

May/June 2016

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Washington  
(Festival Edition)**

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straight up

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**Oliver Jones: Jazz Ambassador**

Written by: Mike Manny

As I write, I'm listening to a hard-swingin' recording of the great pianist, Mr Oliver Jones. I heard him play years ago in Toronto at the now-closed Montreal Bistro Jazz Club, and I can't wait to re-live the swing here at the TD Winnipeg International Jazz Festival!

The wonderful Oliver Theophilus Jones was born in 1934 in Montreal, not far from another Canadian icon, Oscar Peterson. The young Jones would actually walk the few blocks to listen to the decade-older Peterson practice.

Oliver has facility across a range of styles. In his teens and twenties, he performed everything from swing to rock-&-roll, dazzling audiences with theatrical stunts—including some dancing and playing piano from underneath the keys. He always came back to jazz, and has performed and recorded with a vast array of jazz musicians, including Ranee Lee, Skip Bey, Dave Young, Barry Elmes, Steve Wallace, Ed Thigpen, Clark Terry, Terry Clarke, and Hank Jones. In every setting, he shows exceptional musical artistry at the piano—I love his flowing, fast runs and his blues-influenced harmonic structures.

Over a seven-decade career, Oliver Jones has toured the world as an ambassador of jazz, but also an ambassador of Canada. His distinctive voice has earned him many accolades and awards, including Officer of the Order of Canada, the National Order of Québec, the Oscar Peterson Award, the National Jazz Awards Keyboardist of the Year, and the Governor General's Performing Arts Award.

Now 81 years old, this musical emissary will grace the TD Winnipeg International Jazz Festival on his second official retirement tour. He'll heat up the West End Cultural Centre on June 20—I'll see you there!

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