

LEARNING UNIT VII

Modern Jazz: Bebop and Charlie Parker

*By the beginning of the 1940s, the swing style was moving away from the inherent artistic qualities of the music as an entertainment vehicle for dancing. The rhythms, harmonies, and forms used in big band music were becoming increasingly predictable and performances became very polished. There was much less of a focus on individual improvisation, and several of the younger and more creative musicians searched for more improvisational freedom. Thus the inspiration for a new approach to jazz called Bebop, the foundation of modern jazz styles. In this unit, we will examine how musical performance practices differed from early jazz styles and some of the pioneers of this audacious style such as saxophonist **Charlie Parker**—a symbol of modern jazz.*



Four pioneers of modern jazz:
Charlie Parker (alto sax), Thelonious Monk (piano),
Charles Mingus (bass), and Roy Haynes (drums)

With a focus on improvisation, *bebop* (or *rebop*, or simply *bop*) allowed for an upsurge of musical innovation. Motivated by the more harmonically and rhythmically advanced players in the swing era, such as saxophonists Coleman Hawkins and Lester Young, pianist Art Tatum, trumpeter Roy Eldridge, and numerous players in Kansas City, bebop musicians expanded the palette of musical devices from which to choose while improvising. Many aspects of swing were imported, including swing feel and a penchant for the blues.

These younger players consequently gravitated towards smaller groups and combos. Some developed their musical ideas at impromptu after-hours jam sessions in New York's Harlem. Two of these after-hours nightclubs that planted the seeds of modern jazz were Monroe's Uptown House and Minton's Playhouse. Minton's featured a house rhythm section led by drummer **Kenny Clarke** and the maverick pianist **Thelonious Monk**. Many innovative young

players regularly appeared at Minton's including trumpeter **Dizzy Gillespie** and alto saxophonist **Charlie Parker** the most influential and truly remarkable of these musicians. Due to a wartime shortage of materials used to make records, as well as a strike by the American Federation of Musicians from 1942-1944, there were no recordings made of this new musical development. Only a few outside of Harlem were aware of this new emerging style. But the experiments of these musicians exhibited a fresh approach to playing music that laid the groundwork for the modern jazz language.

By the mid-1940s, these new jazz explorations moved downtown to West 52nd St. in Manhattan where an array of nightclubs, including the Royal Roost, the Onyx, the Spotlite, Kelly's Stables, the Three Deuces, The Downbeat, and The Famous Door, featured this new fiery and cutting edge style.

Bebop was more complex rhythmically, melodically, and harmonically than any other previous jazz style and required greater technical proficiency to perform properly. It was a radical departure from the musical conventions of swing, and bebop players seemed indifferent to commercial success as entertainers. They played music for listening rather than for dancing. When Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie made the first recordings of bebop in 1945 (which also coincided with a national New Orleans/Dixieland jazz revival), most listeners and many older musicians, such as Louis Armstrong and Cab Calloway, were perplexed by their audacious new sound. Even the press and many critics regarded bebop as a joke. Others, however, saw the undeniable ingenuity in the music and the virtuoso mastery of bebop performers.

By the early 1950s, this intellectual and artistic musical approach included many important proponents--including the influential pianist **Bud Powell**, bassist **Charles Mingus**, drummer **Max Roach**, trumpeter **Fat Navarro**, tenor saxophonist **Dexter Gordon**, and the young trumpeter **Miles Davis**.

Charlie Parker

More than anyone else, alto saxophonist **Charlie Parker** (1920-1955), also known as "Bird" or "Yardbird," was a symbol of bebop and its most impressive and influential musician. Parker is considered the single most important figure in modern jazz and one of the greatest musicians of the 20th century. Parker's influence on the development of jazz as an individual art form rivals that of Louis Armstrong. His astounding technique and originality greatly increased the level of technical proficiency needed to successfully play jazz.

Born in Kansas City, Parker is responsible for numerous technical innovations in saxophone playing, and many musicians, critics, and scholars consider Parker the greatest saxophonist of all time. He introduced a new tone quality to the alto saxophone--a drier, full tone with less vibrato than earlier saxophonists.



The following video we are going to view is an excellent introduction to bebop, the culture surrounding it, and the life Charlie Parker. This one-hour long film features interviews by Jay McSchann, Dizzy Gillespie, his widow Chan Parker, among others, and contains the only two film clips of Parker: a silent film and a T.V. appearance in 1951 with Dizzy Gillespie.



CELEBRATING BIRD: THE TRIUMPH OF CHARLIE PARKER
Directed by Gary Giddens
Produced in 1989

Link found in Jazz Appreciation Audio and Video Playlist document

General Characteristics of Bebop

- Typical ensembles are combos, most often a quartet or quintet. Often, a saxophonist and/or trumpet player with a rhythm section consisting of piano, bass, and drums.
- A focus on improvisation reflecting the spirit of the jam session. Rarely are there complex arrangements like in swing.
- Increased harmonic tension and complexities through the use of *extended harmony* and *reharmonization*.
- Complex *angular melodies*. Often longer and more irregular phrasing.

- Tunes are often based on popular standard songs--retaining the basic chordal structure and form, but replacing the original melody with a new melody (*line*) that resembled bebop improvisations. Also, standard songs with their original melodies were played, along with the 12-bar blues and completely original tunes.
- *Monophonic* textures: one melody with accompaniment by the rhythm section.
- Highly syncopated and unpredictable rhythms. 8th-note based melodic lines with accents on the “ands” of the beat. The scat term “bebop” is in reference to the syncopations heard in the music.
- Tunes are often played at very fast tempos.
- A freer rhythm section approach reacting to soloists: piano comping, walking bass lines, more melodic drumming with more emphasis on varied ride rhythm patterns, kicks, fills, and surprising syncopated bass drum accents called (at that time) *dropping bombs*.
- Elements of Afro-Cuban music were often used.

Much of these characteristics and practices were presented in Learning Unit 1 “Understanding Jazz.”

The Form of a Typical Bebop Performance

Bebop performances reflect the improvisational spirit of a jam session and follow the “Head--Solos--Head” chorus format, as we see in the following diagram:

|| Head | horn solos | piano solo | bass and/or drum solo and/or trading 4s | Head ||

The following recording was recorded at Birdland, famous Manhattan jazz club named in Charlie Parker’s honor. This live radio broadcast captures five great bebop performers letting loose on a typical evening performance. “Anthropology” is based on George Gershwin’s “I Got Rhythm,” a tune that was the basis for many bebop compositions (what musicians call *rhythm changes*).

The performance is taken at a remarkably fast tempo, but the performers are not at all daunted by the speed and each soloist glides through the rapidly changing chords with ease. Take notice of the exceptional unison melodic lines by Parker and Gillespie on the heads, as every subtle nuance is played as if one person. The style of each soloist including pianist Bud Powell is also notably similar. During the entire performance, pianist Bud Powell *comps*, bassist Tommy Potter provides a *walking bass line*, and drummer Roy Haynes plays various accented *kicks* and “*drops bombs*” in addition to varied *ride rhythms*. (Note that this is a fairly low-quality recording due to the technology of the time).



CHARLIE PARKER AND THE ALL-STARS

"Anthropology" (Parker, Gillespie)

Recorded live from Birdland and the Bandbox, New York City, March 31, 1951.

Charlie Parker (alto sax); Dizzy Gillespie (trumpet); Bud Powell (piano); Tommy Potter (bass); Roy Haynes (drums); Symphony Sid (radio announcer).

Meter: 4/4 meter
Tempo: Extremely Fast; 320 beats per minute
Form: 32-bar AABA song form (*rhythm changes*);
Head--Solos--Head; *trading 4s* with the drummer before last head)

		<u>FORM</u>	<u>BARS</u>	
0:00		<i>Intro</i>	4	drum solo
0:03	<i>I.</i>	AABA	32	Head trumpet and alto sax play this bebop "line" in unison
0:27	<i>II.</i>	AABA	32	Charlie Parker alto sax solo (1st chorus)
0:52	<i>III.</i>	AABA	32	alto sax solo continues (2nd chorus)
1:17	<i>IV.</i>	AABA	32	alto sax solo continues (3rd chorus)
1:43	<i>V.</i>	AABA	32	Dizzy Gillespie trumpet solo (1st chorus)
2:07	<i>VI.</i>	AABA	32	trumpet solo continues (2nd chorus)
2:32	<i>VII.</i>	AABA	32	trumpet solo continues (3rd chorus)
2:56	<i>VIII.</i>	AABA	32	Bud Powell piano solo (1st chorus)
3:20	<i>IX.</i>	AABA	32	piano solo continues (2nd chorus)
3:44	<i>X.</i>	AABA	32	Trading 4s (alto sax-drums-trumpet-drums-alto sax-drums-trumpet-drums)
4:08	<i>XI.</i>	AABA	32	Trading 4s continue (2nd chorus)
4:31	<i>XII.</i>	AABA	32	Head (as before)--ending

One of the criticisms that certain more traditional jazz fans had of bebop is that it lost the "soul" of the blues. However, bebop is deeply rooted in the blues as is evident in the next two recordings. "Bloomdido" is a bright 12-bar blues, but with more complex harmonies and bebop practices.

CHARLIE PARKER AND DIZZY GILLESPIE

"Bloomdido" (Parker)

Recorded in 1949.

Charlie Parker (alto sax); Dizzy Gillespie (trumpet); Thelonious Monk (piano);
Curley Russell (bass); Buddy Rich (drums).

Featuring three of the most important innovators in modern jazz--Parker, Gillespie, and Monk--"Bloomdido" displays the complex harmonies and angular melodies beboppers often incorporated in the 12-bar blues form. The head is played twice (2 choruses) at the beginning and at the end, which is typical with the blues at a medium or fast tempo.

Meter: 4/4 meter

Tempo: Fast; 228 beats per minute

Form: 12-bar "bebop blues": Head--Solos--Head, 15 choruses

	<u>FORM</u>	<u>BARS</u>	
0:00	<i>Intro</i>	4 4	piano solo drum solo
0:09	<i>I</i>	12	Head trumpet (w/cup mute) and alto sax play this bebop "line" in unison
0:22	<i>II</i>	12	Head repeated
0:34	<i>III</i>	12	Charlie Parker alto sax solo (1st chorus)
0:47	<i>IV</i>	12	alto sax solo continues (2nd chorus)
1:00	<i>V</i>	12	alto sax solo continues (3rd chorus)
1:12	<i>VI</i>	12	alto sax solo continues (4th chorus)
1:25	<i>VII</i>	12	Dizzy Gillespie trumpet solo (1st chorus)
1:38	<i>VIII</i>	12	trumpet solo continues (2nd chorus)
1:51	<i>IX</i>	12	trumpet solo continues (3rd chorus)
2:03	<i>X</i>	12	Thelonious Monk piano solo (1st chorus)
2:16	<i>XI</i>	12	piano solo continues (2nd chorus)
2:29	<i>XII</i>	12	Buddy Rich drum solo (1st chorus)
2:42	<i>XIII</i>	12	drum solo continues (2nd chorus)
2:55	<i>IXV</i>	12	Head
3:08	<i>XV</i>	12	Head repeated--ending

"Parker's Mood" is a slow 12-bar blues displaying the more poignant side of Bird.

CHARLIE PARKER
"Parker's Mood" (Parker)
Recorded in 1948.

Charlie Parker (alto sax); Duke Jordan (piano);
Tommy Potter (bass; Max Roach (drums)

Dizzy Gillespie

John Birks "Dizzy" Gillespie (1917-1993) was the most influential trumpet player of the late 1940s and 1950s, setting the standard for modern jazz trumpet playing. He played in much the same manner as Charlie Parker and his recordings with Parker are considered jazz classics. Although Parker may have exemplified the bebop movement, it was Gillespie who every musician looked up to as almost a father figure. He was a mentor and teacher to many of the beboppers of the period and helped to establish the modern jazz language.

Gillespie achieved the greatest popular recognition of any bebop musician. Unlike other modernists, Gillespie had a reputation for entertaining and "clowning around" on stage. Most of the general public knew him for his unusual "bent-up" trumpet, and startling "puffed cheeks," but usually not for his musical artistry.



Dizzy Gillespie

Dizzy introduced many new approaches to trumpet playing. Like Parker, he had remarkable technique. The nickname "Dizzy" came from his playing of extremely long phrases in the trumpet's high register. Dizzy's sound was much brighter and piercing than that of Armstrong and previous players.

Unlike Parker, Gillespie was an important and original composer. Many of his tunes are jazz classics and an integral part of the modern jazz repertoire. During the late 1940s, Gillespie met the Afro-Cuban percussionist **Chano Pozo** who was playing regularly at the many Latin nightclubs on New York's West 53rd St. Pozo introduced Gillespie to the exciting rhythms of Afro-Cuban music. Dizzy was also interested in expanding the possibilities of bebop. So, in 1947, Gillespie formed an exciting big band that incorporated bebop and Afro-Cuban rhythms.

The opening of "Manteca" is based on the African-like layering of ostinato figures played by separate sections of the band. One also hears the lofty solo statements by Gillespie over these polyrhythms, and later during the more straight-ahead bop sections of the arrangement. The success of "Manteca," and Gillespie's other endeavors into Afro-Cuban jazz, brought to the attention of other jazz performers the enormous resources available in Latin music. Latin influenced sounds have been a vital part of jazz ever since.



DIZZY GILLESPIE

"Manteca" (Gillespie, Chano Pozo, arranged by Gil Fuller)

Recorded on December 30, 1947

Gillespie (trumpet); H. Johnson, J. Brown, G. Nicholas, J. Gayles, C. Payne (saxes); D. Burns, E. Wright, L. Wright, E. Bailey (trumpets); T. Kelly, W. Shepard (trombones); John Lewis (piano); Al McKibbin (bass); K. Spearman (drums); Chano Pozo (conga drums and vocal interjections)

Other Important Bebop Pioneers

The virtuosic pianist **Bud Powell** (1924-1966) transferred the horn-like improvisations of Bird and others to the piano. Powell developed a mainstream piano style that became the model for most jazz pianists of the 1950s. Like many other under-appreciated modern American jazzmen, Powell spent much of his career in Europe.

Two drummers are also noted for their contributions to bebop and to modern jazz drumming. **Kenny Clarke** (1914-1985) is considered the "godfather" of modern jazz drumming. Clarke was the first to emphasize ride rhythms on the cymbals, while maintaining the snare drum and toms for improvised rhythmic punctuations, and the bass drum for syncopated accents. **Max Roach** (1925-2007) was known for his extremely melodic solos.



Thelonious Monk

The “High Priest of Bop,” pianist/composer **Thelonious Monk** (1920-1982), created an individual and radical piano and compositional style. A master of the development of *motifs*, his musical approach emphasized economy and space. Monk developed a purely pianistic approach, not playing the long melodic phrasing normally associated with horn playing. Monk introduced unusual and dissonant piano sonorities that inspired many later performers. Monk was also an extremely important composer of bebop tunes, many of which have become jazz standards.

Monk’s 12-bar blues “Straight, No Chaser” has become a standard amongst all musicians. The head is built upon a rising five-note motif where the melodic accents are in constant flux. Monk's unconventional and angular melodic style is evident, not only in his writing, but in his piano playing. Monk continuously employs new and imaginative motifs throughout both his accompanying and in his improvised solos.



THELONIOUS MONK
"Straight, No Chaser" (Monk)
Recorded 1965

Monk (piano); Charlie Rouse (tenor saxophone); Larry Gales (bass); Ben Riley (drums).

KEY TERMS for Unit VII

ANGULAR MELODIES	Melodies which contain wide leaps and sudden changes in direction
DROPPING BOMBS	Syncopated and surprising accents played on the drummer's bass drum behind a soloist
EXTENDED HARMONY	The theoretical process of enlarging or thickening a chord by adding additional upper tones to the basic notes of a chord
LINE	A pre-composed melody played as the head in a bebop performance
MONOPHONY	Literally "one sounding"; A basic texture in music where one person is playing or singing a melody, or UNISON playing or singing amongst more than one person; Also refers to the above described texture with accompaniment that is not melodic. MONOPHONIC
MOTIF	A short melodic idea used as the basis for development: MOTIVE
REHARMONIZATION	The theoretical process of replacing chords in a standard chord progression with other chords
TRADING 4s	The practice of exchanging improvised solo sections between two or more soloists, one of which is often the drummer, in a call & response manner--one plays 4 bars and the other(s) play 4 bars; Also TRADING 2s, TRADING 8s, trading blues choruses, etc.