mixed with many other kinds of music, of which ragtime and the blues were the most important, and at the beginning of the second decade of the 20th century a new kind of music had arisen from all this: jazz.

It was especially ragtime, closely related to the earlier minstrel music, that gave the piano its place in the jazz band. But the function of the piano changed: the typical solo instrument took its place in the rhythm section next to the guitar, the double-bass, and the drums; it became an accompaniment instrument whose function largely corresponded to that of the guitar or the banjo. True, the piano was also used for solos, but as such it was less important than the horns, which have dominated at all times. In big bands, where the pianist is often the leader, it often happens that at one time and another the piano is not played at all, because the leader stands in front of the band. After 1950 several leaders of small combos did not even include the piano in their ensembles, where, after the disappearance of the guitar as a rhythm instrument, only

bass and drums were considered genuine members of the rhythm section.

In orchestras and combos only the really great pianists have the chance to play such long solos as the horns. This procedure with the piano is indeed only logical. Considered from the point of view of the combo or of the band it is an ambiguous instrument, because a pianist — by means of his own left hand — is able to provide an accompaniment to the solo voice of his right hand, while indeed more melody voices than one are possible. Thus in a certain sense the piano is already a complete orchestra: it can fulfil all functions alone, whereas orchestral instruments seldom have more than one function — the piano cannot be classed. And this does not only go for jazz: in western art-music the piano has fared just the same: it is primarily a solo instrument.

The American music called ragtime started seriously on its stormy development after 1890, and it rose to unprecedented popularity. The most striking musical characteristics were strictly-kept tempo, almost exclusive use of 2/4 and 4/4 time, and intensively-applied syncopation. Both rhythm and melody showed a clear relation with march music. All these seem obvious reasons why the brass bands especially felt attracted to this music when they were looking for something different from march music. The word ragtime is supposed to be a contraction of "ragged time," which refers to the characteristic syncopation already mentioned. This ragtime, however, was typical piano music. It was the pianists, with Scott Joplin the best-known, who brought ragtime to development. While the brass band music started to develop very slowly into jazz under ragtime and other influences, the piano-ragtime led a completely independent existence till about 1925. After 1920 its popularity decreased more and more, and although one meets the term ragtime now and then after '25 it is not quite the same:

ragtime-piano has by this time turned into jazz-piano. It is impossible to trace exactly how the development went, when it took place, and how long it took. This much, however, is almost certain: the ragtime-pianists, from New Orleans especially, started to give up syncopation more and more; consequently the stiff, angular, wooden rhythm slowly disappeared. Just as in the parallel development of orchestral music it was replaced by a more supple and flowing rhythm. Jelly Roll Morton is considered one of the most important pianists of this transition period; his playing stands between ragtime and jazz-piano, in spite of all his own declarations that he was the inventor of jazz. New York especially was a city famous for its many pianists; ragtime there had even acquired a completely distinctive character, and they called it the Harlem piano style. The names of its great pianists included Willie "The Lion" Smith, "The Beetle," Lucky Roberts, Eubie Blake, Duke Ellington, Fats Waller, and James P. Johnson.

Between 1920 and 1930 most of them developed from ragtime to jazz-piano, not because ragtime simply went out of fashion, but because the pianists developed in such a way that it gradually disappeared from the scene. All this took place at a time before New York had become *the* jazz centre of America. Till about 1930 it was Chicago that set the tone. It was there that the development of jazz was settled in the first place. The cornetist and bandleader Joe "King" Oliver, who, like most of the musicians, came from New Orleans, already had an established reputation around 1920; he started recording extensively with his band in 1923; thus grown-up jazz played by negro musicians was recorded for the first time. In the meantime he had brought the young Louis Armstrong over from New Orleans and the latter settled the direction jazz was to develop in. At first with Oliver, afterwards with Armstrong, the rhythmic suppleness that replaced the woodenness of ragtime

Bud Powell (middle or late 1940s)
photograph Frank Driggs's collection



worked on and on; it became one of the distinguishing marks of jazz.

This almost indefinable quality of jazz, this suppleness, springiness, swinginess, or however one wants to describe it, was to be called "swing." Especially in Chicago, because of Oliver, Armstrong, and others, one finds this element strongly represented in the new music for the first time. And also in Chicago one finds the first great jazz pianist, Earl Hines, nicknamed "Fatha" (from "father") because he is deservedly considered the founder of modern jazz-piano playing. Here the wooden rhythm which was a mechanical motion rather than a true rhythm has disappeared completely.

Indeed, closely connected with the swing element, there is a question of rhythm in the sense of dividing and playing with the element of time.

All this is connected with the acquisition of a growing technical command over the piano. Hines stood on a lonely height for a long time while many great interpreters were to be found on other instruments used in jazz. The reason is simply this: the piano makes much higher demands on the musician than, e.g., the trumpet or the saxophone, at any rate if he wants to reach a reasonable musical result within not too long a time.

The piano is typically an instrument produced by a highly developed culture. We do not meet it in folk music or in the country: it remained a town instrument, partly because its weight makes it almost untransportable. Ragtime as well as jazz pianists are "two-hand musicians," which means that both hands are playing together. There are solo and supplementary voices, plus a rhythmic-harmonic accompaniment, exactly as in much European art-music involving the piano.

Just as jazz is distinct from many other kinds of music in the world — it is the only music in which rhythm, melody, and harmony have developed equally, for in Africa, Asia,



Jelly Roll Morton

and Europe not more than two of these three elements have gone together — so the same goes for the piano in jazz.

The blues (originally a vocal music, later vocal with guitar accompaniment, and later still with orchestral accompaniment) was, as a form and a way of musical expression, incorporated in jazz: this is logical, because the blues was one of the most important of the forms of music that co-operated in the origin of jazz.

Also in the twenties a solo piano style developed which was purely blues in respect of form and which furthermore possessed all the characteristics of jazz: boogie-woogie. This style, although purely pianistic, has little in common with the other piano styles mentioned above in that there is positively no question of two-hand playing in the accepted sense.

In boogie-woogie the left hand and the right are as independent as the rhythm section and the horns in a jazz band. The only difference is that the left hand repeats one figure without interruption or alteration throughout the piece, adapted to the three chords of the old 12-bar blues, and the right hand improvises on this basis — here there is more question of rhythm than of melody. From this it is clear that boogie-woogie is in the first place a functional music. In New York there were enough Harlem piano players, but the boogie-woogie style was very popular in the poor quarters of Chicago, where many house parties were organised. The idea was that everyone had to pay some money to the host so that the latter could pay the rent of his house with it. Hence the name “rent parties” for a system less sound and efficient but more attractive than borrowing from a bank.

It was only in 1936, when Meade Lux Lewis was introduced to the public at large by promoter-critic John Hammond, that this remarkable piano style became known and that such names as Jimmy Yancey, Pete Johnson (not to be confused with James P. Johnson), and Albert Ammons

gained a reputation as famous boogie-woogie pianists. In the meantime the development of jazz-piano playing — solo playing — went on. James P. Johnson had developed from a ragtime pianist into a jazz pianist, Earl Hines had become the first giant of the jazz-piano, and 1930 was reached.

Three years afterwards a young pianist made some recordings that exploded like a bomb, especially among musicians. Art Tatum was far in advance of his time. He knew how to exploit to the full the harmonic possibilities offered by jazz themes in the themes themselves as well as in improvised choruses. What struck the public most was his unbelievable technical command of the piano: he could do anything with it. It was almost twenty years — and that is a very long time in the short history of jazz — before another pianist appeared anything like as nimble-fingered as Tatum. It is unfair to mention other important figures of the thirties like Teddy Wilson, Jess Stacey, or Joe Sullivan and to remark that, compared with Tatum, they come on a different plane, because Tatum was a unique phenomenon.

One of the consequences of Tatum's appearance on the scene — historically speaking so early — was that it took a long time, as has already been said, before piano playing progressed to a further stage. In fact jazz as a whole had to undergo a swift development before a new leading figure came to the fore.

Between 1940 and 1945 Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, together with some others, did a lot of pioneering, and in the latter year a new form of jazz was born: bop. Gradually musicians on other instruments became prominent who to a certain degree could rank with Bird and Diz. In the case of the piano it was Bud Powell. He was the first and great example for the younger generation, and now — fifteen years afterwards — his influence on them is still undeniable.

For Powell the left hand became less important than it had been for his predecessors. Only in the accompaniments, in ensemble playing, as well as in solos, are both hands used, but in a totally different way. There is no constant rhythm, but where there have to be accents and where harmonic turns are a matter of importance block chords are put down. This way of playing was later called “comping.” However, in the pianist's own solos the left hand had a, very subordinate function, the touching of only a single chord now and then, while all interest was concentrated in the right hand.

The harmonies used by Powell and other boppers were not so different from Tatum's, but because they were played in other positions, and because the touch was different, they sounded different and more modern. Besides, this bop piano playing was more complicated in rhythm, as a result of the nature of bop itself, which showed these differences from the preceding swing music: a quick harmonic development in respect of the alteration of chords as well as the usage of more different chords within one theme; the building of melodies on these harmonies in the themes as well as in the improvised solos, so that these melodies too underwent an even, quick development; and finally, a noticeably more complicated rhythm.

The first two aspects are unmistakably related to the fact that jazz is a western music; the last found its origin to a large extent in the growing consciousness of the (negro) musicians: in contrast to their former attitude, they became justifiably proud of their origin, so that the advanced art of African rhythm could begin to play an important part in an American music.

Jazz is a unique music. One of its many fascinating aspects is the strikingly quick development it underwent after 1920. With the solo pianists brought together on this record this development is to be heard in the least complicated way.

Sam Goold

(dates unknown)

WHIPPING THE KEYS (June 1923)

The only thing known about this ragtime pianist is that this is the only recording he ever made, at a time when ragtime was already several years past the height of its popularity. Goold must have been a virtuoso; he displays a sound technique and takes a tempo that is certainly rather high for ragtime. The rhythmically wooden, hopping character is clearly shown here; thematically, too, the ragtime is classical: its divisions are exactly like those of the march.

Note: In jazz and allied music a "theme" is not, as in so-called "classical" music, a piece of melodic material tied down to no particular length, but a complete whole. In *Whipping the keys* the first 32 bars in 2/4 comprise the first theme; this theme consists of two almost identical sections of 16 bars. The theme lengths afterwards occurring most frequently in jazz contain 12 (the blues), 16, and 32 bars.

James P. Johnson

(1891-1955)

WEEPING BLUES (June 28, 1923)

Although James Price Johnson was never a real celebrity for the public at large he was the doyen of Harlem piano. From 1904 he lived in New York, where he was a pianist-bandleader towards the end of the First World War. In the twenties all New York pianists acknowledged him as their master, and in that time too he made his only tour abroad, with the show *Plantation Days* to England.

Weeping blues is based on the 12-bar blues form for the greater part (4 bars I, 2 bars IV, 2 bars I, 2 bars V, 2 bars I), but in atmosphere and rhythm this is almost pure ragtime, in spite of the fact that here and there "blue notes" — flattened thirds and sevenths — are used.

RIFFS (January 29, 1929)

In principle a riff is nothing but an ostinato motif; one meets it in all kinds of music, from the most primitive to the most highly developed. The riff can be either two or

four bars long. Its appearance in jazz is undoubtedly due to the influence of blues, and also to that of religious and gospel music. *In the mood* is, although certainly not the best, the best-known example of a riff number.

Here James P. does not play riffs in the real sense of the word; they are rather particular little figures that return sometimes several times at a stretch.

What strikes one most in this Johnson performance is its difference from the recording of six years earlier. Here too, especially with regard to the form, much ragtime is to be heard, but rhythmically speaking James P. has really developed into a jazz pianist: there is a good deal of swing in his playing.

In the meantime, another period comes to an end with this number: the twenties, which as far as New York was concerned were controlled by James P. Johnson, and in which the development of jazz took place in Chicago, because there the influence of the blues was so much stronger, as may be clearly heard from side 1 of this record.

James P. Johnson



Hersal Thomas (circa 1924)

photograph Frank Driggs's collection



Fats Waller

(1904-1943)

MUSCLE SHOALS BLUES *

Thomas Waller was born in New York in the year James P. Johnson went to live there; afterwards he became Johnson's pupil. In this recording the stylistic influence of Waller's teacher is still clearly noticeable, but the elements of his own are notable too: a more pronounced but above all more fluent rhythm. In other words, swing is coming into ragtime, which is thus beginning to lose one of its features and to develop into jazz.

Waller's popularity rose to great heights in the late thirties and early forties, but that popularity was the popularity of Fats Waller the entertainer rather than of Fats Waller the pianist. Only in jazz circles was and is he recognised as one of the greatest; moreover, he produced a great number of outstanding compositions, apart from the famous songs he wrote for shows in co-operation with lyric-writer Andy Razaf.

*) Recording date: a) based on original matrix numbers: New York, end 1922;
b) acc. to Delaunay: New York, 1924.

Lemuel Fowler

(dates unknown)

BLUES MIXTURES (July 3, 1923)

The Chicagoan Fowler, like Waller, here plays a blues — but it is clear that the Windy City was indeed the jazz centre. Not only is the atmosphere more like that of the blues; except for a single figure this music does not make one think of ragtime in any respect, as the blues of James P. Johnson certainly does. However slow the tempo may be, here you hear swing, deriving from the country blues of the South. It appears to have been impossible to arrive at real blues and jazz simply by following the typical 12-bar pattern. This is a proof how enormously important the element of swing is.

Meade Lux Lewis

(born 1905)

HONKY-TONK TRAIN BLUES (January 11, 1936)

This is a re-recording of Lewis's original 1929 *H. T. train blues*. It is the most classical example of boogie-woogie, completely blues in form but with a character entirely of its own. The left-hand figure is based on the sound of the elevated trains in Chicago; it became internationally renowned when John Hammond, after hearing the '29 recording, went to look for Lewis, found him working as a car-washer in a garage, and brought him to New York. After 1940 the boogie craze slowly but surely disappeared.

Hersal Thomas

(dates unknown)

HERSAL BLUES (February 1925)

Within jazz the blues itself starts to develop, as can be heard in this recording by Hersal Thomas, another Chicagoan. The chords as given by James P. Johnson's *Weeping blues* still serve as a basis, and there really is the 12-bar frame, but between the basic chords Thomas adds passing chords, or changes as they are called in modern jazz. Thus the blues remains completely blues but gradually develops a specific jazz character.

Fats Waller

photograph Frank Driggs's collection



Meade 'Lux' Lewis in costume from his appearance in New Orleans, United Artists 1947 film with Louis Armstrong.

photograph Frank Driggs's collection



Earl Hines

(born 1905)

MY MONDAY DATE (December 9, 1928)

James P. Johnson was thirty-eight years old when he recorded his *Riffs*. Two months before, a fifteen-years-younger pianist in Chicago had made his recording debut as a soloist with *Caution blues* and *My Monday date*. This Earl Kenneth Hines was, for his twenty-three years and especially for that time, an unbelievably mature musician. The difference between him and Louis Armstrong, the only man comparable to him in greatness, is evident when we look at Armstrong when, at the age of 23, he was in King Oliver's band in 1923, five years before this recording. And this relatively short period of five years is again a sign of the quick development and growth of jazz between 1920 and 1930. Hines, so young when this recording was made, is even for us a bewildering phenomenon when we see him in his own surroundings.

Here we have to do for the first time with really pure jazz-piano, in which nothing reminds us of ragtime, because the only passages that could be cited in this respect have to be seen as Fats Waller influences. Hines has released himself from the strict ragtime motoric rhythm — in his playing we do not only find enormous swing: this is really rhythm . . . the "playing with the time" . . . the continuous creation of tension and the resolution of it. Where Earl Hines took such a great step forward, it is even more remarkable that history repeated itself within less than five years.

Earl Hines



Art Tatum

(1910-1956)

SOPHISTICATED LADY (March 21, 1933)

Originally Art Tatum played the violin, with which he started at the age of 13. A short time afterwards he started to study the piano and at the age of 20 he had already acquired a certain local fame by his public and radio appearances in his native town, Toledo, Ohio. In 1932, as accompanist to the singer Adelaide Hall, he went to New York, a city that was to take over the leading role in jazz from Chicago. This was for the simple reason that the musicians went to New York, which in turn had very complicated sociological reasons.

Tatum's appearance in *The Apple* had an effect like that of a bomb; he was soon called "a musician's musician," a significant title of honour. It means a musician with very special qualities, so special that he is chiefly appreciated by fellowmusicians. A musician's musician is invariably a person who never attains great public popularity. Art Tatum had this bad luck; even in avowed jazz-fan circles he was never fully recognised, for the simple reason that he was too far ahead of his time.

His importance has already been explained in the introduction; it is therefore enough to point out a single feature of his interpretation of the Ellington classic, a feature that demonstrates Tatum's harmonic and melodic invention: namely the bridge in the theme, that is, the third section of eight bars, and especially its last two. There are many more such progressions in the improvisations — after the

playing of the whole 32-bar theme — and they are then much more elaborate and of greater rhythmic complexity. Tatum recorded this *Sophisticated lady* during his first solo session. Previously he had only been in the studio once as an accompanist.

WILLOW WEEP FOR ME (summer 1949)

It is only fair to have Art Tatum represented twice in this jazz Pianorama. It is interesting to compare this track with the sixteen-years-older recording, *Sophisticated lady*. It has the same brilliant technique but also an inner maturity that makes this concert recording a real experience every time one listens to it.

Joe Sullivan

(born 1906)

AN ARMFUL OF YOU (September 9, 1952)

Tatum was a "musician's musician," but although he was appreciated little or not at all by the public his musical influence is still working now. Joe Sullivan, a pianist from Chicago, would never have played the way he does without Tatum, although — and this also speaks well for him — there are also very clear Earl Hines influences. This is easily accounted for, for in Hines's great period Sullivan worked in Chicago, and after 1930 he played, like so many others, in New York.



Bud Powell

photograph Melody Maker files

Art Tatum



Teddy Wilson

(born 1912)

BETWEEN THE DEVIL AND THE DEEP BLUE SEA
(November 2, 1937)

Theodore Wilson's playing too is unimaginable without Tatum's, however personal his style may be. Unlike Tatum's, however, Wilson's jazz was enormously popular with a public even larger than the group of avowed jazz-fans.

The flexibility, the light-footed character, and the fine technique of his playing were to be heard in hundreds of his recordings from the thirties. Among his best-known recordings are those with Billie Holiday and with several combos under the direction of Benny Goodman.

Bud Powell

(born 1924)

BOUNCING WITH BUD (Paris, December 18, 1959)

Jazz developed quickly, as you have already read. Jazz-fans' appreciation for their idols waxes and wanes quickly too; their mental maturity is not so highly developed as that of the musicians who play their favourite music. It is an unhappy and foolish phenomenon when yesterday musician A was *the* great man of his instrument, and today B has taken his place and A has been completely forgotten. So it was with Charlie Parker, the greatest and most influential improvising soloist jazz has known, while Dizzy Gillespie, a lively and mature artist, has a steadily dwindling circle of admirers.

In the same year that Art Tatum played his *Willow weep for me*, Bud Powell had reached the height of his powers. He was *the* bop pianist. In his own playing and in that of those who came afterwards, Art Tatum's influence remained undeniable, but it is also a fact that all modern pianists — the generation after 1945 — owe something to Powell. Powell himself, however, went down like Dizzy Gillespie and most bop pioneers; this and other circumstances led him, just like Don Byas and Kenny Clarke, to settle in Europe. Hence it is that he is to be heard with Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers in this recording, made during a Paris concert on their 1958 European tour (Lee Morgan, tpt; Wayne Shorter, ten; Jymie Merritt, bs; Art Blakey, d).

Bud Powell, the last link in the chain of piano greats in jazz, ends this survey. If we fix Sam Gould's style historically in 1920 and Bud Powell's in 1950, the whole comprises three decades, less than half a man's life in western society.

That is 75% of the whole still young history of jazz, but it is still a development that can be called pretty well unique.

Out of a better sort of popular music — ragtime — an art-music — jazz — developed, reaching a high level within a very short time — short especially where the piano is concerned. One of the characteristics of jazz is that an interpretation can never be repeated in exactly the same way, not even when there is a score. A jazz musician always has certain licenses even within that restriction, e.g. in his treatment of rhythm. The fact that a completely elaborated score occurs very rarely only serves as an example to show more clearly how important the gramophone record was and is in jazz.

Before the arrival of other media like the tape recorder, the gramophone record was the only means of keeping this art for the future — in this case *now*.

That is why everybody who calls himself a real jazz-fan, a *music* fan, should be happy that it is possible to revive the history of jazz-piano, by means of this disk, in the recordings of the musicians who made the history.

Michiel de Ruyter

Joe Sullivan and Count Basie, in a rare photo taken as they were playing an impromptu duet



photograph Frank Driggs's collection

Teddy Wilson



photograph Columbia Records Inc.