

What I Love About...

Charlie Parker

By Austin Vickrey

Charlie Parker - Overview

- Born - August 29, 1920, Kansas City, Missouri
- Died - March 12, 1955, New York City, New York
- Began saxophone at 11 years old, began professional career at 15 years old.
- Nicknames: “Yardbird,” “Bird”
- Spent 3-4 years practicing up to 15 hours a day
- One of the biggest innovators of bebop style jazz.

Charlie Parker - Overview

- Influences: Count Basie Band, Bennie Moten Band, Buster Smith (mentor), Lester Young
- Famous cymbal throw by Jo Jones (drummer for Basie), prompted a woodshed period for a year
- Bands: Jay McShann, Earl Hines, became leader of his own band
- Developed bebop concept along with: Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonius Monk, Max Roach, Bud Powell.
- Checkered history with drugs (heroin), would get clean but it wouldn't take.
- Died at 34 years old - pneumonia, bleeding ulcer, cirrhosis, heart attack. Coroner mistakenly thought his age was between 50-60 years old.

Charlie Parker - Impact on me as a musician

- I started saxophone at 11 years old and heard Charlie Parker when I was 13/14 years old.
- Heard Parker on a cassette tape after my first jazz lesson.
- Song: A Night in Tunisia - Charlie Parker All-Stars - Solo Break
- I purchased the Charlie Parker Omnibook (transcriptions) and proceeded to try to find as many recordings as I could.
- Bird has been my main influence in music

Charlie Parker - What grabs me about his music

- The virtuosic playing (Night in Tunisia solo break)
- Fluidity of ideas
- Melodies of his compositions - Contrafacts
- Sound an expression - rooted in the blues
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Charlie Parker - Notable Recordings

- 1945 - Savoy label - Charlie Parker's Reboppers Significant tracks: "Ko-Ko," "Billie's Bounce," "Now's the Time"
- 1949 - Charlie Parker with Strings - Norman Granz arranged for session. "Just Friends," "Everything Happens to Me," "April in Paris," "Summertime," "I Didn't Know What Time It Was," "If I Should Lose You."
- 1952 - Clef/Verve label - Bird and Diz - co-leaders Significant tracks: "Bloomdido," "Passport," "Leap Frog"
- 1953 - Jazz at Massey Hall (Live recording) - All-star group "The Quintet" Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Bud Powell, Charles Mingus, Max Roach
- Many many recordings for Verve, Dial, Savoy compilations.

Charlie Parker - Contrafacts

- A “contrafact” is a melody that is composed over the harmony to an existing song. This was a big practice in the development of bebop and jazz to avoid copyright laws. Chord changes cannot be copyrighted; only melodies can be copyrighted.
- Short list of Charlie Parker contrafacts:
 - “Bird Gets the Worm” = “Lover, Come Back to Me”
 - “Bird of Paradise” = “All the Things You Are”
 - “Chasin’ the Bird,” “Constellation,” “Dexterity,” “Kim,” “Moose the Mooche,” “An Oscar for Treadwell,” “Passport,” “Red Cross,” = “I Got Rhythm
 - “Confirmation” = “Twilight Time”
 - “Klaunstance” = “The Way You Look Tonight”
 - “Ko-Ko” = “Cherokee”
 - “Marmaduke” = “Honeysuckle Rose”
 - “Quasimodo” = “Embraceable You”
 - “Ornithology” = “How High the Moon” (Co-written by Benny Harris)
 - “Donna Lee” = “Back Home in Indiana” (FUN FACT - This melody claimed by Miles Davis but attributed to Bird.)

Charlie Parker - The Take Away

- Can't mention jazz or bebop without the study of Charlie Parker. His influence was tremendous and is still felt today.
- Charlie Parker study is (in my opinion) a MUST for all students of jazz and jazz saxophone. Understanding his melodies, style, phrasing, and vocabulary is an essential part of learning how to improvise and play jazz music.
- There aren't many video recordings out there, but search YouTube. Listen to recordings. Play out of the Charlie Parker Omnibook (Bird Bible). Transcribe melodies and solos that you like.

Charlie Parker - YouTube Links

- Live - “Hot House” with Dizzy Gillespie - https://youtu.be/tJYO6_t4d08
- “A Night in Tunisia” with the famous alto break - <https://youtu.be/lxH83kmjpyw>
- “Bird Gets the Worm” - Fastest tempo I have found at 340 BPM - <https://youtu.be/zwXNB9kkTSg>
- “Bloomdido” - Blues in Bb - at 1:12-1:14 - use of humorous quote (Shave and a Haircut) - <https://youtu.be/1MCGweQ8Oso>
- “Lover Man” - Bird had to be physically supported by producer Ross Russell because he was so out of it from using drugs. - <https://youtu.be/pHYNe5eV2I>
- “Blues for Alice” - Example of “Bird Blues” chord changes - <https://youtu.be/4s5FZBisaf8>