

Wynton Kelly Biography

Wynton Charles Kelly is one of the greatest jazz pianists of all time, and one of my personal favorites. Kelly is known for his swinging, rhythmic and bluesy, but the same time melodic soloing, individual block chord-style as well as groovy and highly supportive work as an accompanist.

Wynton Kelly was born in Brooklyn, New York December 2, 1931. He began playing piano in an early age, and although he attended 'The High School Of Music And Art', he never had much formal training in music.

Kelly started his professional career at an early age of 12, playing in different R&B groups. As mentioned above, playing with the R&B groups had a great influence to his playing, bringing blues and groove into his playing that shaped his unique style later in his career.

From the age of 15 until his draft into the the U.S Army 1952 Kelly worked and recorded with Ray Abrams' R&B Band, vocalists Babs Gonzales, and Dinah Washington, Lester Young and Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis, and Dizzy Gillespie, just to name a few. Also in 1951, in the age of 19, he released his first album as a leader, 'Piano Interpretations' on Blue Note Records.

After his release from the military, he continued working with Washington and Gillespie, as well as with Charles Mingus, Billie Holiday, Johnny Griffin and Sonny Rollins.

Late 50's and early 60's Kelly worked with most of the major jazz leaders, including Art Blakey, Lee Morgan, Cannonball Adderley, Blue Mitchell, Hank Mobley and Clark Terry. Other notable collaborations in the early 60's were with John Coltrane (Kelly appears on the track 'Naima' on the record 'Giant Steps'), and Wayne Shorter (Kelly appearing on the Shorter Debut 'Introducing Wayne Shorter').

1958 he recorded his second album as a leader, 'Piano' and a year after he joined Miles Davis' group replacing Red Garland, the group he has become

most associated. He appears on several legendary Miles Davis records, including 'Kind Of Blue', 'Someday My Prince Will Come' and 'In Person - I've At The Mohawk'.

Kelly stayed with Miles until 1962, when he, Paul Chambers and Jimmy Cobb (also from Davis' group) left Miles and formed The 'Wynton Kelly Trio', one of the most known piano trios in the history of jazz. This trio was part of several legendary albums between 1959 and 1968, including records with other leaders, for example guitarist Wes Montgomerys 'Smokin' At The Half Note' and two live albums by Joe Henderson, 'Four' and 'Straight, No Chaser'.

Wynton Kelly died in Toronto, Canada, on April 12, 1971, after an epileptic seizure.