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LEGENDARY JAZZ PIANIST AND COMPOSER THELONIOUS MONK RECEIVES PULITZER PRIZE

Washington, DC – The 90th annual Pulitzer Prizes were announced earlier this week by the Pulitzer Prize Board at Columbia University in New York. The Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz is pleased that its namesake, legendary jazz pianist and composer Thelonious Monk, received a posthumous Award “for a body of distinguished and innovative musical composition that has had a significant and enduring impact on the evolution of jazz.”

Monk is the first jazz musician and composer to receive the honor since 1999, when a Special Citation was awarded to Duke Ellington on the centennial of his birth. In addition to Ellington and Monk, only three other jazz composers have been recipients of the Pulitzer: George Gershwin, Scott Joplin, and Wynton Marsalis.

“Thelonious Monk is one of the greatest composers of all time and the leading composer who bridged bebop to modern jazz,” noted Tom Carter, President of the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz. “His unique sound and creative spirit revolutionized the music and transcends generations. Thelonious Monk’s work and legacy live on through the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz, which introduces young people around the world to the rich history of jazz and the importance of perpetuating and expanding this art form. The Pulitzer Prize fittingly honors an American genius and will ensure that Thelonious Monk and his music reach a wider audience.”

Thelonious Monk

Thelonious Sphere Monk (1917-1982) is recognized as one of the most influential figures in the history of Jazz. He was one of the architects of bebop and his impact as a composer and pianist has had a profound influence on every genre of music.

Monk was born on October 10, 1917, in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, but his parents, Barbara Batts and Thelonious Monk, soon moved the family to New York City. Monk began piano lessons as a young child and by the age of 13 he had won the weekly amateur contest at the Apollo Theater so many times that he was barred from entering. At the age of 19, Monk joined the house band at Minton’s Playhouse in Harlem, where along with Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, and a handful of other players, he developed the style of jazz that came to be known as bebop. Monk’s compositions, among them “Round Midnight,” were the canvasses over which these legendary soloists expressed their musical ideas.



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In 1947, Monk made his first recordings as a leader for Blue Note. These albums are some of the earliest documents of his unique compositional and improvisational style, both of which employed unusual repetition of phrases, an offbeat use of space, and joyfully dissonant sounds. That same year, he married his long-time love Nellie Smith and later had two children, Thelonious, Jr. and Barbara (1954-1984). In the decade that followed, Monk played on recordings with Miles Davis, Charlie Parker, and Sonny Rollins and recorded as a leader for Prestige Records and later for Riverside Records. Brilliant Corners and Thelonious Monk with John Coltrane were two of the albums from this period that brought Monk international attention as a pianist and composer.

In 1957, the Thelonious Monk Quartet, which included John Coltrane, began a regular gig at the Five Spot. The group's performances were hugely successful and received the highest critical praise. Over the next few years, Monk toured the United States and Europe and made some of his most influential recordings. In 1964, Thelonious Monk appeared on the cover of Time magazine, an honor that has been bestowed on only three other jazz musicians. By this time, Monk was a favorite at jazz festivals around the world, where he performed with his quartet, which included long-time associate Charlie Rouse. In the early '70s he discontinued touring and recording and appeared only on rare occasions at Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall and the Newport Jazz Festival.

Thelonious Sphere Monk passed away on February 5, 1982. His more than 70 compositions are classics which continue to inspire artists in all forms of music. In his lifetime he received numerous awards and continues to be honored posthumously. The Smithsonian Institution has immortalized his work with an archive of his music. In addition, the U.S. Postal Service issued a stamp in his honor. A feature documentary on Monk's life, *Straight, No Chaser*, was released to critical acclaim. The Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz was founded to honor Monk by preserving the music to which he dedicated his life. Monk's integrity, originality, and unique approach set a standard that is a shining example for all who strive for musical excellence.

Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz

The Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz (www.monkinstitute.org) is a non-profit education organization established in memory of Thelonious Monk, the legendary jazz pianist and composer. Monk believed the best way to learn jazz was from a master of the music. The Institute follows that same philosophy by bringing together the greatest living jazz musicians to teach and inspire young people. The Institute offers the most promising young musicians college level training by America's jazz masters and presents public school-based jazz education programs for people around the world. Helping to fill the tremendous void in arts education left by severe budget cuts in public school funding, the Institute's education programs are provided free to the public and use jazz as the medium to encourage imaginative thinking, creativity, a positive self-image, and respect for one's own and others' cultural heritage.