

## BUTCH THOMPSON SHORT BIOGRAPHY

In a career spanning 40 years, pianist Butch Thompson has earned a world-wide reputation as a master of ragtime, stride, and classic jazz piano. He spends much of his time on tour in the U.S. and internationally. Although he often travels as a soloist, he also appears with his well-known trio or his eight-piece **New Orleans Jazz Originals** band. He performs with symphony orchestras, among them recently the Hartford Symphony, the St. Louis Symphony, the Minnesota Orchestra, and the Cairo (Egypt) Symphony. Widely known for his 12-year stint (1974-1986) as house pianist and bandleader on public radio's *A Prairie Home Companion*, he continues as a frequent guest on that show.

Thompson was born and raised in Marine on St. Croix, a small river town in Minnesota, where he was playing Christmas carols on his mother's upright piano by age three, and began formal lessons at six. He studied clarinet in high school, and led his first professional jazz group as a senior. At 18, he made his pilgrimage to New Orleans, where he befriended and studied with the late clarinetist **George Lewis**, and was one of the few non-New Orleanians to appear at Preservation Hall during the 1960s and '70s.

After two years in an Army band during the '60s, Thompson returned to Minnesota. While studying Latin American music at the University of Minnesota, he spent some time in Ecuador, and wrote music based on that country's folk tunes. The **Minnesota Orchestra** with Thompson at the piano, premiered his *Ecuadorean Suite*, based on those early pieces in June 1998.

In 1974, Thompson began his well-remembered 12-year run as the house pianist on *A Prairie Home Companion*, beginning with the show's first broadcasts in July of that year. The Butch Thompson Trio, formed as the show went into national distribution in 1978, remained the official house band until 1986.

During the 70s and 80s, he toured widely in Europe. In 1985, to commemorate the 100th birthday of jazz cornetist Joe "King" Oliver, he formed his eight-piece King Oliver Centennial Band for tours in Switzerland, Germany, and England.

In 1987, Thompson commissioned composer **Gordon Wright** to orchestrate the five-part *Scott Joplin Suite for Piano and Orchestra*. Since then, he has toured widely as a pops concert soloist, specializing in such American composers as Joplin, Fats Waller, Eubie Blake and James P. Johnson.

During the early 90s, Thompson began an association with the off-Broadway show *Jelly Roll! The Music and the Man*, which won Obie, Lucille Lortell and Outer Critics Circle awards as best off-Broadway musical of 1995. Thompson worked onstage with the show in New York and on several national tours through 1997.

In addition to his career as a performer, Thompson writes articles and reviews on jazz and produces his own weekly radio show, *Jazz Originals*, on KBEM radio in Minneapolis. His writing has appeared in *The Mississippi Rag*, *Keyboard Classics*, *New Orleans Music* and other magazines, as well as in various CD booklets.

One of Thompson's latest CDs, an album of holiday duets with cellist Laura Sewell, is titled *Bethlehem After Dark*. This release is the 10th in Thompson's acclaimed series for the Daring/Rounder label of Boston. He also played on the Grammy-winning 1997 Verve release *Doc Cheatham and Nicholas Payton*. His 1968 solo recording debut, *Butch Thompson Plays Jelly Roll Morton*, is currently available as a Biograph CD.