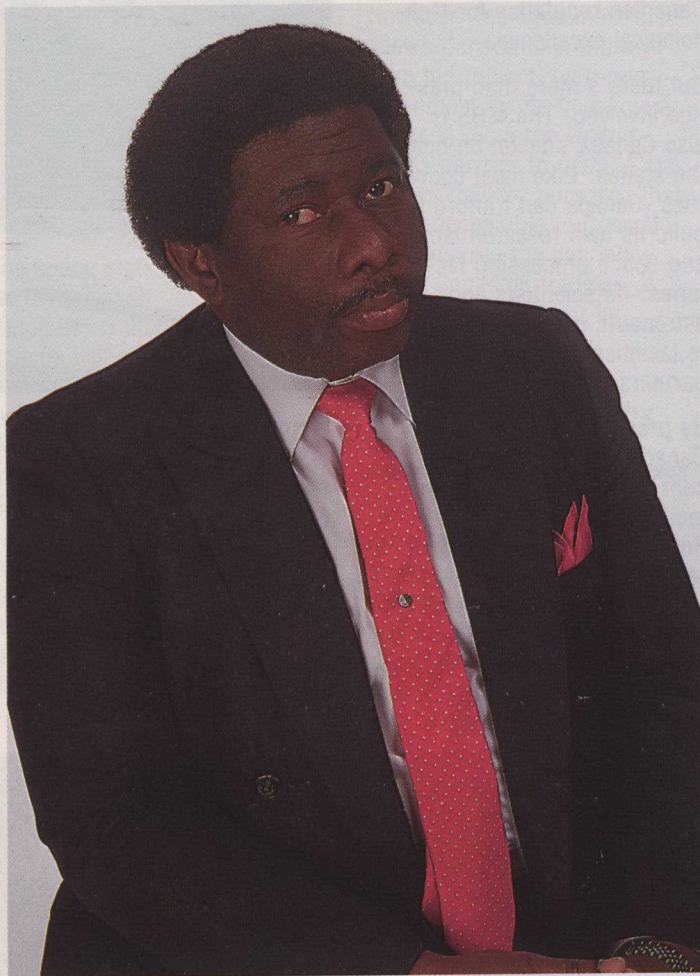


# O LIVER JONES: THE LATE-BLOOMER OF JAZZ

**O**liver Jones is "hot"! The Canadian-born jazz pianist is in demand all over the world, having completed tours to widespread critical acclaim in Europe, North America, Australia and Japan. Now he's preparing for a 1989 African tour. Jones' success story is unique in that, at 54 years of age, he has been playing jazz seriously for only the past seven years.

Born in 1934, Jones grew up in the working-class district of St. Henri in Montreal. Falling in love with the piano at an early age, he performed his first concert when he was only five. He began formal training at age seven and two years later began studying under Daisy Peterson, the sister of Canada's best-known jazz man: Oscar Peterson. "She was a good teacher," Jones recalls, "understanding and encouraging. She knew I had talent and made sure I got the proper training I needed, giving me a solid classical grounding."

Soon Oliver Jones was performing in local cafés. During the forties, there were well over 300 clubs in Montreal, the majority of which featured live shows. That meant that a lot of work was available for musicians, either playing with a dance band or supporting a club act. Even in the smaller towns surrounding Montreal, live music was in big demand.



In 1951, Jones moved south of Montreal to Valleyfield, Quebec, to become a member of a house band in a hotel. Six years later, Jones was back in Montreal, playing for American Al Cowans. At that time, late night jam sessions were very popular. Musicians like Jones would show up at one of the several after-hours clubs and unwind by "jamming" the night away. According to Jones, these affairs were very competitive but were good learning experiences for young musicians.

**Oliver Jones:** "on the road to musical genius."

Towards the end of the fifties, however, the music union, declaring that club owners were taking advantage of the musicians, imposed a hefty fine on musicians who were discovered jamming for free at the after-hours clubs. According to Jones: "For years, many wouldn't take a chance, and it killed the whole jam scene."

It was in 1963 that Jones met and started playing with Jamaican singer Kenny Hamilton. The next year, they were booked for a month in Miami, Florida. As it turned out, Jones was gone for 16 years, relocating in San Juan, Puerto Rico, where the band frequently played. Their repertoire consisted of "Top 40" pop songs and Jones was both accompanist and musical director.

*Oliver Jones' style . . . is a robust and swinging one that is reminiscent of fellow Montrealer Oscar Peterson's in its finesse.*

The band grew more and more popular and in its hey-day toured North America supporting such stars as Bob Hope, Jimmy Durante, Connie Francis and Phyllis Diller. They also played in West Germany and the Far East in United States Overseas shows entertaining American troops.

Tired of the "Top 40" circuit and feeling uncomfortable alongside musicians half his age, Jones returned to Montreal in 1979. There had been a possibility of his getting a job teaching at McGill University, but three eye operations (which failed to restore vision to his right eye) prevented him from pursuing this. Instead, he went to work at Tiffany's, a cocktail lounge on Montreal's trendy Crescent Street and before long, Jones was approached by jazz bassist, Charlie Biddle, to join his band.