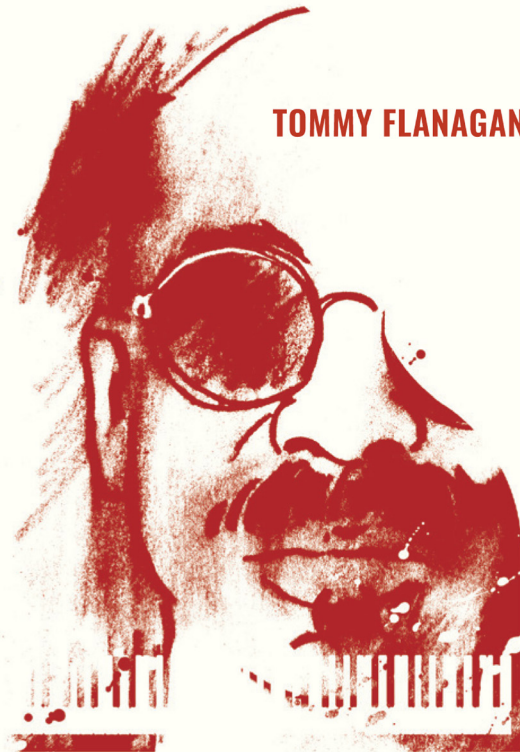


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TOMMY FLANAGAN SOLO PIANO



STORYVILLE

TOMMY FLANAGAN SOLO PIANO

Tommy Flanagan was always known for his tasteful, flawless and swinging piano playing. He added class to every session that he was involved in and fortunately he was well documented during the latter part of his career. Solo Piano was not initially released until decades after its 1974 recording. It is significant historically because this outing was the pianist's first record date as a leader in 13 years and, most importantly, because it is very good music.

Flanagan was born March 16, 1930 in Detroit, Michigan. His first instrument was the clarinet which he played for five years starting when he was six. He switched permanently to piano at the age of 11 and, by the time he was a teenager, he was already a professional musician. Detroit during the 1945-55 period had a very fertile jazz scene that included such up-and-coming young talents as trumpeters Thad Jones and Donald Byrd, trombonist Curtis Fuller, Yusef Lateef on tenor and flute, baritonist Pepper Adams, vibraphonist Milt Jackson, guitarist Kenny Burrell, bassist Paul Chambers, and drummers Elvin Jones and Louis Hayes among others. The Detroit piano legacy began with Hank Jones and continued with Flanagan, Barry Harris, Roland Hanna, and Kirk Lightsey. While the local scene was given a great deal of respect by visiting jazz musicians, all of the Detroit players in time had to move to New York in order to gain fame and regular opportunities to record.

Tommy Flanagan, other than a 1951-53 stint in the Army, played in Detroit steadily into 1956. When he finally relocated to New York, he became in-demand almost immediately for record dates and gigs. He had opportunities to perform with

the who's who of jazz due not only to his skills but his versatility, sounding quite comfortable in settings ranging from mainstream swing to bop and John Coltrane's music. Some of his key musical associations were with bassist Oscar Pettiford, trombonist J.J. Johnson (1956-58), a transitional group headed by Miles Davis (1957), trumpeter Harry "Sweets" Edison (1959-60) and Coleman Hawkins (1961). In addition, he led his own albums for the New Jazz, Prestige, Savoy and Moodsville labels.

Flanagan toured the world as Ella Fitzgerald's accompanist during 1963-65 and 1968-78. Although this was a steady and prestigious association, it resulted in the pianist becoming underrated and under recorded. He was too busy touring with the singer to take advantage of other opportunities and he was in danger of being forgotten altogether, particularly as a soloist. The pianist gradually recognized that fact and in 1975 he started leading a series of superior trio recordings. The warm reception that his albums received helped to launch the groundwork for the solo career that he resumed when he decided to leave Ella in 1978.

Until the long delayed release of Solo Piano, it was believed that Tommy Flanagan's "comeback" began with 1975's The Tokyo Recital for the Pablo label and that his only full-length album of unaccompanied piano solos was 1977's Alone Too Long which was released by Denon in Japan. Solo Piano forced a slight readjustment of the jazz history books and, most importantly, offers listeners some very enjoyable music from the great pianist. It also includes a few surprises, particularly for those listeners who think of Flanagan as primarily a bop stylist.

When swing was succeeded by bop as jazz's modern mainstream, the function of the piano changed from being a timekeeper to part of the rhythm section. While the pre-1945 styles of jazz piano had the pianists keeping time with his or her left hand, usually by striding back and forth between bass notes and chords, in bebop that role is usually handled by the string bassist. Bop pianists use their left hands to hit chords on a more unpredictable basis, accenting beats like a drummer "dropping bombs," while their right plays hornlike lines.

That approach works perfectly in trio settings but can leave some pianists sounding incomplete when taking unaccompanied solos. Bud Powell, the leader in the field, was able to imply the beat and slightly adjust his style when playing solos. In the case of Tommy Flanagan, his ability to play swing was a major asset and in a solo setting he often added a modified stride, as can be heard on his version of "Sleeping Bee."

As if to challenge himself, Flanagan begins his recital with uptempo versions of two Bud Powell bop tunes, "Parisian Thoroughfare" and "Wail," a pair of heated pieces that have rarely been performed by a solo pianist. He shows that he really does not miss the bass or drums since his time is flawless and he alternates easily between stating and implying the beat.

On swing-oriented numbers such as "Isn't It Romantic," "Sleeping Bee" and "Yesterdays," Flanagan always kept the melody close by even while creating improvised variations. One never has a problem knowing where the pianist is for he builds his improvisations off of the melody rather than simply discarding the theme in favor

of jamming over its chord changes. He follows those classic songs with an infectious version of "Stompin' At The Savoy" that manages to sound both vintage and modern.

Flanagan was always a great admirer of Billy Strayhorn's music, and he invariably included at least one of the composer's songs during each performance. On this set, he creates a lyrical medley of four Strayhorn pieces: the haunting ballads "Passion Flower" and "Chelsea Bridge," the dramatic "Pretty Girl," and a swinging "U.M.M.G. (Upper Manhattan Medical Group)."

To conclude the enjoyable program, Flanagan performs a song apiece by three great composers of the bebop era (Dizzy Gillespie's "Con Alma," Tadd Dameron's "If You Could See Me Now," and Thelonious Monk's "Ruby, My Dear") before ending the set with a joyful rendition of "Lover."

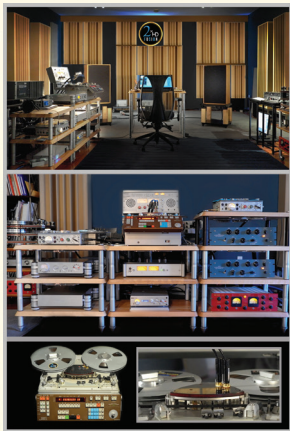
By the time Tommy Flanagan left Ella Fitzgerald's backup band in 1978, his series of trio recordings had reminded the jazz world that he was a brilliant and very musical pianist. He worked steadily during the next 23 years, touring Europe and Japan while being based in New York and remaining one of the most consistently satisfying of all jazz pianists. Flanagan passed away on Nov. 16, 2001 at the age of 71 but he has never been forgotten. Tommy Flanagan is remembered with love, respect and admiration for his playing and his classy nature. Solo Piano adds to his impressive musical legacy.

Scott Yanow, 2021

Author of 11 books on jazz including *Jazz On Film*, *Swing*, *Bebop*, *Trumpet Kings*, and *Jazz On Record 1917-76*.



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The 2xHD Fusion Mastering System: In the constant evolution of its proprietary mastering process, 2xHD has progressed to a new phase called 2xHD FUSION, integrating the finest analog, with state-of-the-art digital technology.

The mastering chain consists of a selection of high-end vacuum tube equipment. For the recordings on this album, the original 1/4" 15 ips NagraMaster curve, NAB or CCIR master tapes were played on a Nagra-T tape recorder, modified with high-end tube playback electronics, wired with OCC silver cable from the playback head direct to a Nick Doshi tube head preamplifier. The Nagra T, with its four direct drive motors, two pinch rollers and a tape tension head, has one of the best transports ever made. A custom-built carbon fiber head block and a head damping electronic system permit 2xHD FUSION to obtain a better resolution and 3D imaging.

The resulting signal is then transferred into high resolution formats by recording it in DXD using a custom 2xHD Technologies A to D converter. All analog and digital cables that are used are state-of-the-art Siltech. The 2xHD FUSION mastering system is powered by a super capacitor power supply, using a new technology that lowers the digital noise found in the lowest level of the spectrum. A vacuum tube NAGRA HD DAC X is used as a reference digital playback converter to A and B with the original analog master tape, permitting the fusion of the warmth of analog with the refinement of digital.

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TOMMY FLANAGAN SOLO PIANO

- 1 **Parisian Thoroughfare** (Bud Powell) **3:35**
- 2 **Wail** (Bud Powell) **2:38**
- 3 **Isn't It Romantic** (Richard Rodgers · Lorenz Hart) **3:37**
- 4 **Sleepin' Bee** (Truman Capote · Harold Arien) **4:46**
- 5 **Yesterdays** (Jerome Kern · Otto Harbach) **3:30**
- 6 **Stompin' At The Savoy** (B. Goodman · C. Webb · E. Sampson · A. Razaf) **4:42**
- 7 **Strayhorn Medley** (Billy Strayhorn) **11:51**
Passion Flower
Chelsea Bridge
Pretty Girl
U.M.M.G.
- 8 **Con Alma** (Dizzy Gillespie) **3:07**
- 9 **If You Could See Me Now** (Tadd Dameron · Carl Sigman) **3:26**
- 10 **Ruby My Dear** (Thelonious Monk) **3:02**
- 11 **Lover** (Richard Rodgers) **2:46**

Total time: 47:04

Tommy Flanagan · Piano
Recorded February 25 · 1974 in Zürich, Switzerland
2xHD Mastering: RENÉ LAFLAMME
2xHD Executive Producer: ANDRÉ PERRY
Notes by · Scott Yanow
Design · FinnNygaard.com

