

Jack Kerouac on Jazz and the Beat Generation

The following two essays reveal the influence of jazz as a driving force in Jack Kerouac's *oeuvre*. The first essay, *Jazz Of The Beat Generation*, is a selection that also appears, in its adapted form, in his most famous novel *On The Road*. In the second, *The Beginning Of Bop*, which is taken from a collection of essays called *Good Blonde & Others*, Kerouac takes on the role of jazz historian. Kerouac's reading of this essay was recorded in 1959 and passages are featured on this CD as the excerpts entitled *Fantasy: The Early History Of Bop*.

JAZZ OF THE BEAT GENERATION by Jean-Louis

This selection is from a novel-in-progress, THE BEAT GENERATION. Jean-Louis is the pseudonym of a young American writer of French-Canadian parentage [Jack Kerouac]. He is the author of one published novel. (Copyright, 1955, by Jean-Louis.)

Out we jumped in the warm mad night hearing a wild tenorman's bawling horn across the way going "EE-YAH! EE-YAH!" and hands clapping to the beat and folks yelling "Go, go, go!" Far from escorting the girls into the place, Dean was already racing across the street with his huge bandaged thumb in the air yelling "Blow, man, blow!" A bunch of colored men in Saturday night suits were whooping it up in front. It was a sawdust saloon, all wood, with a small bandstand near the john on which the fellows huddled with their hats on blowing over people's heads, a crazy place, not far from Market Street, in the dingy skid-row rear of it, near Harrison and the big bridge causeway; crazy floppy women wandered around sometimes in their bathrobes, bottles clanked in alleys. In back of the joint in a dark corridor beyond the splattered toilets scores of men and women stood against the wall drinking wine-spodi-odi and spitting at the stars . . . wine, whiskey and beer. The behatted

tenorman was blowing at the peak of a wonderfully satisfactory free idea, a rising and falling riff that went from "EE-yah!" to a crazier "EE-de-lee-yah!" and blasted along to the rolling crash of butt-scarred drums hammered by a big brutal-looking curl-sconced Negro with a bullneck who didn't give a damn about anything but punishing his tubs, crash, rattle-ti-boom crash. Uproars of music and the tenorman *had it* and everybody knew he had it. Dean was clutching his head in the crowd and it was a mad crowd. They were all urging that tenorman to hold it and keep it with cries and wild eyes; he was raising himself from a crouch and going down again with his horn, looping it up in a clear cry above the furor. A six-foot skinny Negro woman was rolling her bones at the man's hornbell, and he just jabbed it at her, "Ee! ee! ee!" He had a foghorn tone; his Horn was taped; he was a shipyard worker and he didn't care. Everybody was rocking and roaring; Galatea and Alice with beers in their hands were standing on their chairs shaking and jumping. Groups of colored studs stumbled in from the street falling over one another to get there. "Stay with it man!" roared a man with a foghorn voice, and let out a big groan that must have been heard clear to Sacramento, "Ah-haa!" – "Whoo!" said Dean. He was rubbing his chest, his belly, his T-shirt was out, the sweat splashed from his face. Boom, kick, that drummer was kicking his drums down the cellar and rolling the beat upstairs with his murderous sticks, rattletyboom! A big fat man was jumping on the platform making it sag and creak. "Yoo!" The pianist was only pounding the keys with spread-eagled fingers, chords only, at intervals when the great tenorman was drawing breath for another blast of phrase. Chinese chords, they shuddered the piano in every timber, chink and wire, *boing!* The tenorman jumped down from the platform and just stood buried in the crowd blowing around; his hat was over his eyes; somebody pushed it back for him. He just hauled back and stamped his foot and blew down a hoarse baughing blast, and drew breath, and raised the horn and blew high wide and screaming in the air. Dean was directly in front of him with his face glued to the bell of the horn, clapping his hands, pouring sweat on the man's keys; and the man noticed and laughed in his horn a long quivering crazy mule's hee-haw and everybody else laughed and they rocked and rocked; and finally the tenorman decided to blow his top

and crouched down and held a note in high C for a long time as everything else crashed along skittely-boom and the cries increased and I thought the cops would come swarming from the nearest precinct.

It was just a usual Saturday night goodtime, nothing else; the bebop winos were wailing away, the workingman tenors, the cats who worked and got their horns out of hock and blew and had their women troubles, and came on in their horns with a will, saying things, a lot to say, talkative horns, you could almost hear the words and better than that the harmony, made you hear the way to fill up blank spaces of time with the tune and very consequence of your hands and breath and dead soul; summer, August 1949, and Frisco blowing mad, the dew on the muscat in the interior fields of Joaquin and down in Watsonville the lettuce blowing, the money flowing for Frisco so seasonal and mad, the railroads rolling, extraboards roaring, crates of melons on sidewalks, bananas coming off elevators, tarantulas suffocating in the new crazy air, chipped ice and the cool interior smells of grape tanks, cool bop hepcats standing slumped with horn and no lapels and blowing like Wardell, like Brew Moore softly . . . all of it insane, sad, sweeter than the love of mothers yet harsher than the murder of fathers. The clock on the wall quivered and shook; nobody cared about that thing. Dean was in a trance. The tenorman's eyes were fixed straight on him; he had found a madman who not only understood but cared and wanted to understand more and much more than there was, and they began duelling for this; everything came out of the horn, no more phrases, just cries, cries, "Baugh" and down to "Beep!" and up to "EEEEEE!" and down to clinkers and over to sideways echoing horn-sounds and horselaughs and he tried everything, up, down, sideways, upside down, dog fashion, horizontal, thirty degrees, forty degrees and finally he fell back in somebody's arms and gave up and everybody pushed around and yelled "Yes, yes, he done blowed that one!" Dean wiped himself with his handkerchief.

Up steps Freddy on the bandstand and asks for a slow beat and looks sadly out the open door over people's heads and begins singing "Close Your 'Eyes." Things quiet down for a minute. Freddy's wearing a tattered suede jacket, a purple shirt with white buttons, cracked shoes and zoot pants without press; he didn't care. He looked like a pimp in Mecca, where there are no pimps; a barren woman's child, which is a dream; he looked like he was beat to his socks; he was down, and bent, and he played us some blues with his vocals. His big brown eyes were concerned with sadness, and the singing of songs slowly and with long thoughtful pauses. But in the second chorus he got excited and embraced the mike and jumped down from the bandstand and bent to it and to sing a note he had to touch his shoe tops and pull it all up to blow, and he blew so much he staggered from the effect, he only recovered himself in time for the next long slow note. "Mu-u-u-u-sic pla-a-a-a-a-a-ay!" He leaned back with his face to the ceiling, mike held at his fly. He shook his shoulders, he gave the hip sneer, he swayed. Then he leaned in almost falling with his pained face against the mike. "Ma-a-a-ke it dreamy for dan-cing" – and he looked at the street outside, Folsom, with his lips curled in scorn – "while we go ro-man-n-n-cing" – he staggered sideways - !Lo-o-o-ove's holi-da-a-a-ay" – he shook his head with disgust and weariness at the whole world – "Will make it seem" – what would it make it seem? – everybody waited, he mourned – "O-kay." The piano hit a chord. "So baby come on and just clo-o-o-o-se your pretty little ey-y-y-es" – his mouth quivered, offered; he looked at us, Dean and me, with an expression that seemed to say "Hey now, what's this thing we're all putting down in this sad brown world" – and then he came to the end of his song and for this there had to be elaborate preparations during which time you could send all the messages to Garcia around the world twelve times and what difference did it make to anybody because here we were dealing with the pit and prune juice of poor beat life itself and the pathos of people in the Godawful streets, so he said and sang it, "Close-your-" and blew it way up to the ceiling with a big voice that

came not from training but feeling and that much better, and blew it through to the stars and on up – “Ey-y-y-y-y-es” and in arpeggios of applause staggered off the platform ruefully, broodingly, nonsatisfied, artistic, arrogant. He sat in the corner with a bunch of boys and paid no attention to them. They gave him beers. He looked down and wept. He was the greatest.

Dean and I went over to talk to him. We invited him out to the car. In the car he suddenly yelled “Yes! Ain’t nothing I like better than good kicks! Where do we go?” Dean jumped up and down in the seat giggling maniacally. “Later! Later!” said Freddy. “I’ll get my boy to drive us down to Jamson’s Nook, I got to sing. Man I live to sing. Been singing ‘Close Your Eyes’ for a month – I don’t want to sing nothing else. What are you two boys up to?”

We told him we were going to New York tomorrow. “Lord, I ain’t never been there and they tell me it’s a real jumping town but I ain’t got no cause complaining where I am. I’m married you know.” “Oh yes?” said Dean lighting up. “And where is the little darling tonight and I bet she’s got a lots of nice friends . . . man . . .” “What do you mean?” said Freddy looking at him half-smiling out of the corner. “I tole you I was married to her, didn’t I?” – “Oh yes, Oh yes,” blushed Dean. “I was just asking. Maybe she’s got a couple of friends downtown, or somethin’, you know man, a ball, I’m only lookin for a ball, a gang ball, man.” – “Yah, what’s the good of balls, life’s too sad to be ballin all the time, Jim,” said Freddy lowering his eye to the street. “Shee-it,” he said, “I ain’t got no money and I don’t care tonight.”

We went back in for more. The girls were so disgusted with Dean and I for jumping around with everybody else that they had left by now, gone to Jamson’s Nook on foot; the car we’d come in, and had to push from down Mission, wouldn’t run anyway. We saw a horrible sight in the bar; a white hipster fairy of some kind had come

in wearing a Hawaiian shirt and was asking the big bull-necked drummer if he could sit in. The musicians looked at him suspiciously. He sat at the tubs and they started the beat of a blues number and he began stroking the snares with soft goofy bop brushes, swaying his neck with that complacent Reich-analyzed ecstasy that doesn’t mean anything but too much T and soft foods and goofy kicks in cafeterias and pads at dawn and on the cool order. But he didn’t care.

The musicians looked at him and said, “Yeah, yeah, that’s what the man does, shh-ee-eet.” He smiled joyously into space and kept the beat with butterfly brushes, softly, with bop subtleties, a giggling rippling background for big solid foghorn blues. The big Negro bull-neck drummer sat waiting for his turn to come back. “What that man doing?” he said. “Play the music,” he said. “What in hell!” he said. “Shh-ee-eet!” and looked away red-eyed. Freddy’s boy showed up at this moment; he was a little taut Negro with a great big Cadillac. We all jumped in. He hunched over the wheel and blew the car clear across San Francisco without stopping once, seventy miles per hour; he was fulfilling his mission with a fixed smile, his destiny we’d expected of the rumors and songs of him. Right through traffic and nobody even noticed he was so good. Dean was in ecstasies. “Dig *this* guy, man – dig the way he sits right in that seat with the feel of the car under his both haunches, a little bit forward, to the left, against the gut of the car and he don’t make any outward indication and just balls that jack and can talk all night while doing it, only thing is he doesn’t bother with life, listen to them, O man the things, the things, he lets Freddy do that, and Freddy’s his boy, and tells him about life, listen to them, O man the things . . . the things I could – I wish – let’s not stop, man, we’ve got to keep going now!” And Freddy’s boy wound around a corner and bowled us right in front of Jamson’s Nook and was parked. “Yes!” yelled Dean. A cab squeaked to a stop in the street; out of it jumped a skinny seventy-year-old withered little Negro preacherman who threw a dollar bill at the cabby and yelled “Blow!” and ran into the club pulling on his coat

(just come out of work) and dashed right through the downstairs bar yelling "Go, go, go!" and stumbled upstairs almost falling on his face and blew the door open and fell into the jazz session room with his hands out to support him against anything he might fall on, and he fell right on Lampshade who was reduced to working as a waiter in Jamson's Nook that summer (the great Lampshade whom I'd seen shout the blues with veins helling in his neck and his overcoat on), and the music was there blasting and blasting and the preacherman stood transfixed in the open door screaming "Blowblowblow!" And the man was a little short Negro with an alto horn that Dean said obviously lived with his grandmother, "Just like my boy Jim!", slept all day and blew all night and blew a hundred choruses before he was ready to jump for fair, and that's what he was doing. "It's Carlo Marx!" screamed Dean above the fury. And it was. This little grandmother's boy with the scrapped up alto had beady glittering eyes, small crooked feet, spindly legs in formal black pants, like our friend Carlo, and he hopped and flopped with his horn and threw his feet around and kept his eyes transfixed on the audience (which was just people laughing at a dozen tables, the room thirty by thirty feet and low ceiling) and he never stopped. He was very simple in his ideas. Ideas meant nothing to him. What he liked was the surprise of a new simple variation of chorus. He'd go from "ta-potato-rup, ta-potato-rup" repeating and hopping to it and kissing and smiling into his horn – and then to "ta-potatola-dee-rup, ta-potatola-DEE-rup!" and it was all great moments of laughter and understanding for him and everyone else who heard. His tone was clear as a bell, high, pure and blew straight in our faces from two feet away. Dean stood in front of him, oblivious to everything else in the world, with his head bowed, his hands socking in together, his whole body jumping on his heels and the sweat, always the sweat pouring and splashing down his tormented neck to literally lie in a pool at his feet. Galatea and Alice were there and it took us five minutes to realize it. Whoo, Frisco nights, the end of the continent and the end of the road and the end of all dull doubt. Lampshade was roaring around with trays of beer: everything he did was in

rhythm: he yelled at the waitress with the beat: "Hey now, babybaby, make a way, make a way, it's Lampshade coming your way!" and he hurled by her with the beers in the air and roared through the swinging doors in the kitchen and danced with the cooks and came sweating back. Ronnie Morgan, who'd earlier in the evening performed at the Hey Now Club screaming and kicking over the mike, now sat absolutely motionless at a corner table with an untouched drink in front of him, staring gook-eyed into space, his hands hanging at his sides till they almost touched the floor, his feet outspread like lolling tongues, his body shriveled into absolute weariness and entranced sorrow and what-all was on his mind: a man who knocked himself out every night and let the others put the quietus to him at dawn. Everything swirled around him like a cloud. And that little grandmother's alto, that little Carlo Marx hopped and monkey-danced with his magic horn and blew two hundred choruses of blues, each one more frantic than the other and no signs of failing energy or willingness to call anything a day. The whole room shivered. It has since been closed down, naturally.

Dean and I raced on to the East Coast. At one point we drove a 1947 Cadillac limousine across the state of Nebraska at 110 miles an hour, beating hotshot passenger trains and steel wheel freights in one nervous shuddering snapup of the gas. We told stories and zoomed East. There were hoboes by the tracks, wino bottles, the moon shining on woodfires. There were white-faced cows out in the plains, dim as nuns. There was dawn, Iowa; the Mississippi River at Davenport, and Chicago by nightfall. "Oh man" said Dean to me as we stood in front of a bar on North Clark Street in the hot summer night, "dig these old Chinamen that cut by Chicago. What a weird town – whee! And that woman in that window up there, just looking down with her big breasts hanging from her old nightgown. Just big wide eyes waiting. Wow! Sal we gotta go and never stop going till we get there." – "Where we going man?" – "Obvious question say Charley Chan. But we gotta go, we gotta

GO." Then here came a gang of young bop musicians carrying their instruments out of cars. They piled right into a saloon and we followed them. They set themselves up and started blowing. There we were. The leader was a slender drooping curly-haired pursy-mouth tenorman, thin of shoulder, twenty-one, lean, loose, blowing modern and soft, cool in his sports shirt without undershirt, self-indulgent, sneering. Dean and I were like car thieves and juvenile heroes on a mad – with our T-shirts and beards and torn pants – but the bop, the combo! How that cook leader picked up his horn and frowned in it and blew cool and complex and was dainty stamping his foot to catch ideas and ducked to miss others – saying "Wail" very quietly when the other boys took solos. He was the leader, the encourager, the schoolmaker, the Teshmaker, the Bix, the Louis in the great formal school of new underground subterranean American music that would someday be studied all over the universities of Europe and the world. Then there was Pres, a husky handsome blond like a freckled boxer, like Jackie Cooper, meticulously molded in his sharkskin plaid suit with the long drape and the collar falling back and the tie undone for exact sharpness and casualness, sweating and hitching up his horn and writhing into it, and a tone just like Pres Lester Young himself, blowing round and Lester-like as they all leaned and jammed together, the heroes of the hip generation. "You see man Pres has the technical anxieties of a money-making musician, he's the only one who's expensively dressed, obvious big band employee, see him grow worried when he blows a clinker, but the leader, that cool cat, tells him not to worry and just blow truth." They roll into a tune - "Idaho." The Negro alto high-school broad-gash-mouth Yardbird tall kid blows over their heads in a thing of his own, moveless on the horn, fingering, erect, an idealist who reads Homer and Bird, cool, contemplative, grave – raises his horn and blows into it quietly and thoughtfully and elicits birdlike phrases and architectural Miles Davis logics. The children of the great bop innovators. Once there was Louis Armstrong blowing his beautiful bop in the muds of New Orleans; even before him the mad tuba-players and trombone kings who'd

paraded on official days and broke up their Sousa marches into ragtime, on Bourbon, Dauphine and South Rampart and Perdido Street too. After which came swing, and Roy Eldridge vigorous and virile blasting the horn for everything it had in waves of power and natural tuneful reason – "I Want a Little Girl," "I Got Rhythm," a thousand choruses of "Wonderful" – leaning to it with glittering eyes and a lovely smile and sending it out broadcast to rock the jazz world. Then had come Charlie Parker, a kid in his mother's woodshed in Kansas City, the dirty snow in late March, smoke from stovepipes, wool hats, pitiful brown mouths breathing vapor, faint noise of music from down the way – blowing his tied-together alto among the logs, practicing on rainy days, coming out to watch the old swinging Basie and Bennie Moten band that had Hot Lips Page and the rest – lost names in swingin' Kaycee – nostalgia of alcohol, human mouths chewing and talking in smoky noisy jazzrooms, yeah, yah, yeah, yah, last Sunday afternoon and the long red sunset, the lost girl, the spilt wine – Charlie Parker leaving home and unhappiness and coming to the Apple, and meeting mad Monk and madder Gillespie . . . Charlie Parker in his early days when he was out of his mind and walked in a circle while playing his horn. Younger than Lester, also from K.C., that gloomy saintly goof in whom the history of jazz is wrapped: Lester. Here were the children of the modern jazz night blowing their horns and instruments with belief; it was Lester started it all – his fame and his smoothness as lost as Maurice Chevalier in a stage-door poster – his drape, his drooping melancholy disposition in the sidewalk, in the door, his porkpie hat. ("At sessions all over the country from Kansas City to the Apple and back to L.A. they called him Pork Pie because he'd wear that gone hat and blow in it.") What door-standing influence has Dean gained from this cultural master of his generation? What mysteries as well as masteries? What styles, sorrows, collars, the removal of collars, the removal of lapels, the crepe-sole shoes, the beauty goof – that sneer of Lester's, that compassion for the dead which Billy has too, Lady Day – those poor little musicians in Chicago, their love of Lester, early heroisms in a room, records of Lester, early Count, suits

hanging in the closet, tanned evenings in the rosy ballroom, the great tenor solo in the shoeshine jukebox, you can hear Lester blow and he is the greatness of America in a single Negro musician – he is just like the river, the river starts in near Butte, Montana, in frozen snow caps (Three Forks) and meanders on down across states and entire territorial areas of dun bleak land with hawthorn crackling in the sleet, picks up rivers at Bismarck, Omaha, and St. Louis just north, another at Kay-ro, another in Arkansas, Tennessee, comes deluging on New Orleans with muddy news from the land and a roar of subterranean excitement that is like the vibration of the entire land sucked of its gut in mad midnight, fevered, hot, the big mudhole rank clawpole old frogular pawed-soul titanic Mississippi from the North, full of wires, cold wood and horn – Lester, so, holding his horn high in Doctor Pepper chicken-shacks, backstreet. Basie Yaycee wearing greasy smeared corduroy bigpants and in torn flap smoking jacket without straw, scuffle-up shoes all slopey Mother Hubbard, soft, pudding, and key ring, early handkerchiefs, hands up, arms up, horn horizontal, shining dull, in wood-brown whiskeyhouse with ammoniac urine from broken gut bottles around fecal pukey bowl and a gal sprawled in it legs spread in brown cotton stockings, bleeding at belted mouth, moaning “yes” as Lester, horn placed, has started blowing, “blow for me mother blow for me,” 1938, later, earlier, Miles is still on his daddy’s checkered knee, Louis’ only got twenty years behind him, and Lester blows all Kansas City to ecstasy and now Americans from coast to coast go mad, and fall by, and everybody’s picking up. Stranger flowers now than ever, for as the Negro alto kid mused over everyone’s head with dignity, the slender blond kid from Curtis Street, Denver, jeans and studded belt and red shirt, sucked on his mouthpiece while waiting for the others to finish; and when they did he started, and you had to look around to see where the new solo was coming from, for it came from his angelical smiling lips upon the mouthpiece and it was a soft sweet fairy-tale solo he played. A new kind of sound in the night, sweet, plaintive, cold; like cold jazz. Someone from South Main Street, or Market, or Canal, or Streetcar, he’s the sweet

new alto blowing the tiny heartbreaking salute in the night which is coming, a beautiful and whistling horn; blown easily but fully in a soft flue of air, out comes the piercing thin lament completely softened, the New Sound, the prettiest. And the bass player: wiry redhead with wild eyes jabbing his hips at the fiddle with every driving slap, at hot moments his mouth hung open; behind him, driving, the sad-looking dissipated drummer, completely goofed, chewing gum, wide-eyed, rocking the neck with that Reich kick, dropping bombs with his foot, urging balloons. The piano – a big husky Italian truck-driving kid with meaty hands and a burly and thoughtful joy; anybody start a fight with the band, he will step down; dropping huge chords like a Wolfean horse turding in the steamy Brooklyn winter morn. They played an hour. Nobody was listening. Old North Clark bums lolled at the bar, whores screeched in anger. Secret Chinamen went by. Noises of hootchy-kootchy interfered. They went right on. Out on the sidewalk came an apparition – a sixteen-year-old kid with a goatee and a trombone case. Thin as rickets, mad-faced, he wanted to join this group and blow with them. They knew him from before and didn’t want to be bothered with him. He crept into the bar and meekly undid his trombone case and raised the horn to his lips. No opening. Nobody looked at him. They finished, packed up and left for another bar. The boy had his horn out, all assembled and polished of bell and no one cared. He wanted to jump. He was the Chicago Kid. He slapped on his dark glasses, raised the trombone to his lips alone in the bar, and went “Baugh!” Then he rushed out after them. They just wouldn’t let him play with them, like the sandlot baseball gang back of the gas tank. “All these guys live with their grandmothers just like my boy Jim and our Carlo Marx alto!” said Dean and we rushed after the whole gang. They went across the street. We went in.

There is no end to the night. At great roar of Chicago dawn we all staggered out and shuddered in the raggedness. It would start all over tomorrow night. We rushed on to New York. “There ain’t nothing left after that,” said Dean. “Whee!” he said. We

seek to find new phrases; we try hard, we writhe and twist and blow; every now and then a clear harmonic cry gives new suggestions of a tune, a thought, that will someday be the only tune and thought in the world and which will raise men's souls to joy. We find it, we lose, we wrestle for it, we find it again, we laugh, we moan. Go moan for man. It's the pathos of people that gets us down, all the lovers in this dream.

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The Beginning of Bop by Jack Kerouac

Bop began with jazz but one afternoon somewhere on a side-walk maybe 1939, 1940, Dizzy Gillespie or Charley Parker or Thelonious Monk was walking down past a men's clothing store on 42nd Street or South Main in L.A. and from the loudspeaker they suddenly heard a wild impossible mistake in jazz that could only have been heard inside their own imaginary head, and that is a new art. Bop. The name derives from an accident, America was named after an Italian explorer and not after an Indian king. Lionel Hampton had made a record called "Hey Baba Ree Bop" and everybody yelled it and it was when Lionel would jump in the audience and whale his saxophone at everybody with sweat, claps, jumping fools in the aisles, the drummer booming and belaboring on his stage as the whole theater rocked. Sung by Helen Humes it was a popular record and sold many copies in 1945, 1946. First everyone looked around then it happened – bop happened – the bird flew in – minds went in – on the streets thousands of new-type hepcats in red shirts and some goatees and strange queerlooking cowboys from the West with boots and belts, and

the girls began to disappear from the street – you no longer saw as in the Thirties the wrangler walking with his doll in the honkytonk, now he was alone, rebop, bop, came into being because the broads were leaving the guys and going off to be middleclass models. Dizzy or Charley or Thelonious was walking down the street, heard a noise, a sound, half Lester Young, half raw-rainy-fog that has that chest-shivering excitement of shack, track, empty lot, the sudden vast Tiger head on the woodfence rainy no-school Saturday morning dumpyards, "Hey!" and rushed off dancing.

On the piano that night Thelonious introduced a wooden off-key note to everybody's warmup notes, Minton's Playhouse, evening starts, jam hours later, 10 P.M., colored bar and hotel next door, one or two white visitors some from Columbia some from Nowhere – some from ships – some from Army Navy Air Force Marines – some from Europe – The strange note makes the trumpeter of the band lift an eyebrow. Dizzy is surprised for the first time that day. He puts the trumpet to lips and blows a wet blur –

"Hee ha ha!" laughs Charley Parker bending down to slap his ankle. He puts his alto to his mouth and says "Didn't I tell you?" – with jazz of notes . . . Talking eloquent like great poets of foreign languages singing in foreign countries with lyres, by seas, and no one understands because the language isn't alive in the land yet – Bop is the language from America's inevitable Africa, *going* is sounded like *gong*, Africa is the name of the flue and kick beat, off to one side – the sudden squeak uninhibited that screams muffled at any moment from Dizzy Gillespie's trumpet – do anything you want – drawing the tune aside along another improvisation bridge with a reach-out tear of claws, why be subtle and false?

The band of 10 PM Minton's swings into action, Bird Parker who is only 18 year old

has a crew cut of Africa looks impossible has perfect eyes and composure of a king when suddenly you stop and look at him in the subway and you can't believe that bop is here to stay – that it is real, Negroes in America are just like us, we must look at them understanding the exact racial counterpart of what the man is – and figure it with histories and lost kings of immemorial tribes in jungle and Fellaheen town and otherwise and the sad mutts sleeping on old porches in Big Easonburg woods where just 90 years ago old Roost came running calling “Maw” through the fence he'd just deserted the Confederate Army and was running home for pone – and flies on watermelon porches. And educated judges in hornrimmed glasses reading the *Amsterdam News*.

The band realized the goof of life that had made them be not only mis-placed in a white nation but mis-noticed for what they really were and the goof they felt stirring and springing in their bellies, suddenly Dizzy spats his lips tight-drum together and drives a high screeching fantastic clear note that has everybody in the joint look up – Bird, lips hanging dully to hear, is turning slowly in a circle waiting for Diz to swim through the wave of the tune in a toneless complicated wave of his own grim like factories and atonal at any minute and the logic of the mad, the sock in his belly is sweet, the rock, zonga, monga, bang – In white creamed afternoons of blue Bird had leaned back dreamily in eternity as Dizzy outlined to him the importance of becoming Mohammedans in order to give a solid basis of race to their ceremony, “Make that rug swing, mother, - When you say Race bow your head and close your eyes.” Give them a religion no Uncle Tom Baptist – make them wearers of skull caps of respectable minarets in actual New York – picking hashi dates from their teeth – Give them new names with zonga sounds – make it weird –

Thelonious was so weird he wandered the twilight streets of Harlem in winter with no hat on his hair, sweating, blowing fog – In his head he heard it all ringing. Often

he heard whole choruses by Lester. There was a strange English kid hanging around Minton's who stumbled along the sidewalk hearing Lester in his head too – hours of hundreds of developing choruses in regular beat all day so in the subway no dissonance could crash against unalterable choruses in implacable bars – erected in mind's foundation jazz.

The tune they were playing was *All the Things You Are* . . . they slowed it down and dragged behind it at half temp dinosaur proportions – changed the placing of the note in the middle of the harmony to an outer more precarious position where also its sense of not belonging was enhanced by the general atonality produced with everyone exteriorizing the tune's harmony, the clonk of the millennial piano like anvils in Petrograd – “Blow!” said Diz, and Charley Parker came in for his solo with a squeaky innocent cry. Monk punched anguished nub fingers crawling at the keyboard to tear up foundations and guts of jazz from the big masterbox, to make Charley Parker hear his cry and sigh – to jar the orchestra into vibrations – to elicit gloom from the doom of the black piano. He stared down wild eyed at his keys like a matador at the bull's head. Groan. Drunken figures shaded in the weaving background, tottering – the boys didn't care. On cold corners they stood three backs to one another, facing all the winds, bent – lips don't care – miserable cold and broke – waiting like witchdoctors – saying, “Everything belongs to me because I am poor.” Like 12 Century monks high in winter belfries of the Gothic Organ they wildeyed were listening to their own wild sound which was heralding in a new age of music that would eventually require symphonies, schools, centuries of technique, declines and falls of master-ripe styles – the Dixieland of Louis Armstrong sixteen in New Orleans and of big Pops Forest niggerlips jim in the white shirt whaling at a big scarred bass in raunchy non-gry New Orleans on South Rampart street famous for parades and old Perdido Street – all that was mud in the river Mississippi, pasts of 1910 gold rings, derby hats of workers, horses steaming turds near breweries and

saloons, - Soon enough it would leap and fill the gay Twenties like champagne in a glass, pop! - And crawl up to the Thirties with tired Rudy Vallees lamenting what Louis had laughed in a Twenties Transoceanic Jazz, sick and tired early Ethel Mermands, and old beat bedsprings creaking in that stormy weather blues when people lay in bed all day and moaned and had it good - The world of the United States was tired of being poor and low and gloomy in a line. Swing erupted as the Depression began to crack, it was the year marijuana was made illegal, 1937. Young teenagers took to the first restraint, the second, the third, some still wandered on hobo trains (lost boys of the Thirties numbered in the hundreds of thousands. Salvation Armies put up full houses every night and some were ten years old) - teenagers, alienated from their parents who have suddenly returned to work and for good to get rid of that dam old mud of the river - and tear the rose vine off the porch - and paint the porch white - and cut the trees down - castrate the hedges - burn the leaves - build a wire fence - get up an antenna - listen - the alienated teenager in the 20th Century finally ripe gone wild modern to be rich and prosperous no more just around the corner - became the hepcat, the jitterbug, and smoked the new law weed. World War II gave everybody two pats of butter in the morning on a service tray, including your sister. Up from tired degrading swing wondering what happened between 1937 and 1945 and because the Army'd worked it canned it played it to the boys in North Africa and raged it in Picadilly bars and the Andrew sisters put the corn on the can - swing with its heroes died - and Charley Parker, Dizzy Gillespie and Thelonious Monk who were hustled through the chow lines - came back remembering old goofs - and tried it again - and Zop! Dizzy screamed, Charley squealed, Monk crashed, the drummer kicked, dropped a bomb - the bass questionmark plunked - and off they whaled on Salt Peanuts jumping like mad monkeys in the gray new air, "Hey Porkpie, Porkpie, Hey Porkpie!"

"Skidilibee-la-bee you, - oo, - e bop she bam, ske too ria - Parasakiliaoolza -

menooriastibatiolyait - oon ya koo." They came into their own, they jumped, they had jazz and took it in their hands and saw its history vicissitudes and developments and turned it to their weighty use and heavily carried it clanking like posts across the enormity of a new world philosophy and a new strange and crazy grace came over them, fell from the air free, they saw pity in the hole of heaven, hell in their hearts, Billy Holliday had rocks in her heart, Lester droopy porkpie hung his horn and blew bop lazy ideas inside jazz had everybody dreaming (Miles Davis leaning against the piano fingering his trumpet with a cigarette hand working making raw iron sound like wood speaking in long sentences like Marcel Proust) - "Hey Jim," and the stud comes swinging down the street and says he's real *bent* and he's *down* and he has a *twisted* face, he works, he wails, he bops, he bangs, this man who was sent, stoned and stabbed is now *down*, *bent* and *stretched-out* - he is home at last, his music is here to stay, his history has washed over us, his imperialistic kingdoms are coming.

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jazz

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