

ON JAZZ



SCAT CATS - Mel Torme (r) and Jon Hendricks hug it up during a JVC Jazz Festival/New York concert salute to the Society of Singers.

EVERYBODY KNOWS BIRD IS THE WORD

You're going to hear a lot more about this, believe you me, but Clint Eastwood's production of *Bird*, the musical biography of Charlie Parker that was a hit at Cannes and is now a hit in Paris, is slowly making its way towards an American theatrical release. We're looking at September now, I think, since the producers are angling to get this one on the New York Film Festival schedule (that September cinematic extravaganza was the launching place for *Round Midnight*, the other Warner Bros. jazz epic). Advance word on the film, from the jazzers that I've spoken to who've seen it, is good. Quite good.

Now you'd think Warner Bros. would issue their own soundtrack on this one, but you'd be wrong. As they did with *Round Midnight*, Columbia has the soundtrack to *Bird* lined up, and it'll be out, the way it looks now, ahead of the film, in August.

I've heard the soundtrack. It's excellent but it's weird. It sounds weird; it even looks weird. For example, on the back cover, under "Side One," it lists the first song, "Lester Leaps In," and the personnel: Charlie Parker: Alto Sax; Monty Alexander: Piano; Ray Brown: Bass; John Guerin: Drums. Monty Alexander was 10 years old when Charlie Parker died. Monty Alexander never played with Charlie Parker.

Okay, so what we have here is music supervisor Lennie Niehaus doing the same thing for Charlie Parker as was done for Patsy Cline in *Sweet Dreams*. Instead of having a Bird imitator, he's taken Bird's solos themselves and set them within newly-recorded settings. Look, it makes sense. The very nature of jazz is such that a player's personality - his sound, his phrasing, his ability to think on his feet - is a big piece of the whole picture. You could have a saxophonist playing like Charlie Parker, even playing Charlie Parker's solos, but it's never going to sound like Charlie Parker. A re-created solo never, ever sounds like a solo that somebody is conceiving on the spot, and nobody - not Charles MacPherson, not Cannonball Adderley, not Sonny Stitt -

ever caught the mercurial genius of Charlie Parker exactly right. And, to their credits, none of them really tried to. Not to mention the fact that some of those old bebop records were recorded so poorly that the drums, bass and piano sound something like industrial racket. To use the original records, as they were recorded, in the movie would have been impossible. No, this was the only way to get Bird doing his own playing. (Remember *The Al Jolson Story*? Larry Parks played Jolson, but Jolson, who was still alive, did his own singing.)

So the music here sounds fine, if funny - like seeing Woody Allen as Zelig standing with Babe Ruth or Adolf Hitler. It's Bird, okay, but Guerin's drumming and Alexander's piano playing, for example, are pure 1988. They didn't, they couldn't, wipe out their own styles; they couldn't - they're jazz players after all - become Bud Powell and Kenny Clarke. So we hear Charlie Parker with modern chords behind him, with a bossa nova beat years before bossa nova was introduced, with guys like Jon Faddis, Ron Carter and Barry Harris. It sounds a bit strange - the alto, to me, sounds like it was recorded many years ago (maybe it's just because I'm so familiar with that sound in those tinny settings).

So the music sounds fine, in a strange, novelty kind of way, and I'm sure it functions beautifully in the film, but - here's the big question - why put out a soundtrack album with the newly-recorded material? Why not just put out the soundtrack album with the original tracks, and let the people who enjoyed the movie enough to go buy the album hear what was really going on? In fact, Warner Bros. owns a good hunk of Charlie Parker's most essential recordings - the Dial catalogue - and they've kept most of that stuff out-of-print for years.

It's a stupid question - of course there was going to be a soundtrack album, if only so Lennie Niehaus's marvelous work could be appreciated. But I wonder if this isn't going to spoil people with digital ears - people who may then go buy some original Bird records, take one listen, and say, "Yuukkk! It sounds like it was recorded a million years ago!!!!!!"

I'm quite sure that this will cause a spurt in Charlie Parker reissues and other Bird-related projects (- Sphere has just done a Charlie Parker album for Verve, and Verve's complete Parker boxed-set will be out on CD in the fall, to name two examples), and that is good news. And, to reiterate the bottom line, this soundtrack is a damned good album. But weird.

Lee Jeske

CASH BOX JAZZ ALBUMS

Title, Artist, Label, Number, Distributor	W		L		W
	O	C	O	C	
1 REFLECTIONS GEORGE HOWARD (MCA 42145)	3	8			
2 KILIMANJARO THE RIPPINGTONS (Passport Jazz PJ 88042)	2	13			
3 SIMPLE PLEASURES BOBBY MCFERRIN (EMI-Manhattan E1-48059)	1	13			
4 EVERY STEP OF THE WAY DAVID BENOIT (GRP GR 1047)	4	10			
5 JOHN PATITUCCI (GRP GR 1049)	7	14			
6 DIANNE REEVES (Blue Note BLT 46906)	6	35			
7 TIME AND TIDE BASIA (Epic BFE 40767/E.P.A.)	8	15			
8 AND YOU KNOW THAT KIRK WHALUM (Columbia FC 40812)	5	21			
9 EYE OF THE BEHOLDER CHICK COREA ELEKTRIC BAND (GRP GR 1053)	9	6			
10 STILL LIVE KEITH JARRETT TRIO (ECM 835 008-1)	10	7			
11 ELLA IN ROME- THE BIRTHDAY CONCERT ELLA FITZGERALD (Verve/PolyGram 835 454-1)	18	6			
12 EARLY SPRING ALPHONSE MOUZON (Optimism OP 6002)	12	11			
13 THAT SPECIAL PART OF ME ONAJE ALLAN GUMBS (Zebra/MCA 42120)	14	11			
14 NATURAL ELEMENTS ACOUSTIC ALCHEMY (MCA Master Series 42125)	16	9			
15 FOLKSONGS FOR A NUCLEAR VILLAGE SHADOWFAX (Capitol 46924)	17	7			
16 DANCING IN THE DARK SONNY ROLLINS (Milestone M-9155)	15	14			
17 TRIBUTE TO COUNT BASIE GENE HARRIS ALL-STAR BIG BAND (Concord CJ 337)	11	21			
18 DIANE SCHUUR & THE COUNT BASIE ORCHESTRA (GRP GR 1039)	13	41			
19 TIME IN PLACE MIKE STERN (Atlantic 81840)	9	12			
20 EVERYNIGHT LIVE AT VINE ST JOE WILLIAMS (Verve/PolyGram 833236)	20	37			
21 STICKS AND STONES DAVE GRUSIN/DON GRUSIN (GRP 1051)	23	5			
22 STILL LIFE (TALKING) PAT METHENY GROUP (Geffen GHS 24145)	21	50			
23 SHADOW PROPHETS KEVIN EUBANKS (GRP 1054)	26	5			
24 THE IMMIGRANTS THE ZAWINUL SYNDICATE (Columbia FC 40969)	24	12			
25 MARSALIS STANDARD TIME VOL. 1 WYNTON MARSALIS (Columbia FC 40461)	22	43			
26 THE WYNTON MARSALIS QUARTET LIVE AT BLUES ALLEY (Columbia FC 40675)	DEBUT				
27 EYES OF THE VEILED TEMPRESS Chuck Mangione (Columbia FC 40984)	29	4			
28 WHEN WE'RE ALONE FRANK POTENZA (TBA 235)	31	3			
29 RITES OF SUMMER SPYRO GYRA (MCA 6235)	DEBUT				
30 POLITICS YELLOWJACKETS (MCA 6236)	33	2			
31 MAKES YOU WANNA PIECES OF A DREAM (EMI-Manhattan E1-48740)	35	2			
32 TEARS OF JOY TUCK & PATTI (Windham Hill WH 0111)	32	3			
33 RENAISSANCE BRANFORD MARSALIS (Columbia FC 40711)	25	37			
34 GAMALON (Amherst AMH 3318)	DEBUT				
35 GRP SUPER LIVE IN CONCERT DAVE GRUSIN, LEE RITENOUR, CHICK COREA, DIANE SCHUUR, TOM SCOTT (GRP GRA-1-1650)	28	18			
36 IF THIS BASS COULD ONLY TALK STANLEY CLARKE (Portrait/CBS 40923)	DEBUT				
37 LOUD JAZZ JOHN SCOFIELD (Gramavision 18-8801-1)	27	12			
38 PARIS BLUES GIL EVANS & STEVE LACY (Columbia/PolyGram 380 049)	30	4			
39 WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD LOUIS ARMSTRONG (MCA 25204)	34	4			
40 NORTHERN LIGHTS DAN SIEGEL (CBS Associated BFZ 44026/E.P.A.)	37	18			

JAZZ FEATURE PICKS

RAY CHARLES AND BETTY CARTER - Dunhill CD DZS 039 - Producer: Sid Feller

One of the most eagerly-sought of jazz collectors items restored to print - CD print that is - after years of obscurity. The combination of Charles and Carter's voices - fire and ice - gives this '61 date its one-of-a-kind fizz; though Marty Paich's arrangements don't hurt. (The Jack Halloran Singers don't help.) Part of another passel of Charles ABC-Paramount reissues on Dunhill - all digitally dolled-up in spiffy new clothes - which also includes GENIUS + SOUL = JAZZ, the great Quincy Jones- and Ralph Burns-arranged album that puts Charles at the helm of two big bands, including the Count Basie Orchestra, and GREATEST COUNTRY & WESTERN HITS. Extra tracks, from other sessions, beef up each album.

THE CARMEN McRAE - BETTY CARTER DUETS - Great American Music Hall GAMH-2706 - Producers: Tom Bradshaw, Betty Carter, Carmen McRae

This seems to be Betty Carter's year. This '87 live session is an unlikely - and highly-successful - meeting of two diverse jazz divas: the craggy, cynical,

world-weary McRae, and the smooth, sensuous, high-flying Carter. They wrap these eight standards up with wit, wisdom, and swinging experience. A scintillating team.

SWINGIN' SWEET - Maxine Sullivan with the Scott Hamilton Quintet - Concord Jazz CCD-4351 - Producer: Takao Ishizuka

The late, elegantly-swinging vocalist in a delicious '86 set with the simpatico Scott Hamilton Quintet. Includes a lovely "Loch Lomond." CD only.

MOSCOW NIGHT - Dave Brubeck - Concord Jazz CCD-4353 - Producer: Russell Gloyd

The Brubeck Quartet does its familiar thing, including "Take Five," live from Moscow. The Soviets eat it up, Brubeck devotees will too. CD and cassette out now, LP due in August.

LIVE AT JOE SEGAL'S JAZZ SHOWCASE - The Louie Bellson Quartet - Concord Jazz CJ-350 - Producer: Louie Bellson

Easy-going mainstream blowing date, with Louie on tubs, Don Menza on reeds, John Heard on bass, and Larry Novak on piano. Nothing surprising, just a pleasant, live, toe-tapper.