

Gene Norman presents an ART TATUM concert

For a community of its size, jazz boasts an astonishing number of giants. Select what instrument you will, including the vocal instrument, and you will find a sizable group of acknowledged masters, each with a distinct style and a long, long line of disciples. One of these is Art Tatum, the pianist, whose cheerfully inventive playing is presented here, recorded in concert performance.

Since 1928, when he found his first job in Toledo, Ohio, Art Tatum has been the center of an admiring crowd, during the early years composed largely of fellow musicians, later expanding to include virtually everyone who delights in fine piano. Tatum's playing is as light-fingered as it is light-hearted, and his imagination is equally breezy. His celebrated runs and variations are among the welcome phenomena of popular music-making, the result of a highly personalized conception. Frequently Tatum never quite approaches a full statement of the tune he is playing, flirting with it joyously throughout a series of choruses, draping it in all sorts of musical disguises without ever wholly concealing it. The tantalizing extra dimension this creates forces the listener to use his imagination along with Tatum; when the atmosphere is right—as it almost always is with Tatum—the spark of creative performance is caught.

From his first job at eighteen, Tatum went through the usual round of small-time jobs, learning about his listeners and about his craft. The last of a succession of violin instructors had suggested that he take up the piano, and he studied with only one teacher. Consequently, on his first job and thereafter, he discovered

the necessity of playing to and for an audience, gaining in stature as he gained in experience. An extensive vaudeville tour took him throughout the country and to Europe, after which he returned to night-clubs. As vaudeville played its lingering death-scene, clubs were flooded with entertainers, and the hey-day of the musicians had not yet appeared. Occasional employment kept him going, and Tatum found his most fervid reception from musicians like the late Fats Waller. During this period he continued to experiment with his playing, and the enthusiasm spread from musicians to the general public, although his work was confined to a few clubs in a few cities.

In 1942 he formed a trio and found even more listeners. His records, too, made him one of the most-discussed pianists in the country. Then, in 1946 he made his recital debut, bringing his engagingly intimate style to the vast concert auditoriums, and found it just as effective there as it had been in smaller establishments. Since that time he has been in constant demand for concerts such as that presented in this collection, recorded in May [sic], 1949, at the Shrine Auditorium, in Los Angeles. The magic of the Tatum touch is supremely evident in a group of eight old favorites and a Tatum original, rippling away as refreshingly as ever. From *Yesterdays* to *How High the Moon*, this Art Tatum concert offers a striking sampling of the work of one of America's finest jazz pianists.