

# BIRD IN SWEDEN



Including a previously unissued extended version of Body and Soul



Charlie Parker's second visit to Europe occurred in November 1950 when the alto saxophonist crossed the Atlantic for a hectic seven-day tour of Sweden. Eighteen months earlier he had played the highly successful Paris Jazz Festival, but that was in the warmth of May. Now Bird found himself in a northern climate where winter had set in.

Dressed in a chunky Harris-tweed overcoat, Charlie arrived at Bromma Airport, near Stockholm, on Sunday, November 19. A crowd of musicians, critics and fans were there to greet him. Parker soon felt at home in Sweden. He liked the attitude of the people who treated him as an artist and with the respect he deserved.

The tour, booked by Bird's manager Billy Shaw, was sponsored by Nils Hellstrom, publisher of the Swedish jazz magazine, *Estrad*. Trumpeter Roy Eldridge was co-featured and both American stars were set to appear with a band of Swedish musicians. No doubt Parker would have preferred to have been with his own quintet, as he was in Paris the previous year, but the truth is that the group had disbanded. At home, Charlie was now working either with a lumbering string section or as a single with local rhythm sections. By comparison his Swedish accompanists were more than adequate.

Things got away to an auspicious start with a concert at Konserthuset, a large hall in Stockholm. Bird was partnered by trumpeter Rolf Ericson whose style was not unlike that of Red Rodney. Drummer Jack Noren provided a good solid beat. Obliging the Swedish fans who were still catching up with his records from three or four years earlier, Parker played new versions of titles which had been waxed for Dial — *Cool Blues*, *Cheers*, and *Lover Man*. Later that Monday evening he played a jam session at the national headquarters of the Swedish jazz clubs.

It became obvious from the outset that Parker's work was of a very high order, even by his exacting standards. His playing had an airy, joyful quality that was never to be repeated in the remainder of his life. He was a happy man during that brief time in another land and his improvisations reflected this fleeting contentment when a normally troubled existence was temporarily forgotten. As Ross Russell wrote in his Parker biography, *Bird Lives!*, it was "the last good season".

From Stockholm the concert troupe travelled to Gothenburg, and the following day they pressed

on to Malmö for a matinee at the Amiralen dance hall. That is where the music in this album begins for Bird's set was captured on a wire recorder. In certain respects the Malmö sides are more satisfactory than the Helsingborg sessions because the four performances are unedited and we hear Parker's solos in complete settings — alongside trumpeter Rolf Ericson's agile contributions and the competent interludes from the talented Gosta Theselius. We are also able to appreciate the warm enthusiasm of the Swedish audience.

The concert was opened by Charlie's colleagues with Arne Domnerus on alto. They played an attractive warm-up set including *Fine And Dandy*, *Out of Nowhere* and *All The Things You Are*. But when Parker came on things really began to take off. *Anthropology* and *Cheers* are impeccable performances for a hastily-thrown-together band. Bird has no trouble with the rhythm section (despite drummer Noren's heavy "bombs") and soon strikes up a sympathetic partnership with Ericson (apparent on the fours in both *Anthropology* and *Cool Blues*). *Lover Man* was always a significant tune for Parker. In 1945 he had supplied a beautiful modulation at the start of Sarah Vaughan's version and enhanced it further with some delightful fills. The following year there was his "crack-up" *Lover Man* for Dial when an artist stared despair and madness fully in the face. The brief *Lover Man* from Malmö, however, is probably the one the saxophonist would have liked to remember. It is certainly better than the slightly tense studio rendition for Norman Granz in 1951. Note in the Swedish fragment Ericson lays out until Bird closes in approved style with a smear of *An English Country Garden*.

It is rather a pity that Parker's solo on *Cool Blues* was unaccountably lost (perhaps the recordist was getting short of wire?). It begins midway through a lively Ericson solo. Then follows a flowing piano passage by Theselius and some absorbing exchanges between Charlie and Rolf. After the Malmö gig the musicians took part in a rapidly convened jam session at the University of Lund, a few miles away. Bird was having some late nights but he seemed to enjoy every moment, as did his fellow American Roy Eldridge. They were soon "on the road" again. Next day the musicians crossed the Sound to Denmark for a big concert in Copenhagen. On the Friday (November 24) they were back in Sweden for a matinee at Folkets Park, a beer garden and dance pavilion in Helsingborg. It is from this date that the bulk of the enclosed

music stems. The balance of the tracks were made at a jam session in a restaurant after the concert.

The existence of Charlie Parker's Swedish recordings did not become generally known until the late 1950s. Of course he was unable to make any official studio sides in Scandinavia because of his contract to Norman Granz. In Europe at that time tape recorders were quite a novelty and an expensive luxury. However at least one Swedish fan (who has since died) had an old wire recorder and on it captured the solos that Bird played at Malmö and Helsingborg.

The quality was by no means perfect technically, but you can hear very clearly what Bird was doing. When it was decided to issue the music the tracks were heavily edited so that all Bird's playing could be included. The piano solos, in any case, were barely audible. Still, before reissuing the record Spotlite producer Tony Williams checked sources to see if any complete performances existed. He managed to locate the extended *Body and Soul* which preserves the solos of two of Bird's colleagues, along with their "fours".

Charlie's statement on *Body And Soul* raises a very interesting point. It has often been claimed that Parker possessed the gift of photographic memory. That he also had the power of instant musical recall seems likely. Thousands of tunes and compositions were stored in his mind and could be unlocked whenever he had a horn in his hand. The phrases that made up his improvisations were not inserted because they fell easily under his quicksilver fingers. They enhanced and expanded the line. Bird never forgot a particularly choice phrase. If we listen to another recorded version of *Body And Soul*, made with a Jay McShann combo for a radio transcription exactly 10 years earlier (available on Spotlite SPJ 120), we find several of the same ideas that appear in the Swedish solo. The two treatments are entirely different but the mature Bird remembered his younger self . . . the child was truly father of the man.

During this period Parker was fighting a losing battle with his 15-year addiction to heroin. In an effort to kick the habit he was substituting alcohol as a stimulant. In Sweden he sought refuge in bottle after bottle of potent schnapps, but the beverage appeared to affect his musical performance not at all, apart from the occasion of his farewell concert in Scandinavia. Only the bait of yet another bottle of schnapps persuaded

him to leave his bed. For once Bird was outplayed by the Swedish altoist Arne Domnerus. Charlie celebrated his fondness for *Swedish Schnapps* in a recording of that name for Granz the following August.

The tremendous impact of Charlie Parker's week in Sweden is still recalled with crystal clarity by all of those who were fortunate enough to hear him. Musicians, critics and fans came from far and wide to attend his concerts. As Lars Werner wrote in 1959, "The Stockholm concerts on November 20, followed by a jam session arranged by the Stockholm Jazz Club, belong to my most unforgettable and profound emotional experiences and I am sure that everybody who heard Charlie Parker on his Swedish tour was deeply touched."

Ross Russell's appraisal, based on the collective views of most Swedish critics, emphasises the importance of the enclosed album, "Charlie's playing during the Swedish tour was on a high, perhaps new level. Realizing that listeners were already familiar with his records and were ready to hear, not replays of a past success, but innovations, he stretched out. His tone was clear and singing and the saxophone under perfect control, even on pianissimo passages."

As already indicated, Bird for the most part used lines that his listeners would be familiar with, but expounded anew on the Dial sides that had percolated through to Northern Europe in those post-war years of utility and austerity. In choosing *Strike Up The Band* and *Find And Dandy*, not normally in his repertoire, Bird was pleasing his Swedish companions who featured both standards regularly. The only new addition to his book that Bird performed in Sweden was *Star Eyes* which he had recorded a few months earlier.

Werner states that most Swedish musicians in 1950 were into the "cool" bag and that Bird's music had little influence, although the players who worked with him on the tour were "spurred by his presence and performed with much more fire and swing than usual". If you compare this music with the bulk of Swedish jazz recordings from that year you will hear that Mr. Werner hit the nail on the head. But he may have underestimated the long-term effect of Bird's appearances on the local musicians. It probably helped them to re-appraise their playing and to see that modes of the moment are not necessarily the best or only ways of expression. Certainly there was nothing "cool" about

# BIRD IN SWEDEN



Ericson's efforts or the keyboard contributions of Gosta Theselius.

Exceptionally good as Bird was at the Helsingborg concert, he was even sharper at the jam session in a restaurant where some 75 enthusiasts gathered to pay homage to his artistry in the early hours. *Body And Soul* (normally regarded as a preserve of tenor saxophonists) is an offering of rare beauty. Having lived with the edited version these past 15 years, it was a tremendous rise to be confronted with the whole performance uncut. Hitherto the solos of Norwegian trumpeter Rowland Greenberg (an earnest student of Roy Eldridge) and Gosta Theselius (showing his versatility by blowing Don Byas-influenced tenor) were excised. So too were the four-bar breaks between Parker and the other two horns. Again, one must observe that Bird lifts the playing of those around him. The pianist here, by the way, is Lennart Nilsson. Despite the differences in style and approach this is in all respects a memorable piece of improvised music — Parker at the peak.

Few will complain about Bird's umpteenth negotiation of the *How High The Moon* chords (with an *Ornithology* touch or two), at a tempo that was somewhat slower than the norm on this familiar ground.

Thus it was that a Bird, failing in health and stumbling uncertainly from one personal crisis to the next, found a momentary refuge; discovered fresh and surprising reserves of music in himself — as his audiences did. The sojourn soon over. On Sunday, November 26, 1950, Charlie Parker headed for Bromma Airport once to catch an S.A. flight to Paris. Trumpeter Greenberg and critic Carl-Erik Lindgren to see him off. When the flight was indgren embraced Charlie and said, "Au revoir, Charlie. Of course you know that means we meet the next time." I sincerely hope will be in the very near future."

Parker looked at Lindgren and in a fateful voice replied, "No, Carl, we will never meet again." The remainder of Bird's stay in Europe is best forgotten. In Paris he was due to play at a concert promoted by Charles Delaunay, having already received a sizeable advance from the Frenchman. Instead he stayed up for three nights, drinking and jamming in the Left Bank clubs. In the early hours of the day he was due to appear on stage in Paris, Charlie caught a plane to London, changed aircraft and winged his way back to New York.

Leonard Feather arranged for Bird to speak by trans-Atlantic telephone to the audience to explain his non-appearance. "Sorry, folks, it was just one of those things . . . I had to cut out," he was heard to say. Roy Eldridge retorted, "Why did you leave me?" But Parker's reply was drowned in atmospherics and the line finally went dead. *The Melody Maker*, in its story the week after the fiasco, hinted darkly that there was "more to this than meets the eye" and suggested that Bird had flown to escape "an impending brush with the law".

At some point during his "Paris revels" Charlie found time to make a strange broadcast with the commercial orchestra of Maurice Moufflard. He arrived at the session with a collection of assorted percussionists who, at his insistence, were added to the ensemble for a version of Tadd Dameron's *Ladybird* (which is included in the Spotlite LP, *Bird In Paris* SPJ 118) and *Honeysuckle Rose* (missing and presumed lost).

That was the final musical chapter of Charlie Parker in Europe. He never saw Paris or Stockholm again. Luckily, through this double album, we can cross the yawning chasm of more than 24 years and hear the happenings of those happy days in Helsingborg and Malmo. When we look at the photographs of Bird, alternately smiling or playing with a wrapt involvement before the intense Swedes, we realise that there he found a deep sense of fulfilment.

The Parker story is crowded with "ifs". One of them inevitably is: What would have happened if Charlie had moved to Europe, as Kenny Clarke urged him to? It might have saved him from such an early death, and at least extended his life beyond the 34 years that were his relatively small span. It is an imponderable. We will never really know, just as we can never logically explain Parker's genius. His life was enigmatic; it is in the music that we encounter the frighteningly beautiful truth as only he could create it.

Notes: Mark Gardner  
Sleeve design: Malcolm Walker  
Reissue produced by Tony Williams

## PERSONNEL

### :CHARLIE PARKER AND HIS SWEDISH ALL STARS

Rolf Ericson tpt; Charlie Parker alt; Gosta Theselius p; Thore Jederby bs; Jack Noren d.

Amiralen Dance Hall, Malmo, Sweden Wednesday, November 22, 1950.

### \*CHARLIE PARKER AND HIS SWEDISH ALL STARS

Same personnel,  
Folkets Park, Helsingborg  
Friday, November 24, 1950.

### +CHARLIE PARKER AND HIS SWEDISH ALL STARS

Rowland Greenberg, possibly Rolf Ericson tpt; Charlie Parker alt; Gosta Theselius ten; Lennart Nilsson p; probably Thore Jederby bs; probably Jack Noren d. Unknown Restaurant, Sweden Same date.

#### SIDE ONE (18:58)

:Anthropology	(Gillespie-Parker)	(5:47)
:Cheers	(Parker)	(6:24)
:Loverman	(Davis-Ramirez-Sherman)	(1:50)
:Cool blues	(Parker)	(4:20)

#### SIDE TWO (20:00)

*Anthropology	(Gillespie-Parker)	(5:31)
*Scapple from the Apple	(Parker)	(6:15)
*Embraceable you	(Gershwin)	(2:31)
*Star eyes [tpt. out]	(Raye-de Paul)	(2:09)

#### SIDE THREE (15:14)

*Cool blues	(Parker)	(5:00)
*All the things you are	(Kern)	(4:52)
*Strike up the band	(Gershwin)	(4:37)
+How high the moon	(Hamilton-Lewis)	(3:36)

#### SIDE FOUR (17:04)

+Body and soul	(Green-Heyman-Sour)	(11:24)
+Fine and dandy	(James-Swift)	(5:40)

# BIRD IN SWEDEN

Anthropology  
Cheers  
Loverman  
Cool blues  
Anthropology  
Scrapple from the Appie  
Embraceable you

Star eyes  
Cool blues  
All the things you are  
Strike up the band  
How high the moon  
Body and soul  
Fine and dandy

