

"It was a hard decision to make because it meant financial uncertainty," Jones explains. "And in your mid-40s, the risk seems almost too great." But the risk paid off.

The transition from pop to jazz was difficult, Jones admits. He had considered himself a good commercial pianist but only a mediocre jazz musician, and he lacked confidence. But Jones improved quickly and played regularly at the Four Seasons

Jones recorded his first jazz album in 1983 on the CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) label. After that, he met up with record-producer Jim West, owner of Justin Time Records, a small independent Canadian company that focuses exclusively on jazz artists. Since then, Jones has recorded six albums on that label. *Requestfully Yours* served to promote Jones' reputation in Europe. In 1986, *Lights of Burgundy*, his fifth album, won Canada's Juno Award for best jazz album of the year.

Oliver Jones' style is a unique blend of influences. It is a robust and swinging one that is reminiscent of fellow Montrealer Oscar Peterson's in its harmonic finesse.

"A lot of people ask me if I get tired of the comparison, but not when I'm compared to one of the world's best jazz pianists," says Jones. "If I can do one-tenth of what Oscar has accomplished, I will consider myself having done something in the world."

Jones' velocity and accuracy bewitch his audience. Like a true follower in the Art Tatum tradition, Jones is extremely fast, but never sloppy. His complex and technically brilliant improvisations show influences of Peterson, Brubeck, Tatum and Garner. His playing is very percussive and possesses an underlying be-bop current, and his enlightened sense of dynamics impresses even the sternest of critics.

On September 24, Oliver Jones performed at the Queen Elizabeth Hall at the Southbank Centre in London, England. Part of the Canada Nouveau Promotion of Canadian Design and the Arts in London, the show received rave reviews from the audience and critics alike.

The next major step in Jones' career is his upcoming tour of Africa. Tentatively scheduled for March and April of 1989, it will take Jones to such places as Cairo, Egypt; Lagos, Nigeria; Dakar, Senegal; Abidjan, Ivory Coast; and Yaounde, Cameroon.

Coinciding with this event is a documentary film on Oliver Jones produced by Duckworth Films of Montreal. To be filmed in Africa during the tour, its purpose is not to record the tour, but rather to focus on jazz as a by-product of the slave trade and hence a largely African phenomenon.

The working title for the hour-long film is *Oliver Jones in Africa* and it is scheduled for release in early 1989. It is the second film on Jones by filmmaker Martin Duckworth. The first, *Le jazz: un vaste complot*, was premiered on July 2 at the Montreal International Jazz Festival. It featured two other reputed jazz pianists as well as Jones: Leonid Chezyk of the Soviet Union and a Canadian from Montreal, Jean Beaudet. Jones, as well as acting as official host for the event, played at the festival for the seventh consecutive year.

Hotel with Biddle, and later split his time between The Queen Elizabeth Hotel and Biddle's own place, *Biddle's Jazz and Ribs*.

But Jones moved up quickly. In 1982, he played at the famed Montreal International Jazz Festival. The following year he was featured there in a solo concert. According to Jones, that event really boosted his confidence: he realized that he could play and entertain without support from other musicians. These days, approximately one-third of Jones' work consists of solo performances.

Len Dobbin of Montreal's *The Gazette* newspaper said of the album: "Musicians Oliver Jones, Fraser Macpherson, Reg Schwager, Michel Donato and Jim Hillman, producer Jim West and engineer Morris Appelbaum all helped to make the LP one of [the best], if not the best ever produced in Canada."

Last year, Jones released *Speak Low, Swing Hard*. It received rave reviews the world over, some critics hailing it as Jones' best yet.

Jones' albums have won praise from jazz critics and fans alike.

However, Peterson's style is for the most part "virtuoso," whereas Jones' is more subtle and romantic. In Peterson's view, Jones is "on the road to musical genius." Leonard Feather, the revered American jazz critic, recently referred to Jones as "one of the best musicians I have ever heard."

