

The

**ALTOSAX**

&  
TENORSAX

of

**CHARLES PARKER**  
**“CHARLIE”**  
**“BIRD”**

**“Pt 2: to the end, now 1954-55”**

Born: Kansas City, Kansas, Aug. 29, 1920  
 Died: NYC. March 12, 1955

*Introduction:*

Charlie Parker, the Bird, or even Yardbird, should need no introduction. Being the most important personality in the process of creating modern jazz, he excited us immensely from the first day we heard his music. Oslo Jazz Circle was firmly based upon swing and the glorious 1930s, but when we learned that among Bird's most important inspirators were Chu Berry and Lester Young, everything seemed to be put in place, and bebop filled our hearts!

*Late history:*

Parker returned to New York in April 1947. He formed a quintet (with Miles Davis, Duke Jordan, Tommy Potter and Max Roach), which recorded many of his most famous pieces. The years from 1947 to 1951 were Parker's most fertile period. He worked in a wide variety of settings (nightclubs, concerts, radio and recording studios) with his own small ensembles, a string group and Afro-Cuban bands, and as a guest soloist with local musicians when traveling without his own group. He visited Europe (1949 and 1950). Though still beset by problems associated with drugs and alcohol, he attracted a very large following in the jazz world, and enjoyed a measure of financial success. In July 1951 Parker's New York cabaret license was revoked at the request of the narcotics squad; this banned him from nightclub employment in the city and forced him to adopt a more peripatetic life until the license was reinstated (probably in autumn 1953). Sporadically employed, badly in debt, and in failing physical and mental health, he twice attempted suicide in 1954 and voluntarily committed himself to Bellevue Hospital, New York. His last public engagement was on March 5, 1955 at Birdland, a New York nightclub named in his honor. He died seven days later in the Manhattan apartment of his friend the Baroness Pannonica de Koenigswarter (ref. The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz).

*Message:*

You may find it odd to produce a solography 'backwards'. Charlie Parker has been presented before from the beginning until his breakdown in California autumn 1946. Why not continue after he got out of hospital? The first reason is blaming Benedetti and his marvellous work (issued on Mosaic)! It seemed impossible to give that work a sensible treatment, too complicated, too large. The second reason is more prosaic. While I know his music of the forties very well, the same is not the case for the fifties, and I thought by going into that, I could help cleaning up the chaos of broadcasts. One year at a time seemed to be a good idea, but 1950 would be hanging in the air, so therefore first 1954 (he did not record in 1955 until his premature death). Whether these two Bird-solographies will ever meet, I doubt, but one never knows ...

## 1954 – 1955 (last years)

**CHARLIE PARKER****Boston, Jan. 18, 1954**Herbie Williams (tp), Charlie Parker (as), Rollins Griffith (p), Jimmy Woode (b),  
Marquis Foster (dm), Symphony Sid (mc).

WCOP broadcast from the Hi Hat, four titles:

6:47	Ornithology	Solo 3 choruses of 32 bars. (FM)
9:36	Out Of Nowhere	Solo 64 bars. Duet with (tp) 16 bars to coda. (M)
7:02	Cool Blues	Solo 7 choruses of 12 bars. (FM)
4:44	Scrapple From The Apple (NC)	Soli 8 and 64 bars. (FM)

**Boston, Jan. 18-24, 1954**

Same. Four titles:

7:44	Ornithology	Solo 4 choruses of 32 bars. (FM)
7:12	My Little Suede Shoes	Straight 32 bars to solo 64 bars. Straight 36 bars. (M)
6:59	Now's The Time	Solo 9 choruses of 12 bars. (M)
6:04	Groovin' High	Solo 3 choruses of 32 bars. (F)

**Boston, Jan. 23, 1954**Same with Jay Migliori (ts) added (pleasant surprise!), George Solano (dm)  
replaces Foster. Four titles:

9:14	Now's The Time	Solo 8 choruses of 12 bars. (FM)
5:48	Out Of Nowhere	Solo 3 choruses of 32 bars. Solo 32 bars to coda. (M)
5:01	My Little Suede Shoes	Straight 32 bars to solo 32 bars. Straight 20 bars. (M)
1:08	Jumpin' With Symphony Sid (NC)	Solo with (mc) 28 bars (NC). (FM)

**Boston, Jan. 24, 1954**

Same as Jan. 18. Five titles:

6:11	Cool Blues	Solo 7 choruses of 12 bars. Soli 4 and 4 bars. (F)
6:01	My Little Suede Shoes (NC)	Solo 10 bars (NC). Straight 36 bars. (M)
7:35	Ornithology	Solo 4 choruses of 32 bars. Straight 32 bars. (F)
4:23	Out Of Nowhere	Soli 32 and 16 bars to coda. (M)
2:34	Jumpin' With Symphony Sid	Solo 4 choruses of 12 bars. (FM)

**Boston, Jan. 1954**

Probably same personnel.

WCOP broadcast from the Hi-Hat, one title, unissued (James Accardi collection):

6:36	My Funny Valentine	Soli 3 and 1 choruses of 36 bars to coda. (M)
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The Boston broadcasts seem to be the Bird's very last recorded club dates. There is nothing in his playing to indicate that he is into a decline and final year. On the contrary he plays with great inspiration and fire all through this week. The accompanying group is of fine quality, giving Bird the support he needs. The repertoire is well known, and we can only sit back and enjoy "Ornithology", "Cool Blues", "Now's The Time" and all the others, some in several versions. No need to select highlights, they are all worth playing, but watch out for fascinating details, like bars 13-14 of "... Nowhere"'s second chorus or "Cool ..."s fourth chorus, both Jan. 18, or the undated "Ornithology" and much more!

**STAN KENTON & HIS ORCHESTRA****Portland, Oregon, Feb. 25, 1954**

Bigband personnel with Charlie Parker (as) guesting.

Concert from Civic Auditorium, three titles:

2:33	Night And Day	Solo with orch 3 choruses of 48 bars to coda. (FM)
3:05	My Funny Valentine	Solo with orch 3 choruses of 36 bars to coda. (SM)
2:47	Cherokee	Intro 8 bars to solo with orch 3 choruses of 64 bars to long coda. (F)

Bird is managing well sitting in with the Kenton orchestra, even "Cherokee" in uptempo seems to pose no problems. Much beauty to be heard in "... Valentine", while "Night ..." is not always coherent (could there also be some splicing here?).

**CHARLIE PARKER QUINTET** **NYC. March 31, 1954**  
Charlie Parker (as), Walter Bishop (p), Jerome Darr (g), Teddy Kotick (b), Roy Haynes (dm).

Four titles were recorded for Clef:

1531-1	I Get A Kick Out Of You	Solo/straight 2 choruses of 68 bars. Solo/straight 36 bars to coda. (FM)
1531-4	I Get A Kick Out Of You (NC)	Straight 44 bars (NC). (FM)
1531-6	I Get A Kick Out Of You (NC)	Straight 52 bars (NC). (FM)
1531-7 ms	I Get A Kick Out Of You	Solo/straight 2 choruses of 68 bars. Solo/straight 20 bars to coda. (FM)
1532-1	Just One Of Those Things	Straight 48 bars. Solo 64 bars. Straight 12 bars. (F) to coda. (S)
1533-1	My Heart Belongs To Daddy (NC)	Straight 8 bars (NC). (M)
1533-2	My Heart Belongs To Daddy	Straight 32 to solo 32 bars. Solo/straight 36 bars to coda. (M)
1534-1	I've Got You Under My Skin	Straight 64 to solo 48 bars. Solo/straight 24 bars to coda. (F)

There is nothing obviously wrong with this session. Lots of takes are needed for "... Kick ..." but seems not to be Bird's fault; take 1 has a misunderstanding after the piano solo, when the guitar chooses to play, something omitted in the final version. Possibly the altosax tone is slightly closed. The setup makes Bird not to go for the deep improvisations but rather playing on the surface, therefore noted as solo/straight. "Just One ..." might have needed another take. Choose one, choose "... Daddy", it's a lovely tune and a fine solo!

**CHARLIE PARKER WITH STRINGS** **NYC. Aug. 27, 1954**  
Charlie Parker (as) with quintet and (strings).  
WABC broadcast from Birdland, four titles:

2:10	What Is This Thing Called Love?	Solo with orch. (F)
2:35	Repetition	Solo with orch. (M)
2:05	Easy To Love	Solo with orch. (M)
3:28	East Of The Sun	Solo with orch. (M)

Maybe I should not say it, but I find the arrangements rather corny. Therefore it is a wonder that Bird do not seem to bother but plays his part correctly and beautifully, although of course he never has the chance to work out something.

**CHARLIE PARKER QUARTET** **NYC. Sept. 25, 1954**  
Charlie Parker (as), John Lewis (p), Percy Heath (b), Kenny Clarke (dm).  
Three titles were recorded in concert at Carnegie Hall:

3:38	The Song Is You	Straight 1 to solo 4 choruses of 64 bars to coda. (F)
1:55	My Funny Valentine	Solo 36+20 bars. (SM)
2:24	Cool Blues	Solo 9 choruses of 12 bars. (F)

The recording balance is not good here, Bird's playing is seemingly hanging in the air. The three tunes are played as a unit, and there are several examples all through that show he is not in his best shape this night.

**CHARLIE PARKER QUINTET** **NYC. Dec. 10, 1954**  
Charlie Parker (as), Walter Bishop (p), Billy Bauer (g), Teddy Kotick (b), Art Taylor (dm).

Two titles were recorded for Verve:

2115-2	Love For Sale	As take 4. (FM)
2115-3	Love For Sale (NC)	Straight 48 bars (NC). (FM)
2115-4	Love For Sale	Straight 64 bars to solo 64 bars. Straight 20 bars to coda. (FM)
2115-5 ms	Love For Sale	As take 4. (FM)
2116-2	I Love Paris	Straight 48 bars to solo 32 bars. Solo/straight 16 bars. (SM)
2116-3 ms	I Love Paris	As take 2. (SM)

The evergreen concept of the previous Clef session is continued, possibly planned together. It is strange that only two titles were made, because this one has Bird in better and best shape. Beautiful tunes played easily with no obvious problems, and several takes were only a benefit. One might wonder if anybody felt that this was the genius' last visit to a recording studio; if his health was bad, it certainly did not influence his terminal music.

No further recording sessions, no recordings of Charlie Parker in 1955 (Jan. – March 12) have been found.

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