

Keith Jarrett

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Keith Jarrett in Antibes, France, 2003

Background information	
Born	May 8, 1945 Allentown, Pennsylvania, United States
Genres	Jazz, western classical music, jazz fusion, free improvisation
Occupations	Pianist, organist, composer
Instruments	Piano, organ, soprano saxophone, melodica
Years active	1966–present
Labels	Atlantic, Impulse!, ECM, Universal Classics
Associated acts	Gary Peacock, Jack DeJohnette, Paul Motian, Charlie Haden, Art Blakey, Charles Lloyd, Miles Davis, Gary Burton, Dewey Redman, Freddie Hubbard, Airtó Moreira, Marion Williams, Kenny Wheeler, Don Jacoby, Dennis Russell Davies, Ralph Towner, Sam Brown

Keith Jarrett (born May 8, 1945) is an American pianist and composer who performs both jazz and classical music. Jarrett started his career with Art Blakey, moving on to play with Charles Lloyd and Miles Davis. Since the early 1970s he has enjoyed a great deal of success in jazz, jazz fusion, and classical music; as a group leader and a solo performer. His improvisations draw not only from the traditions of jazz, but from other genres as well, especially Western classical music, gospel, blues, and ethnic folk music.

In 2003, Jarrett received the Polar Music Prize, the first (and to this day only) recipient not to share the prize with a co-recipient,^[1] and in 2004 he received the Léonie Sonning Music Prize.

In 2008, he was inducted into the *Down Beat* Hall of Fame in the magazine's 73rd Annual Readers' Poll.

Early years

Jarrett grew up in suburban Allentown, Pennsylvania with significant early exposure to music.^[2] He possessed absolute pitch, and he displayed prodigious musical talents as a young child. He began piano lessons just before his third birthday, and at age five he appeared on a TV talent program hosted by the swing bandleader Paul Whiteman.^[3] The young Jarrett gave his first formal piano recital at the age of seven, playing works by composers including Mozart, Bach, Beethoven, and Saint-Saëns, and ending with two of his own compositions.^[4] Encouraged especially by his mother, Jarrett took intensive classical piano lessons with a series of teachers, including Eleanor Sokoloff of the Curtis Institute.

In his teens, as a student at Emmaus High School in Emmaus, Pennsylvania, Jarrett learned jazz and quickly became proficient in it. In his early teens, he developed a strong interest in the contemporary jazz scene; a Dave Brubeck performance was an early inspiration. At one point, he had an offer to study classical composition in Paris with the famed teacher Nadia Boulanger—an opportunity that pleased Jarrett's mother but that Jarrett, already leaning toward jazz, decided to turn down.^[5]

Following his graduation from Emmaus High School in 1963,^[6] Jarrett moved from Allentown to Boston, Massachusetts, where he attended the Berklee College of Music and played cocktail piano in local clubs. After a year he moved to New York City, where he played at the Village Vanguard.

In New York, Art Blakey hired Jarrett to play with the Jazz Messengers. During a show with that group he was noticed by Jack DeJohnette who (as he recalled years later) immediately realized the talent and the unstoppable flow of ideas of the unknown pianist. DeJohnette talked to Jarrett and soon recommended him to his own band leader, Charles Lloyd. The Charles Lloyd Quartet had formed not long before and were exploring open, improvised forms while building supple grooves. Their 1966 album *Forest Flower* was one of the most successful jazz recordings of the mid-1960s and when they were invited to play the Fillmore in San Francisco, they won over the local hippie audience. Although the band would become plagued by internal instability and (according to Jarrett) siphoning-off of show revenue by Lloyd, its tours across America and Europe, even to Moscow, made Jarrett a widely noticed musician in rock and jazz underground circles. It also laid the foundations of a lasting musical bond with drummer Jack DeJohnette (who also plays the piano). The two would cooperate in many contexts during their later careers.

In those years, Jarrett also began to record his own tracks as a leader of small informal groups, at first in a trio with Charlie Haden and Paul Motian. Jarrett's first album as a leader, *Life Between the Exit Signs* (1967), was released on the Vortex label, to be followed by *Restoration Ruin* (1968), which is arguably the most bizarre entry in the Jarrett catalog. Not only does Jarrett barely touch the piano, but he plays all the other instruments on what is essentially a folk-rock album, and even sings. Another trio album with Haden and Motian, titled *Somewhere Before*, followed later in 1968, this one recorded live for Atlantic Records.

Miles Davis

The Charles Lloyd Quartet with Jarrett, Ron McClure and Jack DeJohnette came to an end in 1968, after the recording of *Soundtrack* because of disputes over money as well as artistic differences.^[7] Jarrett was asked to join the Miles Davis group after Miles heard him in a New York City club (according to another version Jarrett tells, Miles had brought his entire band to see a tour date of Jarrett's own trio in Paris; the Davis band being practically the only audience, the attention made Jarrett feel embarrassed). During his tenure with Davis, he played both Fender Contempo electronic organ and Fender Rhodes electric piano, alternating with Chick Corea; they can be heard side by side on some 1970 recordings, for instance the August 1970 Isle of Wight Festival performance preserved in the film *Miles Electric: A Different Kind of Blue* and now on *Bitches Brew Live*. After Corea left in 1970, Jarrett often played electric piano and organ simultaneously. Despite his growing dislike of amplified music and electric instruments within jazz, he continued with the group out of respect for Davis and because of his desire to work with Jack DeJohnette. He has often cited Davis as a vital influence, both musical and personal, on his own thinking about music and improvisation.

Jarrett is heard on several Davis albums: *Miles Davis at Fillmore: Live at the Fillmore East*, *The Cellar Door Sessions* (recorded December 16–19, 1970, at the Cellar Door club in Washington, DC), and *Live-Evil*, which is largely composed of heavily edited Cellar Door recordings. The extended sessions from these recordings can be heard on *The Complete Cellar Door Sessions*. Jarrett also plays electric organ on *Get Up With It*; the song he is featured on, "Honky Tonk", is an abridged version of a track available in its entirety on *The Complete Jack Johnson Sessions*. In addition, part of a track called "Konda" (recorded May 21, 1970) was released during Davis's late-1970s retirement on a compilation album called *Directions* (1980). The track, which features an extended Fender Rhodes piano introduction by Jarrett, was released in full on 2003's *The Complete Jack Johnson Sessions*.^[8]

1970s quartets

From 1971 to 1976, Jarrett added saxophonist Dewey Redman to the existing trio with Haden and Motian (who would produce one more album as a threesome called *The Mourning of A Star* for Atlantic Records in 1971). The so-called American quartet was often supplemented by an extra percussionist, such as Danny Johnson, Guilherme Franco, or Aírto Moreira, and occasionally by guitarist Sam Brown. The quartet members played various instruments, with Jarrett often being heard on soprano saxophone and percussion as well as piano; Redman on musette, a Chinese double-reed instrument; and Motian and Haden on a variety of percussion. Haden also produced a variety of unusual plucked and percussive sounds with his acoustic bass, even running it through a wah-wah pedal for one track ("Mortgage on My Soul", on the album *Birth*). The group recorded two albums for Atlantic Records in 1971, *El Juicio (The Judgement)* and *Birth*, another on Columbia Records called *Expectations* (that included rock-influenced guitar by Sam Brown, plus string and brass arrangements and for which Jarrett's contract with the label was allegedly terminated within two weeks of signing), eight albums on Impulse! Records and two on ECM.

Byablue and *Bop-Be*, albums recorded for Impulse!, mainly feature the compositions of Haden, Motian and Redman, as opposed to Jarrett's own, which dominated the previous albums. Jarrett's compositions and the strong musical identities of the group members gave this ensemble a very distinctive sound. The quartet's music is an amalgam of free jazz, straight-ahead post-bop, gospel music, and exotic, Middle-Eastern-sounding improvisations.

In the mid/late 1970s Jarrett led a "European quartet" concurrently with the American quartet, which was recorded by ECM. This combo consisted of saxophonist Jan Garbarek, bassist Palle Danielsson, and drummer Jon Christensen. They played in a style similar to that of the American quartet, but with many of the avant-garde and Americana elements replaced by the European folk influences that characterized the work of ECM artists at the time.

Jarrett became involved in a legal wrangle following the release of the album *Gaucha* in 1980 by the U.S. rock band Steely Dan. The album's title track, credited to Donald Fagen and Walter Becker, bore an undeniable resemblance to Jarrett's "Long As You Know You're Living Yours", from Jarrett's European quartet 1974 *Belonging* album. When a *Musician* magazine interviewer pointed out the similarity, Becker admitted that he loved the Jarrett composition and Fagen said they had been influenced by it. After their comments were published, Jarrett sued, and Becker and Fagen were forced to add his name to the credits and to include him in the royalties.^[9]

Solo piano

Jarrett's first album for ECM, *Facing You* (1971), was a solo piano date recorded in the studio. He has continued to record solo piano albums in the studio intermittently throughout his career, including *Staircase* (1976), *The Moth and the Flame* (1981), and *The Melody at Night, With You* (1999). *Book of Ways* (1986) is a studio recording of clavichord solos.

The studio albums are modestly successful entries in the Jarrett catalog, but in 1973, Jarrett also began playing totally improvised solo concerts, and it is the popularity of these voluminous concert recordings that has made him one of the best-selling jazz artists in history. Albums released from these concerts were *Solo Concerts: Bremen/Lausanne* (1973), which Time Magazine gave its 'Jazz Album of the Year' award; *The Köln Concert* (1975) which became the best-selling piano recording in history,^[10] and *Sun Bear Concerts* (1976) – a 10-LP (and later 6-CD) box set.

Another of Jarrett's solo concerts, *Dark Intervals* (1987, Tokyo), had less of a free-form improvisation feel to it because of the brevity of the pieces. Sounding more like a set of short compositions, these pieces are nonetheless entirely improvised.

After a hiatus, Jarrett returned to the extended solo improvised concert format with *Paris Concert* (1990), *Vienna Concert* (1991), and *La Scala* (1995), before his career was interrupted by chronic fatigue syndrome. These later concerts tend to be more influenced by classical music than the earlier ones, reflecting his interest in composers such as Bach and Shostakovich, and are mostly less indebted to popular genres such as blues and gospel. In the liner notes

to *Vienna Concert*, Jarrett named the performance his greatest achievement and the fulfillment of everything he was aiming to accomplish.

Jarrett has commented that his best performances have been when he has had only the slightest notion of what he was going to play at the next moment. He also said that most people don't know "what he does", which relates to what Miles Davis said to him expressing bewilderment – as to how Jarrett could "play from nothing". In the liner notes of the Bremen Lausanne album Jarrett states something to the effect that he is a conduit for the 'Creator', something his mother had apparently discussed with him.

Jarrett's 100th solo performance in Japan was captured on video at Suntory Hall, Tokyo on April 14, 1987, and released the same year. The recording was titled *Solo Tribute*. This is a set of almost all standard songs. Another video recording, titled *Last Solo*, was released in 1987 from a live solo concert at Kan-i Hoken hall in Tokyo, recorded January 25, 1984. Both of these recordings were reissued on Image Entertainment DVD in 2002.

In the late 1990s, Jarrett was diagnosed with chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) and was unable to leave his home for long periods of time. It was during this period that he recorded *The Melody at Night, With You*, a solo piano effort consisting of jazz standards presented with very little of the reinterpretation he usually employs. The album had originally been a Christmas gift to his second wife, Rose Anne.

By 2000, Jarrett had returned to touring, both solo and with the Standards Trio. Two 2002 solo concerts in Japan, Jarrett's first solo piano concerts following his illness, were released on the 2005 CD *Radiance* (a complete concert in Osaka, and excerpts from one in Tokyo), and the 2006 DVD *Tokyo Solo* (the entire Tokyo performance). In contrast with previous concerts (which were generally a pair of continuous improvisations 30–40 minutes long), the 2002 concerts consist of a linked series of shorter improvisations (some as short as a minute and a half, a few of fifteen or twenty minutes).

In September 2005 at Carnegie Hall, Jarrett performed his first solo concert in North America in more than ten years, released a year later as a double-CD set, *The Carnegie Hall Concert*.

On November 26, 2008, he performed solo in the Salle Pleyel in Paris, and a few days later, on December 1, at London's Royal Festival Hall, marking the first time Jarrett had played solo in London in seventeen years. These concerts were released in October 2009 on the album *Paris / London: Testament*.

The Standards Trio

In 1983, at the suggestion of ECM head Manfred Eicher,^[11] Jarrett asked bassist Gary Peacock and drummer Jack DeJohnette, with whom he had worked on Peacock's 1977 album *Tales of Another*, to record an album of jazz standards, simply titled *Standards, Volume 1*. Two more albums, *Standards, Volume 2* and *Changes*, both recorded at the same session, followed soon after. The success of these albums and the group's ensuing tour, which came as traditional acoustic post-bop was enjoying an upswing in the early 1980s, led to this new Standards Trio becoming one of the premier working groups in jazz, and certainly one of the most enduring, continuing to record and tour for more than twenty-five years.

The trio has recorded numerous live and studio albums consisting primarily of jazz repertory material. The trio members each cite Ahmad Jamal as a major influence in their musical development for his use of both melodic and multi-tonal lines.^[citation needed]

The Jarrett-Peacock-DeJohnette trio also produced recordings that consist largely of challenging original material, most notably 1987's *Changeless*. Several of the standards albums contain an original track or two, some attributed to Jarrett, but most are group improvisations. The live recordings *Inside Out* and *Always Let Me Go* (both released in 2001) marked a renewed interest by the trio in wholly improvised free jazz. By this point in their history, the musical communication among these three men had become nothing short of telepathic, and their group improvisations frequently take on a complexity that sounds almost composed.^[citation needed] The Standards Trio undertakes frequent world tours of recital halls (the only venues in which Jarrett, a notorious stickler for acoustics, will play) and is one

of the few truly successful jazz groups to play both straight-ahead (as opposed to smooth) and free jazz.

A related recording, *At the Deer Head Inn* (1992), is a live album of standards recorded with Paul Motian replacing DeJohnette, at the venue in Delaware Water Gap, Pennsylvania, 40 miles from Jarrett's hometown, where he had his first job as a jazz pianist. It was the first time Jarrett and Motian had played together since the demise of the American quartet sixteen years earlier.

Classical music

Since the early 1970s, Jarrett's success as a jazz musician has enabled him to maintain a parallel career as a classical composer and pianist, recording almost exclusively for ECM Records.

In The Light, an album made in 1973, consists of short pieces for solo piano, strings, and various chamber ensembles, including a string quartet and a brass quintet, and a piece for cellos and trombones. This collection demonstrates a young composer's affinity for a variety of classical styles.

Luminessence (1974) and *Arbour Zena* (1975) both combine composed pieces for strings with improvising jazz musicians, including Jan Garbarek and Charlie Haden. The strings here have a moody, contemplative feel that is characteristic of the "ECM sound" of the 1970s, and is also particularly well-suited to Garbarek's keening saxophone improvisations. From an academic standpoint, these compositions are dismissed by many classical music aficionados as lightweight, but Jarrett appeared to be working more towards a synthesis between composed and improvised music at this time, rather than the production of formal classical works.^[citation needed] From this point on, however, his classical work would adhere to more conventional disciplines.

Ritual (1977) is a composed solo piano piece recorded by Dennis Russell Davies that is somewhat reminiscent of Jarrett's own solo piano recordings.

The Celestial Hawk (1980) is a piece for orchestra, percussion, and piano that Jarrett performed and recorded with the Syracuse Symphony under Christopher Keene. This piece is the largest and longest of Jarrett's efforts as a classical composer.

Bridge of Light (1993) is the last recording of classical compositions to appear under Jarrett's name. The album contains three pieces written for a soloist with orchestra, and one for violin and piano. The pieces date from 1984 and 1990.

In 1988 New World Records released the CD *Lou Harrison: Piano Concerto and Suite for Violin, Piano and Small Orchestra*, featuring Jarrett on piano, with Naoto Otomo conducting the piano concerto with the New Japan Philharmonic. Robert Hughes conducted the Suite for Violin, Piano, and Small Orchestra. In 1992 came the release of Jarrett's performance of Peggy Glanville-Hicks's *Etruscan Concerto*, with Dennis Russell Davies conducting the Brooklyn Philharmonic. This was released on Music Masters Classics, with pieces by Lou Harrison and Terry Riley. In 1995 the record label Music Masters Jazz released a CD on which one track featured Jarrett performing the solo piano part in *Lousadzak*, a 17-minute piano concerto by American composer Alan Hovhaness. The conductor again was Dennis Russell Davies. Most of Jarrett's classical recordings are of older repertoire, but Jarrett may have been introduced to this modern work by his one-time manager George Avakian, who was a friend of the composer. Jarrett has also recorded classical works for ECM by composers such as Bach, Handel, Shostakovich, and Arvo Pärt.

In 2004, Jarrett was awarded the Léonie Sonning Music Prize. The prestigious award usually associated with classical musicians and composers has only previously been given to one other jazz musician—Miles Davis. The first person to receive the award was Igor Stravinsky, in 1959.

Other works

Jarrett has also played harpsichord, clavichord, organ, soprano saxophone, drums, and many other instruments. He often played saxophone and various forms of percussion in the American quartet, though his recordings since the breakup of that group have rarely featured these instruments. On the majority of his recordings in the last twenty years, he has played acoustic piano only. He has spoken with some regret of his decision to give up playing the saxophone, in particular.^[citation needed]

On April 15, 1978, Jarrett was the musical guest on *Saturday Night Live*. His music has also been used on many television shows, including *The Sopranos* on HBO. The 2001 German film *Bella Martha* (English title: *Mostly Martha*), whose music consultant was ECM founder and head Manfred Eicher, features Jarrett's "Country," from the European quartet album *My Song*.^[12]

Idiosyncrasies

One of Jarrett's trademarks is his frequent, loud vocalizations (grunting, squealing, and tuneless singing), similar to that of Glenn Gould, Thelonious Monk, Erroll Garner, Oscar Peterson, Ralph Sutton, Willie "The Lion" Smith, Paul Asaro, and Cecil Taylor. Jarrett is also physically active while playing, writhing, gyrating, and almost dancing on the piano bench. These behaviors occur in his jazz and improvised solo performances, but are for the most part absent whenever he plays classical repertory. Jarrett has noted his vocalizations are based on involvement, not content, and are more of an interaction than a reaction.^[13]

However, Jarrett is notoriously intolerant of audience noise, including coughing and other involuntary sounds, especially during solo improvised performances. He feels that extraneous noise affects his musical inspiration, and distracts from the purity of the sound. As a result, cough drops are routinely supplied to Jarrett's audiences in cold weather, and he has even been known to stop playing and lead the crowd in a group cough. This intolerance was made clear during a concert on October 31, 2006, at the restored Salle Pleyel in Paris. After making an impassioned plea to the audience to stop coughing, Jarrett walked out of the concert during the first half, refusing at first to continue, although he did subsequently return to the stage to finish the first half, and also the second. A further solo concert three days later went undisturbed, following an official announcement beforehand urging the audience to minimize extraneous noise. In 2008, during the first half of another Paris concert, Jarrett complained to the audience about the quality of the piano that he had been given, walking off between solos and remonstrating with staff at the venue. Following an extended interval, the piano was replaced. In 2007, in concert in Perugia during the Umbria Jazz Festival, angered by photographers, Jarrett implored the audience: "I do not speak Italian, so someone who speaks English can tell all these assholes with cameras to turn them fucking off right now. Right now! No more photographs, including that red light right there. If we see any more lights, I reserve the right (and I think the privilege is yours to hear us), but I reserve the right and Jack and Gary reserve the right to stop playing and leave the goddamn city!" This caused the organizers of the Festival to declare that they would never invite him again.^[]

Jarrett has been known for many years to be strongly opposed to electronic instruments and equipment. His liner notes for the 1973 album *Solo Concerts: Bremen/Lausanne* states: "I am, and have been, carrying on an anti-electric-music crusade of which this is an exhibit for the prosecution. Electricity goes through all of us and is not to be relegated to wires." He has largely eschewed electric or electronic instruments since his time with Miles Davis.

Jarrett is a follower of the teachings of Georgian spiritual teacher G. I. Gurdjieff,^[] and in 1980 recorded an album of Gurdjieff's compositions, called *Sacred Hymns*, for ECM.

Jarrett has also visited Princeton University's ESP lab run by Robert Jahn.^[]

Personal

Jarrett lives in an 18th-century farmhouse in Oxford Township, New Jersey, in rural Warren County. He uses a converted barn on his property as a recording studio and practice facility.^[14]

Jarrett's first marriage, to Margot Erney, ended in divorce. He and his second wife Rose Anne (née Colavito) divorced in 2010 after a thirty-year marriage. Jarrett has four brothers, all younger, two of whom are involved in music. Chris Jarrett is also a pianist, and Scott Jarrett is a producer and songwriter. Noah Jarrett, one of two sons from Jarrett's first marriage, is a bassist and composer. Another son, Gabe, is a drummer based in Vermont.

Jarrett has acknowledged that audiences, and even fellow musicians, have at times been convinced he is African American, due to his appearance.^[15] He relates an incident when African American jazz musician Ornette Coleman approached him backstage, and said something like, "Man, you've got to be black. You just have to be black", to which Jarrett replied, "I know. I know. I'm working on it."^[16]

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External links

- KeithJarrett.it (<http://www.keithjarrett.it>) The most complete fan site dedicated to Keith Jarrett
- Keith Jarrett fansite (<http://www.keithjarrett.org>).
- Interview with Keith Jarrett for BBC (2009) (<http://dothemath.typepad.com/dtm/interview-with-keith-jarrett.html>)
- Art of the States: Keith Jarrett (<http://artofthestates.org/cgi-bin/performer.pl?perf=691>) performing *Lousadzak*, op. 48 (1944) by Alan Hovhaness
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