

## THE MEASURE OF A GREAT "BIRD'S" FLIGHT

What has taken America decades to understand is that jazz is its original contribution to the music world, and that its sources are in the dreams of people for joy and freedom, and in the suffering people endure when that dream and joy are frustrated by disloyalties and estrangement. Because the popular mind dismissed it and its creator, the Negro, as beneath our sophisticated attainment and attention, jazz first found its support in New Orleans' red-light district, Storyville, and the Chicago dive. In the ominous city of mechanized man and dehumanized crowds, a man bumps another man but never notices him. The free spirit has become threatened in this milieu of mass organization. It is jazz that has offered free expression that treasures the worth of the individual. It is precisely because jazz offers a worthwhile reply to the suppressed cry for human identity that it is gifted with agelessness. Those who have lived for a while and have encountered first hand the wide range of life's burden, both suffering and joy, death and birth, parting and meeting—those who have had the sobering experiences of life have all the more depth of feeling to express and assimilate, could they find the freedom to do so. Authentic jazz is constantly offering this medium for expression. It looks at the world neither sentimentally nor cynically. Somehow goodness and evil forever shake hands, as in jazz the stomp is followed by the blues. Thus jazz speaks deeply to the young and the old with a note of hope and strength. Life is worth the struggle. Our hopes, our sorrows, our dreams are not in vain. Colored by its range of counterpoint, free improvisation, and stirring rhythm, jazz is very much an art, and can seek either the most agitated or the most touching means for its artistry, according as it desires.

It seems to be a maxim that men of artistic genius must first flatten the traditional, which they have both understood and, at one time or another admired, before they can construct an original. Joyce casually disassembled the Victorian novel and replaced it with an eccentric structure that is still being admitted in our changing times. In jazz, which is a lot younger than the novel, there have only been a few figures—Buddy Bolden, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Charlie "Bird" Parker. These were the giants whose ideas moulded jazz music into its different forms. We can enjoy their music and the atmosphere in which their music was cast. It should be remembered that jazz could remain what it was in Buddy Bolden's time only if colored people had remained the same. But the Negro's position in American society was far from being static, in effect, it was constantly changing and the dynamic evolution of jazz can be explained only in terms of the no less dynamic evolution of the Negro in America.

In jazz we talk about distinctive musical imagination as a prime element, and its natural appetite for new and striking forms, and its constant search for that food. It is not strange, then, to find that the two-beat rhythmic accent of early jazz should have given way to the subtler four-beat rhythmic basis of modern swing. Jazz melody was bound to move from the relatively simple strides of the early blues toward the scintillating elaborations of the Progressive School of Charlie "Bird" Parker. Parker, who played alto saxophone, was a man of exceptional musical ability and, to say the least, a unique individual. It was just three years ago that he died at the age of thirty-four. Although he played with many white

musicians, Parker was a negro steeped in the negro tradition of great blues music. He was, however, tremendously energetic and ever looking for new channels of expression. In the changes which jazz had undergone since he started playing it in 1937, Parker sensed that it was losing its feeling and depth of expression to the superficialities of new, digressive patterns. Consequently to modern jazz, the area he helped define, he brought back this essential of individual expressionism, and thus gave the meaning and depth of feeling that the Negro had injected into the more primitive forms. He carried the original message of jazz in its more sobering moments, and communicated the intensity which he felt so poignantly.

It is rather paradoxical that Parker in his lifetime was unknown except in the inner circles of jazz; yet he, perhaps, more than any other single musician, gave to modern jazz its most revolutionary ideas. Parker's personal life was a constant struggle marked by poverty, loneliness and artistic frustration. We must admire the man for the sense of dedication he brought to his music, which was his only solace and source of inspiration. He had an uncompromising integrity that would not allow him to sacrifice his art for the commercial success that could have been his because of his technical skill as an instrumentalist. This, of course, is a sign of the depth and maturity of Parker which those unfamiliar with the great demands of authentic jazz would not readily come to understand and appreciate. Parker's life was tragic, and he died in a small New York apartment. A memorial concert held for him in Carnegie Hall a few weeks after his death became a bespangled barge of uneasy jazz musicians and bragging show-business people all of whom admired him tremendously. Birdland, a spacious, unattractive Broadway nightclub, was named 1949 in the "Bird's" honor, and became, shortly before his death, a veritable mecca of top jazzmen. His name lives on with his spirit in a tune that was recently rewritten from a dominant line used in the melodic variations of composition. This cheerful earful is, of course, "Lullaby of Birdland". Parker's life was, for what it was worth, much like that of the late poet, Dylan Thomas. Both had amazing creative talent. Both were in their thirties when they died. Both were modified revolutionaries. Both had damaging twists in their personalities that were bathed in either dope or alcohol. Both gave overgenerously of themselves in their work.

Parker was born in Kansas City, which was then considered the cradle of much of modern jazz. He started playing at an early age with the young energetic breed of musicians, and soon joined forces with Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis, and Billy Eckstine, with whom he shared his musical ideas. He demanded the perfection of a man who could give that same quality of perfection and creativeness. Consequently "Bird" rarely had to put up with the type of musician once described as "blood-relative sounding". "Bird" Parker was during all of his career, a very hot jazzman, and his celebrated style was unquestionably his own invention, despite his acknowledged influence to a young saxophonist, Lester Young. The heart of Parker's style was its unceasing and uncanny projection of surprise. It was composed, principally, of long and short melodic lines, stated with much elaboration and with a full-blooded sound. He also had that rare gift among jazz musicians, an acute grasp of dynamics, which make his playing very moving at times.

Parker was until a few years before his death little known outside of the jazz world. Today, one cannot buy a modern jazz record without hearing, however palely, the spirit of Charlie Parker. The time may come, of course, when modern jazz musicians who are notoriously parochial creatures, begin to absorb and enrich themselves with a knowledge of the older traditions of their music, as Parker always did. They may also attempt to acquire the "Bird's" technical tricks, but they will never reach the beautiful and sure flights of his artistry. Indeed, it is not often that one finds a person who has flown the depths and heights of human experience and has at the same time been gifted with such a marvellous capacity for expression that he might bring the universal message that, after all, life is worth the struggle.

—R. St. JOHN '58



### SPRING

Cold bleak Winter is in Her tomb,  
And the days warmth bring;  
Gay May flowers begin to bloom,  
For it now is Spring.

The red-breasted creatures Nature commands  
Return and sing  
The snowbirds' departure from the land;  
'Tis clear, 'tis Spring.

The wise old owl sits still, serene  
As his echo rings  
Through the valley so low and green,  
For he knows 'tis Spring.

The earth's green carpet majestically lies—  
Awaiting its tilling.  
The happy farmer gently sighs—  
Ah! Lovely Spring.

—BEVERLEY HOWARD '59

### REMINISCENCES OF EUROPE

How can a fellow become fully developed intellectually when he's never been off the Island, never been anywhere? The answer is, of course, that he can't. He has to get out and see the world around him, see how different peoples live, see other cultures and other patterns of life; and most of all, he has to absorb the new ideas with which he comes in contact, and put them to good use. Only after doing this, will he feel the security of broad-mindedness and the sense of truly belonging in this world. Only then, will his life take on a new lustre and fullness, and the chores of everyday life assume a new meaning.

To heighten your interest in touring, otherwise called globe-trotting, I would like to recall to you some of the places I've been, and some of the things I've seen. My vacation began when I arrived in Old England from New York. My first impression of this land was an historical one. The glorious past of England was present, present in cities, in the towns, in the country, present everywhere. Visiting Stratford-on-Avon was a memorable experience. Here I saw the actual house in which Shakespeare was born. It was a dwelling of the Tudor Period, and, although very large, was thatched. Since the guide told me that I could explore the place for as long as I liked, I spent quite a while poking around the building and its surroundings. Later, I inspected the famous Shakespearian Theatre, and Anne Hathaway's Cottage, so named for Shakespeare's wife.

The town of Stratford, itself, was, at first glance, very picturesque. It appeared to be a drowsy little hamlet that even the River Avon, flowing lazily by, would not dare disturb. But life, so I later found, goes on as briskly in this town as it does anywhere else. The people, although quite aware of the past, do not live it. They are proud of their country's heritage, but prouder still of its advancements witnessed by the modern facilities and accommodations available everywhere.

Sailing down the Avon in a special touring boat, I arrived at the city of Bristol for a brief visit. This city was certainly not noted for its beauty, but it was an interesting place, nevertheless. Situated here, are the huge industrial factories which get their power from the coal-mines of Wales. A reminder of the Industrial Revolution period are the rows and rows of squalid tenements to be found around or near the factories. I was rather happy to leave Bristol, however, as I became anxious to visit Devonshire and Cornwall. I arrived in the town of Devon, and put up for the night at a small inn. The next morning at an early hour, I hired a guide and went off to cross the moors. What rugged country! I recalled Emily Bronte's description of the moors in "Wuthering Heights". And here was I in this very place that became so dismal and eerie when the fogs closed in and night fell. But when the view is clear, the scenery is quite enchanting. I wandered for hours in this region until I became quite exhausted and returned to the inn for a rest. From here I motored to the coast of Cornwall to view the rocky sea-coast, returning the same afternoon to set out for London.

South-West England was sparsely populated compared with Middlesex County, and the great city of London, itself, was a teeming tourist's paradise. This city, besides being the centre of British government and culture, is the greatest port of Europe, and ships from every part of the world dock here. Naturally, the first