

**The**  
**PIANO**  
**of**  
**GARNET CLARK**

Solographer: Jan Evensmo  
Last update: Sept. 30, 2017

Born: Garfield Memorial Hospital, 11<sup>th</sup> & Florida Avenues N.W.,  
Washington, D. C., Feb. 7, 1916  
Died: l'asile de Clarefontaine, Paulaincourt, Haute-Savoie, France,  
Nov. 30, 1938

*Introduction:*

Garnet Clark 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!!

## GARNET CLARK 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 Sedric (ts), Garnet Clark (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), Garnet Clark (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**

Garnet Clark 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!

**GARNET CLARK**

**Paris, 1937**

Garnet Clark solo (p).

One title recorded at Hopital Ste Anne:

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 Garnet Clark could have accomplished in the development of jazz piano.

No further recording sessions.

... ooo ...