

# CHARLIE PARKER BIRD AT THE ROOST

THE SAVOY SESSIONS



“And so, ladies and gentlemen, with our theme song, “Jumping With Symphony Sid,” done by the great Charlie Parker and the All-Stars we take our microphone right down to the Royal Roost, the Metropolitan Bopera House, located on Broadway between 47th and 48th Streets right opposite the Strand Theater, where the lights are low and the music is in a real knocked-out groove...where for only 90¢ you can sit back and relax from 9:30 in the evening until four in the morning and have a wonderful time digging the gonest sounds of pure progressive jazz. And so, to start things jumping, here’s one I know you’ll really enjoy.....”

Typical radio announcement  
—“Symphony Sid” Torin



SIL 1108

Such amiably jivey, nonstop chatter should be familiar to any over-40 modern jazz fan who grew up in or near New York City. In 1948 bebop was suddenly the rage, and 'Symphony Sid' Torin, a veteran local jazz disc jockey, had become one of the music's most audible champions. A revolution in jazz styles had been underway steadily and pervasively over the preceding few years, with the classic early bop recordings by Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, Bud Powell, Dexter Gordon, J.J. Johnson, the Eckstine band, et al spreading the word. Young bop-influenced players were turning up everywhere. Still, by the end of 1947 bebop was more of an artistic than a commercial success. The key recordings had all been made for small, independent labels and, with the exception of occasional well-publicized concerts, boppers were scuffling looking for decent gigs. In Manhattan, for example, the legendary 52nd Street clubs were in decline, folding due to lack of business or changing to non-jazz policies. By early 1948 the Three Deuces and the Hickory House were the only spots left on the Street where modern sounds could still be heard. Even though disc jockeys everywhere were spinning modern jazz sides, and popular enthusiasm for bop seemed to be growing daily, the new music was still responded to with ambivalence by many. However, all this was about to change.

In April 'Symphony Sid' and promoter Monte Kay, who had already staged a number of successful bop concerts and sessions locally, convinced the owners of Ralph & Bill's Chicken Roost, a nondescript Broadway nightspot that had flirted unsuccessfully with jazz in the past, to try out a one-night-a-week bop policy. Sid talked up the sessions on his nightly broadcasts. The initial Tuesday night mini-concerts were such popular events that within a month the newly-named Royal Roost had adopted a nightly modern jazz policy and was rightly billing itself as "the house that Bop built." Many local modern players were working steadily at the Roost, notably Bird, Miles Davis, Tadd Dameron, Allen Eager, Fats Navarro and Kai Winding. Faithful fans, hip tourists, curiosity seekers and so forth jammed the new headquarters for bebop nightly for bills that often featured three or more groups of star players. "Name" groups, singers and even big bands were soon booked and squeezed into the modestly-sized basement room. Bop was big news and was doing great business. Roost-styled clubs, i.e. with an admission charge and a "bleachers" gallery area for serious fans, sprang up everywhere.

But don't forget our boy 'Symphony Sid,' the all-night, all-frantic one. By the summer of 1948 Sid was hosting a nightly disc jockey slot on WMCA. He arranged to get an AM radio wire into the Roost every Friday night and incorporated a live broadcast of the last hour's activity on the bandstand into his show between 3 and 4 AM. For countless fans in the New York metropolitan area these live tastes of what was happening at the Roost generated additional interest in the club and served as yet another proof that bop had arrived.

Now then, if you are reading this and thinking damn! why wasn't I around, or awake, to catch all those great live sounds; or, more likely, damn! wouldn't it have been great if someone had just recorded all of that stuff, don't despair. Someone *did* take down most of the broadcasts, and on professional quality recording equipment. Realizing what an unusual opportunity was being afforded him, a freelance audio engineer by the name of Boris Rose stayed up early Saturday morning after early Saturday morning and transcribed the majority of those hour-long broadcasts. And, since Charlie Parker appeared at the Royal Roost frequently in late '48 and early '49, Rose recorded a good deal of live Parker material.

For all of its runaway success the Roost itself was a relatively shortlived operation. Sensing a gold mine in modern jazz the Roost's operators rashly took a long-term lease on the then-defunct Harem, a much larger second-floor room nearby on Broadway and renamed the club Bop City. Roost bookings were all switched to the new Bop City location which opened in April, 1949. So, just a year after the start of the whole phenomenon, the Roost—the Metropolitan Bopera House—that wonderful banquet of bebop was no more. Sid of course went along to Bop City and continued his live broadcasts for a time. But, alas, the early flush of public interest in modern jazz had peaked, and soaring costs for overly-ambitious shows plus heavy operating expenses resulted in rather poor health for Bop City. Nevertheless, despite the inconsistencies and pitfalls of the nightclub busi-

ness, bebop had become an integral part of the jazz club scene. Various clubs experimented with bop policies, and by the end of 1949 Birdland, that durable showplace, had opened and began emulating the policies which had proved so successful during the Roost's brief existence. This time there was no attempt to change the basic formula, and Birdland remained at the same location for over a decade, surviving all of the winds of change that blew through jazz in that period.

Perhaps due to the turbulent source of bebop's development, that brief period of the Royal Roost's operation symbolizes for many fans a brave and exciting time for modern jazz. And the recordings that were captured help to confirm what an impressive level of playing was going on in that Broadway basement for those few months. Rose's recording log reads like a guest register of the greatest and most popular players of the day. Between September, '48 and April '49, here are some of the stars, beside Parker, who blew into Sid's WMCA microphone: Tadd Dameron's small groups, which often featured Fats Navarro, Allen Eager and Milt Jackson; the famous Miles Davis "Birth of the Cool" tuba band in its only public appearance; Dizzy Gillespie's big band; the boppish Woody Herman 2nd Herd, which featured Stan Getz, Serge Chaloff, Bill Harris and assorted other stars; the Chubby Jackson big bop band during its very brief life; Lester Young's quintet; the Count Basie band featuring Wardell Gray; the Charlie Ventura bop-styled unit with Jackie Cain & Roy Kral—not to mention various individual stars like Ella Fitzgerald, Flip Phillips, Lee Konitz, Bud Powell and Lucky Thompson. And those are just the groups and players that happened to be in the Roost on Friday nights during Sid's live broadcasts—occasional comments or announcements by Sid on different weeks refer to other top players who appeared at the club during the same period.

This album contains four complete sets with Bird's groups, from three different mornings in February and March of 1949. Some of these titles have already appeared on two previous *Savoy* releases; four titles have never appeared on record before.

The first two sets heard here, both from the 2/12/49 broadcast apparently, feature Parker with his regular quintet of that period. Kenny Dorham had recently replaced Miles Davis as Bird's regular trumpet player and was by this time quite familiar with the group's book. The rhythm team of Al Hais, Tommy Potter and Max Roach had been together for a while and functioned very smoothly and subtly. For the last two sets the Parker quintet is augmented by two guest soloists each of whom had played with the Gillespie-Parker group which made the historic tour of the West Coast during 1945 and 46. Lucky Thompson and Milt Jackson both sound comfortable with Bird's group, and so the proceedings are more orderly and coherent than many "pick-up" units of all-stars captured accidentally on live recordings. The bebop lines were well-known by fans and musicians alike, in that, with the exception of "Slow Boat To China," a pop tune of the day for which Bird had developed a penchant, all of the arrangements played here were identical to the well-known *Dial*, *Guild* and *Savoy* single records. 1949 was still a part of the 78 rpm era, and each of the original records had been instrumental in building the reputations of Bird, Dizzy and the whole bebop movement. A review of Bird's broadcast performances from this period will reveal that he tended to keep to a predictable repertoire of requested recorded performances.

As one is endlessly reminded in discussions of Parker's gifts and style, he was a musical genius and an unceasingly inventive improviser. What more realistic test of this thesis could there be than a collection of performances of very familiar routines played after 3 o'clock in the morning? Each tune finds Bird approaching the set routines and familiar changes with verve and fresh imagination. There are *no* attempts here to coast or simply paraphrase recorded solos. Bird, and his sidemen, stand up each time and get off choruses of highly inventive bop improvisations. Among the quintet titles "Barbados" and "Groovin' High" are quite impressive. The septet sounds particularly good on "Scrapple From The Apple." But, why don't *you* just sit back, relax and dig these gone sounds and have a wonderful time picking your own favorites.

Thank you, Bird. Thank you, Sid. Thank you, Boris. Thank you, Savoy.

—Bill Miner



#### SIDE ONE

Scrapple From The Apple  
Barbados  
BeBop  
Groovin' High  
Confirmation  
Salt Peanuts

#### SIDE TWO

Cheryl  
Slow Boat To China  
Chasin' The Bird  
Half Nelson  
A Night In Tunisia  
Scrapple From The Apple

#### PERSONNEL:

**A Side:** Charlie Parker: alto sax, Kenny Dorham: trumpet, Al Haig piano, Tommy Potter: bass, Max Roach: drums. 2/12/49

**B Side:** Milt Jackson: vibes, Lucky Thompson: tenor sax (out on B2) 2/26 and 3/12/49

Announcements by Symphony Sid Torin  
"Barbados" and the entire B side previously issued on Savoy 12179 or 12186. The other performances are previously unissued on Savoy.

**Reissue Produced by Bob Porter**

**Executive Producer: Steve Backer**

**Transfers & Editing: Jerry Valburn and Jack Towers**

**Mastering: Al Brown (Frankford-Wayne)**

Cover Art: Andy Lackow

Photography: Bob Parent

Design: Howard Fritzon

Art Direction: Bob Heimall



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