



johnny o'neal jazz giant

village jazz profile

Johnny O'Neal is a giant who casts no shadow. To a great many people, Johnny is their secret favorite pianist, someone who for the last ten years had to be seen live to be heard at all almost, and proves the industry may be forgetting about artistry.

Johnny O'Neal is a native of Detroit now living in Atlanta, and one of those gifted few who literally "broke in" at 19, recording his first album at 26, for **Concord jazz** which featured the great bass player **Ray Brown**. No mean feat for someone still in their teens!, Oscar was 23 when he debuted at Carnegie Hall with Ray, but that was 1949! He has also worked with legendary performers like **Dizzy Gillespie, Milt Jackson, Sarah Vaughan, Wynton Marsalis** and **Art Blakey**. It was with Blakey that Johnny was able to expose his enormous talents to Japan and Europe.

Throughout the years, Johnny has kept in touch with Montreal jazzman **Charlie Biddle**. With the unflagging support Johnny received from Charlie, Johnny was able to sustain some fairly rough times and stay inspired through a ten year recording drought. Thanks to Charlie and his legendary jazz club "Biddles" Johnny was able to catch the attention of Jim West and Justin Time and release his first CD in ten years "On the Montreal Scene". The CD features New Yorker [Taurus Mateen](#) on bass, **Russell Malone** on guitar and **Wali Muhammed** on drums, who seems to be seeing a lot of action these days at both Biddles and Justin Time. There will be a full review in [VILLAGE JAZZ CD REVIEWS](#) in April. **VILLAGE JAZZ** is intending to release the "[Countess](#)" CD in July by Countess Felder. Countess claims that when she first heard Johnny play he was 17, she quit her job that day to start her career over with Johnny at the piano, Johnny himself will stop his shows dead to give her stage time and the rapport they share has to a degree been captured on the CD which was recorded live at the Alabama Theatre and features not only Johnny but [Collins "Bo" Berry](#) on trumpet. All members of the Alabama Music Hall of Fame.

Johnny has also had his Carnegie Hall moment, as the opening act for [Oscar Peterson](#).

Johnny's music has its heartbeat in gospel and the blues, but to hear Johnny tear a strip off a bebop tune at an outrageous tempo sometimes defies the laws of pianist gravity. Everything he does looks effortless and has that rare stamp of authenticity that allows even the most wary jazz critic to find him likable without dispute. His blend of everything from [Tatum](#) to **Monk** to **Garner** has a mimics understanding underneath, and Johnny's unerring pitch and swing are the elements that make him a giant, *he can do anything he wants to*. Even his vocals, which are finally exposed on his latest recording, is unpretentious and his ability to phrase and interpret a lyric put him also, in my estimation, amongst some of the greatest singers of our generation.

So stop letting the industry decide what you should hear and give Johnny the listen he deserves, go to your record store and request his recordings. Then buy them!!!

village jazz recordings and productions 1997
