Dum-De-Dum-Dem, Dem-Dum! Oscar Peterson stood up from the piano in Carnegie Hall and the audience went crazy. His manager whispered to him to play something else. Oscar smiled and sat back down. Dem-Di-Dam, Dem-di-du-daaaaa!

Oscar Emmanuel Peterson was born on August 15, 1925 in Montreal, Canada. He had 3 siblings: Chuck, May, and Daisy. Both of his parents loved music very much and believed that every home should have a piano in it, so Oscar began studying piano and trumpet at the age of 5. Sadly, when Oscar was only 7 he was diagnosed with tuberculosis, a disease that targets the respiratory system. It weakened his lungs and he was forced to quit trumpet. A year later his brother, Chuck, died from the same disease. In 1940, when Oscar was 15, his older sister, Daisy, took him to a CBC amateur radio contest. He was reluctant at first, but Daisy persuaded him to play. The judges liked him so much he got a spot the very same night!

In 1941, Oscar decided to ask to quit high school in order to become a professional jazz pianist. His father agreed but said “You have to become the best. There is no second best.” This was a huge risk because if he failed he would have no job and no education. The same year he created a trio with Herb Ellis and Ray Brown. In 1945 Oscar decided to create his first record. He called it “I Got Rhythm”. He was very determined to “become the best”. By the 1950’s his was the highest paid jazz trio in the world.

In 1949, at the age of 25, Oscar played in New York’s Carnegie Hall. He was asked to “play what you like for as long as you like”, by the manager. In 1950, Oscar decided that Canada and the U.S. was not enough, so he toured Europe with Ella Fitzgerald.

Oscar moved to Toronto in 1957 and started the Oscar Peterson School of Music. He also taught at York University. In 1964 he composed “Canadiana Suite”, one of his most famous pieces. During the 1970’s he had his own CTV show called “the Oscar Peterson Show”. In 1973, Oscar received the Order of Canada.

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He composed “Africa Suite” in 1983 and received the Order of Quebec in 1991. Unfortunately, he suffered a stroke during a concert in 1993, but continued playing both hand’s parts with only his right hand. Oscar received the Glenn Gould prize twice in 1993 and 1999. Atthe age of 79, in 2004, he played at the Montreal jazz festival for the last time. He had recovered from his stroke, but still suffered pain in his left hand.

Oscar Emmanuel Peterson died in his Mississauga home at the age of 82 on December 23, 2007. He left an immense mark on the jazz world, introducing classical chords to it for the first time. Thousands of mourners lined the streets to pay their last respects to someone who for many was the greatest jazz pianist that ever lived. But Oscar’s memory still lives in his music, and his fan’s hearts.

Here is a link to a video of him performing “I Can’t Get Started”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cIkQNti8_EU>

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