



Music's Many Faces

Portraits of Jazz Musicians

By Stephanie McLean

I wrote this to “give back” to those who either took the time to give me their email addresses at an art show, or who joined my email list by visiting my website or social media channels. I hope you enjoy these little musician bios. And **thank you.**

I hold a bachelor’s degree in Fine Arts from Concordia University, with a major in Music. This education has given me so much insight into fine art and painting, specifically, even though my formal education is in music. I’m a firm believer in artistic energy being transferable from one medium and practice to another.



Wonderful World

Acrylic and Gel Medium on Canvas
24"x24"

Louis Armstrong/"Pops"/"Satchmo" popularized jazz music through his horn-like scat singing, his jovial, smiley personality and his unmistakable gravelly voice.

At 17, Louis Armstrong was playing in brass bands and on river boats in New Orleans. (He learned to sight read on the river boats!) But the real beginnings of Louis Armstrong's 50-year career saw him playing the cornet in Joe Oliver's Creole Jazz Band in Chicago.

Armstrong was one of the first popular African-American entertainers to "cross over" to wide popularity with white and international audiences.

He also appeared in a few films and was posthumously inducted into the Rhythm & Blues Hall of Fame. He is also the first name on the membership list of the Jazz Hall of Fame.



cELLAbration! (SOLD)
Acrylic and Gel Medium on Canvas
24"x24"



Charles Ellison, my Jazz Language class university professor, introduced me to Ella. Ella, in turn and along with Professor Ellison, ignited my passion for jazz.

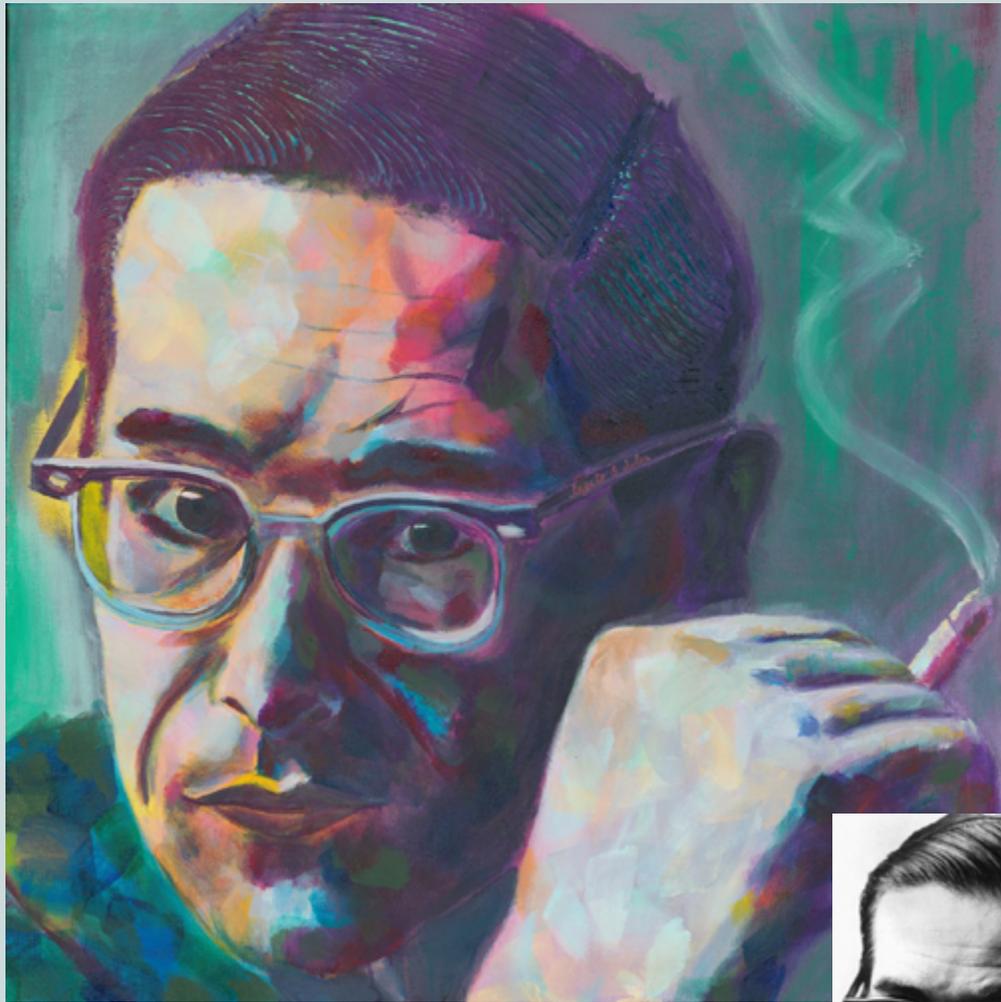
I don't recall exactly which song got me hooked on her singing but it may well have been "Mack the Knife", recorded live in Berlin. That song "made the cut", along with other great jazz vocal performances, on Professor Ellison's "Jazz Vocals – mixed tape #1".

From her humble beginnings in Yonkers, NY, during an era drenched in racism to her last performance at Radio City Music Hall in NYC (which I fortunately witnessed), Ella's life was a celebration of song, of jazz and of overcoming the many obstacles placed on her path to success.

My “cELLAbration!” painting is itself a celebration of all things Ella. You’ll find the names of some of the standards she sang scripted on her boa.

“cELLAbration!” will be joining most of my other musician paintings on the walls of the Art Gallery of Grande Prairie from July to mid-November, after which she will be delivered to her new home in Toronto’s east end.

Thank you to pianist Robert! I hope she enjoys your piano playing and I hope you enjoy looking at her above your piano!



Evans, Blue in Green

Acrylic and Gel Medium on Canvas
24"x24"



Bill Evans's unique touch does not evade the listener. His classical foundation makes the piano keys twinkle, filling the atmosphere with emotion and transporting us to an imaginary venue: a smoke-filled jazz club, a concert hall, our living room...

Citing Bud Powell as his "single, greatest influence,*" Evans's impressionistic approach to music harmony and his use of melodic "singing" lines still have an impact on jazz pianists today.

I wanted to create a moody painting of Bill Evans. I felt his Blue and Green composition lent itself well to visual expression, both because of the title and the music: a ballad with what some may feel is a sad or "moody" melody. While I don't think my adaptation of Mr. Evans'

portrait is "sad", it has been said to be moody, which was my intent.

And yes, it was Bill Evans, not Miles Davis, who wrote the song:

"Blue In Green" is an iconic jazz ballad from Miles Davis' 1959 album, *Kind Of Blue*. Although the composer's credit went to Davis on the album, the piece was actually composed by pianist Bill Evans (The Miles Davis estate has acknowledged this fact). Miles gave Evans the opening Gm6 [chord] and asked him to compose a tune which started with that chord."

- <https://keyboardimprov.com/>, Ron Drotos

* Evans, Bill; Hultin, Randi (1994). *The Complete Bud Powell on Verve* (Liner notes, booklet). Verve. p. 39.



Maestro Mingus

Acrylic and Gel Medium on Canvas
24"x24"



As a vocalist, I wasn't very familiar with Charles Mingus until I listened to Joni Mitchell's "Mingus" album.

There's a story about Mingus telling Joni the strings on her Paprika Plains song (on her "Don Juan's Reckless Daughter" album) were out of tune. Apparently, Joni said she'd wished someone had told her about this earlier, and developed a deep respect for Mingus.

ALS had Mingus in a death grip when Joni asked him to collaborate with her, along with the late, great Jaco Pastorius and the ever-amazing Wayne Shorter. (So many great tracks on the Mingus album!) Regardless, his performance on the album was as strong as it was on the recordings of his own tunes.

I was fortunate to have seen quite a few of the greats “live” (Ella, Betty Carter, McCoy Tyner, Herbie Hancock, Wynton Marsalis, etc.) but wish I’d have taken the time to get to know Charles Mingus earlier on in his career, because I’d have loved to have seen him in concert!

Mingus is an unsung hero in the jazz world; or perhaps, rather, a hero that is not lauded nearly enough.

He led orchestras, ensembles, played piano and collaborated with musicians in other genres, exposing his artistry throughout his prolific recordings.

When painting “Maestro Mingus”, I let myself swirl in an aural bath of Mingus hits, and figured that, had been awards for jazz music back in the 50s and 60s, he’d have won quite a few gold records. The pops of metallic gold paint on his cigar, lips and eyelid are a testament to this notion.

Hang this colourful and moody painting or print wherever you like to relax and listen to music in your home (and crank the Mingus tunes)!

