



volume one *blue note 1510*

THELO- NIOUS

genius of modern music

MONK

GENIUS OF MODERN MUSIC THELONIOUS MONK

BLP 1510 Vol. 1

**'ROUND ABOUT MIDNIGHT
OFF MINOR
RUBY MY DEAR
I MEAN YOU
**APRIL IN PARIS
IN WALKED BUD**

**THELONIOUS
EPISTROPHY
MISTERIOSO
WELL YOU NEEDN'T
*INTROSPECTION
HUMPH**

BLP 1511 Vol. 2

****CAROLINA MOON
**HORNIN' IN
**SKIPPY
**LET'S COOL ONE
SUBURBAN EYES
EVONCE

**STRAIGHT NO CHASER
FOUR IN ONE
NICE WORK
MONK'S MOOD
WHO KNOWS
ASK ME NOW**

*previously unissued
**not previously issued on LP

**'ROUND ABOUT MIDNIGHT, IN WALKED BUD,
MONKS MOOD, WHO KNOWS:**
George Taitt, trumpet; Sahib Shihab, alto sax; Thelonious Monk, piano; Robert Paige, bass; Art Blakey, drums.

**OFF MINOR, RUBY MY DEAR, APRIL IN PARIS, WELL
YOU NEEDN'T, INTROSPECTION, NICE WORK:**
Thelonious Monk, piano; Gene Ramey, bass; Art Blakey, drums.

I MEAN YOU, EPISTROPHY, MISTERIOSO:
Milt Jackson, vibes; Thelonious Monk, piano; John Simmons, bass; Shadow Wilson, drums.

THELONIOUS, HUMPH, SUBURBAN EYES, EVONCE:
Idresse Suliman, trumpet; Danny Quebec West, alto sax; Billy Smith, tenor sax; Thelonious Monk, piano; Gene Ramey, bass; Art Blakey, drums.

**CAROLINA MOON, HORNIN' IN, SKIPPY, LET'S
COOL ONE:**
Kenny Dorham, trumpet; Lou Donaldson, alto sax; Lucky Thompson, tenor sax; Thelonious Monk, piano; Nelson Boyd, bass; Max Roach, drums.

**STRAIGHT NO CHASER, FOUR IN ONE, ASK ME
NOW:**
Sahib Shihab, alto sax; Milt Jackson, vibes; Thelonious Monk, piano; Al McKibbon, bass; Art Blakey, drums.

THE DICTIONARY tells us that genius is exceptional natural capacity for creative and original conceptions and a genius is a person having such capacity. When considering the attributes of Thelonious Monk in the light of this definition, the title *Genius Of Modern Music* fits logically in all its aspects.

Monk's creativity is not limited to only the melodic or the harmonic or the rhythmic but embraces all three.

His harmonic innovations (new chord) patterns and reinterpretations of older ones) were some of the most important germinating factors at Minton's. In fact Monk is synonymous with the Minton's of the earliest Forties because of the major role he played there in the birth of the new music.

The melodic side of Monk is exemplified best by his original compositions such as *'Round About Midnight*, *Well You Needn't*, *Ruby My Dear* and *Off Minor* which have become permanent parts of the "Jazz library" through numerous in person performances and recordings by Monk and by people like Miles Davis, Bud Powell, Stan Getz and Jimmy Raney, George Wallington, Kenny Dorham and Barney Kessel.

Monk's rhythmic subtleties are more a permanent personal part of him than his melodic and harmonic contributions which have been assumed and interpreted by many other musicians. Among the pianists only Randy Weston has been directly influenced by him although Bud Powell and other pianists of that idiom exhibit Monkish flavor at various times. The rhythmic nuances by this master of time seem to escape Monk's detractors who give him little credit as a soloist but even if this side remains an enigma to them, the melodic and harmonic richness of performances like *'Round About Midnight*, *Ruby My Dear*, *April In Paris*, *Introspection*, *Ask Me Now* and *Four In One* is proof enough of his singular prowess and certainly more than enough food for thought. The wit and warmth are in abundance.

His direct antecedents are hard to discern but there is a tacit link with the Harlem pianists of an earlier era. Occasionally this comes out into the open as in the striding left hand on *Thelonious* and the "train blues" on *Well You Needn't*, but it is the implied spirit which embodies more than one era of Jazz.

These two volumes represent the finest collection of Thelonious Monk to be found anywhere with lucid examples of his work from both the Forties and the Fifties.

Volume I (BLP 1510) contains recordings culled from the mid and late Forties. There is the sombre beauty of the already immortalized *'Round About Midnight*, the percussive, provocative minority of *Off Minor*, the sentiment without sentimentality of *Ruby My Dear*, the unflagging freshness of *Well You Needn't*, the Monk in Paris in April of

April in Paris, the questioning beauty of the heretofore unreleased *Introspection*, the humor and ingenuity of the one-noted *Thelonious* and the marvelous harmonic and rhythmic interplay between Milt Jackson and Monk on *Epistrophy* (written by Monk and Kenny Clarke), *I Mean You* (a theme borrowed by Gerry Mulligan for his *Motel*) and *Misterioso*.

Volume 2 (BLP 1511) has five tracks from the Forties. *Suburban Eyes*, written by tenorman Ike Quebec, and *Evonce*, a Quebec-Idresse Suliman collaboration, feature Quebec's cousin Danny Quebec West on alto, the Dexter Gordonish (of that time) tenor of Billy Smith and the pungent trumpet of Idresse Suliman in addition to Monk. Suliman has only started to be appreciated recently. This group can be heard on *Humph* and *Thelonious* in Volume 1.

Two of the remaining Forties-recorded tracks are *Monk's Mood*, a piano solo integrated with the theme, as carried by George Taitt and Sahib Shihab, which expresses a melancholia with one cent worth of hope, and the up tempo *Who Knows*. These are done by the quintet which appears on *'Round About Midnight* and *In Walked Bud* in Volume 1. *Nice Work*, a trio exploration of the Gershwin classic, stems from a 1947 trio session.

The majority of the tracks in Volume 2 were recorded in the Fifties. *Four In One* and *Straight No Chaser* reunite Monk with Milt Jackson, Sahib Shihab and Art Blakey. It is interesting and rewarding to hear the maturation of the four colleagues. *Ask Me Now*, done at the same session with just the trio, is worthy of the earlier great trio performances.

As composer-arranger for the sextet, Monk shows another facet of his skill. The 6/4 waltz that he makes of *Carolina Moon* is an example of how to get away from the usual jazz beat and still swing. Lou Donaldson, Kenny Dorham and Lucky Thompson help considerably in the realization of this attempt (to say nothing of Max Roach) and make their solo power felt in the other numbers, *Hornin' In*, *Skippy* and *Let's Cool One*. Contrast these sextet tracks with the exact instrumentation of the *Suburban Eyes* group and you'll see where Monk has continued to grow while still remaining the individual personality who leads and influences modern music and its makers.

— IRA GITLER

Cover Design by REID K. MILES
Photo by FRANCIS WOLFF
Remastering by RUDY VAN GELDER

THELONIOUS MONK

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I MEAN YOU, EPISTROPHY, MISTERIOSO:

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THELONIOUS, HUMPH:

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THELONIOUS MONK

One of jazz's most brilliant composers, Thelonious Sphere Monk was from word go a contrarian. As a pianist, he rambled, marched and leaped across the keys with uncompromising vision and relentless creativity, stamping his distinctive signature on every tune he wrote or covered. During his early days on the jazz scene in the '40s, he was crowned the High Priest of Bebop, a



dubious moniker since Monk's radical playing was driven more by stride, blues and swing influences than rapid-fire bop. Indeed instead of piquing the curiosity of jazz followers, the esoteric title actually scared more people away from his admittedly difficult and odd-sounding music. But Monk was not swayed, possessed with a creative idiosyncrasy and penchant for playing on his own planet of dissonant harmonies, angular melodies and rhythmic twists.

Unfortunately Monk's recording career was truncated due to health setbacks. He launched off as a leader with Blue Note (documented on *Genius of Modern Music, Volumes One & Two*) beginning in 1947 and continuing through 1952, with his music largely misunderstood and unappreciated. After stints on Prestige, Riverside and Columbia, Monk closed his recording days in 1971 with sessions in London released by Black Lion. Monk was largely inactive the rest of the decade, fully faded from the scene and passed away in 1982. By then the jazz world had finally begun to comprehend the genius of Monk, but beyond that

people knew little to nothing of who he was and what other-worldly luminosity he contributed to modern music.

Monk's pianistic voice and his compositional gift were not fully appreciated until after he died. When it finally dawned on musicians how right his wrong notes were and how sage his off-kilter musings were, they flocked to take on his music, ranging from Monk's highly charged "In Walked Bud" and "Four in One" to his sublime ballads "Ruby My Dear" and "Ask Me Now"—all included in his early Blue Note sessions. Today Monk's compositions rank second only to Duke Ellington's as the most recorded jazz works.

What's so appealing about *Genius of Modern Music, Volumes One & Two* is that this is the first time Monk recorded his originals, all of them classic pieces that he continued to return to throughout his career (Orrin Keepnews, who produced Monk during his Riverside days, said that the pianist loved revisiting his tunes well after his Blue Note sessions: "If he was no longer actively searching for new chords, new ways of sync-

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operating, new figures, new runs, it was because he had found them. He created his own highly personal vocabulary, and it enabled him to say things exactly the way he wanted to say them — so why should he change?). While Monk certainly finessed the songs from his early recording days, here you get to savor them fresh.

On *Volume One*, along with inventive covers of such standards as “Nice Work If You Can Get It” and “April in Paris,” Monk introduces one of his grand romps, “Well, You Needn’t,” playing ebulliently, splicing chords and delivering sprinkling right-hand dissonant notes — with a zip and bounce throughout. One of his most renowned compositions, “Round Midnight,” makes its first radiant appearance under his own name (Cootie Williams had recorded it in 1944 and Dizzy Gillespie, 1946), as does “Off Minor,” with its Looney-tunes playfulness and slapstick-like development. The October 15, 1947 sessions features a sextet with the



rhythm team of bassist Gene Ramsey and drummer Art Blakey (soon to make his Blue Note debut as leader); the October 15 date was trio only (Ramsey, Blakey), and the November 21 quintet session had Blakey returning for another round.

Volume Two comprises two sessions: July 23, 1951 with quintet

and Blakey again along with vibes player Milt Jackson; and May 30, 1952 with a killer sextet featuring trumpeter Kenny Dorham, alto saxist Lou Donaldson, tenor saxist Lucky Thompson, bassist Nelson Boyd and drummer Max Roach. It debuts another Monk gem, “Straight No Chaser” (a merry, blues-infused jaunt with Monk darting and sparking the keys) and the swinging “Let’s Cool One,” with the pianist taking a somewhat “normal” break. Highlight is the whimsical “Skippy.”

Taken as a whole, *Genius of Modern Music, Volumes One & Two* opens the window on the early artistry of Monk that Keepnews describes as being “a wizard, a poet” whose music had that special “thrill of anticipation and wonder.” Certainly the litmus test of a genius.

— Dan Ouellette, 2012