

Arts & ENTERTAINMENT

Advocate Promoted Jazz for Decades

Remembering Billy Taylor

(AP) -- Billy Taylor, an acclaimed jazz pianist and composer who became one of the genre's most ardent advocates through radio, television and the landmark Jazzmobile arts venture, is being remembered after his death at age 89.



Billy Taylor

Taylor died Dec. 28 of a heart attack in Manhattan, said his wife, Theodora Taylor. "He enjoyed his life," she said. "Music was his love."

Though he had a noteworthy career as a musician and composer that spanned decades, and played with luminaries such as Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie and Miles Davis, Billy Taylor was probably best known as a tireless jazz booster, educator and broadcaster.

Dr. Taylor, as he preferred to be called, was the first black to lead a television studio orchestra in the 1950s. He helped found Jazzmobile in the 1960s — which began as mobile, outdoor concerts on a parade float to bring free music to inner city neighborhoods. He was host of a popular jazz show on National Public Radio from 1977 to 1982.

And, in what he later called one of his more significant accomplishments, he profiled musicians for CBS' Sunday Morning show — winning an Emmy Award in 1983 for a piece on Quincy Jones.

For Taylor, jazz was a central musical form for telling the story of America.

"If you really listen to that, study that, everything you need to know about America is right

William Taylor was born July 24, 1921, in Greenville, N.C., but he grew up mostly in Washington, D.C. After graduating from Virginia State College, where he studied sociology and music in the 1940s, he moved to New York City to forge a career as a jazz pianist.

He lucked out, landing a gig playing with Ben Webster, Big Sid Catlett and Charlie Drayton opposite the Art Tatum Trio, he told an interviewer in 1994.

His went on to lead the Billy Taylor Trio, and composed dozens of pieces for ensembles as well as more than 300 songs, including the popular "I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free."

there, and it's up to us who've experienced much of that to be able to share that," he continued.

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