

PREFACE

During the early 1970's the art of the solo jazz pianist, relatively dormant since the death of Art Tatum, experienced a reawakening of surprising dimensions. The success of the concert performances and ECM recordings of Chick Corea and Keith Jarrett undoubtedly contributed to this phenomenon and, perhaps, did much to initiate it. The stylistic range of the musical flowering which resulted, however, could hardly have been anticipated. In addition to rediscovering the awesome two-handed abilities of Tatum, Earl Hines and Fats Waller, the melodic and rhythmic power of Thelonious Monk and Bud Powell, and the prophetic contributions of Lennie Tristano and Bill Evans, the pianists spearheading the new solo piano 'revival' have increasingly incorporated musical vocabulary from 19th and 20th century European composers as well as that of folk and ethnic musics from throughout the world. There are, today, nearly as many different solo piano styles as there are improvising pianists.

A single text could in no way deal with the vast range of musical vocabulary currently in use by creative solo pianists. The purpose of this book is simply to give a clear introduction, thru musical examples and analysis, to the basic technics and styles of solo piano playing employed by contemporary jazz pianists. Each chapter concludes with a discography listing influential or historically important recordings by pianists associated primarily with the particular style being discussed.

The basic aesthetic of solo jazz piano playing, as currently practiced, is expressed in two different but related approaches: that of transmitting the feeling of a small jazz band thru a single instrument (in the manner of the legendary early

pianists such as Jelly Roll Morton and Earl Hines), and that of perfecting a rhythmic and textural approach which implies much more information than is explicitly stated (in the manner of more recent pianists such as Bud Powell and Bill Evans). Occasionally there are pianists who combine the subtleties and harmonic sophistication of modern jazz with the raw rhythmic energy of the earlier jazz styles (Duke Ellington, Monk, Jimmy Rowles, Dave McKenna, Clare Fischer). Any of the three approaches can, of course, be effective if the music really comes from the heart and is played with clarity and conviction.

Many contemporary improvising pianists use vocabularies which make little or no reference to the jazz tradition. While their music is often interesting and strongly communicative, it lies well beyond the scope of this book. Chapters VI thru VIII, however, will provide at least a starting point for the study of non-jazz traditions which have been significant influences since the 1960's.

It is my hope that this book will stimulate an interest in the solo jazz piano tradition. The study of this tradition should include intensive listening to the recordings listed in the discographies, the transcription and assimilation of solos or excerpts which are of particular interest to the student, reading the books listed in the bibliography and becoming actively involved in the local jazz community as a listener and, whether immediately or eventually, as a player. Notation and analysis can only underscore what must ultimately be sensed, heard and experienced, on all levels, for oneself.