

## **William Edward Taylor**

### **Doctor of Fine Arts**

Dr. Billy Taylor is considered the foremost jazz educator of our time. He is also a supremely gifted performer, an impresario, a television personality, a prolific composer, and an influential scholar. A native of Greenville, N. C., Dr. Taylor grew to manhood in Washington, D.C. He began his musical education there under Henry Grant and earned his undergraduate degree from Virginia State University (1942). Later, he earned his master's and doctoral degrees in music education from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Taylor settled in New York in his early twenties and quickly became immersed in its vibrant music scene. In 1949 he began a two-year stint as house pianist at Birdland where he performed with such legendary musicians as Dizzy Gillespie, John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday, and Charlie Parker. Since the early 1950s he has led his own trios.

Taylor is a prolific writer of and about jazz. He is the composer of numerous commissioned works and over 300 songs. His most popular song, *I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel To Be Free*, has been recorded by such artists as Lena Horne, Leontyne Price, and Harry Belafonte. Dr. Taylor's book *Jazz Piano: A Jazz History* is a standard work found in music libraries across the nation. He is the author of more than a dozen other books, among them the first book ever written about bebop.

Dr. Taylor is well known to television audiences from his work as a correspondent for *CBS Sunday Morning* for the past twenty years. His radio and television work has also included a thirteen-week series "The Subject is Jazz" for educational television (1958), influential programming from radio station WLIB in New York, service as music director for *The David Frost Show*, and a 1999 PBS special *Walk Through Harlem*.

Since 1994, Taylor has served as Artistic Advisor for Jazz to the Kennedy Center. In this post, he has developed several concert series presented throughout the year, including his own "Billy Taylor's Jazz at the Kennedy Center," a series of sessions with his trio and guest artists who perform and engage in musical discussion with the audience. The latter sessions are recorded for broadcast nationally on National Public Radio.

Among Taylor's many awards and prizes are the National Medal of the Arts (1992), the New York State Governor's Arts Award (1997), the Peabody Award for excellence in broadcast journalism, and an Emmy for his profile on Quincy Jones. Taylor is a Duke Ellington Fellow at Yale University and the Wilber D. Barret Artist in Residence at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.