

Mail Bag

Thank you so much for sending me the Jazzletter piece on Ken. I too "lost it" when reading your beautiful closing paragraphs.

Then I recalled returning home late one afternoon about five years ago and finding Ken sitting on the terrace, smoking a cigar (which he had given up many years earlier), a tall Scotch-and-soda in his hand, listening to Basie music. The look on his face was beatific and I joked that he looked like he'd died and gone to heaven. Love,

Maida Glancy, New York City

That terrace is just off the living room of the Park Avenue penthouse apartment where Ken and Maida lived in the late years of his life. This image is the one I too will retain of Ken.

The Immortal Joker Part One

In view of the respect of so many musicians for the late Dizzy Gillespie, it is at first reflection a little strange that his sometime associate Charlie Parker is placed on a higher plane, held in almost religious reverence, by a good many critics and by that element of the lay public susceptible to their edicts.

A little reflection should clear up the mystery.

Jazz criticism has from the earliest days been plagued by puritanism. Much of the writing about it has come from what is known, often imprecisely, as the political left. Certainly a taste for jazz usually (though not always!) engenders an interest in and consequent horror at the racial injustice of American society, which, if it not as virulent and sanctioned, even legislated, as it once was, is a long way from disappearing.

Puritanism, as H.L. Mencken observed, is "the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy." Puritanism is not, of course, an exclusively Protestant proclivity: it has some of its most ardent adherents among Jews.

To those who succumb to it, it is hard to perceive anything as having value only because it is beautiful or exciting, or merely diverting. This leads to the belief that all art is propaganda, a view held by my grandfather. Abbey Lincoln said this in an interview. Whether she (and my grandfather) meant that it was, since it inevitably expressed *somebody's* vision, or should be, I cannot say.

But I do know that as an underlying assumption, it leads to the view that art should be *doing* something, accomplishing something, and more specifically the reform and improvement and advance-

ment of society. It is art seen as utility.

Stravinsky asserted that music is about music. But that doesn't sit well with some people, and those who fulfill Mencken's dictum often resent success, and in jazz, particularly, it has led to attacks on those who attain it, such as Dave Brubeck and the late Cannonball Adderley. Jazz admirers pride themselves on the superiority, and indeed, exclusivity of their taste. And for all the breast-beating that goes on in the panel discussions at those bizarre periodic conferences of jazz critics and editors and educators and producers and others who circle about the art—reiterating year after year that "We've got to do something about the state of jazz!"—the fact is that all too many of its fans don't really *want* it to be widely accepted, for popularity would end its talismanic emanations as proof of rarified taste and exalted sensitivity. In other words, nothing would displease the stone jazz fan more than for the music to become truly, massively popular.

What the public likes is usually bad. Ergo, anything the public likes is bad; which does not truly follow. What the public *doesn't* like is necessarily good, which also doesn't follow. These tacit assumptions are often there.

Now, there are exceptions to these generalizations. An artist who is widely admired *may* be worthy of consideration *if* he or she has suffered a miserable life. This gets a lot of drunks and junkies into the Pantheon on a pass. Some of them, to be sure, deserve to be there, but the right artist may be elected for the wrong reason. Bill Evans almost certainly would not have received the immense reverence his memory evokes (and deserves) had he been in his personal life as stable and prosperous as, say, Dave Brubeck or John Lewis. Much of the mystique surrounding Bix Beiderbecke grows out of his short and tragic alcoholic life, rather than from his gifts as an artist. Lenny Bruce is celebrated as much for his crucifixion by the "authorities" as for the brilliance of his insights. There is an implicit condescension in this process: I can admire him because I feel sorry for him, affirming my own superiority. Condescension to brilliance is the ultimate arrogance.

America, land of ambition and success, has, paradoxically, an ongoing love affair with failure and premature death. Billy Lives. Jack Kennedy didn't really die, he is a vegetable in a secret hideaway.

Dizzy Gillespie made some mistakes: despite a miserable childhood, he achieved happiness, a stable marriage, and a status as an almost regal ambassador of his music and his country. His life was an unrolling carpet of laughter and achievement.

That doesn't make for very good dramaturgy. Therefore Dizzy is dead, but Bird Lives.

I think Dizzy was a man of genius.

So does Alyn Shipton, an English commentator and BBC broadcaster who brings to the task of chronicling jazz a goodly experience as a musician: he is a bass player. He is the author of *Groovin' High: The Life of Dizzy Gillespie*, from Oxford University Press. Shipton sees it as I do:

"Perhaps because of Dizzy's longevity compared to bebop's other principal character, Charlie Parker, who burned out at the age of thirty-five in 1955, and perhaps also because of his cheerful demeanor and obvious talents as a showman and entertainer, his contribution to jazz's major revolutionary movement has been consistently underrated. Yet in many ways he was a far more wide-ranging, original, and innovative musician than Parker, possessed of a similarly miraculous instrumental talent, but with a ruthless determination to achieve and, for much of his life, a clear sense of direction."

The *New York Times* requires (or at least used to; maybe they've abandoned this folly) a reviewer to sign a paper asserting that he or she does not know the author of the book in question. But in specialized fields, almost everyone knows everyone else. So there is always the risk of cronyism creeping into a review on the one hand, malicious jealousy on the other. Even hidden loyalties to someone or something discussed in the book may influence the evaluation. So reviewing is a dubious exercise at best.

I know Alyn Shipton, and consider him a friend by e-mail and telephone, though we have never actually met. I even did some tidbits of research on this book on his behalf: for example, I interviewed Junior Mance for him.

This does not compromise my judgment of the book. If I hadn't liked it, I would have greeted its appearance with a discreet silence. I think it's a very good book, scrupulously researched and balanced in its judgments. It is also the first biography since Gillespie's death. As for Dizzy's autobiography, *To Be or Not to Bop*, it cannot be considered an infallible report on his life and work. For one thing, it suffers from Dizzy's modesty, the consequence of which is that he was among those who underestimated his importance. Another is inaccuracy. Even autobiographies, perhaps one should say particularly autobiographies, cannot be counted on for accuracy. Memory slips. Shipton proves that Dizzy could not possibly have heard Roy Eldridge when he was growing up in Cheraw, South Carolina, although Dizzy repeatedly said that he did. Eldridge had not yet made a radio broadcast when Dizzy was still in Cheraw.

Dizzy endlessly told the story of how he got his uptilted trumpet. He said he put it on a chair at a jam session. Somebody sat on it, and when he picked it up, its bell was tilted up at a forty-five-degree angle. He gave it a tentative try, and said, "Damn, I think I like that!" I was one of the many persons he told that story. But it can't be true, and had I stopped to think of it, I would have asked these questions:

How does a horn lying on its side on a chair get its bell tilted upward when somebody sits on it? Wouldn't that just cave in the piping? And if someone somehow tilted it up, why didn't the tube collapse at the bend point? In the old days (maybe now, for all I

know) brass-instrument makers filled the pipe with hot tar, let it cool, made the requisite curves and bends, with the tar preventing the tube's collapse, then melted the tar away.

Although Shipton isn't assertive about it, he suggests another explanation. There was in one of the English orchestras a trumpet player who had eyesight problems. He had a horn built with the bell tilted upward, so that it was out of the line of vision when he was reading music. Dizzy met that man. He may have filed that image in his head and eventually had a horn built to similar specifications. I remember one of his early bent horns; the bell was detachable for packing away. It attached to the horn with a little thumb screw. Later Dizzy had horns built in his preferred configuration and had a trumpet case made to accommodate this shape. In any case, I'll never again accept gullibly the story of that horn's serendipitous discovery. Dizzy was not above telling a good story, certainly not when it was funny.

From the opening paragraph of his preface, Shipton leaves you in no doubt about his estimate of Gillespie. "Jazz is a music full of thrilling sounds," he writes. "It can also span the full breadth of human emotion from exhilaration to profound sadness, from love to alienation, from celebration to commiseration. All the greatest jazz musicians have the ability to touch their listeners in one or more of these areas, but, for me, Dizzy Gillespie's music has managed to inhabit all of them, while simultaneously conveying more of the sheer joy and excitement of jazz than that of any other musician."

Farther on, he says, "Dizzy was always modest about his own contribution to bebop. Partly in deference to the memory of Charlie Parker, he always stressed Parker's input at the expense of his own. I have attempted to show how Dizzy's contribution was in many ways more important. By being the one who organized the principal ideas of the beboppers into an intellectual framework, Dizzy was the key figure who allowed the music to progress beyond a small and restricted circle of after-hours enthusiasts. This was a major element in his life, and virtually everyone to whom I spoke stressed Dizzy's exceptional generosity with his time in explaining and exploring musical ideas. Modern jazz might have happened without Dizzy, but it would not have had so clearly articulated a set of harmonic and rhythmic precepts, nor so dramatic a set of recorded examples of these being put into practice."

Shipton asserts: "I am more convinced than ever that I have been privileged to examine the life of one of the great human beings of the twentieth century."

Alyn tells us that while Dizzy did not object to his nickname in the press or publicity, he did not want it used by his friends. His full name being the rather elegant John Birks Gillespie, his friends for the most part seemed to call him Birks. I must have picked it up by osmosis, but certainly that's what I always called him. I adored the man.

The pattern of Shipton's book is to present the story of Dizzy's life in one chapter, a discussion of the music from that time in the next. But you'd better have a representative selection of Dizzy's recordings at hand as you read. The book valuable without them, but it would have been enhanced by a listening guide and discogr-

phy. An important collection is the two-CD set *The Complete RCA Victor Recordings*, which gives a good chronicle of Gillespie's work from May 17, 1937, when he played his first solo on records, Morton's *King Porter Stomp*, with the Teddy Hill band, through to July 6, 1949, when he recorded Lester Young's *Jumpin' with Symphony Sid* and three other tracks. By then he was fully developed as an artist, master of his medium. The rest of his life would be devoted to refinement and dissemination.

I remember Nat Adderley coming out of a corridor backstage at some jazz festival in the 1960s, grinning so broadly that I said, "What are you so happy about?"

Nat said, "Dizzy just showed me some shit on the horn that I don't believe!"

I mentioned this to Nat two or three years ago, asking if he remembered it. "Yeah!" he said. "I not only remember it, I still remember what he *showed* me!"

Shipton quotes Ray Brown, who arrived in New York at the age of nineteen. His first night in town, he was with Hank Jones at the *Spotlite* when Dizzy entered.

"So Hank says, 'Hey, Dizzy! Come over here! I want you to meet a friend of mine, just got in town. A great bass player.'"

"I say, 'Hello.'"

"Dizzy says, 'You play good?'"

"Well, what am I going to say? So I said, 'I can play, you know.'"

"He said, 'Do you want a job?'"

"Well, I almost had a heart attack. But I said, 'Yeah.'"

"He took a card out of his pocket and said, 'Be at my house tomorrow night, seven o'clock.'"

Ray would be a key figure in solving the problem of the rhythm section in bebop. In some of the earliest bebop records, the rhythm sections — made up of musicians nurtured in the swing era — seem stiff with the idiom. But, pertinent to Dizzy's function as a teacher:

Ray told me, and Shipton too, that he had played with the group, which included Charlie Parker, Bud Powell, and Max Roach, all of them incomparably brilliant, for several months without hearing a word of comment from Dizzy. Finally, unnerved, Ray asked him, "Am I doing all right?"

Dizzy said, "Yeah. But you're playing a lot of wrong notes."

Ray went almost into shock. Dizzy took him to a piano and showed him what he wanted Ray to play; Ray always remembered the harmony lesson of that day. Why hadn't Dizzy taken up the subject earlier? Maybe he was waiting for Ray to be ready; then he poured out the information. This was always his gift to his fellows: knowledge. And his was immense, unfathomable. He was, as Shipton notes, not only a brilliant musician. He was in all ways a brilliant man.

He was born in Cheraw, South Carolina, on October 21, 1917, the youngest of nine children, seven of whom survived. Dizzy told friends and interviewers that he was terrified of his father, James Gillespie, a bricklayer and weekend piano player who beat him and his brothers every Sunday morning, whether they had done anything wrong during the week or not. This didn't break the

boy's spirit; on the contrary, it made him into a prankster and a fighter. Taught by a neighbor, a former school teacher, John Birks could read and do his numbers before he went to kindergarten. Dizzy's brother, James Penfold Gillespie, ran away from home because of the father's cruelty. Shipton says that "it is tempting to attribute John Birks's own mean streak to his father's behavior," but cautions against putting too much value on the hypothesis.

I would quibble with Shipton only on the choice of the term "mean streak". I knew Dizzy from 1959 until his death on January 6, 1993, which is to say over a period of thirty-four years. And I knew him well. What's more, I have known many people who knew him better than I did, including Junior Mance, Lalo Schiffrin, and Phil Woods. There was an angry streak in Dizzy, but I never saw anything in him small enough to be called mean, nor did I ever hear of it. He could flair with anger, but usually it came on like a sudden storm and passed as quickly. He was the most benign of men, and Shipton takes good note of this, although I always felt Dizzy could carry a long grudge toward anyone who did him wrong, such as cheating him and his band on money, which happened on more than one occasion.

Dizzy learned to play trombone in school. Then a friend next door was given a trumpet at Christmas. It fascinated him.

James Gillespie forced all his children to take piano lessons, though only John Birks became truly interested in music. Dizzy retained a deep interest in the piano. "He taught himself harmony," Shipton writes, "working out scales and chords at the piano and applying what he learned to the trumpet." Bobby Hackett played guitar, and applied his knowledge of harmony to his cornet playing; Hackett in later life was one of Dizzy's friends. And Dizzy and Milt Jackson, in later years, would take turns playing piano to back each other up.

Thus Dizzy was almost entirely self-taught. They are treacherous terms, "self-taught" and "self-educated," often carrying a connotation of *untaught* or *uneducated*. The terms mean no such thing. One of the values of formal education, at least in the arts, is that a good teacher can shorten your search time, guiding what is in the end self-education. You can learn to draw only by the repeated doing of it, until the coordination between eye and brain and hand is reflexive and unconsidered. Thus it is with musical education, for in the last analysis, in learning an instrument you are training muscle memory. It may indeed be the great virtue of the older jazz musicians that they *were* self-taught, each of them working out his individual problems in his own way. As I think I have previously mentioned, I was discussing the question of tone with Don Thompson a couple of years ago. Don said, "I think it is impossible not to have a personal tone." But of course, once you think about it! You approach music with your unique physical attributes. As Clark Terry told me, Miles Davis used a Heim mouthpiece. Clark said, "I could never use one." The reason, Clark said, is that Miles had thin lips and he, Clark, did not. Itzhak Perlman uses what is considered in classical music a completely "wrong" technique, with the neck of the violin resting in the crook of his thumb and forefinger—the "incorrect" position used by country fiddlers. Eddie Harris once asked Lester Young a question

about embouchure. Prez told him, "I can only tell you about my mouthpiece in my mouth. I can't tell you about your mouthpiece in your mouth." The physical differences between Clark Terry and Miles Davis in part explains the difference in their tones; and that of Dizzy too.

In any case, Dizzy was far from being the only "self-taught" musician. So were Gil Evans and Robert Farnon, both of whom acquired formidable technical knowledge of harmony and orchestration. So were Gene Puerling, Wes Montgomery, and that ultimate auto-didact, Erroll Garner. A university education is indispensable to someone who can't find the way to the public library.

But his self-education left John Birks with certain idiosyncracies. He was never restrained from letting his cheeks bulge out, which is by all theory supposed to cripple a trumpet player's technique. But Dizzy did it, and so did (and does) Maynard Ferguson, and no one ever accused either of them of lack of technique. Miles, on the other hand, with good classical training on trumpet, never had the fluid technique that Dizzy had, nor the command of the horn of Maynard Ferguson, nor the chops of Harry James, who was one of his early models. Dizzy did not himself understand why and how his cheeks bulged out: he said they fascinated his dentist. And, Birks said, he had been written up in dental literature, the phenomenon being known (and he sounded a little proud of it) as "Gillespie pouches."

Dizzy worked for a time in the 1930s picking cotton. Then he had another stroke of luck. One of the few high schools for blacks in the area was the Laurinburg Institute, about thirty miles away in Laurinburg, North Carolina. It had a scholarship program for the poor. Dizzy and his cousin Norman Powe, a trombone player, were both admitted without fees. He worked on the school farm to pay for clothes and other necessities, and claimed in later life that he was a master farmer. He practiced trumpet and piano incessantly. Norman Powe recalled, Shipton tells us, that they studied classical music. One wonders what they heard. In 1935, Debussy had been dead seventeen years, Ravel had only two years left to live, and Stravinsky's *The Firebird* was nearly twenty-five years old. In later years, Dizzy would refer to listening to classical music as "going to church." So one is justified in wondering how much (given his incredible ears) he was picking up from that source. Certainly much of what he and Charlie Parker did was adapted, not invented, the flabbergasted response of later critics with no knowledge of classical music to the contrary notwithstanding.

Early in 1935, Gillespie's mother moved to Philadelphia, and in May, when he failed physics in his final year at Laurinburg, he left Cheraw to join her. Years later, when he was a famous musician, Dizzy stopped in Laurinburg. The head of the school said, "Here's something you forgot," and gave him his high-school diploma and his football letter.

Living in South Philadelphia, John Birks formed friendships with organist Bill Doggett and worked in a band led by Frankie Fairfax. When, during a rehearsal, a trumpet player looked over at the chair where John Birks was supposed to be, he said, "Where's Dizzy?"

Dizzy was at the piano. The name stuck.

Shipton traces Gillespie's various affiliations and jobs during the Philadelphia years, so far as it is possible. His leap into the professional big-time came when he joined Lucky Millinder's band in 1937. Shipton quotes Art Blakey as saying that Millinder was a superb bandleader with big ears, though he couldn't read a note of music. Dizzy told me the same thing. In the band with him was Charlie Shavers, who would be an important mentor to him. Living now in New York, he made friendships with Kenny Clarke and trumpeters Benny Harris, Bobby Moore, and Mario Bauza, who would exert an important influence on him. And he sat in a lot at the Savoy Ballroom, where he met Teddy Hill. Dizzy signed on with Hill's band for a tour of Europe. The band sailed for Paris in May, 1937. Just before their departure—on May 17—the band went into the studio to record. The testimony of musicians who heard him at that time indicates that Birks already had a formidable range, playing effortlessly two octaves above middle C.

On *King Porter Stomp*, Dizzy that day made his first recorded solo. It is to be found in *Dizzy Gillespie: The Complete RCA Victor Recordings*. Shipton writes that Dizzy's solo on that tune is, "in the opinion of many critics, one of the most effective assimilation of Eldridge's approach by any player" Maybe. But I already hear the emergence of the "real" Dizzy Gillespie. The playing is fierce, and focussed with a kind of acetylene flame.

Shipton quotes the English writer and musician John Chilton, discussing Gillespie's skilled use of the microphone: "If you heard him without a microphone he had a noticeably thin tone." Not when I rehearsed with him. Dizzy's tone was thin, knifelike, penetrating, when he wanted it to be. It could also be, with or without microphone, quite fat, particularly in the low register. One thing that struck me as I listened again to recordings through his career was the range of tonal shadings he commanded.

Birks had become enamored of a young dancer named Gussie Lorraine Willis, usually called just Lorraine. His lovely ballad *Lorraine* is named for her. Dizzy courted her by mail while she worked at the Apollo theater. She seemed unattainable, a strong and disciplined woman who was unimpressed by his role as a musician. At the same time, she helped him with money while he was waiting out his New York City union card. She would remain the great stabilizing constant of his life.

The next plateau of his career was the period with Cab Calloway, which began in 1939. Like Lucky Millinder, Calloway was not a musician. But Millinder made his own judgments. Dizzy told an English interviewer: "Cab didn't know anything about music, he was a performer and a singer. He knew very little about what was going on, but he did have a good band. He relied on other people to tell him how good a guy was . . . and these guys were at the top of their profession. It was the best job in New York City at the time . . ."

Calloway's was one of the most successful of commercial big bands, and one of the most tasteful. In his drape-shaped white zoot suits, he made himself a figure of comedy, cavorting about the stage, singing his Hi-de-ho, and displaying a snow-plow mouth of white teeth. As a kid, encountering him in movies, I felt an

embarrassed discomfort at his monkey shins, as surely as I did the grovelling of Steppin Fetchit and Mantan Moreland. To me it was the same thing, disguised as hip, or hep as they said in those days. Louis Armstrong similarly embarrassed me, so much so that at first his image blocked my perception of his musical importance. What I did not see (and neither did some of the young black militant musicians of later years) is that this was the way of show business. I think I understood it at last the first time I saw Guy Lombardo swooping and scooping about a stage in front of what, as both Armstrong and Gerry Mulligan recognized, was a very good 1920s dance band.

Furthermore, early in the century, not only the blacks were patronized and mocked in show business. So were the Irish, the Jews, and the Germans, the latter by what were called Dutch comics. Ethnic insult songs were common. One of my favorite politically incorrect titles came out in World War I, as the United States tried to achieve some sort of unity of its disparate peoples: *When Tony Goes Over the Top, Keep Your Eye on that Fighting Wop*. I kid you not. I didn't invent that.

And so the self-mockeries of Armstrong and Calloway have to be seen in perspective: they were in show business, and jazz had not yet been defined as an art form by critics as anxious to aggrandize their own tastes as to glorify the music. I sometimes think that the worst thing that ever happened to jazz was to be defined as an "art form," with all the pretensions and affectations the term entails. John Birks Gillespie, an incredible natural humorist, never loaded the music with that burden, and for that he has been often misunderstood.

The Calloway band was one of the best of the era, and one of the most successful. If Cab in movies embarrassed me, some of the band's instrumental records, such as *A Smooth One*, rather than *Minnie the Moocher*, were key elements of my collection when I was about thirteen. Thanks to Alyn Shipton, I now know those instrumentals were recorded at the urging of Milt Hinton and other members of the band.

The Calloway band was moving forward, partly, Shipton relates, due to the impetus of Hinton, guitarist Danny Barker, and drummer Cozy Cole in the rhythm section. Dizzy's Cuban friend Mario Bauza joined the band just before Dizzy. He was to be a powerful influence on Gillespie, deepening the latter's interest in Latin rhythms generally and Cuban rhythms particularly, which of course led back to Africa, and in jazz led to the quite correct term Afro-Cuban. Chico O'Farrill told me that back in the mountains of Cuba when he was a boy, local percussionists played more authentic African rhythm than one could find in Africa, because of their long insulation from European music; the situation would be parallel to the preservation in pure form of Elizabethan song in the Appalachians. In each case, isolation preserved authenticity. Chico told me this was coming to an end with Fidel Castro's drive for universal literacy. And, too, radio made its incursions. Once, in a jungle village far up a small tributary to the Demerara River in what was then British Guiana, I considered with fascination the thatched homes of the autochthonous people; and observed uneasily a young man with a small radio, listening to rock-and-roll.

Birks said in 1979 that his style had cohered by the time he joined Calloway. Shipton corroborates this, writing that "by 1939-40 his bop vocabulary was largely in place, and when he cut his 1939 records, he had not heard Charlie Parker or felt his influence."

His playing made a lot of the musicians in the Calloway band uncomfortable. He certainly made Calloway uncomfortable with, aside from his musical explorations, his onstage antics, miming football passes behind Cab's romantic ballads, firing spitballs, and the like. Yet he was assigned most of the trumpet solos until Calloway got Jonah Jones into the band.

If Calloway did not care for Gillespie, the feeling was mutual. Dizzy found the arrangements ordinary, and he was increasingly restless. But new arrangers were constantly presenting new charts, and I would think that this honed Dizzy's reading skills, which became almost awesome. And during this time, he was at every opportunity sitting in at Minton's, meanwhile explaining his harmonic thinking to bassist Hinton and guitarist Barker. Shipton concludes from the evidence that Dizzy met Charlie Parker on June 24, 1940, when the Calloway band played Kansas City. One of the things I noticed about Dizzy over the years is that he absolutely never referred to Charlie Parker as Bird. He *always* called him Yard, contracted from Yardbird. Indeed, when I induced Dizzy to write an article about Parker for *Down Beat*, probably in 1960 (I did the typing), the title I put on the piece was *The Years with Yard*.

Dizzy was astounded by Parker when he heard him play. "The things Yard was doing, the ideas that were flowing . . . I couldn't believe it. He'd be playing one song and he'd throw in another, but it was perfect."

Shipton writes, "Most of those who knew him agree (with a consensus absent from comparative appraisals of Gillespie) that Parker had the aura of genius about him."

Dizzy had far the superior theoretical knowledge; in fact, Red Rodney, who worked in Charlie Parker's quintet, told me he didn't think Bird could read very well.

Birks had married Lorraine Willis on May 9, just before he met Parker. To the end of his days, he credited her with the stability of his life, saying that without her he might have got involved with drugs and alcohol. He meant heroin, of course; everyone who knew him is aware that Birks, like Basie, was not, shall we say, averse to a little pot.

The famous spitball incident happened in September, 1941. Milt Hinton said Jonah Jones threw the wet wad of paper, which landed in the spotlight. By now Calloway was so used to contending with Dizzy's antics that he accused him of it. After the show, he tried to slap Dizzy. Dizzy (who always carried one, even in later years) pulled a knife. The two began to scuffle, Dizzy tried to stab Calloway, Hinton diverted the stroke, and the knife went into Calloway's leg. When Cab got to his dressing room, he found the pants of his white suit covered in blood. He fired Dizzy immediately. The incident made *Down Beat*, and I recall that this was the first time I ever read or heard the name Dizzy Gillespie.

Shipton says that hints of the bebop to come are heard in some

of the Calloway recordings. Moonlighting (with Milt Hinton and Cozy Cole) from Calloway, Dizzy recorded several "sides," as they said in those days, with Lionel Hampton. One of them was *Hot Mallets*, of which Hampton would later say, "The first time bebop was played on trumpet was when Dizzy played on *Hot Mallets*." But about all you hear of Dizzy (the track is in the RCA two-CD collection) is some brief cup-muted solo work at the start, and it isn't very boppish to me. What I find notable about the record is that Benny Carter plays alto on it, and did the chart; he and Dizzy would always be friends.

The next major period of Gillespie's life is the time of experiment at Monroe's Uptown House and Minton's. Legends have grown up about these jam-session encounters, sometimes with Kenny Clarke and Thelonious Monk. Dizzy recalled that Charlie Christian, often considered one of the precursors of bebop, took part. Shipton writes, "Those with no knowledge of the rhythmic and harmonic changes afoot in bebop were systematically excluded as the musicians on the bandstand played ever more esoteric chord changes and improvised melodic lines built of increasingly complex chordal extensions at greater and greater speed."

What he does *not* write is equally significant. He does not say that the purpose of these exercises was to keep the "white boys" off the bandstand, which myth has been oft repeated. It is preposterous on the face of it, first of all for its assumption that men of the intellectual grandeur of Parker and Gillespie would put in that kind of thought and study and practice for the mere malicious purpose of racial exclusion. If Dizzy had angers, as he did, he was far above a simplistic racism. Furthermore, he and Parker never excluded whites from their company and their groups. Al Haig, Red Rodney, Gerry Mulligan, Phil Woods, Lalo Schiffrin, and Mike Longo, among others, came into their orbit and fellowship, and Dizzy, the ever-compulsive teacher, went to considerable lengths to show them what he was doing. And anyway, a skilled arranger could analyze what was going on at Minton's.

What is certain is that in the Monroe's-Minton's experiments, the key figures did not welcome fools gladly. One fool who would jump up on the bandstand and, despite spectacular lack of talent, have the temerity to play with Parker and Gillespie, was a tenor player Dizzy nicknamed Demon. I asked Dizzy about this guy.

"Demon," Birks said. "He was the original freedom player: freedom from melody, freedom from harmony, and freedom from rhythm."

Shipton notes that, besides Monroe's and Minton's, one of the significant locales in the ongoing experimentation was the apartment at 2040 Seventh Avenue that Dizzy and Lorraine took after their marriage. Dizzy told me that Lorraine disapproved of Charlie Parker, because of his chaotic way of life, probably fearful that he would influence Dizzy. Most of those I have met who knew him (Dizzy could never believe that I'd never met "Yard") liked him a lot. Dizzy would be sitting at his upright piano, writing down whatever he and Parker were working out. Lorraine would come home and tell Parker to leave. "Yard" would walk to the door, still playing his horn, Lorraine would shut the door behind him, and he

would stand in the hall, still blowing, as Dizzy wrote out the material they were working on. How often this happened, I don't know; I remember only how I laughed at the images when Birks told me the story. (Is it one of his humorous inventions? I cannot say.)

There is a hiatus in the recorded history of bebop's evolution, due to the recording ban tyrannically imposed by James Caesar Petrillo, head of the American Federation of Musicians. It lasted more than a year, creating an illusion that jazz (not just bebop) moved forward in one great leap. This seems to have happened to the Woody Herman band as well. When it went back to recording, it reflected some of the innovations of Parker and Gillespie, including an exuberant wildness with band members shouting encouragement to each other and behaving in a goofy manner. The unison trumpet soli section of *Caldonia* was widely purported to be a Gillespie solo. It was actually a Neal Hefti solo that all the other trumpet players picked up and played in unison with him. It was, however, Neal told me, very much in Dizzy's manner, for he and all the rest of the band's trumpet section were mad for Dizzy. Dizzy had in fact written for Woody and even played with the band as a sub for a time in early 1942. Dizzy wrote three charts for the band, including *Down Under*, which Woody recorded in July of that year, *Swing Shift*, and *Woody 'n' You*. The latter two were not recorded. *Down Under* is startlingly ahead of its time, and Woody was so impressed by Gillespie's writing that he encouraged him to give up playing to devote himself to it. "I'm glad he ignored me," Woody told me.

After writing for Woody, Dizzy spent a short period with the Les Hite band and then a second stint with Lucky Millinder, who—musicians testified he would fire a man for no other reason than sudden whim—dropped him, then tried to rehire him. But Dizzy was working steadily in Philadelphia, and commuting to New York to sit in with, among others, Charlie Parker, at Kelly's Stable. Ira Gitler noted that Birks paid a six-dollar train fare to play a ten-dollar job.

Dizzy was further revealing his complete lack of color bias. In Philadelphia, he worked with Stan Levey. Dizzy took up a pair of drumsticks to teach the young drummer some of the ideas he and Kenny Clarke had developed, once again illustrating that generosity with knowledge that was one of his most admirable characteristics. This must be seen against the pattern of selfishness in early jazz musicians; some trumpeters played with a kerkchief over the right hand to prevent others from "stealing" their stuff.

Early in 1943, Dizzy joined the Earl Hines band; so did Charlie Parker. The band was thus a, well, *Hot House* in the evolution of bebop, in spite of the fact that Earl Hines didn't much care for what the two of them were doing, even though he had himself been a radical innovator and, further irony, directly influenced two of the major players in the emerging musical movement: Bud Powell and Al Haig.

John Birks Gillespie was poised on the verge of a revolution.

(To be continued)