

**The**  
**PIANO**  
**of**  
**GARNETT CLARKE**

Solographer: Jan Evensmo  
Last update: Nov. 25, 2019

Born: Garfield Memorial Hospital, 11<sup>th</sup> & Florida Avenues N.W.,  
Washington, D. C., Feb. 7, 1916  
Died: Hopital Psychiatrique, Saint Remy, Haute-Saone, France, Nov. 30, 1938

*Introduction:*

Garnett Clarke is a real piano legend and passed away much, much too early. However, his few recordings show an enormous talent, and he shall not be forgotten.

*History:*

Played piano for drummer Tommy Myles' Band in Washington from ca. 1930. Moved to New York (ca. 1934), played at Pod's and Jerry's, recorded with Alex Hill and together with Benny Carter worked for Charlie Barnet. Went to Europe with Benny Carter in 1935 and together they joined Willie Lewis' Band in Paris for a short while. Did solo work in 1936, also toured Switzerland as accompanist for Adelaide Hall. In autumn 1937 he suffered a mental breakdown and spent the rest of his life in a hospital (conflicting information on which one). Died from pulmonary tuberculosis.

*Message:*

Clark's first name is often spelled with two t's. However, whether Garnet or Garnett is correct cannot be decided from public information (ref. Howard Rye). If somebody has got his signature, let us know!! Postscript of Nov. 20, 2019: Extensive research by Melissa Jones and also Charles Iselin and Phil Schaap, confirms the birth and death dates above, gives more hospital information and also gives his name as Garnett Clarke. This name is now used in the solography.

## GARNETT CLARKE SOLOGRAPHY

**ALEX HILL & HIS HOLLYWOOD SEPIANS** NYC. Oct. 19, 1934

Joe Thomas, Benny Carter (tp), Claude Jones (tb), Albert Nicholas (cl), George James (as), Gene Sédric (ts), Garnett Clarke (p), Eddie Gibbs (g), Billy Taylor (b), Harry Dial (dm), Alex Hill (vo, ldr).

Two titles were recorded for Vocalion:

16141-1 Song Of The Plow Intro/ens. Acc. (vo) 32 bars. (SM)

16142-1 Let's Have A Jubilee Acc. (vo) 32 bars. (FM)

There is a certain elegance in the piano backing here which seems to be different from that of GC's contemporaries. However, too bad we have no chance to hear him soloing on his own, from this session alone it is not possible to deduct his originality.

**GARNETT CLARK & HIS HOT CLUBS FOUR** Paris, Nov. 25, 1935

Bill Coleman (tp, vo-732), George Johnson (cl), Garnett Clarke (p), Django Reinhardt (g), June Cole (b).

Three titles were recorded for French HMV:

730-1 Rosetta Intro 4 bars. Soli 32 and 6 bars. (F)

731-1 Stardust Soli 32 and 32 bars to coda. (M)

732-1 The Object Of My Affection Intro 4 bars. Acc. (vo) 32 bars.  
Solo 32 bars. (FM)

Listen to the intro on "Rosetta", enough to make GC legendary and genius!! Here we encounter a different performer, with his own ideas of harmony, as evident also in his soloing, note in particular the last solo of 6 bars. "... Affection" is perhaps not that unique, and it is obvious that this young man still is on his way. On "Stardust" he opens the item in a rather conventional way but with small but exciting details. However, when he closes with another chorus, he shows his originality in a more profound way. This being GC's only "swing session", we can only be curious about what he could do on a daily basis.

**same date**

Garnett Clarke solo (p). One title:

733-1 I Got Rhythm 2:56. (M/F)

Quoting Daniel Nevers' liner notes: "- a strange and beautiful piano solo rendition of Gershwin's favourite "I Got Rhythm". GC proves himself there to be one of the most forgotten – and one of the greatest – ancestors of modern jazz piano. So – not very surprisingly – Hugues Panassie describes thus his effort ("Jazz Hot" no. 8 – May 1936): "It would be better not to speak at any length about Garnet Clark's solo piano, "I Got Rhythm". You would swear that Garnet had deliberately played in an absurd manner". Today it is just regrettable that originality and creativity could be dismissed just like that. Play it, and while you certainly will note the 'absurd' sections, you will certainly appreciate GC's art!

**ADELAIDE HALL** probably Basel, Switzerland, 1936

Probably Garnett Clarke (p), Adelaide Hall (vo).

Advertisement for the "Black And White Birds Revue" from German Theatre, six brief vocal items with piano accompaniment, no soloing:

Truckin' 0:15. (F)

Solitude 0:31. (S)

I Can't Give You Anything But Love 0:23. (M)

I Must Have That Man 0:12. (M)

Dida Diga Doo 0:13. (F)

Truckin' 0:15. (F)

Postscript of Nov. 20, 2019: Since the biography states that GC "also toured Switzerland as accompanist for Adelaide Hall", and the announcer speaks a kind of German very much like the Suisse version of it, the conclusion comes very quickly, only need to be checked aurally. And yes, it definitely sounds like a sophisticated artist, no common stride pianist, and as close to the few GC examples we have, so this must be him!!!

**GARNETT CLARKE****Paris, 1937**

Garnett Clarke solo (p).

One title was recorded at Hopital Sainte-Anne, 14<sup>th</sup> arrondissement:

Improvisation

3:25. (S)

This scratchy acetate has jazz piano in the same genre and same importance as Bix Beiderbecke's piano recordings. We hear a deeply committed and talented artist, not at all sounding 'absurd' or seeming to be suffering from mental problems on this recording day. We can just wonder what Garnett Clarke could have accomplished in the development of jazz piano.

Note: Sometimes on or after July 19, 1937, GC was transferred to another hospital in Saint-Remy, 180 miles southeast of Paris, where he eventually died.

No further recording sessions.

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