

Erroll Garner: The Top 25 icons in Jazz history

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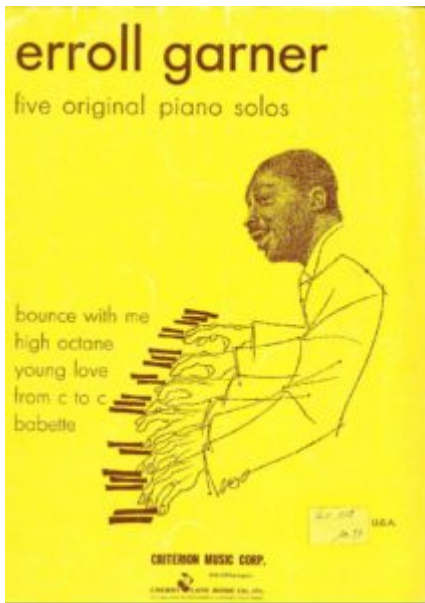
Erroll Garner: The Top 20 pearls in Jazz history

Perhaps best known as the composer of “Misty,” Erroll Garner was also one of the most original, intuitive and exciting pianists to emerge during the modern jazz era. Garner’s significance as a major jazz innovator easily rivals his status as a successful composer. His approach to melody, harmony, and especially rhythm were fresh and inventive.

Garner was born Erroll Louis Garner on June 15th, 1921, in Pittsburgh, [Pennsylvania](#). He and his twin brother Ernest were the youngest of six children and were raised in a musical environment. His older brother, Linton, became a noted musical accompanist and pianist. Garner was playing the piano by the age of three, although he never had any formal training throughout his long career.

His mother was born in Staunton, Virginia, and graduated from Avery College in Pittsburgh. She had a remarkable contralto voice and sang in a church choir with Garner’s father. Garner’s father had aspired to be a concert singer, but he suffered from asthma. At bedtime, Garner’s mother would play recordings for her children on the Victrola, and the next morning a young Garner would pull himself up on the piano

stool and play exactly what he had heard the night before.



A woman named Miss Madge Bowman taught piano to the Garner family, and Garner began taking lessons from her at age six. She gave up on him shortly thereafter when she realized he was playing all of her assignments by ear instead of learning to read notes. Garner's childhood friend, bassist Wyatt "Bull" Ruther, took piano lessons from Garner's sister, and Conley reported that Ruther remembered how easily Garner picked up music at a young age.

At age seven, Garner began to play regularly on Pittsburgh's KDKA radio station with a group called The Candy Kids, and by the age of eleven he was playing on Allegheny riverboats. His high school band teacher recognized Garner's innate ability and encouraged him not to take music lessons in order to preserve his unusual talents, and Gamer eventually dropped out of high school to play with Leroy Brown's orchestra.

He learned to play the "novelty rag" styles of musicians such as Zez Confrey from the 1920s by listening to old 78 records, and this particular style was marked by steady left hand chord rhythms supporting loose, right-hand melodic interpretations.

Garner traveled to [New York](#) City in 1939 as an accompanist for night club singer Ann Lewis, and soon returned to serve as a

substitute for [Art Tatum](#) in Tatum's trio with guitarist "Tiny" Grimes and bassist "Slam" Stewart.

Garner stayed on when the trio became the Slam Stewart Trio in 1945. He had developed an extraordinary style that was uniquely his own, and it was around this time in [New York City](#) that he met pianists [Billy Taylor](#) and George Shearing, and bassist John Levy while playing at Tondelayo's on 52nd Street. He also played at the Melody Bar on [Broadway](#), at the Rendezvous, and at Jimmy's Chicken Shack uptown. While playing in [Los Angeles](#), Garner met and recorded *Cool Blues* with Charlie Parker, which was released in 1947.

Jazz innovator, pianist, and composer [Erroll Garner](#) was a notably distinctive pianist who recorded with Charlie Parker and was one of the most frequently seen jazz musicians on television in the 1950s and 1960s. Although Garner never learned to read music, and taught himself how to play and compose, his unique virtuoso technique attracted many imitators and ardent fans.

His technique included a four-beat fixed pulse of blocked chords in the left hand, using wide-spaced voicings similar to swing rhythm-guitar playing, and he often "kicked" the beat in a style similar to a swing drummer. Strong and bouncy left-hand rhythms and beautiful melodies were the trademarks of Garner's music.

He is best known as the composer of "**Misty**," now an American standard featured in the 1971 film *Play Misty for Me*, and his impact as a jazz innovator rivals his legacy as a successful composer. Paul Conley, who wrote and produced a show about Garner for [National Public Radio](#) (NPR), described Garner as, "one of the most original, intuitive and exciting pianists to emerge during the modern jazz era."

Garner's influences include "novelty rag" musicians from the 1920s such as Zez Confrey, in addition to [Pittsburgh](#) native

Earl Hines, [Count Basie](#) guitarist Freddie Green, [Fats Waller](#), and classical recordings. *Down Beat's* Ralph J. Gleason wrote in 1995, "It would be hard to pick out 10 jazz pianists today in whose work Garner would not be justified in calling attention to his own influence."

For the Record...

Born Erroll Louis Garner on June 15, 1921 (died January 27, 1977), in Pittsburgh, PA; youngest of six children, raised in a musical environment played piano by the age of three, never had any formal training throughout his long career; mother sang in a church choir with Garner's father, who had aspired to be a concert singer, but suffered from asthma as a child; twin brother named Ernest, older brother Linton became a noted musical pianist and composer.

[The Best of Erroll Garner](#)

TRACKLIST

[00:00](#) "Misty" Erroll Garner [02:46](#) "Erroll's Bounce" Erroll Garner [05:45](#) "Laura" Erroll Garner [08:31](#) "Undecided" Erroll Garner [11:14](#) "Play Piano Play" Erroll Garner [14:31](#) "Caravan" Erroll Garner [21:33](#) "Penthouse Serenade" Erroll Garner [24:30](#) "Trio" Erroll Garner [27:34](#) "Frankie And Johnny Fantasy" Erroll Garner

[30:28](#) "The Man I Love" Erroll Garner [33:07](#) "The Petite Waltz Bounce" Erroll Garner [36:19](#) "Honeysuckle Rose" Erroll Garner [38:59](#) "I Cover the Waterfront" Erroll Garner [42:02](#) "You'd Be

So Nice to Come Home to" Erroll Garner [48:24](#) "Memories of You"
Erroll Garner [51:30](#) "Blue Lou" Erroll Garner [01:00:44](#)
"Cherokee" Erroll Garner

[01:07:02](#) "How High the Moon" Erroll Garner [01:10:27](#) "Indiana"
Erroll Garner [01:13:01](#) "Just You Just Me" Erroll Garner
[01:16:06](#) "Lover Man" Erroll Garner [01:19:24](#) "Perpetual Emotion
(Garnerology)" Erroll Garner [01:29:02](#) "Stompin' At the Savoy"
Erroll Garner [01:32:10](#) "This Is Always" Erroll Garner

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