



Thelonious Monk: The Life and Times of an American Original

By Robin Kelley

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THELONIOUS MONK is the critically acclaimed, gripping saga of an artist's struggle to "make it" without compromising his musical vision. It is a story that, like its subject, reflects the tidal ebbs and flows of American history in the twentieth century. To his fans, he was the ultimate hipster; to his detractors, he was temperamental, eccentric, taciturn, or childlike. His angular melodies and dissonant harmonies shook the jazz world to its foundations, ushering in the birth of "bebop" and establishing Monk as one of America's greatest composers. Elegantly written and rich with humor and pathos, *Thelonious Monk* is the definitive work on modern jazz's most original composer.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Elusive, mysterious, strange, eccentric, weird, genius—the legend of jazz pianist Thelonious Monk began early in his career, propagated by supporters and detractors in equal measure. Kelley (*Race Rebels*) breaks down the mythology, taking great pains to establish, for example, that Monk, far from being an untutored savant, was intimately familiar with classical and popular music. Every step of Monk's musical journey is teased out in meticulous detail, from his childhood piano lessons to his groundbreaking half-year run headlining at New York's Five Spot, along with behind-the-scenes stories from the recording sessions for classic albums like *Brilliant Corners* and *Monk's Music*. Kelley also explains Monk's most notorious behaviors—stony silences when confronted in public, exuberant dancing during concerts—as the outward signs of a bipolar disorder that went unrecognized for much of his life, with immeasurable impact on his career. (He was often unable to even play in New York jazz clubs because his reputation precluded him from getting a work license from city authorities.) Sometimes, the sheer amount of information can be overwhelming, but whether he's charting the highs or lows of Monk's emotional swings, Kelley rarely strays from his central theme of an extraordinary talent pushing against the boundaries of his art. (*Oct.*)
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Review

Thoroughly researched, meticulously footnoted, and beautifully crafted, "Thelonious Monk" presents the most complete, most revealing portrait ever assembled of the man known as the high priest of bebop.
--Steve Greenlee, Boston Globe

I doubt there will be a biography anytime soon that is as textured, thorough and knowing. . . The "genius of modern music" has gotten the passionate, and compassionate, advocate he deserves. --August Kleinzahler, New York Times Book Review

If every icon deserves at least one definitive bio, it's official: Monk now has his. --K. Leander Williams, Time Out Magazine

This exhaustively researched work will undoubtedly now remain the definitive work on Monk, a rebel with a cause. --Steve Heilig, San Francisco Chronicle

This affectionate biography fills in the fascinating and heart-wrenching backstory of an artist the world has always longed to know better.
--John Kehe, Christian Science Monitor

About the Author

Robin D.G. Kelley is Professor of History and American Studies at the University of Southern California. He has written widely on American culture, politics, and African American history. His books include, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class*, *Yo' Mama's DisFunktional!: Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America*, and the forthcoming *Going Home: Jazz and the Making of Modern Africa*, to be published by Harvard University Press.

Users Review

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