

Billy Taylor's Biography

Billy Taylor encompasses that rare combination of creativity, intelligence, vision, commitment and leadership, qualities that make him one of our most cherished national treasures.

The distinguished ambassador of the jazz community to the world-at-large, Dr. Billy Taylor's recording career spans nearly six decades. He has also composed over three hundred and fifty songs, including "I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel To Be Free," as well as works for theatre, dance and symphony orchestras.

Playing the piano professionally since 1944, he got his start with Ben Webster's Quartet on New York's famed 52nd Street. He then served as the house pianist at Birdland, the legendary jazz club where he performed with such celebrated masters as Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie and Miles Davis. Since the 1950s, Billy Taylor has been leading his own Trio, as well as performing with the most influential jazz musicians of the twentieth century.

Dr. Taylor has not only been an influential musician, but a highly regarded teacher as well, receiving his Masters and Doctorate in Music Education from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and serving as a Duke Ellington Fellow at Yale University.

He has also hosted and programmed such radio stations WLIB and WNEW in New York, and award winning series for National Public Radio. In the early 1980s, Taylor became the arts correspondent for CBS Sunday Morning.

Dr. Billy Taylor is one of only three jazz musicians appointed to the National Council of the Arts, and also serves as the Artistic Advisor for Jazz to the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, where he has developed one acclaimed concert series after another including the Louis Armstrong Legacy series, and the annual Mary Lou Williams Women in Jazz Festival.

With over twenty three honorary doctoral degrees, Dr. Billy Taylor is also the recipient of two Peabody Awards, an Emmy, a Grammy and a host of prestigious and highly coveted prizes, such as the National Medal of Arts, the Tiffany Award, a Lifetime achievement Award from Downbeat Magazine, and, election to the Hall of Fame for the International Association for Jazz Education.

Now in his eighties, and officially retired from active touring and recording, he remains active with his educational activities and a full schedule of speaking engagements and appearances on radio and television.