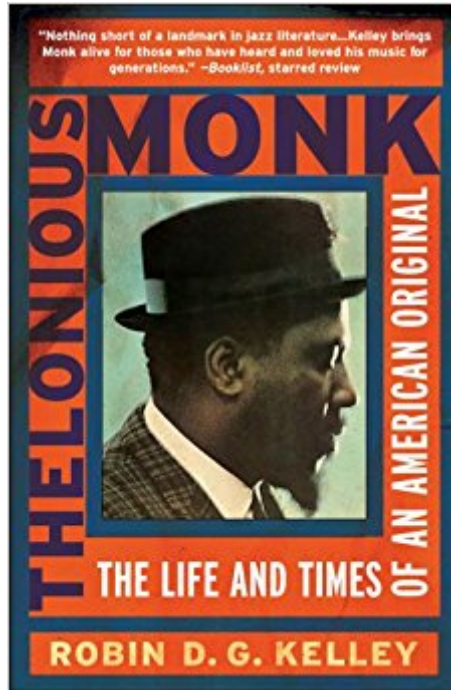


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# Thelonious Monk: The Life And Times Of An American Original



## Synopsis

The first full biography of legendary jazz musician Thelonious Monk, written by a brilliant historian, with full access to the family's archives and with dozens of interviews. 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.

## Book Information

Paperback: 624 pages

Publisher: Free Press; Reprint edition (November 2, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1439190461

ISBN-13: 978-1439190463

Product Dimensions: 6 x 1.5 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.5 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (104 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #263,230 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #57 in [Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Biographies > Jazz](#) #288 in [Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Musical Genres > Jazz](#) #1784 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Ethnic & National](#)

## Customer Reviews

588 pages, including acknowledgments, appendices, notes, and compositions by Monk. This adds up to 129 pages out of the total. The paper used is a cream-white, and the type-face is straight forward, clean and, together, make for an easy read. There are 16 pages of black and white photographs, starting with Monk's parents, on through his family, and several of Monk playing on the bandstand. These are a valuable addition, and give some depth to the writing. This is an important book on Thelonious Monk. Not only his music, but an in-depth look at the person behind the music. The author, Robin Kelley, delved into Monk's life for ten years, with access to family papers and private recordings. In doing so Kelley has produced the first book to accurately portray what made Monk "tick". Many books talk about Monk the "hipster", the jazz player who wore hats (believe it or

not, this was thought to be important) not in keeping with the current fashion of the day, the outspoken man who most deemed overly critical, and, an eccentric. Was Monk temperamental? Absolutely. Did he act in ways outside "normal" behavior? Yes. Was Monk a true eccentric? Probably most certain. But in this well written book the author digs deeply into Monk's life, starting with his upbringing, his family ties and influence, his early life, jail, and his mental and physical disorders, his one true love in life, Nellie, and his many friends (Baroness Nica de Koenigswarter for example), and associates in the music world. This book shows why Monk--was Monk. His mother's encouragement to follow his own path, early in Monk's life, set him on his own individual path.

a "Reader's Digest Condensed" version so that casual fans can learn the essentials about Monk's life and career, without having to invest a month in reading all the details of his daily life presented here. The book is a good thing...but too much of a good thing for lovers of Monk's albums who are neither musicians nor historians of black life in the early 20th century. It's not just Monk's genealogy that gets into print, but that of his wife and some of his friends. We don't get a brief background of his major sidemen, we get extensive histories of some, and some history on almost everyone who ever played with Monk, even for a single outing. In addition, the history of NYC jazz clubs is detailed. I love Monk's music and I was glad I struggled through this massive work, and met Thelonious the real person, who loved his family, struggled against poorly understood manic depression, dabbled in hard drugs without becoming addicted, and was broke until about the last ten years of his long career. For decades, he got paying music work too seldom, then he hit a stretch in which he perhaps worked too much. For decades, he got too little attention from record buyers and club owners in spite of his innovations at the keyboard. I started my jazz listening as a teen, afraid of Monk. That was 50 years ago, and Brubeck, Bill Evans, Oscar Peterson and George Shearing were all I could handle, being a square white kid with little money or life experience. I actually did not own a Monk album until ten years ago. Since then, I've owned ten or more, and he is the one jazz pianist who gets extensive repeat listening from me. Yes, he played the same 20 original tunes over and over with different size groups, different instrumentation, at different lengths, and when he was in different moods...

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