

A black and white close-up photograph of Charlie Parker playing a saxophone. He is looking upwards and to the left, with his mouth on the instrument. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting his facial features and the texture of the saxophone.

# **BIRD**

**CHARLIE  
PARKER  
ON DIAL  
VOLUME 1**

**SPOTLITE 101**

The Charlie Parker/Dial association started in January 1946 while Dizzy Gillespie and Bird were playing an engagement at Billy Berg's club with the sextet they had brought over to the coast comprising Bird, Dizzy, Milt Jackson, Al Haig, Ray Brown and Stan Levey. The group never recorded as such and only two broadcasts are known to exist, namely DIZZY ATMOSPHERE (issued on Klacto MG102) and SALT PEANUTS. The first recording session for the newly-launched Dial label was scheduled to take place on Tuesday, January 22, 1946 at Electro Broadcast Studios with the impressive line-up of Parker, Gillespie, Lester Young, Milt Jackson, Ray Brown, Stan Levey and George Handy. Handy, arranger for the Boyd Raeburn orchestra, was contractor and leader as well as the pianist. The Monday before the session, George Handy visited the Tempo Music Shop, which served as headquarters for Dial, and suggested to Ross Russell a week's postponement. Lester Young had gone to San Diego for a gig. The choice of Tuesday was the key to the situation because that was the night off at Berg's where five of the musicians were engaged. The following Tuesday found itself in conflict with a Norman Granz concert on which Parker was to appear and so it was agreed to re-schedule Dial session number one for the week following. So it was that on Tuesday, February 5, following the final night for the Gillespie outfit at Berg's, that Handy assembled all the musicians as he had contracted to do except for Prez, who was again missing and was replaced by Lucky Thompson and Milt Jackson, also missing, was replaced by guitarist Arvin Garrison.

Towing a task force of hipsters, hip chicks and hangers-on behind them this group drove to Glendale in a caravan of autos and took over the studio like an invading army. The crowd inundated the grounds, buildings and the recording studio itself and possibly for the first time the smoking of pot and the practice of free love in public places was introduced to the city of Glendale. Amongst the chaos that prevailed DIGGIN' DIZ, an original by Handy based on the chords of LOVER was all that was recorded. The rehearsal over the musicians were instructed to be on hand promptly at 9 p.m. on Thursday, February 7 for the real thing. Things did not turn out as expected. Handy had stayed up the entire night with Bird, who had given him the slip, Prez again could not be found, and due to lack of sleep and nervous exhaustion Handy announced that he had decided to abandon the whole project. Consequently the session for which the rehearsal had been held never took place and Dizzy took the Berg group, with Lucky Thompson substituting for Bird along to the studios instead. That weekend the group returned by plane to New York but Charlie was not on the flight. Stan Levey recalls spending several hours and an estimated \$20 on cab fares trying to find him. Later it was learned that Charlie had exchanged his return ticket to New York for cash. On return to New York the Sextet was booked in at the Spotlite with Leo Parker on baritone replacing Bird. Anxious to establish Parker's whereabouts, Ross Russell visited the Braddock Hotel where the desk clerk advised him that Bird had moved out and left no forwarding address. He was missing for several days but finally turned up at the Tempo Music Shop the night of February 20th. It was on that night that he signed an exclusive contract to record for one of the most obscure record companies ever to exist.

Charlie's first recording session for Dial took place on the rainy afternoon of Thursday, March 28th at Radio Recorders Studios on Santa Monica Boulevard in Hollywood. Russell had learnt his lesson of using cut price studios at the DIGGIN' DIZ rehearsal. Radio Recorders was a custom studio of excellent reputation and acoustics, performing contract work for dozens of independent record companies. Charlie had full control for the selection of musical material and musicians on the date. The band was whipped into shape at an after-hours club operated by Foster Johnson, a dancer well known in Negro show business. It was called the Finale Club and was located in an old commercial building in the Little Tokyo quarter of Los Angeles near the corner of First and San Pedro Streets. Miles Davis who had arrived in LA a short while previously with Benny Carter was now working regularly with Bird at the Finale whilst all the other musicians present on the date were to be seen jamming with Bird at the Finale at one time or another. Joe Albany who also was a regular member of the Parker led quintet was originally scheduled to make the date but Joe whose hyper-sensitive feelings were deeply wounded by one of Bird's remarks walked out one night and was immediately replaced by Dodo Marmarosa. Red Callender also scheduled for the session quit on the final rehearsal when Charlie, without explanation, told the musicians to wait, left the club and did not return for two hours. Apparently he had driven all over south LA looking for the Moose. In real life the Moose was a man named Emry Byrd, a cripple who rolled himself around in a self-propelled wheel chair, using this front to cloak his activities as a heroin dealer as he went from one club to another along Central Avenue in Los Angeles. The Moose was another of the bizarre characters who hung about the jazz scene in those years.

The session ran from 1 p.m.-6 p.m. and was notable—so Ross Russell recalls—for being the only occasion on which Bird was on time. In fact he was there early, bustling about, all busyness, very much enjoying his new role as leader and musical director. In order not repeat previous mistakes the session was kept a secret. 3 takes of MOOSE THE MOOCHE, named after Emry Byrd, 4 takes each of YARDBIRD SUITE and ORNITHOLOGY and 5 takes of NIGHT IN TUNISIA were recorded. Thanks to the rehearsals at the Finale the first three numbers were completed by 3.30 p.m. The large number of takes is explained by Bird's insistence on musical perfection in the ensemble passages. Take 3 of MOOSE THE MOOCHE, recently discovered, is issued here for the first time. After a twenty minute break the band returned to the studio. The next two hours were spent rehearsing and recording NIGHT IN TUNISIA with a total of 5 takes and innumerable false starts. After the first take had been played back and found hopeless during the ensemble passages, Bird groaned and said, "I'll never be able to make that break again today". This short passage was issued by Dial as THE FAMOUS ALTO BREAK several years later on Dial LP905 and appears on this issue for the first time since then. A second session was scheduled for a date to be agreed on and to take place within the next 60 days. The hang-ups and bad luck that befell Charlie in the following months delayed this session for over 4 months and was brought to a head on the famous LOVERMAN session held on Monday night, July 29, 1946.

During March and April Charlie continued to lead his band at Foster Johnson's Finale Club and he also appeared at Sunday afternoon jam sessions produced at Billy Berg's. But by now Bird was really scuffling, the price of heroin so much higher in Hollywood than in New York, was consuming vast sums of money that could otherwise have been put to better purpose. The Finale suddenly closed and lacking regular work Bird disappeared. After a search occupying several days and nights Charlie was finally located holed-up in a converted garage on McKinley Avenue. It was a one room structure with a concrete floor, walls without weather proofing or panels, no windows and no heat. The furniture consisted of an iron bed and odd bits and pieces, an old chest of drawers and broken chairs. Charlie's open suitcase, stuffed with soiled clothing, stood on the chest along with several unopened bottles of Gordon's gin. As a result of the Moose having been busted a few weeks earlier Charlie's attempts to buy narcotics had resulted in two bad doses and he was now trying to kick the habit "cold turkey". Withdrawal symptoms were acute.

Howard McGhee who had helped locate Bird, had just signed a contract to provide the band at the Hi De Ho club, Charlie was put on the payroll, given an advance and his saxophone retrieved from the pawn shop. Within the same week he was back on the job but obviously not in good shape. He missed as many sets as he worked, his playing was erratic and he was subject to strange tics, sudden jerks of the arms and legs and would sometimes sit on the stand for an entire set without playing a note. All efforts to get him in a recording studio for the next Dial session met with evasions and hang-ups. May and June passed and finally Howard McGhee said that if the session was to take place it would have to be done at once—Charlie was going downhill rapidly. Maggie offered to get Bird to the studio on any given day, together with the necessary musicians and material. The date chosen was July 29. Charlie arrived at the studios around 2 p.m. about one hour late and accompanied by Howard McGhee and three other musicians who were not regular members of the band playing at the Hi De Ho: Jimmy Bunn, Roy Porter and bassist Bob Kesterson who turned up for the session with his instrument on an Italian motor scooter. Once again the session was kept a secret and the only people present, apart from the musicians and recording engineers were, Bobby Dukoff, the saxophonist, Elliott Grenard correspondent for Billboard magazine whose short story Sparrow's last jump, based on this session appeared in Harper's magazine during May 1947, Dr. Richard Freeman a psychiatrist, his brother Marvin Freeman—Ross Russell's partner in Dial Records, Russell himself and a young man called "Slim" who was acting as bandboy.

Charlie's appearance and playing were anything but reassuring, his tone was on the coarse side and he was having trouble with a squeaking reed. Half an hour passed without anything being decided upon or any start made in actual recording. Charlie would play a few notes, adjust the reed, then put down his horn and sit. The other musicians became worried and tense and only Howard McGhee seemed in control of the situation he called them together and announced that they would try MAX IS MAKING WAX named in honour of Max Roach. The result was chaotic, McGhee managed to pull things together with a fiery solo but Bird was disoriented to the point of incoherence. At this point Ross Russell told recording engineer Ben Jordan to record everything played and above all not to interrupt the musicians. After a rest of ten minutes the band decided to try LOVERMAN, Jimmy Bunn played

the intro and gave the cue for Charlie's entrance, but nothing happened. He stood in front of the microphone but no notes came from his horn until well into the second bar. His solo is one of strange beauty full of gasping pauses and heartbreak phrases. During his solo he kept swaying and once spun completely around so that he went badly "off mike" as can be heard on the record. Charlie then decided to try THE GYPSY a number he had been playing a lot at the Hi De Ho. This time he came in on cue and was steadied from behind by Ross Russell. The notes he plays are halting and tragic and the three minute performance seems to take a very long time. After a brief pause the musicians were incredibly ready to tackle another up tempo number, BEBOP. Much the same ragged unison first chorus is heard as on MAX then after a fine eight bars Charlie falters on the second eight, Howard McGhee desperately yells "blow" and he limps to the end of his chorus. Spectacular Howard McGhee follows and the number closes with a disastrous final chorus and an un-real coda. That was the end of Charlie's recording for the day. McGhee and the rhythm section continued alone whilst Bird accompanied by Slim was sent back by taxi to his hotel, the Civic at First and San Pedro Streets.

Slim put Charlie to bed but contrary to instructions did not stay with him but left the hotel. Within an hour Charlie was up again, left his room and went down to the lobby to use the telephone without bothering to dress. Stark naked he was led back to his room and into bed. This sequence of events was repeated twice within the next twenty minutes after which the manager locked him in his room. Minutes later a guest in the hotel reported smoke coming under Charlie's door, a carelessly dropped cigarette had set fire to his mattress and it was not long before fire engines and several police cars arrived on the scene. Charlie naturally indignant to the invasion of his privacy was struck down by a policeman's blackjack, handcuffed, rolled into a blanket, carried down to a police car and taken away. It took Ross Russell about ten days to locate his whereabouts due mainly to the total unco-operative Jim Crow attitude of the police (twenty four years later the quality of the police has not improved much!). Found in appalling conditions in the psychiatric ward of the Los Angeles County Jail, handcuffed by one wrist to the metal frame of a narrow iron bed and dressed in a pair of striped cotton prison issue trousers and coat over which he wore a straight jacket Charlie shot a long intense look at Ross Russell and cried "For God's sake man, get me out of this joint". Eventually he was committed to Camarillo State Hospital where he spent the next six months.

A benefit fund was administered by Ross and Dorothy Russell, June Orr, Maynard Sloate, Eddie Laguna and Charles Emge and between \$600 and \$900 was raised. A small residue remaining from the fund was turned over to the West View Hospital project which commenced early in 1948. It was open to all members of all races and many musicians took part in the successful campaign to finance its establishment.

#### PERSONNEL

: DIZZY GILLESPIE JAZZMEN  
Dizzy Gillespie tpt; Charlie Parker alt; Lucky Thompson ten; George Handy p; Arvin Garrison g; Ray Brown bs; Stan Levey d. Electro Broadcast Studios, Glendale, California—Tuesday, February 5, 1946.

+ CHARLIE PARKER SEPTET  
Miles Davis tpt; Charlie Parker alt; Lucky Thompson ten; Dodo Marmarosa p; Arvin Garrison (out on "Moose the Mooche") g; Vic McMillan bs; Roy Porter d. Radio Recorders Studios, Santa Monica Blvd., Hollywood—Thursday, March 28, 1946.

= CHARLIE PARKER QUINTET  
Howard McGhee tpt; Charlie Parker alt; Jimmy Bunn p; Bob Kesterson bs; Roy Porter d. C. P. MacGregor Studios, Hollywood—Monday July 29, 1946.

† HOWARD MCGHEE QUINTET  
Same personnel and date.

# CHARLIE PARKER ON DIAL VOL. 1

#### SIDE ONE

:	Diggin' Diz	(2:50)	D1000
+	Moose the Mooche	(2:56)	D1010-1
+	Moose the Mooche	(3:00)	D1010-2
+	Moose the Mooche	(2:58)	D1010-3
+	Yardbird suite	(2:37)	D1011-1
+	Yardbird suite	(2:52)	D1011-4
+	Ornithology	(2:55)	D1012-1
+	Ornithology	(3:13)	D1012-3

#### SIDE TWO

+	Ornithology	(2:57)	D1012-4
+	The famous alto break	(0:47)	D1013-1
+	Night in Tunisia	(3:03)	D1013-4
+	Night in Tunisia	(3:00)	D1013-5
=	Max making wax	(2:28)	D1021-A
=	Loverman	(3:16)	D1022-A
=	The gypsy	(2:58)	D1023-A
†	Bebop	(2:49)	D1024-A

## SPOTLITE 101