

CHARLIE PARKER NIGHT AT DAVE FRANK SCHOOL OF JAZZ

Charlie Parker (1920-1955) was the originator, along with Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, Max Roach, and others, of modern jazz, originally called bebop. His musical contributions have stood the test of time and Charlie "Bird" Parker is considered to be one of the geniuses of American music of the 20th century. He brought virtuosity to the fore in jazz, greatly influenced the harmonic, rhythmic, and melodic language of modern music, and was at the forefront of a cultural revolution that defined American culture in the 1940's and 50's. Charlie's playing can be seen as a musical jumbo, combining swing 1/8th, triplets, and double-time lines, scale/chromatic/chord tone combinations, arpeggios, upper extensions, blues licks, and imitation.

Elements of Style

- 1) Charlie's alto sax sound was shockingly original. Piercingly beautiful but light, Bird's technique was usually flawless, blindingly fast, yet simultaneously pretty and heartfelt. His frequent use of vibrato at the beginning of his notes gave his ballad playing depth and a wide open sound. He avoided the heavy vibrato of earlier sax players.
- 2) Bird's playing outlined a new language that remains the foundation of jazz today. Charlie used scales, chromatic passing tones, chord tones and arpeggios in his solos. His use of the upper extensions of chords (the 9th, 11th, and 13th) as part of his melodic line was revolutionary.

- 3) Each of Charlie's melodic ideas was a complete musical sentence, followed by a rest, followed by a musical-sentence response. Parker made limited use of imitation in his phrases, concentrating on telling a musical story with his solos.
- 4) The shape of the melodic lines was often a "snake-like" motion with frequent changes of direction. Accents were often placed on the highest point in the phrase.
- 5) Parker's music was grounded in the blues, and harmonically based on the Great American Songbook.
- 6) Bird's tempos varied from slow blues, to burners in excess of 300 bpm
- 7) Rhythmically, Charlie's lines were grounded in a swing-1/8th flow, mixed with 1/8 and 1/16th note triplets often at the beginning of a descending phrase. He invented the 1/16th note, or double-time, line, which he used strategically for maximum effect at various points in his solo, usually ending smack on the down-beat.

VIDEO EXAMPLES

- 1) Bird and Coleman Hawkins –
 - a) Hawkins used almost exclusively swing 1/8th line with heavy vibrato
 - b) Bird uses triplets, and 1/16th notes lines in addition to swing eighth lines, and uses more arpeggios and chromatic approaches. His sound and vibrato is lighter. He plays a bluesy, funky ending to his solo.
- 2) Bird and Buddy Rich
 - a) Much faster tempo
 - b) Basically swing 1/8th with lots of triplets and 1/16ths
 - c) Funky solo ending
 - d) A bit of imitation

3) Bird and Diz

- a) starts with unison line
- b) lots of drum bombs
- c) starts with 1/6th line into basic 1/8th with triplets, another 1/16th line
- d) Bluesy shout ending

AUDIO EXAMPLES

1) Koko

- a) intro
- b) fast 1/8th line throughout with trips
- c) imitated phrases on bridge

2) Laura

- a) Stays close to melody – turns around important melody note
- b) Frequent addition to melody
- c) Light vibrato often at beginning of note

3) Just Friends

- a) Starts with 1/16th line, into melody
- b) 1/16th note interpolations within melody
- c) Back to melody with additions
- d) Bluesy riffs, imitated
- e) Mucho 1/16th lines
- f) Melody with additions and 1/6th interpolations

4) Bird Gets the Worm

Recommended listening-

Savoy Sessions, Dial sessions, Bird with strings, the complete Dean Benedetti Recordings

For questions, comments, class idea suggestions, or to schedule a free, no obligation private 45 minute skype lesson with Dave, contact:

Dave Frank School of Jazz, NYC

www.davefrankjazz.com

imitation

E \flat Ab7 Ab7 B \flat arp

B \flat scale C7 chr C7 scale chr C- chr

G7 scale arp C- arp chr F7 arp B \flat chr arp

chr B \flat scale F- chr leap B \flat 7 E \flat arp scale

E \flat scale arp Ab7 Ab7 B \flat chr arp

B \flat arp chr C7 scale C7 arp C- chr

F7 arp B \flat scale B \flat C- Theme

F#7 B 2 B- imitation E7

A A A- arp D7 chr

imitation

E \flat Ab7 Ab7 B \flat arp

B \flat scale C7 chr C7 scale chr C- chr

G7 scale arp C- arp chr F7 arp B \flat chr arp

chr B \flat scale F- chr leap B \flat 7 E \flat arp scale

E \flat scale arp Ab7 Ab7 B \flat chr arp

B \flat arp chr C7 scale C7 arp C- chr

F7 arp B \flat scale B \flat C- Theme

F#7 B 2 B- imitation E7

A A A- arp D7 chr