

BIOGRAPHY

GEORGE WINSTON

Windham Hill Records Recording Artist

RECORDINGS: AUTUMN, Windham Hill Records WH-1012 (1980)

WINTER INTO SPRING, Windham Hill Records WH-1019 (1982)

DECEMBER, Windham Hill Records WH-1025 (1982)

George Winston was born in Hart, Michigan, in 1949 and was raised in Miles City and Billings, Montana. He has also lived in Jackson, Mississippi; Miami and Central Florida, and New Orleans. He moved to Los Angeles in 1971 and from there to Santa Cruz, California, where he currently resides, in 1980. He began listening avidly to music around 1960, especially to pop instrumental acts such as the Ventures, Sandy Nelson, Floyd Cramer, the Chantays ("Pipeline"), B Bumble and the Stingers ("Nut Rocker"), Kokomo ("Asia Minor"), Bill Black, the Champs, Booker T and the MGs, Duane Eddy, King Curtis, Link Wray, Dave "Baby" Cortez, the Tijuana Brass and others. He began playing after high school in Miami in 1967 and started on organ, inspired by blues organists, especially Jimmy Smith, and the rock music of that period. He added electric piano in 1968, inspired by various rock and jazz players on this instrument, such as Joe Zawinal, who was then with Cannonball Adderly Group. In 1971, after hearing records of the legendary stride (swing) pianist, Thomas "Fats" Waller, he was inspired to switch completely to the acoustic piano. It was then that he began to compose stride and blues pieces, and in between working on these, slower impressionistic pieces, influenced some by solo guitarists like John Fahey but mainly inspired by the piano sound itself. In 1972 he recorded his first album for Fahey's Takoma label, originally entitled PIANO SOLOS, with seven of the ten pieces original compositions. This album was reissued in 1981 on the Lost Lake Arts label, a subsidiary of Windham Hill Records, under the title of BALLADS AND BLUES 1972, (LL-81).

With very little happening in the music business, and the Takoma album long out of print, George lost interest in playing in 1977 but began again two years later after hearing recordings of the late New Orleans blues pianist, Professor Longhair (a.k.a. Henry Roeland Byrd) and the album NEW ORLEANS PIANO (Atlantic SD7225), an album of reissued sides from 1949 and 1953. Winston met William Ackerman, owner of Windham Hill Records, to urge Will to reissue Brazilian guitarist Bola Sete's out of print Takoma album OCEAN, (reissued on Lost Lake Arts (LL-82). Ackerman encouraged George to consider recording again, and AUTUMN was released in November 1980. WINTER INTO SPRING was released in May 1982, and DECEMBER was released in November 1982. DECEMBER, as the others, contains original impressionistic pieces of the season but also uses arrangements of seven traditional songs.

By May 14, 1983, all three albums were in the Billboard Jazz Charts, DECEMBER at 5, AUTUMN at 9, and WINTER INTO SPRING at 12. DECEMBER also peaked at 75 on the Billboard Pop Chart. By this time, AUTUMN had sold 300,000 copies, WINTER INTO SPRING 150,000 copies and DECEMBER 150,000 copies.

George describes his style as "impressionistic", and "somewhere between folk and jazz!" He records using solo piano only and strives for as many different sounds as possible. He treats albums as thematic concepts, mainly the seasons, choosing original and non-original pieces which fit. During a live performance, also always solo, the first set usually consists of various songs from the released albums and other unrecorded songs, while the second set is centered around the current season. He shifts the moods more in a live performance than on the album, thus, in addition to the impressionistic pieces, he plays a few songs influenced by the blues, gospel and stride² piano traditions, and an occasional harmonica piece. The live performance, he feels, needs more variety and surprises than someone listening to an album at home.

"Jazz" in the sense that there is some improvisation within the set parts of the pieces. Today "Jazz" more or less means that a piece has some improvisation in it and "classical" generally means music played as written.

²"Stride" piano means the left hand "strides" between a bass note and a rhythm chord while the right hand plays the melody; this evolved in the 1920's out of the ragtime style with Fats Waller being one of the principal players of the stride piano.

Two of Winston's major influences besides Fats Waller and Professor Longhair, include steel string guitarist Alex deGrassi and New York composer Steve Reich. Other musicians who have inspired him include:

- 1) the late pianist Vince Guaraldi, composer of "Cast Your Fate to the Wind" and the music for the "Peanuts" TV shows, including the popular song which George plays in concert, "Linus and Lucy"
- 2) Brazilian Guitarist Bola Sete
- 3) German harpist Andreas Vollenweider
- 4) French guitarist Pierre Bensusan
- 5) New Orleans pianist James Booker
- 6) the Hawaiian "slack key" (fingerpick, open tuning style) guitarists, especially Keola Beamer
- 7) the 17th century Irish harpist Turlough O'Carolan, especially as played by the Californian Patrick Ball on wire string harp (Fortuna Records FOR-LP005—Box 116, Novato, CA 94947)
- 8) guitarist George Cromarty (album produced by George Winston soon to be released)
- 9) various pianists in the Afro-Cuban and the Black Gospel styles.

Winston has so far three albums planned for the future: an album of the summer season, as well as an album about outer space, and finally a fantasy-fairy tale album. He is increasingly involved with producing albums by the musicians who have inspired and influenced him for many years, most of whom have never been recorded.

DISCOGRAPHY

Solo

1. AUTUMN (Windham Hill WH-1012)
2. WINTER INTO SPRING (Windham Hill WH-1019)
3. DECEMBER (Windham Hill WH-1025)
4. BALLADS AND BLUES 1972 (Lost Lake Arts LL-81)
(reissue of PIANO SOLOS: Takoma R-9016)

Other

Sidework

1. William Ackerman: PASSAGE (Windham Hill WH-1014)
("Hawk Circle")
2. Michael Hedges: BREAKFAST IN THE FIELD (Windham Hill WH-1017)
("Lenono")
3. Bob Brozman: SNAPPING THE STRINGS
(Kicking Mule Records KM 322)
(Big Boy Stomp)

Producer

4. Scott Cossu: WIND DANCE (Windham Hill WH-1016)

Compilations

5. AN EVENING WITH WINDHAM HILL LIVE (Windham Hill WH-1026)
one solo song, an extended version of "Reflection"
(originally recorded on WINTER INTO SPRING)
6. WINDHAM HILL RECORDS SAMPLER '81 (WH-1015)
(contains "Moon" from AUTUMN WH-1012)
7. WINDHAM HILL RECORDS SAMPLER '82 (WH-1024)
(contains "Blossom/Meadow" from WINTER INTO SPRING WH-1019)

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