

Oscar Peterson

Hi my name is Bailey and I am going to talk to you about the greatest jazz pianist in the world Oscar Peterson! He was born August 15th 1925, in Montreal, Quebec. He lived with his Mom, Dad, and three older siblings Fred, Daisy, and Charles, as well as 1 younger sibling named May. His father, Daniel was a Railroad Porter for the Canadian Pacific Railroad and an amateur trumpet player. He wanted to teach his kids at least some sort of musical instrument so he got a piano so they could practice. He insisted that all his kids learned to play some piano or bass instrument.

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Oscar Peterson started playing the trumpet at age 5 but wanted to try piano instead. When he started playing piano regularly he worked with his sister Daisy as his teacher. As he was starting to play piano he got diagnosed and hospitalized with tuberculosis at age 8 which killed his brother Fred at age 16. When he started playing piano again he decided to switch teachers as he became better than Daisy and ended up working with Canadian jazz pianist and composer Louis Hooper in 1937.

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He attended the *Conservatoire de Musique du Québec À Montréal* a prestigious public institution founded in 1942 that offers a high level of music education. 2 years after he attended the conservatory he studied with piano teacher and composer Paul de Markey. Famously, his piano hours peaked up

to nearly 18 hours a day. While he was studying with Paul de Marky he entered an amateur contest and won the first place prize of \$250. He got asked by Jimmie Lunceford and Count Basie (one of the most famous band leader and piano player of all time) to move to the US and join their bands but his parents thought he was too young. He also started his own weekly radio show called “fifteen minutes piano rambling” where he played piano for a wider audience.

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A few years later at age 17, he dropped out of school to play as a featured soloist in Jonny Holmes dance band. His father didn't like the idea but instead of forcing him to keep going to school he told him “If you're going to go out there and be a piano player, don't just be another one. Be the best.” His combination of his incredible classical technique with jazz made him just that. He was most famous for his swing, Boogie Woogie, Blues, and Speed styles on the piano. Duke Ellington coined him “The Man With Four Hands” because of his massive hands stretching from 17-18 piano keys.

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He eventually got heard nationally on CBC's Light Up and Listen (a radio session that invites musicians and artists to come and play) as well as the Happy Gang (a popular variety show that is known for their mix of music, corny jokes, and comedy sketches). Oscar Peterson recorded his first recordings around 1945 at age 21 including songs: “I Got Rhythm” and “Blue Moon”. He made his own trio called the Oscar Peterson trio, and fun

fact that most jazz music is made up largely of improvisation which is when the music is made on the spot based on the chord changes and melody.

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Oscar Peterson inspired so many people to become musicians and composers such as Christian Sands, Herbie Hancock, Oliver Jones, Diana Krall, and many, many others. His song Hymn to Freedom, composed in 1962, was written as a tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement (a movement in the United States that dedicated to discrimination against African American). The lyrics were written the following year by Harriette Hamilton. The song was composed with the message to bring hope to resolving racial conflict in America. The power of the lyrics “When every man joins in our song and together singing harmony that’s when we’ll be free” became the anthem adopted by the Movement.

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Oscar Peterson is important to Canada because he was a big influence to many Canadian artists like Diana Krall, who wouldn’t have even been a jazz pianist and singer if it weren’t for Oscar Peterson.

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Oscar Peterson sadly died at age 82 due to kidney failure but ended up on a loonie (point to loonie) at what would have been his 97th birthday. He died with a Juno Award and 8 Grammy awards and ended up on the Canadian Music Hall of Fame.

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I chose to do Oscar Peterson because I love his music and he inspired me to play jazz piano. I'm so glad I got to talk to you about Oscar Peterson. Thanks for listening.