

Jazz Greats: Thelonious Monk



Thelonious Monk was one of the creators of the music known as *modern jazz*.

Monk was born in 1917 in Rocky Mount, North Carolina. Around the age of five, he began to imitate tunes he heard on the family's player piano. When the family moved to New York, young Thelonious' mother scraped together the money for a baby grand piano. Now a single mother, she had little extra money, but she managed to pay for the piano lessons Monk began taking at age 11. A serious student, Monk spent much of his time playing or observing other pianists as they played.

By the age of 13, Monk was playing with a jazz trio at a local bar and grill. At 16, he left school to pursue music full-time. His first important gig came in the early 1940s, when he became the house piano player at a club called Minton's Playhouse. Jazz was undergoing a great period of innovation and change, and Monk was one of the musicians at the center of it all. Beginning in the late 1940s, however, his career declined. A period of poverty, depression, and occasional trouble with the law made life very difficult for Monk and his wife, Nellie.

In 1954, Monk recorded his first solo album, "Pure Monk." Though his temperament was challenging to many of the other musicians he played with, Monk gained and kept the notoriety he had long deserved. In 1964, he appeared on the cover of *Time* Magazine, a rare honor, especially for a jazz musician at the time.

One of the most prolific composers in jazz history, he leaves behind a wealth of recordings and original compositions. Monk still influences jazz musicians today.



Directions: Answer the questions below. Use text evidence to support your answers.

1. What is the main idea of Jazz Greats: Thelonious Monk? Write it in your own words.

Name _____

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2. Choose a quote from the text that supports the following statement, and record it on the lines below.

Thelonious Monk worked hard as a child to become a great musician.

3. Why was Thelonious Monk's appearance on the cover of Time magazine a big deal?

4. Describe what the author means when the text says, "Though his temperament was challenging to many of the other musicians he played with..."

5. What was the result of Thelonious Monk's hard work through his childhood and teenage years?

6. What caused Monk's career to decline in the 1940s?

7. What evidence in the passage shows that Monk's career improved after the 1940s? Include two pieces of evidence.

a. _____

b. _____
