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ECHOES OF AN ERA

The Charlie Parker-Dizzy Gillespie Years



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A quarter-century ago, Bop was a revolution in music, a revolution as enthusiastically supported by some as it was violently opposed by others. The boppers, in fact, were the jazz militants of their day. They wanted to overthrow the jazz establishment, to supplant it with renovative processes which, to the minds of their predecessors, spelled anarchy. The boppers believed that jazz had become stagnant, and that their way represented progress. Like all revolutionaries, they were guilty of excesses. Decked out in goatees, berets and dark glasses, they derided entertainment values and accused older musicians of being Uncle Toms. Eventually, of course, yesterday's revolutionaries became today's conservatives, and as such have been duly appalled by the excesses of the New Thing.

Looking back, with all the benefits hindsight bestows, it is obvious that a change in jazz was inevitable in the mid-40's. Transportation difficulties caused by World War II, and the drafting of key sidemen into the armed forces, had had a grievous effect on the big bands. Their kind of jazz, packaged and skillfully marketed as Swing, had known unprecedented success for a decade, during which popularizers and opportunists had made fortunes. The boppers were well aware of this situation, and they sought to express themselves in a way

others would find hard to copy. Inevitably, there were racial undertones to their thinking, because whites had reaped the harvest of Swing which blacks had sown. While Bop could not long be confined behind racial barriers, the fact remains that it was essentially the creation of black musicians, and most particularly of Charlie "Bird" Parker, John Birks and "Dizzy" Gillespie.

These two artists were both members of Earl Hines's band in 1943. One of the great jazz innovators, Hines has always interested himself in the discovery and presentation of new talent. He began leading a big band as early as 1928, and from that time to date his career has been remarkable not only for the level of his own performance, but for the great singers and instrumentalists he has encouraged and brought to the attention of the public. His tolerance and support resulted in his 1943 band being referred to in all jazz histories as "the incubator of bop." It was there that Bird and Dizzy diligently studied their exercise books and came up with the devices and phraseology that were to characterize the new music.

So far as jazz was concerned, both of them were well grounded in the music of the preceding generation. Charlie Parker had been with Jay McShann's Kansas City band, and Dizzy Gillespie with those of Teddy Hill, Cab Calloway and

Benny Carter. In this heritage, they differed from many of their disciples, whose jazz background was decidedly fragmentary. Bird and Dizzy knew what they were rebelling against, whereas many of their younger imitators did not. The latter, by repeating errors and spur-of-the-moment gaffes, ultimately did the movement considerable harm. However, other understanding and more intelligent musicians, such as trumpet players Benny Harris and Fats Navarro, pianists Thelonius Monk and Bud Powell, trombonist J. J. Johnson, saxophonist and arranger Budd Johnson, and drummer Kenny Clarke, were among those who gave invaluable assistance to a music that was hatched in the Earl Hines incubator and conceived in either Clark Monroe's Uptown House or Minton's Play House, to name the two Harlem clubs where most of the earliest experimentation took place.

Bop harmony was generally more complex than that of the earlier jazz styles, but the rhythmic differences were more than anything else responsible for the line of demarcation between musicians of the old and new styles. Apart from the boppers' feeling for up-beat accentuations, the new style of drumming maintained the rhythm on the top cymbal and used the drums to punctuate the melodic line. Similarly, the pianist did not maintain a regular beat, but left this function to the bass

and concerned himself with indicating chord changes and filling in between the horns' phrases. The unison theme statements often heard were not original, but a continuation of a practice that had been become increasingly popular with small groups of swing era musicians. The basic material also remained much the same—the twelve-bar blues, the chord sequences of *I Got Rhythm*, *Cherokee*, *Indiana*, etc. The original chords were often altered, however, and passing chords added. Improvisations were, in consequence, full of unusual intervals as the soloists played groups of notes related to passing chords not stated by the rhythm section.

Harmonic and rhythmic innovations were supplemented by new conceptions of phraseology, notably longer phrases interspersed with held notes and unexpected pauses. The technical demands of bop were such that comparatively few players could improve satisfactorily within its framework, but some of the best of those that could are heard to advantage here. By 1947, when most of the music in this set was recorded, bop had an easily recognizable character, quite distinct from the "hot" jazz that preceded it and the languid, "cool" kind that was to follow.

The first session heard here brought together in Carnegie Hall not merely Dizzy and Bird, but also John Lewis,

the pianist whose Modern Jazz Quartet was to assume such significance in the next two decades. The opener, *A Night in Tunisia*, was composed by Dizzy and reputedly given its title by Earl Hines. It became one of the major bop anthems, and like *Groovin' High* on the same side, it was one of the favorite vehicles for improvisation of Dizzy and Bird, both of whom often used it in different contexts.

Dizzy plays only on the last three titles of the second record, the other seven being by groups led by Bird. These introduce some formidable young talents on their way up the ladder of fame. One is an aspiring trumpet player, a long way from rock 'n' roll and Fillmore East, but not altogether at home in Bird's aery domain either—Miles Davis. Here, too, is the assured musician who first translated the swiftness of bop to the trombone—J. J. Johnson. And on drums is one of the idiom's masters—Max Roach.

Chronologically last are seven titles recorded by Dizzy in Paris. It is six years later and the tensions of experiment have been relaxed. In the company of that high-spirited singer, Joe Carroll, the leader gives free rein to his sense of humor, and a more extroverted atmosphere results. The perilous phase of the revolution was over, and golden days lay ahead for Dizzy, but time, alas, was running out for Bird.

STANLEY DANCE.



The above photos show "Diz" and "Bird" in a series of photos during live performances at Birdland.

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side one

A Night In Tunisia (Pt. 1) (A)

3:00 (Gillespie-Paparelli) Leeds Music Corp. ASCAP

A Night In Tunisia (Pt. 2) (A)

2:01 (Gillespie-Paparelli) Leeds Music Corp. ASCAP

Confirmation (A)

3:15 (Charlie Parker) Atlantic Music Corp. BMI

Groovin' High (Pt. 1) (A)

3:03 (D. Gillespie) Leeds Music Corp. ASCAP

Groovin' High (Pt. 2) (A)

2:04 (D. Gillespie) Leeds Music Corp. ASCAP

side two

School Days (E)

2:30 (Forshay Music Inc.) BMI

Swing Low Sweet Cadillac (E)

3:55 (Forshay Music Inc.) BMI

Good Bait (E)

4:50 (T. Dameron-C. Basie) Bregman-Vocco Conn. ASCAP

The Champ (E)

4:25 (D. Gillespie) Atlantic Music Corp. BMI

My Man (E)

3:05 (Yuain-Pollack) Leo Feist, Inc. ASCAP

side three

Bird Feathers (C)

2:57 (Forshay Music, Inc.) BMI

Air Conditioning (D)

2:50 (Forshay Music, Inc.) BMI

Quasimodo (D)

2:50 (Forshay Music, Inc.) BMI

Crazeology (D)

2:56 (Forshay Music, Inc.) BMI

Dewey Square (B)

2:55 (Forshay Music, Inc.) BMI

side four

Bongo Bop (D)

2:44 (Forshay Music, Inc.) BMI

Klactoveedstene (C)

2:55 (Forshay Music, Inc.) BMI

Ooh Shoobee Doobee (E)

3:15 (Forshay Music, Inc.) BMI

I've Got The Bluest Blues (E)

3:50 (Forshay Music, Inc.) BMI

Dizzy Atmosphere (A)

(D. Gillespie) Leeds Music Corp. ASCAP

(A) Dizzy Gillespie, trumpet; Charlie Parker, alto saxophone; John Lewis, piano; Al McKibbin, bass; Joe Harris, drums. 29 September, 1947, Carnegie Hall, New York City.

(B) Charlie Parker, alto saxophone; Miles Davis, trumpet; Duke Jordan, piano; Tommy Potter, bass; Max Roach, drums. 28 October, 1947, New York City.

(C) as (b). 4 November, 1947, New York City.
(D) as (b), J. J. Johnson, trombone, added. 17 December, 1947, New York City.

(E) Dizzy Gillespie, trumpet, vocal and conga; Bill Graham, alto and baritone saxophones; Wade Legge, piano; Lou Hackney, bass; Al Jones, drums; Joe Carroll, vocal. 9 February, 1953, Paris.