

VE-2-2512



A TWO  
RECORD  
SET

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THE VERVE  
YEARS  
(1950-51)

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CHARLIE  
PARKER

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*Bird's studio and  
Carnegie Hall recordings  
with string orchestra;  
the legendary sessions  
with Miles Davis,  
Coleman Hawkins,  
Buddy Rich, Hank Jones,  
Red Rodney, John Lewis  
and others.*

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**B**op is no love-child of jazz," Parker said, "bop is something entirely separate and apart. It's just music. It's trying to play clean and looking for the pretty notes."

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It had all started during the early morning hours of a December day in 1939. Unwinding after a night of playing bland fare in the Times Square taxi-dance joint that earned him his living, Parker was jamming at a Harlem chili house with a rhythm section led by an obscure guitarist named Biddy Fleet. He frequently participated in after-hours sessions around Harlem, but although he enjoyed such informal get-togethers, he had grown weary of playing the usual chord changes and was convinced that there had to be a different structure upon which improvisation could take place. "I could hear it sometimes," he later recalled, "but I couldn't play it." However, that night at Dan Wall's Chili House on Seventh Avenue and 139th Street, he suddenly *could* play "it." Running through Ray Nulde's "Cherokee"—a popular hit that year—Parker formed the melody line using a chord's higher intervals, and when Fleet added the pertinent changes, what Parker had been inwardly hearing was suddenly no longer a figment of his mind.

That unceremonious event, the significance of which is said to have eluded the other musicians present, later came to be regarded as the birth of bop; but ten years later, when a *down beat* interviewer suggested this to Parker, he modestly replied, "I am accused of having been one of the pioneers." Though he was probably jesting, Parker's use of the term "accused" was not entirely inappropriate, for even then many people—so-called "jazz authorities" included—continued to regard bop as a bastardized music. Parker did not see bop even as an extension of jazz. "Bop is no love-child of jazz," he said, "bop is something entirely separate and apart. It's just music. It's trying to play clean and looking for the pretty notes."

If Parker meant that bop should not be judged in comparison with the music from which it had obviously evolved, his point was well taken. We know, for example, that French marching music had a strong influence on New Orleans jazz, but who would not think it folly to regard the two musics as anything but separate idioms? The music of Parker and Gillespie, like that of John Coltrane and Ornette Coleman, undeniably shares ancestral roots with the music of King Oliver and Jelly Roll Morton, but the family tree has disparate branches. The walls of style are thin when it comes to jazz—to use the general term—and while crossings from New Orleans to Chicago to Kansas City to Swing were easily made, bop represented a veritable obstacle course to most musicians; it was a highly radical break with convention, and though it took a collective effort to give be-bop its full form as a recognizable en-

tity, Charlie Parker was the one who laid down the new set of rules. (Dizzy Gillespie had independently harbored certain related musical ideas, but by his own admission cannot recall playing bop changes prior to 1942.)

The early part of 1943 found Parker and Gillespie working together in the Earl Hines band and in the now legendary informal sessions at Minton's Playhouse: the seed planted by Parker that December morning in 1939 was about to reach fruition. By the mid-forties there was officially something called be-bop: the commercial exploitation had begun, sides had been chosen, and controversy raged. The age of modern jazz had begun, but there was more money to be made from selling be-bop glasses, be-bop ties and other faddish paraphernalia than from playing the music itself. Parker began recording as a leader, first for Savoy, then for Dial; he was later to say of two of the Dial recordings, "Lover Man" and "Bird Lore" ("Ornithology"), that they "should be stomped into the ground . . . I had to drink a quart of whisky to make the date," but even his worst recordings came to be considered classics.

**P**arker's personal life at this point was, to put it bluntly, a mess. Drugs, alcohol, and the physical neglect that accompanies them had long posed problems, but in 1946, while Parker was recording on the West Coast, his difficulties came to a head. "I don't know how I made it through those years," he later recalled, "I became bitter, hard, cold. I was always on a panic—couldn't buy clothes or a good place to live. Finally, on the coast, I didn't have any place to stay, until somebody put me up in a converted garage. The mental strain was getting worse all the time. What made it worst of all was that nobody understood our kind of music out on the coast. I can't begin to tell you how I yearned for New York. Finally I broke down." When Parker arrived back in New York in the early part of 1947, he was fresh out of Camarillo State Hospital, a California mental institution that offered a rehabilitation program for drug and alcohol addicts.

During Parker's sixteen months in California, the scene had changed: be-bop had attracted new exponents as well as audiences, people were becoming "hipsters," their cult heroes "hoppers," and they crowded the clubs to *listen* rather than dance. The dissenters were still there, fiercely clinging to the past, propping up half-dead New Orleans veterans and hoping that this new music would somehow go away, but be-bop had caught the imagination of the hucksters

and there was no stopping it now. Dizzy Gillespie had become the flamboyant "Clown Prince of Bop"—witty and extroverted, he was popular with the media and a non-jazz public, symbolizing the new music with his beret, goatee, and colorful be-bop terminology.

Parker, a quiet and self-effacing personality, did not partake willingly in the be-bop circus. While he always had the highest regard for Dizzy, whom he once referred to as "the other half of my heartbeat," he took a dim view of Dizzy's bopsploitation activities. "Some guys said, 'Here's bop,'" he told an interviewer in 1949. "Wham! They said, 'Here's something we can make money on.' Wham! 'Here's a comedian.' Wham! 'Here's a guy who talks funny talk.'" Parker, who had led a day-to-day existence during Gillespie's rise, must surely have been hurt to see the scales so improperly balanced; but if the public was unaware of his role in the scheme of things, musicians and other insiders recognized Parker as the true genius of modern jazz. Soon after his return to New York, he formed a quintet and opened at the Three Deuces. After paying his musicians—a group that included Miles Davis and Max Roach—he was clearing \$280 a week, more money than he had ever made before, but hardly a salary commensurate with his stature.

**B**y the end of 1947, Parker was back on heroin, resuming the hazardous life style that had felled him in California. His behavior became increasingly eccentric, but it was tolerated

because he was what he was—the most extraordinarily gifted soloist on the jazz scene since Louis Armstrong. During the last two years of the forties, Parker finally began to achieve a more proportionate measure of recognition as an artist: he won first place in a *Metronome* magazine poll, he was invited to participate in the 1949 International Paris Jazz Festival, and he was signed by Norman Granz, whose record company (Clef, in those days) was not the low-budget shoestring affairs Dial and Savoy had been. Parker was of the opinion that big bands and bop did not mix, but playing with strings was another matter. "You can pull away some of the harshness with the strings and get a variety of coloration," he told an interviewer in 1949. A few months later his horn was singing bop's song against a lush background of strings (the pioneering session is included on the previous Parker set in this series).

On December 15, 1949, ten years after "it" had finally emerged from Charlie Parker's horn in that Harlem chili house

the biggest, most luxuriously furnished jazz club the world had ever seen opened at Broadway and 53rd Street—and it was named after Parker. Some writers have called "Birdland" the ultimate tribute to Parker; but his nickname "Bird" (originally "Yardbird") had become well known by then, and the awe of his fellow musicians (combined with his own eccentricities and no-doubt-magnified stories of his exploits) had made Bird a cult figure—so more accurately the "tribute" was yet another example of exploitation. As Parker entered the fifties and made the recordings contained in this album, the music of Edgar Varèse and Paul Hindemith had begun to intrigue him, and he was hearing new ideas again. "They teach you there's a boundary line to music, but, man, there's no boundary line to art," he said, but time ran out for Charlie Parker before he was able to take his music another step.

During the thirteen-month period covered by this album, Parker continued living high and, for the most part, staying high while somehow managing to keep up with a fairly hectic schedule of musical activity. The commercial success of his first string date prompted an encore (heard on side one of this set) and live performances with strings at such places as Birdland, Harlem's famous Apollo Theatre and—as heard on side two—Carnegie Hall. He also took a new quintet on a Jazz at the Philharmonic tour followed by a trip through the South. Towards the end of 1950, Parker made a short film for Norman Granz, flew to Scandinavia for a week's tour, and topped it off with a wild, non-musical weekend in Paris. He had agreed to perform at a Paris concert on the following weekend, but severe stomach pains made him cut short his stay; the diagnosis was acute peptic ulcers, and Parker had to finish the year in the hospital. Other than that, 1950—in terms of recognition and financial remuneration—had proven to be his best year so far.

Parker's 1951 recording activities were limited to the three sessions appearing on sides three and four of this reissue. Though some purists feel Parker used up his genius on the Savoy and Dial dates of the forties, it is clear that he had by no means expended his ability to develop new musical ideas. Always a superb exponent of the blues—a specialty of the old Jay McShann band—his "K. C. Blues" finds him preaching as skillfully as ever, and his torrential solo toward the end of the "She Rote" (a Parker tune based on the changes of "Out Of Nowhere," a 1931 Tin Pan Alley hit) is Parker the virtuoso at his best. Both selections are from the date with Miles Davis, their first together since 1948 and—as it turned out—their last.

The year 1951 also saw Charlie Parker trying to lend his life some respectability, but as his commercial success reached a high, his health hit an all-time low; he had trouble with his heart, and his ulcer continued to act up. When doctors seemed to be failing him, he cast himself deeper and deeper into drugs; the New York State Liquor Authority revoked his cabaret card (that ludicrous, now extinct license without which a performer could not work in a place that served liquor), thereby prohibiting Bird from working even at Birdland. The August date which ends side four included—with certain irony—"Lover Man," the very tune he had been recording in 1946 just before his California breakdown. His overall health was worse now than it had been in those days, and though most critics view the 1951 "Lover Man" as vastly inferior to the earlier one (because it "lacks emotional intensity"), Charlie Parker never stopped insisting that the celebrated Dial recording ought to be destroyed.

Bad as his health was in 1951, there was no repeat at that time of his 1946 breakdown. A second collapse occurred in 1955, and this time it was final.

Chris Albertson is a contributing editor to *Stereo Review* and author of the book, *Bessie*, a biography of blues singer Bessie Smith.

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## SIDE 1

**DANCING IN THE DARK**  
(Schwartz, Dietz) (C442-5) 3:10 ASCAP

**LAURA**  
(Raksin, Mercer) (C443-2) 2:56 ASCAP

**THEY CAN'T TAKE THAT AWAY FROM ME**  
(G. Gershwin, I. Gershwin) 3:15 ASCAP

**OUT OF NOWHERE**  
(Green, Heyman) (C443-2) 3:10 ASCAP

**EAST OF THE SUN (WEST OF THE MOON)**  
(Bowman) (C 445-4) 3:35 ASCAP

**EASY TO LOVE**  
(Porter) (C447-4) 3:30 ASCAP

**I'M IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE**  
(McHugh, Fields) (C448-2) 3:20 ASCAP

## SIDE 2

**I'LL REMEMBER APRIL**  
(Raye, DePaul, Johnston) (C449-2) 3:15 ASCAP

Recorded in New York City, July 5, 1950  
Charlie Parker (alto saxophone), Edwin C. Brown (oboe), Sam Caplan, Howard Kay, Harry Meinhoff, Sam Rand, Zelly Smirnoff (violins), Issadore Zir (viola), Maurice Brown (cello), Verley Mills (harp), Bernie Leighton (piano), Ray Brown (bass), Buddy Rich (drums), Joe Lippman (arranger, conductor)

**REPETITION**  
(Hefti) 2:44 ASCAP

**WHAT IS THIS THING CALLED LOVE**  
(Porter) 2:46 ASCAP

**APRIL IN PARIS**  
(Harburg, Duke) 3:12 ASCAP

**EASY TO LOVE**  
(Porter) 2:20 ASCAP

**ROCKER**  
(Mulligan) 3:00 ASCAP

Recorded live at Carnegie Hall, New York, September 16, 1950  
Charlie Parker (alto saxophone), Tommy Mace (oboe), Sam Caplan, Ted Bloom, Stan Karpenia (violins), Dave Uchitel (viola), Bill Bundy (cello), Wallace McManua (harp), Al Huig (piano), Tommy Potter (bass), Roy Haynes (drums)

**CELEBRITY**  
(Parker) 1:36 BMI

Recorded in New York City, October 1950  
Charlie Parker (alto saxophone), Hank Jones (piano), Ray Brown (bass), Buddy Rich (drums)

**BALLADE**  
(Parker, Hawkins) 2:54 BMI

Recorded in New York City, October 1950  
Charlie Parker (alto saxophone), Coleman Hawkins (tenor saxophone), Hank Jones (piano), Ray Brown (bass), Buddy Rich (drums)

## SIDE 3

**AU PRIVAVE**  
(Parker) (489-2) 2:42 BMI

**SHE ROTE**  
(Parker) (490-3) 3:10 BMI

**K. C. BLUES**  
(Parker) (491-1) 3:24 BMI

**STAR EYES**  
(Raye, DePaul) (492-2) 3:38 ASCAP

Recorded in New York City, January 17, 1951  
Charlie Parker (alto saxophone), Miles Davis (trumpet), Walter Bishop (piano), Teddy Kotick (bass), Max Roach (drums)

**MY LITTLE SUEDE SHOES**  
(Parker) (540-6) 3:15 BMI

**UN POQUITO DE TU AMOR**  
(Gutierrez) (541-2) 2:46 P.D.

**TICO TICO**  
(Olivieria, Abreu) (542-9) 2:41 BMI

**FIESTA**  
(Massey) (543-3) 2:56 BMI

## SIDE 4

**WHY DO I LOVE YOU**  
(Kern, Hammerstein II) (544-2) 3:01 ASCAP

Recorded in New York City, March 12, 1951  
Charlie Parker (alto saxophone), Walter Bishop (piano), Teddy Kotick (bass), Roy Haynes (drums), Jose Manguel (bongos), Luis Miranda (conga)

**BLUES FOR ALICE**  
(Parker) (609-4) 2:51 BMI

**SISI**  
(Parker) (610-4) 2:46 BMI

**SWEDISH SCHNAPPS**  
(Shavers) (611-3) 3:17 ASCAP

**BACK HOME BLUES**  
(Parker) (612-1) 2:45 BMI

**LOVER MAN**  
(Weill, Anderson) (613-2) 3:28 ASCAP

Recorded in New York City, August 8, 1951  
Charlie Parker (alto saxophone), Red Rodney (trumpet), John Lewis (piano), Ray Brown (bass), Kenny Clarke (drums)

## THE SELECTIONS:

DANCING IN THE DARK

LAURA

THEY CAN'T TAKE THAT  
AWAY FROM ME

OUT OF NOWHERE

EAST OF THE SUN  
(WEST OF THE MOON)

EASY TO LOVE

I'M IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE

I'LL REMEMBER APRIL

*Charlie Parker (alto saxophone) and Strings*

REPETITION

WHAT IS THIS THING CALLED LOVE

APRIL IN PARIS

EASY TO LOVE

ROCKER

*Charlie Parker (alto saxophone) and Strings  
Recorded September 15, 1950, at Carnegie Hall,  
New York*

## CELEBRITY

*Charlie Parker (alto saxophone), Hank Jones  
(piano), Ray Brown (bass), Buddy Rich (drums)*

## BALLADE

*Charlie Parker (alto saxophone), Coleman Hawkins  
(tenor saxophone), Hank Jones (piano), Ray Brown  
(bass), Buddy Rich (drums)*

## AU PRIVAVE

SHE ROTE

K.C. BLUES

STAR EYES

*Charlie Parker (alto saxophone), Miles Davis (trumpet),  
Walter Bishop (piano), Teddy Kotick (bass),  
Max Roach (drums)*

MY LITTLE SUEDE SHOES

UN POQUITO DE TU AMOR

TICO TICO

FIESTA

WHY DO I LOVE YOU

*Charlie Parker (alto saxophone), Walter Bishop  
(piano), Teddy Kotick (bass), Roy Haynes (drums),  
Jose Mangual (bongos), Luis Miranda (conga)*

BLUES FOR ALICE

SI SI

SWEDISH SCHNAPPS

BACK HOME BLUES

LOVER MAN

*Charlie Parker (alto saxophone), Red Rodney  
(trumpet), John Lewis (piano), Ray Brown (bass),  
Kronz Clarke (drums)*

By Chris Albertson

**T**his is the second album in a series of the complete Charlie Parker Verve recordings. The first set, *Charlie Parker: The Verve Years 1948-50* (VE-2-2501), takes us from the enigmatic 1948 version of "Repetition," with Parker soaring above a busy Neal Hefti arrangement, to his performances in the more satisfying context of small hop units, the first date with strings, and, finally, the celebrated "reunion" session with Dizzy Gillespie. Picking up the chronology, this album begins a month later with the second string date, July 5, 1950. Charlie Parker was approaching his thirtieth birthday; ten years had passed since he had made his first recordings as a member of Jay McShann's Kansas City-based orchestra; his debut as a leader on

records was five years in the past; and—as things were to go—only five years hence the sensation-seeking New York *Daily Mirror* would make him front page news with the headline BOP KING DIES IN HEIRESS' FLAT.

As Charlie Parker faced the fifties, he could look back on ten years of trials, tribulations, and triumphs. The past decade had brought him the often venomous attacks of critics whose ears remained hopelessly tuned to the past, but as one faction ridiculed his music, another hailed it the product of genius. As World War II drew to a close, Charlie Parker innocently became the central figure in the battle of the styles, a ridiculous bit of commercial exploitation jointly staged by critics on both sides of the fence. The ensuing polemic, much of it shamelessly scripted, lent an air of novelty to the art of Charlie Parker and his colleagues, and it well may be that he became better known at that time for the controversy—real and imagined—than for the music itself.

(continued)

*Also available on Verve:*

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*Pres with pianists Teddy Wilson and Oscar Peterson (VE 2-2502)*

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*Ella's brilliant performance of 32 of Porter's greatest songs (VE 2-2511)*

*Charlie Parker: The Verve Years (1948-50)*

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VE-2-2512



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*Having as its source the vast library of music recorded by Norman Granz, Creed Taylor and others over a period of three decades, the Verve Collection focuses on outstanding performances by some of America's finest jazz artists.*

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