

**ARTIST
TRANSCRIPTIONS[®]
PIANO**

Transcribed by
Brent Edstrom

SOLO BOO

In a Sentimental Mood

All the Things You Are

Stormy Weather

Cherokee

Caravan

Tenderly

HAL LEONARD

CONTENTS

4 BIOGRAPHY

7 DISCOGRAPHY

8 All the Things You Are

25 Caravan

33 Cherokee

47 In a Sentimental Mood

71 Stormy Weather

63 Tenderly

ART TATUM

JAZZ PIANO'S GREATEST PERFORMER



He dazzled them—listeners and fellow musicians alike. Art Tatum's technical command of the keyboard was unsurpassed.

In the beginning, his right hand runs and his rhythmic left hand showed them what stride piano was all about and what swing was about to become. He was one with the keyboard; he was technically amazing.

Harmonically, he was ahead of his peers. Tonality and tempo were ever fluid, often unpredictable.

He was born in Toledo, Ohio on October 13, 1909. He attended schools for the blind in Toledo and Columbus, due to diminished

eyesight in one eye and complete blindness in the other. His sister Arline says that he "was a beautiful person to be with, seldom moody or selfish." His brother Karl (a helpmate to Art in later life) was always cheered on by Art for his athletic prowess.

Encouraged by musically active parents, he started playing piano by ear at the age of three. He learned to read music by Braille, taking lessons on the piano as well as violin and guitar. While studying at the Toledo School of Music, he was encouraged to become a classical pianist. But what he heard on recordings, piano rolls, and the radio had him answering the call of James P. Johnson and Fats Waller instead. So he formed his own band, playing around the general region.

Tatum did stints with the dance bands of Speed Webb and Milton Senior. He was given his own fifteen-minute show on the Toledo radio station WSPD, which was broadcast on one of NBC's national feeds. In 1932, he left Toledo to accompany singer Adelaide Hall and gigged for a time in New York. This time became legendary in jazz annals because of the "cutting" contests that took place in various clubs, especially in Harlem. Tatum found himself pitted against other pianists that included Willie "The Lion" Smith, James P. Johnson and Fats Waller.

"Tiger Rag" was usually the tune that left the other pianists in the lurch. It is at this time that the superlatives and descriptions of his technique ran rampant: "complicated runs," "prodigious memory," "technical ability," "as choruses developed it was like watching each petal of a flower unfold,"

“played like the wind,” “spectacular embellishment,” “blazing speed and agility,” “cascading arpeggios.” Yet all of this came with a delicate touch. He became the strongest after-hours draw at the cradle of swing, The Onyx Club on Fifty-Second Street.

Money and steady gigs were tough to get in New York during the mid-thirties, so Tatum returned to midwest venues, primarily in Cleveland and Chicago. He then left for the beckoning hot music scene on Central Avenue in L.A., as well as the classy Sunset Boulevard clubs. He played on radio’s *Bing Crosby Show*, giving him national exposure and renown. Performances at many Hollywood celebrity parties were followed by a London tour in 1938. He returned from London to perform in L.A.’s and New York’s prime clubs.

Tatum’s first recordings, made in 1933 for Brunswick, then for Decca, were primarily solo recordings and good ones. These, along with Tatum’s recordings throughout the thirties, were in fact splendid ones. He literally turned the jazz community around with his first recordings. His 1937 version of “Body And Soul” and 1939 recording of “Tea for Two” both made the charts. These were prime examples of his popular song interpretations (now standards), many of those the very pretty ones, some blues, and even classical tunes, all showcasing his improvisational abilities.

In the forties, Tatum switched briefly to a trio format (modeled after the Nat Cole Trio), with Slam Stewart on bass and Tiny Grimes (later Everett Barksdale) on guitar. Back on solo piano, he showed brilliant

virtuosity on the concert recordings made by Gene Norman that are now available on CD (some cuts on *Piano Starts Here*). The *Complete Capitol Recordings* (1949-1952) show Tatum at the height of his powers,* in settings that provided the finest pianos and optimum recording conditions. For these sessions, in addition to the popular ballads of his usual repertoire, he added a true statement of African-American blues, W.C. Handy’s “Aunt Hagar’s Blues.” Another splendid example of Tatum’s artistry, “How High The Moon,” was not issued the first time. In the new liner notes for these sessions, Pete Welding sums them up most poetically: “Tatum rises time and again throughout these vigorous, deep, resourcefully imaginative performances in which the brilliant, audacious fertility and playfulness of his musical thinking are mated perfectly to a prodigious technical command which enables him to translate whatever he was able to imagine into bristling life—immediately, fully, without intervention, as if in a single incandescent flash.”

Starting in 1953, Tatum recorded a record 121 tunes [these numbers vary] on Norman Granz’s Clef label. (They appear now on the Pablo CDs, *The Tatum Solo Piano Masterpieces*.) Granz also partnered Tatum with the jazz greats of the day: Benny Carter, Louie Bellson, Buddy DeFranco, Harry Edison, Roy Eldridge, Lionel Hampton, Jo Jones, Buddy Rich, Red Callender, Barney Kessel, and Ben Webster. During this period, Tatum stretched his harmonies and progressions into newer, lush territory and tonal colors.

The listening public (both during Tatum's lifetime as well as now) is fortunate. There is a great body of technically well-recorded material. From early-on, everyone was well aware of his talents, and the business aspects of Tatum's career seemed to be handled smoothly.

He loved to "sit in" with other players and, after his own jobs, would make the rounds of after-hours clubs. Numerous stories exist from awe-struck musicians about these often chance meetings. In a 1985 essay, Billy Taylor observed that Tatum "...used his foot [on the pedal] almost as another hand. He did things that had not generally been done by a solo jazz pianist. But he did it for color and to use the instrument to its fullest potential." Teddy Wilson noted, "He was so far ahead of everybody else. Harmonically, as a kid, he was using flatted fifths and all the added tones, and improvising those wonderful progressions where he would jump on the other side of the key circle, using the substitute...He was the most exceptional musician I've ever met." The critics agreed and Tatum began to get awards from *Metronome*, *Esquire* and *Downbeat*.

On the personal side, Art Tatum was big but not tall. He wore beautifully tailored suits, often pin-striped with wild ties. He enjoyed baseball and playing cards. (Diminished eyesight aside, his memory was unequalled.) He traveled first class, loved beer, ate well, and lived well. His marriage to his first wife, Ruby, was tumultuous, certainly owing in part to the gypsy lifestyle and crazy hours. They bore a son, Orlando.

While in Los Angeles, he met and fell in love with Geraldine Williamson. After a long relationship, they married in 1955.

During the Granz recordings, Tatum was found to have an advanced case of uremia, a kidney disease. He quickly replaced his beer with fruit juice and began to lose weight. But the disease soon caught up with him. Tatum's final live performance was at the Hollywood Bowl in August 1956. The recordings made just prior to his death (at age 47) on November 5th of that year gave no hint of Tatum's failing health and were as dazzling as all the others.

Tatum was characterized by Erroll Garner as a "virtual God among jazz pianists." Indeed, Fats Waller once introduced Tatum with this statement: "Ladies and gentlemen, God is in the house." McCoy Tyner called him "the greatest pianist that ever lived. I think he is a genius." Many have called him "the single greatest improviser in jazz history."

**All Music Guide To Jazz*
(Scott Yanow), Miller Freeman

DISCOGRAPHY

ALL THE THINGS YOU ARE

Art Tatum Solo Masterpieces #3 (1953-1955)
Pablo 2405-434 (recorded 12/29/53)

CARAVAN

California Melodies,
Memphis Archives 7077 (recorded 4/11/40)

CHEROKEE

Art Tatum Solo Masterpieces #1 (1953-1955)
Pablo 2405-436 (recorded 4/22/54)

IN A SENTIMENTAL MOOD

Art Tatum Solo Masterpieces #8 (1953-1955)
Pablo 2405-439 (recorded 12/29/53)

STORMY WEATHER

Classic Early Solos (1934-1937)
Decca Jazz, GRP GRD-607 (recorded 8/24/34)

TENDERLY

The Complete Capitol Recordings (1949-1952)
CDP 21325 2 (recorded 9/29/49)