



BIRD IN PARIS

The time: May 1949. The place: Postwar Paris. France is gradually relaxing after the long, bitter occupation. The French have already tasted Bebop. In February 1948 they had the Dizzy Gillespie Big Band for a brief, unexpected and very successful visit, musically if not financially, and later that year Howard McGhee's group with John Lewis, Percy and Jimmy Heath, played at the Nice Festival. And now the Paris Beboppers wait expectantly for the appearance of Charlie Parker at the Salle Pleyel for the first international jazz festival there.

Parker and Sidney Bechet were the star attractions of the seven-day event which opened on Sunday, May 8, 1949. Bird flew over on Friday, May 6, in company with Bechet. Kenny Clarke and the other Americans. Rehearsals were held on Saturday afternoon at the Salle Pleyel and the Club St. Germain (apparently Parker didn't show up at the Salle Pleyel for his rehearsal having "disappeared"), and on Saturday evening the organisers of the festival staged a cocktail party for the visiting musicians at the Pavillon de L'Elysée.

Bird and his men—Kenny Dorham, Al Haig, Tommy Potter and Max Roach—played evening concerts on the Sunday and Monday, then did a concert the following Saturday, winding up with afternoon and evening shows on Sunday, May 15, the final day of the festival. From Tuesday to Friday the group undertook a short tour playing concerts in Roubaix and Marseille before returning to Paris. Al Haig recalls, "I do remember standing up on a train from Marseille, France, all day until we got to Paris that night, at which time we raced off to play a concert at the University of Paris, or some such school. I think I had a slight attack of vertigo at that concert! However it all ended well.

Parker seemed to enjoy himself in the French capital, he played quite a bit of snooker with an English musician he chummed up with, went around the city taking typical tourist-type snaps of gendarmes and the postcard views (some of these efforts were published later in a magazine run by Eddie Barclay called "Jazz"). Bird knew Barclay and his wife Nicole who had visited New York earlier in the year and posed for pictures with Charlie at the Royal Roost. He also knew Charles Delaunay whose brainchild the festival was.

Bird also did his share of jamming in the cabarets along the Left Bank. According to Kenny Dorham, "In 1949 Bird had all Paris at his feet. He was playing a concert and there is this part in NIGHT IN TUNISIA where the break comes and Bird had to fill it in—well he does, and the whole place cracks up. Bird, in all his life, never witnessed such enthusiasm. He just stood there with an expression of exuberance on his face. I said to him 'Gone Bird'".

But evidently it was not all sweetness and light. Charlie still had his "personal problems" and in Paris there were those who were quite happy to lay free fixes on him to gain an "in". Some of his behaviour was bizarre. During a conversation while visiting the Club St. Germain, Bird came up with an interesting subject for discussion then immediately sat back and fell fast asleep, leaving his companions to talk about it amongst themselves. There was his famous non-interview with Steve Race where in response to Race's questions he simply recited passages from Omar Khayyam... the story of how he consumed a rose whole on stage to show his gratitude for the audience's applause. Yet other





5

commentators noted Bird's refusal to acknowledge approval. One report stated that "Parker *does* ignore the audience, and he finishes his numbers by turning his back to the audience and stamping out the beat for the next number in the middle of the applause for the last".

Andre Hodeir in his review of the festival in *Jazz Hot*, (June 1949) noted that "Parker appeared to adopt a resolutely anti-commercial attitude with no thought for presentation, sometimes turning his back on the audience at inappropriate moments (although he surprised everyone on the Sunday afternoon by introducing the members of his quintet with considerable humour)".

Bassist Tommy Potter's memories of Bird in Paris were set down in Bob Reisner's *Bird: The Legend of Charlie Parker*. "Bird always wanted to play the big places but his reputation for being unreliable kept him limited to the small clubs. In Europe, he had the chance he wanted. I was with him in 1949, and the reception in France was lavish. Autograph signing parties in record shops and lots of press coverage topped by a press party in Bird's hotel room. Charlie ordered a bottle of champagne, and he tipped the waiter generously, and well he might, because he had that waiter make five trips for five buckets of champagne". When I met Tommy Potter in Paris 15 years later, he repeated the story and even pointed out the hotel where they had stayed. "Bird would say in his lordly voice, 'Garçon! Champagne!' just like they do in the movies, Tommy told me.

The bulk of the enclosed music was recorded on a portable disc machine operated by one of Bird's fans at the Salle Pleyel. Some of the concerts were broadcast but unfortunately it is not known from which evenings this material stems. It is possible that they are all from the final day of the festival when, as already noted, Bird played a matinee and an evening show. This would explain the comparatively similar "alternate takes", of SALT PEANUTS and OUT OF NOWHERE. But this is no more than an idle guess. However we do know that the jam session BLUES on the second side of the record was the very last selection played by the massed ensemble of Bop, Trad and Mainstream musicians.

Wrote Andre Hodeir "the grand closing jam session, featuring side by side all the main performers of the festival, from Bechet to Max Roach, was one of the most spectacular moments, if not of a very high quality musically. And everyone agreed that it was the only possible way to end the Festival".

Hodeir felt that the concerts did not show Bird to the advantage that a club set would have done "..... he doesn't play on the stage with the same freedom as in a club or on a record", commented Hodeir. But still thought Parker "the central attraction of the Festival". Yet the critic judged that three-quarters of the audience were not in tune with Parker's music which seems surprising in view of the applause we hear on these transcriptions.

Sound quality could have been better and the breaks when the record had to be turned over are annoying but Parker's solos are intact and, as we hear some 22 years later, he played very well. So did the other members of the group, especially Haig. Incidentally we must thank Michel Delorme for rescuing ALLEN'S ALLEY and the second take of 52nd. STREET THEME. He found these in a friend's attic where they had lain forgotten for many years. He had to carefully wash the discs in soap and water they were so caked in dust.

Michel states that Parker's famous "Happy Birthday" quotation on OUT OF NOWHERE (1) was not just Bird's way of complimenting Potter on a nice solo but was meant for a person in the audience whose birthday it really was.

LADYBIRD the last item on the record is a real Bird curio. This was originally thought to have been recorded some time during the week of the festival but, thanks to Tony Williams who dug up the new information regarding this track, we now know it was in fact recorded late the following year while Bird was stopping over in Paris for a few days before flying back to the States after his one week tour of Sweden. Tony tells us that Maurice Moufflard remembers one more tune that was played on the broadcast which he thinks was HONEYSUCKLE ROSE. Whether this was ever recorded has not yet been established. Moufflard also recalls that the

unknown percussionists listed were apparently brought along to the session at the last minute by Bird himself.

Despite the pops and crackles these sides can be heard as a document of some of Bird's triumphant and great moments when Paris was his oyster.

notes: Mark Gardner.
production: Dave Green.
sleeve design: Malcolm Walker.
discographical research: Tony Williams.

1. Parker with Max Roach & Swedish drummer Sven Bollhem.
2. Parker outside a Paris record shop.
3. Parker with Eddie Barclay and Sidney Bechet.
4. Parker with Bechet.
5. On stage at the Salle Pleyel.
- 6.

PERSONNEL

CHARLIE PARKER QUINTET:

Kenny Dorham tpt; Charlie Parker alt, vcl-CP; Al Haig p; Tommy Potter bs; Max Roach d. Salle Pleyel, Paris—May 8, 9, 14 or 15, 1949.

+ JAM SESSION:

Aime Barelli, Bill Coleman, Miles Davis, Hot Lips Page, possibly Kenny Dorham tpt; "Big Chief" Russell Moore tbn; Hubert Rostaing cl; Pierre Braslavsky, Sidney Bechet sop; Charlie Parker alt; Don Byas, James Moody ten; Al Haig p; Hazy Osterwald vibes; Jean "Toots" Thielmans g; Tommy Potter bs; Max Roach d. Salle Pleyel, Paris—Sunday, May 15, 1949.

= CHARLIE PARKER AVEC L'ORCHESTRE DE MAURICE MOUFFLARD:

probably:- Roger Guerin, George Jouvin Fassin, unknown tpt; Andre Paquinet, Maurice Gladieu, unknown tbn; Charlie Parker, Robert Merchez alt; Roger Simon ten; Honore True bar; 2 unknown sop; Robert Cambier p; Henri Karen bs; Pierre Loteguy d; 2 or 3 unknown percussionists; Maurice Moufflard dir. ORTF Studios, Paris—late November 1950.

SIDE ONE

- : Scapple from the Apple (1)
- : Out of nowhere (1)
- : Out of nowhere (2)
- : Barbados
- : 52nd. street theme (1)

SIDE TWO

- : Salt peanuts —CP (1)
- : Salt peanuts —CP (2)
- : Allen's alley
- : 52nd. street theme (2)
- + untitled blues
- = Ladybird



6