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PRACTITIONER AND PROPHET: AN ANALYSIS OF
SONNY STITT'S MUSIC AND RELATIONSHIP
TO CHARLIE PARKER

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CHAPTER I

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

Introduction

The 1940s brought about sweeping changes in American popular music. While big band swing was at the height of its popularity, a new revolutionary style of music was developing. Big band swing was a dancer-driven form of musical entertainment, but the new style—bebop—offered a self-consciously modern, artist-driven approach. Bebop’s pioneers included musicians like saxophonist Charlie Parker, trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie, pianists Bud Powell and Thelonious Monk, and drummer Kenny Clarke, who engaged in small group experiments in afterhours New York City jam sessions. While the bebop pioneers worked to establish the shape of the new music, it spread by word of mouth, radio, and a handful of early recordings throughout the United States and abroad.

As bebop traveled to new locations, it attracted other musicians who were excited by what they heard and eager to become practitioners of the art form.

Young musicians especially were drawn to bebop. In the mid-1940s, many young musicians moved to New York to experience and participate in the city’s vibrant

music scene. These musicians brought their own influences and personalities to the music, which soon developed in new and unexpected directions.

Musicians associated with bebop early on, like trumpeter Miles Davis and drummer Art Blakey, were leading their own groups by the 1950s. A second wave of musicians—consisting of players like bassist Charles Mingus and tenor saxophonists Sonny Rollins and John Coltrane—followed soon after. These young musicians were influenced by the bebop pioneers; and after moving to New York City, they began to work alongside them. Through the musical opportunities they received, the early bebop practitioners matured as artists and created their own distinctive styles that would determine the direction of jazz music in the 1960s and beyond.

Saxophonist Sonny Stitt was one such early practitioner. Stitt moved to New York City between 1944 and 1945. This coincided with the rise of bebop, which had been developing in the city for a number of years and was by then in full swing. Stitt's talents on the saxophone were quickly recognized. While still in his early twenties, Stitt began working in the bands of leading jazz artists alongside talented young musicians like himself. The mid-1940s were fruitful years for Stitt. By the end of the decade, Stitt had performed or recorded with

bebop pioneers Dizzy Gillespie, Max Roach, Kenny Clarke and Bud Powell, and was recognized as a master of the style in his own right.

Critics took note of Stitt early on, but remarked that his playing style seemed modeled after saxophonist Charlie Parker, a bebop pioneer and one of the leading figures of the new music. This critical evaluation first appeared in the mid-1940s. It would stay with Stitt throughout his career.

After his early years in New York City, Stitt began work as a solo artist, forming his own ensembles and continuing to perform with Gillespie and other high-profile musicians. He was tireless, adopting an intense schedule of live performance, touring, and recording that he maintained until his death in 1982. The comparison to Charlie Parker persisted, however, and eventually became the prevailing assessment of Stitt's work. Stitt was categorized as a leading bebop practitioner in the mold of Charlie Parker, and not as an innovator in his own right.

Not everyone agreed with this critical consensus. While musicians and critics—even sympathetic ones—often drew comparisons between Stitt and Parker, some defended Stitt's approach to improvisation as unique. For instance, musicians close to both saxophonists noted Stitt's similarity to Parker, even as they praised Stitt and hired him in their bands. Numerous musicians spoke highly

of Stitt's skills as a saxophonist and improviser; and younger players cited Stitt as a mentor and influence on their own musical development. Stitt also disagreed with the critical consensus and responded to his critics in print. In recorded interviews, he denied copying Charlie Parker and objected to his characterization as a Parker imitator in the jazz press.

The Stitt-Parker literature has attracted some academic attention but has yet to be the subject of sustained analysis. Although a great deal has been written about Stitt in general, and much has been written about the question of Stitt's relationship to Parker in particular, to date no academic work has studied the critical consensus (and departures from that consensus) in systematic detail. Longform analysis of Stitt's recorded music is rare. Few academic works contain comparative music analysis of Stitt and Parker solos. None compare the results of that analysis with the critical consensus directly.

Sonny Stitt was a well-known saxophonist who lived through a period of great change in jazz history. He performed and recorded for over four decades, enjoying visibility long after other bebop musicians had died, expatriated to Europe, or otherwise disappeared from the American music scene. This study is an attempt to take stock of this career to better understand Stitt's critical reputation as a Parker imitator.

Problem Statement

Sonny Stitt's critical legacy is that of a highly skilled bebop saxophonist in the mold of Charlie Parker. Statements from some musicians and critics, however, suggest he was more than that. This study intends to discover, through analysis of the critical literature and of Stitt's recorded works, if the prevailing perception of Stitt as a bebop practitioner and Parker imitator is accurate.

Sub-problems

1. The study will explore the relationship between Stitt and Parker through musical analysis of selected works and historical research.
2. While critics describe Stitt primarily as a talented bebop practitioner, many musicians cite him as a major influence on their musical development. This study will explore the nature of that influence.
3. Bebop was a movement focused around artists, musical innovators and cultural revolutionaries, the most prominent figure being Charlie Parker. Stitt's own interviews, however, suggest he did not think of himself in those terms. This

study will examine Stitt's views on music and their implications for the reception of his work.

CHAPTER II

BEBOP AND THE INFLUENCE OF CHARLIE PARKER

A Musical Revolution

The rise of bebop in the 1940s brought about unprecedented changes to the nature and direction of jazz music. Jazz had developed at an astonishing pace in the preceding decades, emerging from diverse genres and traditions to become the most popular music in the United States. Yet even compared with the impressive changes of the 1920s and 30s, bebop represented an entirely new stage in the development of jazz music. While swing has been characterized as the “establishment in jazz of a system of order,”¹ bebop was a “musical revolution,” a “progressive black jazz style” with a “radical avant-garde orientation.”² Swing

¹ Gunther Schuller, *The Swing Era: The Development of Jazz, 1930–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 845.

² Scott DeVeaux, “Constructing the Jazz Tradition,” in *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*, ed. Robert G. O’Meally (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 498; Paul Douglas Lopes, *The Rise of a Jazz Art World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 134, 208.

was a commercial triumph that expanded and extended the music in exciting if largely preexisting directions, but bebop represented a shift in both the form of the music and the consciousness of the people who made it: “With bebop, jazz finally became an *art* music.”³

This shift took expression in musical terms, as a new generation of players reimagined their craft and approach to group performance. On one level, the music became more complex. Rhythm and harmony were broken into smaller units, leading to fast bursts of notes, altered chord structures, and highly chromatic melodies. On another level, the music became simpler: approaches to phrasing were streamlined, and musical time was reconceived in terms of fluid pulse. Without the necessity of clear syncopated rhythms suitable for dancing, rhythm instruments were freed from strict timekeeping roles, giving rise to new accompanying styles; a freer, conversational style of soloing; and a wider variation in song tempos.

Bebop also signaled an ideological shift in the music. By the late 1930s, big band swing was an exciting, tightly arranged form of popular entertainment, and its commercial success propelled many of its leaders and soloists into

³ DeVeaux, “Constructing,” 499. Emphasis in original.

stardom. Bebop, by contrast, was a music subculture that developed largely away from public view. Its pioneers self-consciously identified as modernists, and created music that was often intentionally challenging to audiences and musicians alike.

As bebop matured, it seemed to offer an ideological alternative to commercial swing, to the limitations of a large ensemble medium, and to a market that disproportionately benefited white bands. In the words of one early historian, “younger black musicians, tired of the repetition of the riff-derived arrangements and lack of solo space in the big bands, began to form a new music that they felt could not be so easily appropriated by the white leaders.”⁴ A bebop ideology made a shift away from popular entertainment plausible; it validated the work of the bebop pioneers, and attracted new musicians to the fold.

The departure from big band swing attended a number of demographic changes, one of which was the makeup of the bands themselves. Bebop was a distinctly African-American musical movement. While white bands led the swing era in commercial success, “black musicians devised [bebop] without any help

⁴ Ira Gitler, *Swing to Bop: An Oral History of the Transition in Jazz in the 1940s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 4.

from whites, and they were its stars for a considerable period thereafter.”⁵ Other demographic changes included differences in performance venues and band geography. While swing was defined by big bands that performed in dance halls throughout America, bebop was “quintessentially a music of small combos” working out their music in New York nightclubs.⁶ The bebop pioneers were “usually veteran dance band musicians,” but left the itinerant lifestyle of the big bands behind for positions in New York-based ensembles.⁷

The transformation outlined above—the technical demands of bebop, a shifting ideological consciousness, and the concentration of likeminded players in a single city—gave rise to a new kind of musician. By the mid-1940s, it was clear that the skills and instrumental technique required to play the music were no longer those of just a decade before. After-hours jam sessions, which had long

⁵ James Lincoln Collier in Scott DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 18.

⁶ Scott DeVeaux, “Bebop and the Recording Industry: The 1942 AFM Recording Ban Reconsidered,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 41.1 (1998): 129.

⁷ *Ibid.*

formed an important part of the music, now came to the fore, with “improvisation becoming the defining skill” of a new “professional class of musician.”⁸

Bebop musicians were earnest, close-knit, and determined to develop their craft. “It was the most intelligent phase of our music,” said drummer Kenny Clarke. “It became almost a cult after a while, and the ones who felt themselves musically strong enough would enter it... everyone was studying.”⁹

The bebop pioneers, then, were a group of dedicated African-American musicians who sought to be respected as artists, not merely applauded as entertainers. They were a new kind of musician with a new kind of music, and they would provide the way forward for a generation of players to come.

“Like a Prophet”

By all accounts, the avatar of this new movement was Charlie Parker. Parker was bebop’s chief revolutionary and a brilliant musician precisely of this new kind. His playing was shatteringly original and represented the changes and

⁸ Lopes, *Rise of a Jazz Art World*, 150–151, 153.

⁹ Dizzy Gillespie and Al Fraser, *To Be, or Not—To Bop* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 141.

requirements of bebop in their highest form. According to musicians who knew him, Parker was a “genius of this century”,¹⁰ and “like a prophet,”¹¹ his playing most clearly showed the direction the new music would go. Parker was a deep student of music;¹² he was an artist, a self-taught intellectual and a black romantic figure.¹³ He was bebop’s most charismatic leader, its most colorful personality (in a movement full of colorful personalities) and an articulate spokesman. Most jazz musicians were influenced by him; others emulated or outright copied his style. Charlie Parker was God, to many.¹⁴

¹⁰ Yusef Lateef, quoted in Eric Porter, *What Is This Thing Called Jazz?: African American Musicians as Artists, Critics, and Activists* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 245.

¹¹ Kenny Clarke in Arthur Taylor, *Notes and Tones: Musician-to-Musician Interviews* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1993), 193.

¹² In a 1954 interview with saxophonist Paul Desmond, Parker spoke of practicing “at least 11 to 15 hours a day... over a period of 3 to 4 years,” and of planning further studies in Europe; Carl Woideck, ed., *The Charlie Parker Companion: Six Decades of Commentary* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1998), 123, 129.

¹³ Gillespie and Fraser, *To Be*, 235.

¹⁴ Miles Davis: “Bird himself was almost a god. People followed him around everywhere.” Jackie McLean: “[I] saw the crowd surge to the back... The people were so close around him that he was holding his saxophone case over his head... He was definitely an idol. People really loved him”; “Even passers-by recognized Bird, because when he walked around the Village he was like a god.” Miles Davis and Quincy Troupe, *Miles: The Autobiography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 68; Jackie McLean, interview by Ken Burns, April 10, 1996, accessed October 2011, <http://www.pbs.org/jazz/about/pdfs/McLean.pdf>; A. B. Spellman, *Four Jazz Lives* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 224.

It may seem improper to single out the contributions of one man; bebop was, after all, the work of an entire community of musicians. There are problems, however, with seeing Parker simply as a great musician living among other great musicians; indeed, the overwhelming consensus from critics and musicians suggests otherwise.

As early as 1954 (a year before Parker died), a French musicologist could observe it was “clear that *he created* a school.”¹⁵ A famous saxophonist who knew Parker wondered “[w]hat makes one man so much greater than anything around him,” whose “greatness is contained in some kind of conception that—it’s just *different*.”¹⁶ One noted critic saw Parker as a Copernican revolution in jazz, calling him “the first musician to come along after Armstrong who re-oriented the music in its most basic structure”, who “jump-started the music in a whole new direction” “no matter what instrument you played.”¹⁷ Another saxophonist

¹⁵ André Hodeir, originally in *Hommes et problèmes du jazz*; republished as André Hodeir, *Jazz, Its Evolution and Essence*, trans. David Noakes (New York: Da Capo Press, 1975), 104, emphasis added.

¹⁶ Gerry Mulligan in Gitler, *Swing to Bop*, 221, emphasis in original.

¹⁷ Gary Giddins, interview by Ken Burns, April 9, 1996, accessed October 2011, <http://www.pbs.org/jazz/about/pdfs/Giddins.pdf>. Trumpeter Cootie Williams agreed: “Louis Armstrong changed all the brass players around, but after Bird, *all* of the instruments had to change—drums, piano, bass, trombones, trumpets,

summarized: “It was not like there was this guy and that guy. There was everybody else, and there was Charlie.”¹⁸

The nature of Parker’s contribution to bebop has been explained in various ways. Some musicians described it in superlative terms. “Bird was kind of like the sun,” said Max Roach, “giving off the energy we drew from him.”¹⁹ Most musicians spoke of Parker’s musical genius; here Parker’s contribution was multifaceted, and involved a rethinking of several elements of music—rhythm, melody, harmony, and timbre.

Dizzy Gillespie, who worked closely with Parker during the early years of bebop, believed that their contributions were “so closely entwined that it’s difficult to find out who did what.”²⁰ Nonetheless, Gillespie saw Parker as a “catalyst” and singled out his musical phrasing as significant enough to set the music in a new direction:

saxophones, everything.” Nat Hentoff, *Jazz Is* (New York: Proscenium Publishers, 1992), Kindle edition, emphasis in original.

¹⁸ Al Cohn in Gitler, *Swing to Bop*, 220.

¹⁹ Quoted in Michael James, “Stitt, Parker, and the Question of Influence,” *Jazz Monthly* 5.11, January 1960, 9.

²⁰ Brian Priestley, *Chasin’ the Bird: The Life and Legacy of Charlie Parker* (London: Equinox Publishing, 2005), 36.

“When you phrase something like someone, you are copying them, whether you’re playing the same notes or not... [We] had all our rhythm and our harmonies all ready, and then Charlie Parker came on the scene demonstrating how it could be done. And then all of us fell in behind that.”²¹

Parker’s Imitators

Saxophone players, in particular, seemed unable to escape the influence. If musicians on multiple instruments adopted Parker’s phrasing, saxophonists took much more, emulating his sound, vocabulary, and harmonic approach. Parker’s influence was pervasive enough to affect most saxophone players—even older players—subconsciously.²²

For some, the influence was intentional and total. Sonny Criss admitted he stopped liking other saxophone players once he heard Parker (“It was all over”).²³ For others, Parker’s influence was like a force to be resisted. Art Pepper “really dug Bird,” but avoided him because he “didn’t want Bird to destroy me.”²⁴

Parker’s effect on saxophonists was legendary. Bandleader and bassist Charles

²¹ Ibid.

²² Gitler, *Swing to Bop*, 34.

²³ Ibid., 168.

²⁴ Ibid., 224.

Mingus once addressed the phenomenon—while mocking Parker’s many imitators—by writing a composition subtitled “If Charlie Parker Were a Gunslinger, There’d Be a Whole Lot of Dead Copycats.”²⁵

Parker’s influence led to problems for some musicians. In a music genre where originality is often seen as the ultimate criterion of value, it is no small insult to be accused of copying. Copying betrayed one’s devotion to Parker, but could signify a lack of creativity as well. Saxophonist Jackie McLean said of his early career: “I didn’t want to be original; I wanted to play like Charlie Parker.” He was later criticized by Mingus, who told him, “When are you going to play your ideas... I already heard Bird play that a thousand times.”²⁶

Imitating Parker also won saxophonists few favors with the jazz critics, for whom “individuality and original creativity are typically valued above all other considerations.”²⁷ To this kind of critic, saxophonists who copied Parker did not have a style of their own, or worse, lacked the ability to come up with one. Most jazz saxophonists were influenced by Parker in the 1940s and 50s—and said so.

²⁵ Issued as Charles Mingus and His Jazz Groups, “Gunslinging Bird,” in *Mingus Dynasty*, Columbia, 1960, LP.

²⁶ McLean, interview by Ken Burns.

²⁷ Barry Kernfeld, “Stitt, Sonny,” *African American National Biography*, edited by Henry Louis Gates and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), accessed January 17, 2012, <http://www.oxfordaasc.com/article/opr/t0001/e0962>.

This the critics could forgive. Parker was, after all, the chief pioneer and exponent of a new style of jazz saxophone playing. While being influenced by Parker was excusable, however, conscious imitation was a more serious charge, and blatant copying could damage one's reputation.

CHAPTER III
THE LIFE AND MUSIC OF SONNY STITT

Introduction

Few saxophonists have been saddled with the charge of blatant copying as often as Edward “Sonny” Stitt. A near contemporary of the bebop pioneers, Stitt was only four years younger than Charlie Parker. He moved to New York in 1944–45, before bebop began to receive regular coverage in the jazz press.¹ By 1946, music critics were comparing Stitt’s saxophone playing to Parker in print.

Early statements were positive. For example, a critic wrote in 1946 that “young Stitt... sounds and looks amazingly like Charlie Parker and has better execution.”² As time went on, however, the comparisons became increasingly

¹ Kernfeld, “Stitt, Sonny,” *African American National Biography*. Stitt was with the Tiny Bradshaw Orchestra in August 1944 and the Billy Eckstine Orchestra in April 1945. He moved to New York City between those two dates. For more information on his career chronology, see below.

² Ken Vail, *Dizzy Gillespie: The Bebop Years, 1937–1952* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2003), 38.

dismissive in tone. By the mid-1960s, Stitt was accused of having “given up all pretense of individuality” and was encouraged to stop “playing Parker and [go] back to playing Stitt.”³ In 1967, jazz author Barry McRae wrote of Stitt: “Few coloured men could have been as well employed during the fifties. He worked quite regularly and received a fair share of record dates... [but] his real struggle was for recognition by the critics.”⁴

The comparison to Parker stayed with Stitt until the end of his life. Shortly before Stitt’s death in 1982, jazz writer Eric Myers summarized his career this way: “Sonny Stitt, 57, has been on the fringe of greatness since the early 1940s.”⁵ This situation was regrettable, since Stitt was “a titan of the bebop period who carried the banner of the new music into the 1950s and, after the death of Parker

³ These quotes are attributed to British music broadcaster Steve Race in Sonny Stitt, interview by Les Tomkins, London, 1965, accessed July 2011, <http://www.jazzprofessional.com/interviews/Sonny%20Stitt.htm>.

⁴ Barry McRae, *The Jazz Cataclysm* (South Brunswick: A.S. Barnes, 1967), 20–21. Critical statements like those quoted in this paragraph are discussed in detail in Chapters VI and VII of this study.

⁵ Eric Myers, “Sonny Stitt: Giant of the Bebop Era,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, December 5, 1981, 46.

in 1955, on into the modern era.”⁶ Stitt was also a great influence on younger musicians. However:

Even though many younger saxophonists modeled themselves on Stitt, building their styles around his playing, he was never recognized as a truly original saxophonist. Overshadowed by Parker, he had to run with the ruck, always carrying the opprobrium of being a Parker disciple.⁷

Stitt denied that he copied Parker. In interview after interview, he acknowledged Parker as an influence, but argued that his style was his own: “Of course he had an influence on my playing! He influenced everybody in jazz today... I may have a few of Bird’s clichés, but I can only be myself.”⁸

Notwithstanding these denials, the charge of being a Parker copyist remained with Stitt for the rest of his life. Stitt was recognized as a talented bebop practitioner, but dismissed as derivative—another saxophonist in the mold of Charlie Parker.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ David Bittan, “Don’t Call Me Bird: The Problems of Sonny Stitt,” *Down Beat*, 14 May, 1959, 19, quoted in Thomas Owens, *Bebop: The Music and Its Players* (Cary, NC: Oxford University Press, 1996), 251.

Family Background

Sonny Stitt was born Edward Hammond Boatner, Jr. on February 2, 1924. He was born into a religious household in Boston, Massachusetts, and was surrounded by music from an early age. Stitt's father, Edward Boatner, Sr., was a well-known composer of Negro spirituals, a church choir director, a music professor, and a singer.⁹ His mother Claudine Wicks (*née* Thibou) was a piano, organ, and dance teacher.¹⁰

Stitt was one of many Boatner children to show an interest in music. Stitt's father remarried twice and had other children. Two siblings from Boatner's second wife, Adelaide, also become musicians. Stitt's younger brother, Clifford Boatner, was a concert pianist. His sister Adelaide was a trained singer. A younger sister, Sarah, was later born to Boatner's third wife, Julia.¹¹

⁹ Tim Brooks, *Lost Sounds: Blacks and the Birth of the Recording Industry 1980–1919* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 471–72.

¹⁰ Ira Gitler, *The Masters of Bebop: A Listener's Guide* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2001), 43; Robert 'Bo' White, "Remembering the Musical Genius of Sonny Stitt: Saginaw's Lone Wolf," *Review* 763, accessed August 2014, <http://www.newreviewsite.com/articles/Remembering-the-Musical-Genius-of-Sonny-Stitt-Saginaw--039-s-Lone-Wolf/1186>.

¹¹ Brooks, *Lost Sounds*, 472.

In 1925, Boatner left Boston for Chicago, where he worked as a choir director and pursued a bachelor's degree at the Chicago College of Music.¹² Presumably Stitt and his mother accompanied him to Chicago, as Stitt's mother was a "singer in [Chicago's] National Baptist Convention Choir," which Boatner directed.¹³ Eventually Stitt's parents separated.¹⁴ Stitt stayed with his grandmother for a few years, then moved with his mother to Saginaw, Michigan.¹⁵ There Stitt was raised by his mother and (after she remarried) stepfather Robert Stitt,¹⁶ a foundry worker and future nightclub owner.¹⁷

¹² Gisele Glover, "The Life and Career of Edward Boatner and Inventory of the Boatner Papers at the Schomburg Center," *American Music Research Center Journal* 8–9 (1998–99): 92.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 100. A second account confirms that Stitt's mother was "a singer in a Chicago choir" (Brooks, *Lost Sounds*, 471). There are chronological and factual difficulties with these accounts. Glover writes that Wicks "first met Boatner" during his tenure as director of the National Baptist Convention Choir. However, this is difficult to reconcile with the claim that Boatner moved to Chicago in 1925, given that Stitt was born in 1924. Brooks incorrectly states that Stitt was born in Chicago, instead of Boston. A more likely explanation of the facts is that Boatner and Wicks met while Boatner was living in Boston. Stitt was born there, and the family moved to Chicago shortly thereafter.

¹⁴ "Sonny... was born in Massachusetts but raised in Michigan. His father had split and they were so poor..." Harriet Choice, "Sonny Stitt's Story: From Baptists to Bird," *Chicago Tribute*, August 27, 1971, Section 2.

¹⁵ "My mother got sick, so I stayed with my grandmother a couple of years. And when momma got well, we moved to Saginaw." Sonny Stitt, interview by Felix Grant, WMAL Radio, Washington, D.C., 1981.

¹⁶ There is some confusion in the literature as to whether Stitt was adopted. Brooks, for example, claims that "the boy was adopted by a family named Stitt at

Early Music Education

Stitt began his musical education in Saginaw. He started as a vocalist (“a boy soprano”) and sang well enough to win an amateur singing contest in the early 1930s.¹⁸ Stitt learned to read music and tap dance from his mother, a piano and dance teacher.¹⁹ He began playing piano at age seven and clarinet at around age ten.²⁰ Stitt took to the clarinet, practicing “whenever [he] could, in the

age seven and raised in Saginaw, Michigan.” The vast majority of sources in the literature, however, say nothing about Stitt being adopted, and state that Stitt was raised by Claudine, his biological mother. This is supported by U.S. Census records, which show a Robert Stitt living in Saginaw with Claudine (“wife”) and Edward (“son”) in 1940. Brooks, *Lost Sounds*, 471; “Michigan, 1940 Population Census: Population Schedules,” *FamilySearch*, database and digital images, search for Robert Stitt, Saginaw County, accessed September 22, 2016, <https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.3.1/TH-1971-27889-10651-69?cc=2000219>, Records of the Bureau of the Census, 1790–2007, RG 29 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 2012).

¹⁷ Stitt’s mother later married a third husband, Lonnie, and took his name, becoming Claudine Wicks. Zan Stewart, liner notes to *The Complete Roost Sonny Stitt Studio Sessions*, Sonny Stitt, Mosaic Records, CD box set, 2001, 2; White, “Remembering the Musical Genius of Sonny Stitt.”

¹⁸ According to Stitt, he was “about eight-years-old” at the time. Stitt, interview by Felix Grant.

¹⁹ Choice, “Sonny Stitt’s Story,” Section 2.

²⁰ Stewart writes that Stitt “played piano from about age five and started on clarinet at seven.” Seven seems young for the clarinet, however, given that Stitt started playing clarinet in his grade school band; it also contradicts Stitt’s account that he started at “about 10 years old.” Kernfeld, “Stitt, Sonny,” *African American National Biography*; Stitt, interview by Felix Grant; Stewart, liner notes to *The Complete Roost Sonny Stitt Studio Sessions*, 2.

mornings, at lunch, afternoons, evenings,” and was quickly promoted to second chair in his grade school band.²¹ When Stitt was around fourteen, his mother bought him an alto saxophone. Stitt was tutored on the instrument by Ken Mathews (a teacher at Central Junior High) and mentored by Kenny Anderson (a well-known Saginaw bandleader).²²

Stitt took advantage of the local music in Saginaw. Although a small city, Saginaw was connected to the broader Michigan music scene, and there were frequent live performances in nearby nightclubs and the American Legion Hall. Stitt attended these performances while he was still underage.²³ He participated in jam sessions at the American Legion,²⁴ and eventually found regular weekend

²¹ Quoted in Stewart, liner notes to *The Complete Roost Sonny Stitt Studio Sessions*, 3.

²² According to Stitt, Mathews “was known to hate blacks” and initially opposed Stitt playing clarinet in his band because “his lips were too thick.” Mathews became impressed with Stitt’s industriousness and improvement on the instrument, and gave him private lessons on clarinet and (later) on the saxophone. Stitt, quoted in *Ibid.*; White, “Remembering the Musical Genius of Sonny Stitt.”

²³ Stitt saw Benny Goodman, Charlie Christian, and Nat “King” Cole at the American Legion. “Cole and his band stayed at Stitt’s home... eating with the family and hosting an impromptu session in the parlor.” Zan Stewart, “Sonny Stitt: The Resurrection of a Reedman,” *Music and Sound Output*, July/August 1981, 41; White, “Remembering the Musical Genius of Sonny Stitt.”

²⁴ Woodrow Witt, “Sonny Stitt: His Life and Music” (DMA diss., University of Houston, 2000), 2–3. In Saginaw, the American Legion held after-hour jam sessions; Stitt “lived around the corner” and “could hear them playing all night.”

work reading music at a local nightclub.²⁵ Stitt also listened to jazz on the radio, which exposed him to new artists, including Duke Ellington alto saxophonist Johnny Hodges.²⁶

Stitt received additional instruction from other jazz saxophonists in the area. Local Michigan swing saxophonist George “Big Nick” Nicholas was likely Stitt’s first teacher on the instrument. Stitt also learned from Wardell Gray, who then lived in Michigan and often passed through Saginaw.²⁷

Early Professional Work

In the early 1940s, Stitt began to find work as a professional musician. This included finding work in touring bands, which had openings available as older musicians joined the U.S. Army in World War II. Stitt spent a summer

²⁵ Stitt, interview by Felix Grant.

²⁶ Stewart, “Sonny Stitt,” 41.

²⁷ Nicholas and Gray would stay at Stitt’s home because Saginaw’s only hotel did not accommodate African Americans. *Contemporary Musicians: Profiles of the People in Music*, ed. Michael L. LaBlanc (Detroit: Gale Research, 1989), s.v. “Sonny Stitt”; Stewart, liner notes to *The Complete Roost Sonny Stitt Studio Sessions*, 3; Wayne Enstice and Paul Rubin, *Jazz Spoken Here: Conversations with Twenty-Two Musicians* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 244–245.

touring with Cornelius Cornell, an Ellington-influenced band that included “Big Nick” Nicholas and trumpeter Thad Jones. He spent the following summer touring with Claude and Clifford Trenier in a Jimmy Lunceford-influenced band. Stitt stayed with the Treniers for six months, then returned home to finish high school on the insistence of his mother.²⁸

Stitt graduated from Saginaw High School in 1942. After high school, he performed in clubs in Detroit and joined the Sabby Lewis Orchestra in Boston, the town of his birth.²⁹ The following year Stitt was back in Michigan, working with a band called the Bama State Collegians. Stitt joined the Collegians on a tour from Detroit to New York City. While in New York, Stitt attended jam sessions at venues like the famous jazz clubs on 52nd Street and Minton’s Playhouse in Harlem.³⁰

²⁸ *Contemporary Musicians*, “Sonny Stitt”; Witt, “Sonny Stitt,” 3.

²⁹ Lars Bjorn and Jim Gallert, *Before Motown: A History of Jazz in Detroit, 1920–60* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 77; *Contemporary Musicians*, “Sonny Stitt.”

³⁰ Dieter Salemann, *Sonny Stitt: Solography, Discography, Band Routes, Engagements, in Chronological Order* (Basel: Jazz Circle, 1986) in Witt, “Sonny Stitt,” 3–4.

It was there that Stitt heard many bebop pioneers and future collaborators for the first time. New York City was then a flurry of modern musical activity. Stitt was only nineteen years old, and had “landed in the middle of a musical revolution.”³¹

The Tiny Bradshaw Orchestra

In July 1943 Stitt joined the Tiny Bradshaw Orchestra.³² Again, he was filling a vacancy created by the U.S. military draft.³³ Stitt was recommended to Bradshaw by his friend “Big Nick” Nicholas, who also played tenor saxophone in the group. Stitt then received a telegram from Bradshaw, and met up with the band in Chicago.³⁴

Joining the Tiny Bradshaw Orchestra was a great opportunity for Stitt, and would become his entrée into the wider jazz world. Bradshaw and his band had

³¹ *Contemporary Musicians*, “Sonny Stitt.”

³² Witt, “Sonny Stitt,” 4.

³³ W. Kim Heron, “Stitt’s Sax Makes the ‘Willow Weep’,” *Detroit Free Press*, July 25, 1980, 4B.

³⁴ Stewart, liner notes to *The Complete Roost Sonny Stitt Studio Sessions*, 3.

“gained national prominence” for their hit records with Decca in the 1930s.³⁵ By the mid-1940s, the Bradshaw band was performing arrangements in a “swinging jump-band style” and—increasingly as the decade went on—in “boogie-woogie and ‘jump’ idioms.”³⁶

While touring with Bradshaw, Stitt met two musicians he would get to know far better in New York City: Miles Davis and Charlie Parker. Stitt met a young Davis in East St. Louis.³⁷ He asked Davis to join the Bradshaw band, but Davis, still in high school, was not allowed to go.³⁸ Stitt met Parker in Kansas City. According to Stitt, he searched for Parker, found him on a city street, and began to talk with him. Parker then invited Stitt to join him for a music session.

³⁵ Lawrence McClellan, Jr., *The Later Swing Era: 1942 to 1955* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 45.

³⁶ Schuller, *The Swing Era*, 424.

³⁷ Enstice and Rubin, *Jazz Spoken Here*, 247.

³⁸ Bradshaw offered Davis a job on Stitt’s recommendation. Since Davis was in high school at the time, his mother refused to let him take it. Stitt and Davis likely met in 1943, though some accounts list the date as 1942 or 1944; in one account, Davis misremembers the band as McKinney’s Cotton Pickers. Davis and Troupe, *Miles*, 45; Dan Morgenstern and Sheldon Meyer, *Living with Jazz* (Random House Digital, 2004), Google eBook edition; Ben Sidran, *Talking Jazz: An Oral History* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), 13.

The two saxophonists played together; Parker told Stitt, “You sure sound like me.”³⁹

Stitt also recorded with the Tiny Bradshaw Orchestra. In 1944, the band recorded several sides in New York City for Regis Records.⁴⁰ In the same year, the band recorded in Hollywood for “Jubilee,” a radio variety show aimed at African-American servicemen overseas. The Tiny Bradshaw Orchestra served as the house band for several “Jubilee” programs. In one August 1944 program, Stitt performed a live improvised solo on an arrangement of “Ready, Set, Jump.” It was Stitt’s first solo captured on record.⁴¹

³⁹ Robert George Reisner, *Bird: The Legend of Charlie Parker* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1962), 216. The Kansas City anecdote is found again and again in the Stitt literature, and was often told by Stitt himself. The full anecdote and its history are discussed in depth in the section Meeting Charlie Parker in Chapter VI.

⁴⁰ Stewart, liner notes to *The Complete Roost Sonny Stitt Studio Sessions*, 3. The session produced four tracks (“Straighten Up and Fly Right,” “Bradshaw Bounce,” “After You’ve Gone,” and “Salt Lake City Bounce”), none of which contain solos by Stitt. “Regis,” *The Online Discographical Project*, accessed August 1, 2017, <http://www.78discography.com/Regis.htm>.

⁴¹ Dennis M. Spragg, Carl A. Hällström, and Bo F. Scherman, “Jubilee: Part 1: Programs 1-100,” Glenn Miller Archive, University of Colorado Boulder, last modified July 3, 2015, http://www.colorado.edu/amrc/sites/default/files/attached-files/jubilee_1-100.pdf, 86, 88, 115, 118. “Jubilee” was produced for radio broadcast, but selections from various programs have been released commercially. Stitt’s “Ready, Set, Jump” solo is analyzed at length in Chapter IX below.

In late 1944 or early 1945, Stitt left the Tiny Bradshaw Orchestra. He then moved to the New York area, where he found work in Newark and New York City.⁴² Then in April 1945, Stitt received another great opportunity: he was invited to join the Billy Eckstine Orchestra.⁴³

The Billy Eckstine Orchestra

Joining Eckstine was a musical and professional turning point for Stitt. Unless previous jazz groups Stitt had worked with, the Billy Eckstine Orchestra was a “bop big band.”⁴⁴ It developed organically out of the 52nd Street club scene and was a large-scale working out of the modern New York style. Many of the members of this classic iteration of Eckstine’s band were future jazz greats: alto saxophonist Charlie Parker, tenor saxophonists Dexter Gordon and Gene Ammons; trumpeters Dizzy Gillespie (who was also the band’s musical director) and Fats Navarro; and vocalist Sarah Vaughan.⁴⁵ The band was not a commercial

⁴² Stitt “appeared in Newark and NYC 1945–6.” Leonard Feather, *Inside Jazz* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1977), 98; Scott Yanow, *Jazz on Record: The First Sixty Years* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2003), 270.

⁴³ Kernfeld, “Stitt, Sonny,” *African American National Biography*.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Gillespie and Fraser, *To Be*, 254.

success, but it later became one of the most celebrated groups in modern jazz history.⁴⁶

While Stitt was with Eckstine, the saxophones had one of the strongest sections in the band. The section consisted of Gene Ammons (on tenor) and a group “dubbed the ‘Unholy Four’”—Stitt and John Jackson (alto), Dexter Gordon (tenor), and Leo Parker (baritone).⁴⁷ The group spent large amounts of time together, alternatively rehearsing and causing trouble. Stitt’s experience with Eckstine was musically productive; according to Gordon, Stitt was “sounding like a whirlwind then.”⁴⁸ Eckstine later had fond memories of the group, particularly its sense of humor despite the horrible Jim Crow conditions they faced while touring the South. Musically, “it was a love where everybody was seeking things... trying and learning.”⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Jazz arranger and composer Walter Gilbert Fuller identifies Eckstine’s band as “the beginning of [the] change in the music.” The group is also known as “the legendary Billy Eckstine band.” Gillespie and Fraser, *To Be*, 182; DeVeaux, *Birth of Bebop*, 339.

⁴⁷ Gordon: “There was no discipline on the stand at all.” Gitler, *Swing to Bop*, 131–132.

⁴⁸ Gordon, quoted in Gitler, *Masters of Bebop*, 207.

⁴⁹ Gitler, *Swing to Bop*, 128.

Stitt's tenure with the Eckstine Orchestra was important for additional reasons. It marked the beginning of a musical collaboration with Gillespie that spanned almost four decades. Joining Eckstine was also the first time that Stitt replaced Parker in a professional capacity. When Stitt joined the Eckstine Orchestra in April 1945, he was occupying the alto saxophone chair that Parker held the previous year.⁵⁰

The Dizzy Gillespie Orchestra and Sextet

In 1946, Stitt joined the second iteration of Dizzy Gillespie's jazz orchestra. Stitt was again filling in for Parker. Gillespie had worked with Parker earlier in the year, but when Parker became unavailable due to personal problems, Gillespie hired Stitt instead.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Witt writes: "it is believed that Stitt was Parker's replacement" [in the Eckstine band]. However, while Stitt did occupy the same position as Parker, he was likely not a direct replacement for Parker. According to DeVaux, Parker had left Eckstine months earlier (in August 1944). Witt, "Sonny Stitt," 6; DeVaux, *Birth of Bebop*, 350.

⁵¹ For details about this group and what happened with Gillespie and Parker in early 1946, see Gillespie and Fraser, *To Be*, 242–250; Carl Woideck, *Charlie Parker: His Music and Life* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 22–23.

The Dizzy Gillespie Orchestra was a continuation of the work Gillespie began with Eckstine: an adaptation of his small group experiments with Charlie Parker to a large-ensemble setting.⁵² Stitt worked in Gillespie's orchestra from April to June at the Spotlite Club on 52nd Street.⁵³ Gillespie later signed the group to Victor Records, but Stitt had left by this time, leaving his contributions to the group as a soloist undocumented.⁵⁴

The Dizzy Gillespie orchestra developed out of a jazz sextet that Stitt was also a member of. The sextet consisted of Gillespie, Stitt, vibraphonist Milt Jackson, pianist Al Haig, bassist Ray Brown, and drummer Stan Levey. Its music

⁵² “We wanted to sound in the same idiom as the small bebop unit with Charlie Parker, like what we had played in the small group. We wanted the big band to sound like that.” Gillespie and Fraser, *To Be*, 252–253.

⁵³ Witt, “Sonny Stitt,” 8–9.

⁵⁴ Max Harrison, Eric Thacker, and Stuart Nicholson, *The Essential Jazz Records: Modernism to Postmodernism*, vol. 2 (London: Mansell Publishing, 2000), 208. According to Ken Vail and the Jazz Discography Project, Stitt recorded with Gillespie's orchestra in June and July 1946. These performances are available as Dizzy Gillespie, *Showtime at the Spotlite: 52nd Street, New York City, June 1946*, Uptown Records, 2008, 2 CDs and Dizzy Gillespie, *Odyssey: 1945–1952*, Savoy Jazz, 2002, 3 CDs. However, neither performance contains any solos by Stitt. Vail, *Dizzy Gillespie*, 40; “Dizzy Gillespie Discography,” *Jazz Discography Project*, accessed May 9, 2015, <http://www.jazzdisco.org/dizzy-gillespie/discography>.

was also in the same style as Gillespie's group with Parker from the previous year.⁵⁵

On May 15, 1946, the sextet recorded in New York City.⁵⁶ This was Stitt's first professional small group recording session. Stitt performed solos throughout the session, including on Gillespie's composition "Oop Bop Sh'Bam." The recording of "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" was released later in the year, and became a "bebop hit."⁵⁷

Other New York Work

1946 was a productive year for Stitt, but not only because of his high-profile work with Gillespie. In May, Stitt performed at Lincoln Square Center for an all-star jazz concert promoted as a "Rebop Jam Session."⁵⁸ Stitt left Gillespie's

⁵⁵ Except for Stitt ("in place of Charlie Parker"), each member of the sextet was part of an earlier group that Gillespie brought to California at the end of 1945. Gillespie and Fraser, *To Be*, 251; "Dizzy Gillespie Discography."

⁵⁶ "Dizzy Gillespie Discography." The drummer on the recording was Kenny Clarke (instead of Stan Levey).

⁵⁷ Gillespie and Fraser, *To Be*, 255.

⁵⁸ The concert, produced by Monte Kay and Symphony Sid, included many of Stitt's former bandmates in the Billy Eckstine Orchestra. Kernfeld, "Stitt, Sonny," *African American National Biography*; Leif Bo Peterson and Theo Rehak, *The Music and Life of Theodore "Fats" Navarro: Infatuation*, (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2009), 102; Leif Bo Peterson and Theo Rehak, "Fats Navarro

orchestra and small group in June, then found work as a leader and sideman at the 52nd Street clubs.⁵⁹

In 1946, Stitt also co-led a small group billed as The Be Bop Boys. The group featured Kenny Dorham on trumpet and Bud Powell on piano, and recorded three sessions in August and September for Savoy Records. Stitt recorded an additional Savoy session for drummer Kenny Clarke in September; this session included Dorham, Powell, and trumpeter Fats Navarro.⁶⁰

Chicago, Detroit, Lexington

While 1946 was a productive year for Stitt, his career would soon be upended by drug-related problems. The problems disrupted what seemed likely to be another promising year. Based on his previous work with Gillespie, Stitt won the 1947 *Esquire* New Star award for alto saxophone—an award Charlie Parker

Chronology: 1946,” accessed August 16, 2017, <http://csis.pace.edu/~varden/navarro/Fats%20Navarro%20Chronology%201946.htm>.

⁵⁹ Witt, “Sonny Stitt,” 9.

⁶⁰ Kernfeld, “Stitt, Sonny,” *African American National Biography*; “Bud Powell Discography,” *Jazz Discography Project*, accessed June 5, 2017, <http://www.jazzdisco.org/bud-powell/discography>.

had won the year before.⁶¹ According to Miles Davis, Stitt participated in a 1947 concert of bebop all-stars at Lincoln Square Center in New York; the concert included Parker, Davis, Clarke, Navarro, Max Roach, Art Blakey, Dexter Gordon, Freddie Webster, and other famous musicians in jazz history.⁶² Due to problems arising from heroin addiction, however, Stitt also lost his cabaret card around this time, making it illegal for him to work in New York nightclubs.⁶³

Between late 1946 and early 1947, Stitt left New York City and moved to Chicago. Once there, he performed at South Chicago's Jumptown Club with Davis and saxophonist Gene Ammons, and at ballroom dances with saxophonist Johnny Griffin.⁶⁴ Stitt led groups with Freddy Webster, performing at the Strobe

⁶¹ Stitt, interview by Felix Grant; Leonard Feather, *The Jazz Years: Earwitness to an Era* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1987), 86, 90.

⁶² Davis and Troupe, *Miles*, 105. Other sources state that Stitt left New York City in late 1946—before the concert took place.

⁶³ In his autobiography, Davis wrote of this period: “Bird, Sonny Stitt, Bud Powell, Fats Navarro, Gene Ammons were all using heroin... They were shooting up all the time.” *Ibid.*, 129; Kernfeld, “Stitt, Sonny,” *African American National Biography*.

⁶⁴ Kernfeld, “Stitt, Sonny,” *African American National Biography*; Morgenstern and Meyer, *Living with Jazz*. It is likely that Ammons and Griffin helped Stitt find work, as they were both Chicago-born musicians.

Hotel and Twin Terrace Cafe.⁶⁵ He also led an octet with Ammons that appeared on Dave Garroway's radio program *The 11:60 Club*.⁶⁶

In the summer of 1947, Stitt left Chicago and returned to Detroit. On Thanksgiving, Stitt headlined a "Special Bebop Session" at the Mirror Ballroom.⁶⁷ He also performed at sessions in November and December with Gillespie, and then reportedly with Parker and Davis at the El Sino Club.⁶⁸ In late 1947 or early 1948, Stitt recorded twice for Detroit-based Sensation Records under the name Lord Nelson. The first session included trumpeter Russell Jacquet, trombonist J. J. Johnson, and drummer Shadow Wilson. The second session was released pseudonymously as "Lord Nelson and His Boppers," and included vibraphonist Milt Jackson.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Kernfeld, "Stitt, Sonny," *African American National Biography*.

⁶⁶ Witt, "Sonny Stitt," 9.

⁶⁷ Bjorn and Gallert, *Before Motown*, 99.

⁶⁸ Witt, "Sonny Stitt," 9.

⁶⁹ Tom Lord's *The Jazz Discography Online* dates these recording sessions to May and June 1948. However, Stewart argues that the sessions were earlier, as Stitt was in the U.S. Public Health Service Narcotics Hospital in Lexington, Kentucky during that time (see below). Tom Lord, "Sonny Stitt," in *The Jazz Discography Online*, online database, accessed September 11, 2017, <https://www.lordisco.com>; Witt, "Sonny Stitt," 9–10; Stewart, liner notes to *The Complete Roost Sonny Stitt Studio Sessions*, 4; "Fantasy Records Discography: 19??–1950," *Jazz Discography Project*, accessed August 21, 2017, <http://www.jazzdisco.org/fantasy-records/discography-19-1950>.

In early 1948, Stitt was arrested in Detroit on narcotics-related charges. Stewart writes that Stitt was then “convicted, sentenced to two years in prison and subsequently incarcerated at the prison unit at U.S. Public Health Service facility at Lexington, Kentucky from March 10, 1948 until September 9, 1949.”⁷⁰ Known to musicians as the Lexington Narcotics Hospital or “Narco,” this facility was a drug treatment center as well as a prison. From the 1940s to the 1960s, it housed many other well-known jazz musicians besides Stitt—saxophonist Sonny Rollins, trumpeters Chet Baker and Red Rodney, pianist Tadd Dameron, and drummer Elvin Jones. Narco had an unorthodox approach to drug rehabilitation. Musician inmates were supplied with working musical instruments, allowed to form bands and give weekly concerts, and “were encouraged to practice up to six hours a day.”⁷¹

Although Stitt was free to make music at Narco, being in prison still meant missing out on professional opportunities. In one such case, Stitt lost an

⁷⁰ Stewart, liner notes to *The Complete Roost Sonny Stitt Studio Sessions*, 4.

⁷¹ Nancy D. Campbell, J. P. Olsen and Luke Walden, *The Narcotic Farm: The Rise and Fall of America's First Prison for Drug Addicts* (New York: Abrams, 2008), 152, 157; John Szwed, *So What: The Life of Miles Davis* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 102.

opportunity to participate in a historically significant project. While Stitt was in Kentucky, Davis searched for him to play alto saxophone in the nonet that would eventually record *Birth of the Cool*. Davis could not find him, and hired Lee Konitz instead.⁷²

The Tenor Saxophone

In late 1949, Stitt was released from prison; he then returned to New York City. The following few years brought two important changes in Stitt's music: a shift from the alto saxophone to the tenor saxophone as Stitt's main instrument, and the formation of a musical partnership with tenor saxophonist Gene Ammons.

From 1949 to 1952, Stitt recorded primarily—though not exclusively—on the tenor saxophone. This move away from the alto was interpreted by critics as Stitt's attempt to free himself from his reputation as a Parker imitator.⁷³ Stitt later

⁷² Davis: "I wanted Sonny Stitt [on alto saxophone], but Sonny was in jail, you know." Ibid., 70; Stewart, liner notes to *The Complete Roost Sonny Stitt Studio Sessions*, 4.

⁷³ An example from an article in *Down Beat* magazine in 1959: "Weighed down by the constant comparison [to Charlie Parker], Stitt turned partly away from alto, an instrument he loves, and learned tenor" (David Bittan, quoted in Witt, "Sonny Stitt," 10).

denied that this was the reason: “It wasn’t Charlie that made me do it. I had experience playing the tenor before [and] a great fondness for Lester Young.”⁷⁴

Setting Stitt’s motives aside for the moment, the tenor saxophone recordings encompass only a part of Stitt’s musical activities during this period. Written accounts in the jazz literature, as well as live recordings of concerts at Carnegie Hall and the WNYC Jazz Festival show that Stitt continued to perform publicly on alto after his release from prison in late 1949.⁷⁵ He also made studio recordings on alto in the early 1950s, albeit far less frequently than on tenor.

Stitt’s preference for tenor saxophone in the studio was less noticeable by the mid-1950s, when he made several sessions as a leader on alto.⁷⁶ From 1955 onward, Stitt performed and recorded regularly on both instruments, favoring the tenor primarily in his 1960’s organ-based bands and in projects with other tenor saxophonists.

⁷⁴ Stitt, quoted in Harrison, Thacker, and Nicholson, *Essential Jazz Records*, 65.

⁷⁵ Lord, *Jazz Discography Online*. See below for a more detailed description of Stitt’s performances and recordings during this period.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

Gene Ammons

The most important such project was the two-tenor saxophone group that Stitt formed with Gene Ammons in 1949. This group was not the first time the two saxophonists worked together. Stitt and Ammons had both been members of the Billy Eckstine Orchestra in the mid-1940s. After Eckstine disbanded his orchestra in 1947, Ammons had returned to Chicago, his hometown, where he co-
led a group with Stitt.⁷⁷

The 1950's Stitt-Ammons group was a departure from Stitt's earlier New York work. This was not only because Stitt was performing on the tenor saxophone; it was also because the concept of the group was different from that of Stitt's previous ensembles. Rather than being a conduit for modern jazz improvisation, the group was built on Stitt and Ammons's musical relationship: the contrast between their improvisational styles and their "thrilling duels on the bandstand."⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Bob Porter, *Soul Jazz: Jazz in the Black Community, 1945–1975* (Xlibris Publishing, 2016), Google eBook edition, "Gene Ammons."

⁷⁸ Contemporary Musicians, "Sonny Stitt." Bassist Buster Williams, who toured with Stitt and Ammons in 1960, described their musical relationship this way: "Sonny Stitt was a great technician, and he would be on the bandstand... just dazzling everybody, playing all this beautiful stuff... And when Sonny would

The group was also a departure for Stitt stylistically. Reflecting Ammons's bebop and boogie-woogie backgrounds, the group performed music "on the border between jazz and R&B."⁷⁹ This R&B element boosted the ensemble's appeal, and helped to make Stitt a minor celebrity among African-American audiences.

The original Stitt-Ammons group was a small combo with piano accompaniment. Stitt and Ammons made several recordings between 1950 and 1952. The recordings contain different rhythm sections; many also contain additional horns. Stitt and Ammons stopped recording in early 1952 but worked intermittently until 1955.⁸⁰ Due to drug-related activities, Ammons then spent much of the following fourteen years in prison.⁸¹ Following his release in 1961,

finish... [Ammons] would step up to the mic and play one note. And everybody would go crazy." Ed Enright, "Gene Ammons: Ultimate Redemption," *Down Beat*, August 2012, 35.

⁷⁹ David H. Rosenthal, *Hard Bop: Jazz and Black Music, 1955–1965* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 26–27.

⁸⁰ Lord, *Jazz Discography Online*; Kernfeld, "Stitt, Sonny," *African American National Biography*.

⁸¹ Ammons was incarcerated on three occasions for drug possession and parole violation 1958–61 and 1962–69. Contemporary Musicians, "Gene Ammons."

the two saxophonists formed a new group in Chicago. They reunited again in the early 1970s, performing sporadically until Ammons's death in 1974.⁸²

Back in New York

After Stitt's own release from prison in late 1949, he returned to New York City, where he continued to perform and record in earnest.⁸³ In early October, he worked at the Black Orchid Club on 52nd Street.⁸⁴ Later that month, Stitt recorded a session with J. J. Johnson, pianist John Lewis, and drummer Max Roach for Prestige Records. It was his first of many recording sessions for

⁸² Stitt and Ammons's final group record, *Together Again for the Last Time*, comprises material from sessions half a year before Ammons's death. Kernfeld, "Stitt, Sonny," *African American National Biography*; "Prestige Records Discography: 1973–Present," *Jazz Discography Project*, accessed September 2, 2017, <http://www.jazzdisco.org/prestige-records/discography-1973-present>.

⁸³ Kernfeld writes that Stitt's New York City cabaret card was "reauthorized in around 1950." This seems likely, as Stitt performed in New York clubs in 1949–50. However, according to Gitler—who was immersed in the New York jazz scene and knew Stitt personally—"he was finally able to secure another cabaret card... in the sixties." Kernfeld, "Stitt, Sonny," *African American National Biography*; Gitler, *Masters of Bebop*, 43.

⁸⁴ Witt, "Sonny Stitt," 10. This club was formerly the Onyx Club, a famous jazz venue for New York bebop musicians in the mid-1940s.

Prestige, and produced Stitt's first recording on tenor saxophone.⁸⁵ In December 1949 and January 1950, Stitt recorded on tenor saxophone as a leader with pianist Bud Powell, bassist Curley Russell, and Max Roach—again for Prestige.⁸⁶ On December 24, Stitt performed on alto saxophone at the “Stars of Modern Jazz” Carnegie Hall Christmas concert, appearing with the same group plus Miles Davis, baritone saxophonist Serge Chaloff, and trombonist Bennie Green. Also appearing at the concert were groups led by Charlie Parker, pianist Lennie Tristano, tenor saxophonist Stan Getz, and Sarah Vaughan.⁸⁷

1950 was a similarly busy year for Stitt. In February, he performed with his two-tenor group with Ammons at the Birdland club.⁸⁸ This group worked mainly at Birdland until 1951; its performances in July 1950 were opposite

⁸⁵ Ibid.; Joshua Berrett and Louis G. Bourgois III, *The Musical World of J. J. Johnson* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2002), 307–308. Stitt recorded for Prestige for over two decades.

⁸⁶ Kernfeld, “Stitt, Sonny,” *African American National Biography*.

⁸⁷ Ibid.; Gary Giddins, *Visions of Jazz: The First Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 281. A recording of the concert has since been released as Charlie Parker, *Charlie Parker and the Stars of Modern Jazz at Carnegie Hall, Christmas 1949*, Jass J-CD-16, 1989, CD.

⁸⁸ Stewart, liner notes to *The Complete Roost Sonny Stitt Studio Sessions*, 5.

Charlie Parker with Strings.⁸⁹ In addition to Birdland, Stitt and Ammons began to play a “circuit of small... black clubs that catered to a hip jazz audience.”⁹⁰

Around June, Stitt worked with Miles Davis again at the Black Orchid Club, one of the last remaining jazz clubs on 52nd Street. The band included Bud Powell, tenor saxophonist Wardell Gray, and drummer Art Blakey.⁹¹

Prestige and Roost Records

During this period, Stitt recorded a tremendous amount of material for Prestige Records. From his first date after leaving prison in October 1949 until February 1952, Stitt participated in a total of nineteen sessions for the label.⁹²

⁸⁹ Kernfeld, “Stitt, Sonny,” *African American National Biography*; Ken Vail, *Bird’s Diary: The Life of Charlie Parker, 1945–1955* (Chessington: Castle Communications, 1996), 79.

⁹⁰ Bob Weinstock, the producer of Prestige Records, said the venues were “small black joints, not real jazz clubs, not R&B rooms either.” Stewart, liner notes to *The Complete Roost Sonny Stitt Studio Sessions*, 5.

⁹¹ Arnold Shaw, *52nd Street: The Street of Jazz* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1971), 299; Davis and Troupe, *Miles*, 135.

⁹² All discographical information in this paragraph is taken from “Prestige Records Discography: 1949–1950,” *Jazz Discography Project*, accessed August 23, 2017, <http://www.jazzdisco.org/prestige-records/discography-1949-1950> and “Prestige Records Discography: 1951–1952,” *Jazz Discography Project*, accessed September 2, 2017, <http://www.jazzdisco.org/prestige-records/discography-1951-1952>.

Apart from the J. J. Johnson session described above (where Stitt was a sideman), each of these sessions was either a solo date for Stitt or a group date with Gene Ammons. On the sessions Stitt recorded mostly on tenor, though also on baritone;⁹³ one session from December 1950 had Stitt using an alto borrowed from jazz journalist Ira Gitler.⁹⁴

Most of Stitt's sessions as a leader were recorded with a quartet. The rhythm sections varied; many contained Bud Powell, Kenny Drew, or Duke Jordan on piano; Curley Russell or Gene Wright on bass; and Max Roach or Art Blakey on drums. The dates with Gene Ammons varied from quintets (the most common format) to septets and octets with several horns.⁹⁵ Stitt's records with Ammons "sold well," with one recording, "Blues Up and Down," becoming "a minor hit."⁹⁶

⁹³ Stitt said that he "made a couple sides on the baritone" but "was forced on that." Stitt, interview by Felix Grant.

⁹⁴ Marc Myers, "Sonny Stitt's Prestige Ballads," *JazzWax*, accessed December 2, 2016, <http://www.jazzwax.com/2011/01/sonny-stitt-prestige-ballads.html>.

⁹⁵ In the larger ensembles, Stitt and Ammons took turns playing baritone saxophone on some arrangements in addition to tenor. Bob Porter, *Soul Jazz*, "Gene Ammons."

⁹⁶ Stewart, liner notes to *The Complete Roost Sonny Stitt Studio Sessions*, 5; Scott Yanow, *Bebop* (San Francisco: Miller Freeman Books, 2000), 96. The recordings discussed in this paragraph have been collected and rereleased as Sonny Stitt,

In November 1952, Stitt began to record for New York-based Roost Records. The co-founder of the label, Teddy Reig, had previously produced Charlie Parker's first session as a leader in 1945.⁹⁷ Reig connected the signing of Stitt to Roost with Parker: "Bird had deep affection for Sonny... He said Sonny could play and anytime Bird said someone could play, I listened."⁹⁸ Between November 1952 and April 1965, Stitt recorded a total of eighteen sessions for the label. For the first four of those years, Stitt was likely under contract; he recorded exclusively for Roost until 1956.⁹⁹

In his early Roost recordings, Stitt was featured on orchestral arrangements of jazz standards as well as Stitt's own originals. Reig hired arrangers Johnny Richards (in 1953), Quincy Jones (in 1955) and their respective orchestras for these sessions. For the remaining Roost recordings, Stitt performed with small groups—usually quartets. Frequent collaborators included Hank Jones

Stitt's Bits: The Bebop Recordings, 1949–1952, Prestige PRCD3-30043-2, 2006, CD box set.

⁹⁷ Stewart, liner notes to *The Complete Roost Sonny Stitt Studio Sessions*, 5. The Parker session was for Savoy Records. It produced the classic bebop recording "Ko Ko," which is analyzed in Chapter XIV of this study.

⁹⁸ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 6.

⁹⁹ All discographical information in this and the following paragraph is taken from *Ibid.*, 6–27.

and Jimmy Jones on piano; and Papa Jo Jones, Shadow Wilson, Charlie Persip, and Roy Haynes on drums.¹⁰⁰ Stitt recorded for Roost on both alto and tenor saxophones; on many sessions, he played both horns.¹⁰¹

Career as a Single Artist

In the early to mid-1950s, Stitt broke up his band and began working as a single artist. This move may have been motivated by legal troubles, as Stitt was “sued over payment of commissions” in 1953.¹⁰² Working as a single artist often meant that Stitt traveled alone, performing with different musicians in each city. Sometimes Stitt was recorded with local musicians. For example, Stitt’s live 1954 performances with tenor saxophonist Eddie “Lockjaw” Davis and a local Boston rhythm section were taped and later released.¹⁰³ Stitt did not work with local

¹⁰⁰ Many of Stitt’s Roost albums did not list their personnel. On these albums, the names of the bassists remain unknown. Stewart addresses this issue in *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁰¹ Sixteen of Stitt’s eighteen Roost recording sessions have been collected and rereleased as Sonny Stitt, *The Complete Roost Sonny Stitt Studio Sessions*, Mosaic Records, CD box set, 2001.

¹⁰² According to *Jet* magazine: “Bandleader Sonny Stitt and his agent Dick Carpenter have taken their case to court. Stitt, being sued over payment of commissions, will junk his band and play as a single.” Major Robinson, “New York Beat,” *Jet*, April 23, 1953, 64.

¹⁰³ Lord, *Jazz Discography Online*; Stewart, liner notes to *The Complete Roost Sonny Stitt Studio Sessions*, 7.

musicians exclusively, however. He still performed on occasion with established New York-based rhythm sections.¹⁰⁴

Over time, Stitt grew dissatisfied with his career as a single artist. At the beginning of the 1950s, Stitt lived in New York City, but was “living in hotels” and “kinda homeless.”¹⁰⁵ He then spent much of the decade on the road without a working band. In 1959, Stitt was finally featured in an article in *Down Beat* magazine. The article describes Stitt’s frustration with his career at that point:

Since 1951, [Stitt] has been leading combos or working as a single, picking up rhythm sections where he is playing...

[He] has grown tired of late with touring the country as a single, partly because he finds many musicians are afraid of playing behind him. By the time they gain confidence, the date is ending and Sonny must move on to another town. He would like to have a band, but needs a backer with money...

“I want to be in New York with my own combo,” he said. “I’d like to get an apartment and make the city my headquarters... I’d like to have a good band... I’d like to be playing with guys I like. I have to be semi-happy to blow well.”¹⁰⁶

Despite Stitt’s desire to establish himself as a bandleader, his work as a single in the 1950s presaged much of his work in the decades that followed.

¹⁰⁴ Stewart, liner notes to *The Complete Roost Sonny Stitt Studio Sessions*, 7. For example, in 1955, Stitt worked with bassist Oscar Pettiford and drummer “Papa” Jo Jones at the Loop Lounge in Cleveland.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁰⁶ Bittan, “Don’t Call Me Bird,” 20.

While Stitt toured and recorded with his own groups—and with other world-class musicians as a sideman—he would continue an itinerant career as a single for the rest of his life.

First Marriage/Death of Charlie Parker

In addition to changes in Stitt's professional life, the 1950s were significant for personal reasons. On December 23, 1951, Stitt married Barbara Lancaster, then a chorus girl at Club Ebony in Philadelphia.¹⁰⁷ The couple would divorce in the late 1950s.

Stitt's popularity with African-American audiences was reflected in the coverage his marriage received in the black press. Between 1954 and 1960, Stitt and Lancaster's marriage woes and subsequent divorce were chronicled in the "New York Beat" section of *Jet* magazine.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ "Marriages," *The Billboard*, January 12, 1952, 52.

¹⁰⁸ A typical example: "When bandleader Sonny Stitt brought home a \$750 bronze bust of himself, his wife, Barbara, a chorus girl, was so mad at his extravagance she rushed out and bought herself a \$2,500 mink stole." Major Robinson, "New York Beat," *Jet*, May 15, 1958, 63.

On March 12, 1955, Charlie Parker died in New York City. Stitt was a pallbearer at Parker's funeral; he later referred to the experience as "the worst gig I ever had in my life."¹⁰⁹ According to the jazz literature, Stitt had other encounters with Parker in the months preceding Parker's untimely death. Many of these encounters were similarly upsetting. Around Christmas 1944, Stitt was playing at the Apollo Theater. Parker came to the venue and asked Stitt to borrow one of his saxophones. Stitt refused. Parker then attempted to break into Stitt's dressing room and steal one of his horns.¹¹⁰ According to another well-known anecdote, Stitt saw Parker a week before he died. Parker told him: "Man, I'm not long for this life. You carry on." He then promised to leave Stitt with "the keys to the kingdom."¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Stitt, interview by Felix Grant.

¹¹⁰ Reisner, *Bird*, 189.

¹¹¹ Gitler, *Masters of Bebop*, 44; Reisner, *Bird*, 215. The events contained in this paragraph are discussed at length in Chapter VI, Historical Analysis I: Stitt's Career.

Verve Records and Jazz at the Philharmonic

In the mid to late-1950s, Stitt started new projects that broke the monotony of working as a single artist. The first of these was an album for jazz impresario Norman Granz's Norgran Records in January 1956. The album, *The Modern Jazz Sextet*, included Modern Jazz Quartet members John Lewis (piano) and Percy Heath (bass), as well as Dizzy Gillespie, Skeeter Best (guitar), and Charlie Persip (drums).¹¹² It also featured a tribute to Charlie Parker ("Blues for Bird") written by Gillespie and Stitt. *The Modern Jazz Sextet* was Stitt's first recording for a label other than Roost since 1953, and the first of several sessions for Granz. It was also Stitt's first small group recording with Gillespie since the session that produced "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" in 1946.¹¹³

Stitt's reunion with Gillespie led to additional performing and recording opportunities. In September 1956, Stitt recorded his first album as a leader for Granz's new label, Verve Records. The album, titled *New York Jazz*, featured Ray

¹¹² The album was released under the title *The Modern Jazz Sextet*. "Verve Records Discography: 1956," *Jazz Discography Project*, accessed September 10, 2017, <https://www.jazzdisco.org/verve-records/discography-1956>.

¹¹³ "Dizzy Gillespie Discography."

Brown on bass and Papa Jo Jones on drums.¹¹⁴ In October, Stitt (on alto saxophone) joined Gillespie, Stan Getz, and members of the Modern Jazz Quartet (Lewis, Heath, and drummer Connie Kay) in performances for Jazz at the Philharmonic (JATP), a touring concert series that was also produced by Granz.¹¹⁵

The JATP concerts were a success and led to further opportunities for Stitt. Granz “was so excited by the nightly high-energy jousting of Stan, Gillespie, and Stitt that he brought them into a Los Angeles studio on October 16, 1956—immediately after the tour ended—to create the album *For Musicians Only*.”¹¹⁶ The three horns were joined by John Lewis on piano, Herb Ellis on guitar, Ray Brown on bass, and Stan Levey on drums.

For Musicians Only was unusual for a studio recording of its time. Each of the four tracks were recorded at a fast to very fast tempo. Musicians were encouraged to take long solos. The result is an album that consists mainly of up-tempo improvisation. As Getz biographer Donald Maggin writes:

¹¹⁴ “Verve Records Discography: 1956.”

¹¹⁵ A live 1956 recording of Stitt with this group was finally released in 2011. Ella Fitzgerald et al., *Jazz at the Philharmonic: Seattle 1956*, Acrobat Music, 2011, 2 CDs.

¹¹⁶ Donald Maggin, quoted in Witt, “Sonny Stitt,” 14.

[T]here is an intensely competitive air to the session. Stitt contributes strongly to this feeling; he sounds as if he wants to prove that he is the fastest gun in the West, and as Stan later commented, he pushed hard: “With Stitt you’ve got to work. He doesn’t let you rest. You’ve *got* to work hard, or you’re left at the starting gate.”¹¹⁷

New Quartet and *Sonny Side Up*

In 1956, Stitt formed a working quartet that stayed “together at least a year.”¹¹⁸ The quartet consisted of pianist Charles “Dolo” Coker, bassist Edgar Willis, and drummer Kenny Dennis. It toured throughout the United States and made two recordings—one for Roost, and one for Verve (with pianist Bobby Timmons).¹¹⁹ In an interview, Coker spoke about Stitt’s habit of inviting other musicians to sit in with the band during live performances:

Stitt really tested your mettle... You either could play with him or you couldn’t... He’d call something simple, like a blues, then run it through the 12 keys. He’d test everybody. It was really a challenge to play with him on any instrument at any level, period.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Ibid., emphasis in original.

¹¹⁸ Stewart, liner notes to *The Complete Roost Sonny Stitt Studio Sessions*, 10.

¹¹⁹ The albums were *37 Minutes & 48 Seconds with Sonny Stitt* (Roost) and *Personal Appearance* (Verve). Ibid.; “Verve Records Discography: 1957,” *Jazz Discography Project*, accessed September 10, 2017, <https://www.jazzdisco.org/verve-records/discography-1957>.

¹²⁰ Charles Coker, quoted in Stewart, liner notes to *The Complete Roost Sonny Stitt Studio Sessions*, 10.

In October 1957, Stitt recorded his third solo album for Verve, *Only the Blues*, with Roy Eldridge on trumpet and Oscar Peterson on piano, as well as previous collaborators Ellis (guitar), Brown (bass), and Levey (drums). In December, Stitt reunited with Gillespie again on two studio sessions for Verve. The first session produced the album *Duets*. The second session produced one of Stitt's most celebrated recordings and a hard bop classic, *Sonny Side Up*.¹²¹

Like *For Musicians Only*, *Sonny Side Up* is a small group recording with a three-horn frontline of Gillespie, Stitt (this time on tenor saxophone), and an additional tenor saxophonist. On *Sonny Side Up*, the second saxophonist is jazz pioneer Sonny Rollins, joined by pianist Ray Bryant, bassist Tommy Bryant, and drummer Charlie Persip. Much of the interest on the album is generated by the three horns, and in particular the competitive interplay between Stitt and Rollins. As Stitt relayed to jazz writer Zan Stewart, this competitiveness was by design:

Dizzy called Stitt, told him of the upcoming session, adding, "Rollins is going to be there and he says he's gonna carve your ass." Running into Stitt two nights later, Rollins mentioned the date and said, "And he said

¹²¹ The discographical information in this paragraph is found in "Verve Records Discography: 1957."

you're gonna carve me up." Stitt said, "Oh, yeah, he told me that same thing about you. Let's get him."¹²²

The centerpiece of *Sonny Side Up* is "The Eternal Triangle," a composition attributed to Stitt and based on the musical form and harmony of George Gershwin's "I Got Rhythm."¹²³ "The Eternal Triangle" is notable for being "a fourteen-minute up-tempo workout" that "features one of the great tenor battles of all time."¹²⁴ After an intro, the melodic theme, and a pair of long solos—first by Rollins, then by Stitt—the two saxophonists continue to trade solos in four and eight-measure segments.

In *The Guide to Classic Recorded Jazz*, writer Tom Piazza describes why Stitt's performance on "The Eternal Triangle" was so celebrated:

Stitt and Sonny Rollins are paired off against each other in true gladiatorial style. In Stitt's eight choruses (and the subsequent exchanges with Rollins), you can hear that he had a seemingly unlimited number of ways to negotiate the chord changes, breathing fire all the way.¹²⁵

¹²² Stewart, liner notes to *The Complete Roost Sonny Stitt Studio Sessions*, 13.

¹²³ While "The Eternal Triangle" is known as Stitt's composition, large parts of the A section theme were borrowed from an earlier Charlie Parker solo without attribution. For details, see Priestley, *Chasin' the Bird*, 44; Gustav Rosén, "Saxofonisten—Stilbildare eller Charlie Parker-kopia?", Thesis, Royal College of Music in Stockholm, 2009, 15.

¹²⁴ Tom Piazza, *The Guide to Classic Recorded Jazz* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997), 279.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

JATP and Argo Records

On July 6, 1957, Stitt performed with his quartet at the Newport Jazz Festival.¹²⁶ He, trumpeter Roy Eldridge, and Papa Jo Jones then sat in with the Oscar Peterson Trio the next night.¹²⁷ Following his successful performances with Jazz at the Philharmonic in 1956, Stitt was hired for the American leg of 1957 JATP tour. The tour began at Carnegie Hall on September 14 and continued throughout the United States.¹²⁸ Recordings of concerts in Chicago and Los Angeles in October show Stitt performing with Gillespie, Getz, and members of the Modern Jazz Quartet; as well as accompanying Ella Fitzgerald with swing tenor saxophonists Coleman Hawkins, Lester Young, Illinois Jacquet, and Flip Phillips.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ A copy of the festival program shows Stitt was scheduled to perform, but does not list the band personnel. "Newport Jazz Festival: 1957," *Rhode Island Rocks*, accessed September 11, 2017, <http://www.rirocks.net/Band%20Articles/Newport%20Jazz%20Festival%201957.htm>.

¹²⁷ Verve released a recording of this performance the following year. "Verve Records Discography: 1957."

¹²⁸ Witt, "Sonny Stitt," 14.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*; "Verve Records Discography: 1957."

In 1957 or 1958, Stitt began recording for Chicago-based Argo Records. His self-titled album, *Sonny Stitt*, was released in 1958. *Sonny Stitt* was the first of fifteen albums Stitt would record for Argo and its successor, Cadet Records, between 1957 and 1975.¹³⁰ As with his outings for Prestige, Roost, and Verve, Stitt recorded most of his Argo/Cadet albums using small groups. His second album, *Burnin'*, included a quartet that featured pianist and future frequent collaborator Barry Harris; the album also contained a rendition of Charlie Parker's landmark composition "Ko Ko." In the 1960s, Stitt often co-led his recording sessions with a second horn player, like Gene Ammons, Bennie Green, and tenor saxophonist Zoot Sims.¹³¹

In 1958, Stitt joined Gillespie and Jazz at the Philharmonic once again for a tour of the UK and Europe.¹³² In May, he and Gillespie performed in a televised concert in Belgium. The concert has since been released and remains one of the few longform video recordings of Stitt from this part of his career.¹³³ In July, Stitt

¹³⁰ Lord, *Jazz Discography Online*.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Kernfeld, "Stitt, Sonny," *African American National Biography*.

¹³³ Dizzy Gillespie, *Dizzy Gillespie: Live in '58 and '70*, Reelin' in the Years Productions, 2006, DVD.

was back at the Newport Jazz Festival in a group that included guitarist Sal Salvador, bassist Martin Rivera, and drummer Louis Hayes. A two-and-a-half-minute excerpt of their performance appears on the acclaimed concert film *Jazz on a Summer's Day*.¹³⁴

In 1959, Stitt continued to record voluminously and tour with Jazz at the Philharmonic. He recorded six sessions for Verve that yielded several albums, including *Sonny Stitt Plays Jimmy Giuffre Arrangements*, *Sonny Stitt Sits in with the Oscar Peterson Trio*, and *Stitt Blows the Blues*.¹³⁵ He also recorded two sessions for Roost.¹³⁶

Stitt began his fourth consecutive year of performances with JATP in the spring of 1959. Stitt replaced Stan Getz on a tour of England. Stitt then remained with JATP after Getz's return, performing alongside him and Gillespie as he had done in years before.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ The excerpt captures the end of Stitt's solo and the closing theme to his composition "Loose Walk" (listed as "Blues" on screen). In 1999, the film was added to the National Film Registry. *Jazz on a Summer's Day*, directed by Bert Stern (New Yorker Films, 2000), DVD.

¹³⁵ "Verve Records Discography: 1959," *Jazz Discography Project*, accessed September 12, 2017, <https://www.jazzdisco.org/verve-records/discography-1959>.

¹³⁶ Stewart, liner notes to *The Complete Roost Sonny Stitt Studio Sessions*, 14–16.

¹³⁷ Witt, "Sonny Stitt," 14.

The Miles Davis Quintet

In 1960, Miles Davis asked Stitt to join his band. The band was an outgrowth of what today is called Davis's "first great quintet," a famous group that made a string of classic jazz albums beginning in 1955.¹³⁸ In 1960, the quintet consisted of Davis, tenor saxophonist John Coltrane, pianist Wynton Kelly, bassist Paul Chambers, and drummer Jimmy Cobb. Coltrane had worked on and off with Davis since 1955, but was eager to focus on his own projects. He left the quintet for good in 1960, and Davis called Stitt—who had offered Davis a job with Tiny Bradshaw in the early 1940s—to replace him.¹³⁹

Stitt joined the Miles Davis Quintet in June and stayed until December.¹⁴⁰

Davis supplied a recent recording of the group to help Stitt prepare, but did not hold rehearsals.¹⁴¹ In 1960, Davis was one of the best-known names in jazz, and

¹³⁸ For detailed information about this group and the related "first great sextet"—the immediate precursor to the group Stitt joined—see Ian Carr, *Miles Davis: The Definitive Biography* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2007), 75–94 and 114–131.

¹³⁹ Before calling Stitt, Davis invited tenor saxophonists Jimmy Heath and Wayne Shorter (on Coltrane's recommendation), but they were not available. Davis and Troupe, *Miles*, 247–248.

¹⁴⁰ Jan Lohmann, liner notes to *In Stockholm 1960 Complete*, Miles Davis, John Coltrane, and Sonny Stitt, Dragon DRC D 288, 1992, 4 CDs.

¹⁴¹ As Szwed notes, Davis probably provided Stitt with the recording *Kind of Blue*, which was released the year before. Szwed, *So What*, 215.

his new quintet performed before large, enthusiastic audiences. In June, the group toured the United States, playing the Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles and the Black Hawk club in San Francisco.¹⁴² In August, Davis held a well-attended residency at the Village Vanguard¹⁴³ and appeared at Randall's Island Jazz Festival in New York City.¹⁴⁴ In September and October, the quintet performed to packed audiences in large halls in Europe.¹⁴⁵ The group then returned to the United States and began another residency at the Village Vanguard in November.¹⁴⁶

Stitt received an exuberant reception with Davis, but was an odd fit for the group.¹⁴⁷ In the years preceding Coltrane's departure, Davis's small group music

¹⁴² Stewart, liner notes to *The Complete Roost Sonny Stitt Studio Sessions*, 16.

¹⁴³ "The room was literally jammed... Many of the audience were obviously in protoplasmic harmony with the proceedings." Quoted in Carr, *Miles Davis*, 169.

¹⁴⁴ A *Down Beat* reviewer wrote of the performance: "Sonny Stitt stole the attention from Miles... [he] played impressive alto and superb tenor." Quoted in Stewart, liner notes to *The Complete Roost Sonny Stitt Studio Sessions*, 16.

¹⁴⁵ Stitt did not make a studio recording with the quintet, but concerts in Manchester, Paris, Stockholm, and Amsterdam were recorded and later released. Davis and Troupe, *Miles*, 248–249; Lord, *Jazz Discography Online*.

¹⁴⁶ Carr, *Miles Davis*, 171.

¹⁴⁷ Stewart: "It was a strange band: Sonny had replaced Coltrane and the pair's styles couldn't have been more different. Miles had never been a heart-driven bopper like Sonny, so their approaches clashed." Stewart, liner notes to *The Complete Roost Sonny Stitt Studio Sessions*, 17–18.

began to develop in a more experimental direction, extending the possibilities of the hard bop style it helped to establish. This was due in large part to Coltrane, who was a crucial foil for Davis and has an outsized influence in his group. By 1960, Coltrane “was taking the whole art of improvisation into another realm of values entirely.”¹⁴⁸ His departure marked the beginning of a transitional period both for Davis’s quintet and for his music generally.¹⁴⁹

Stitt had a different musical style than his predecessor and could not fill the same role.¹⁵⁰ This became obvious on modal jazz compositions like Davis’s “So What,” which called for a different kind of improvising than the bebop, blues, and popular standard repertoire Stitt usually played.¹⁵¹ To address this problem,

¹⁴⁸ Carr, *Miles Davis*, 166.

¹⁴⁹ “Coltrane’s departure was a devastating loss to Miles, who almost broke down and wept during their last gig together... [His] departure left a gap that, in some ways, Miles was never able to fill again.” Ibid., 168.

¹⁵⁰ Jazz musicologist Barry Kernfeld describes his tenure with Davis this way: “Stitt was the second in a succession of unsatisfactory replacements for the saxophonist John Coltrane.” Kernfeld, “Stitt, Sonny,” *African American National Biography*.

¹⁵¹ Davis: “Sonny Stitt [played] the wrong kind of shit on ‘So What’... he would always fuck up on that tune.” According to Davis’s biographer Szwed, Stitt “had the same trouble with modes that a lot of other musicians had, playing them as if they were pop tunes in fixed keys, often failing to negotiate the modal shifts that were the whole point of playing them.” Davis and Troupe, *Miles*, 249; Szwed, *So What*, 215–216.

Davis featured Stitt on popular standards like “Stardust,” so “he could play in his own style.”¹⁵² Davis also asked Stitt to perform on the alto saxophone exclusively. Stitt insisted, however, on performing on both alto and tenor.¹⁵³

Stitt and Davis also argued over money. According to Bill Crow in *Jazz Anecdotes*, Stitt asked Davis for a raise and was refused, which led to Stitt’s departure.¹⁵⁴ Another account suggests that tensions between Stitt and Davis were high. Flint-based trombonist Sherm Mitchell witnessed Davis and Stitt “fist fighting onstage” at a performance at The Minor Key jazz club in Detroit.¹⁵⁵ Stitt performed his last concert as a member of Davis’s quintet on December 8 at the Howard Theatre in Washington D.C., then left the group.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² Szwed, *So What*, 216.

¹⁵³ According to drummer Jimmy Cobb, crowds “went crazy” for Stitt’s alto saxophone playing because “he was reminiscent of Charlie Parker.” Jimmy Cobb, interview by William Brower, July 26–27, 2010, accessed November 2011, http://www.smithsonianjazz.org/documents/oral_histories/Jimmy_Cobb_Interview_Transcription.pdf.

¹⁵⁴ When Davis told him “there was no more money, Sonny said ‘No money, no Sonny!’ and left the band!” Bill Crow, *Jazz Anecdotes: Second Time Around* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), Kindle edition, Chapter 9.

¹⁵⁵ “[Stitt] had a temper... It was when Sonny did a solo—they had words onstage. He threatened to knock Miles’ head off and away they went.” White, “Remembering the Musical Genius of Sonny Stitt.”

¹⁵⁶ Szwed, *So What*, 217.

Second Marriage

The Howard Theatre concert was fortuitous. On January 15, 1961, Stitt married Pamela Wanga Gilmore at Mount Moriah Baptist Church in Washington, D.C.¹⁵⁷ Pamela was a vocalist and had opened for the Miles Davis Quintet at that concert at Howard Theatre. Like Stitt's mother Claudine, Pamela Stitt was a church singer who would later become a teacher. She and Stitt had two children together: a daughter Katea (born in 1964), and a son Jason (born in 1969).¹⁵⁸ After they got married, Pamela remained in Washington, D.C. Stitt made it his new home, leaving frequently to work and returning to rest between tours.¹⁵⁹ Around 1970, the Stitts bought a house and moved thirty minutes northeast to Chillum, Maryland.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ According to *Down Beat*, the wedding was briefly postponed because Stitt had bursitis. A memorial website for Pamela Stitt includes information about her marriage to Stitt, but incorrectly lists the marriage year as 1960. "Strictly Ad Lib," *Down Beat*, March 2, 1961, 47; Dera Tompkins, "About Her," *Memory Of*, accessed September 17, 2017, <http://pam-stitt.memory-of.com>.

¹⁵⁸ Tompkins, "About Her."

¹⁵⁹ Stitt did not often work in Washington D.C. "I come home to rest, because I make some lo-o-ng tours, you know?" Stitt, interview by Felix Grant.

¹⁶⁰ By Stitt's recollection, they lived in Washington, D.C. for 8 to 10 years. Stitt, interview by Felix Grant; Mike Kalina, "Sonny Stitt," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, May 9, 1980.

Again, Stitt's marriage was covered in the black press. In late 1960, *Jet* magazine announced his upcoming wedding.¹⁶¹ In 1961, it printed a photo of Pamela and Stitt at their wedding reception, and another of the couple at a Chicago "salute party" for Stitt's "outstanding contributions to the world of progressive jazz."¹⁶² In addition to covering his personal life, *Jet* also reported on Stitt's illnesses and injuries,¹⁶³ recording contracts,¹⁶⁴ and upcoming performances.¹⁶⁵

Stitt placed third in the alto saxophone category of the 1961 *Jet* Readers' Jazz Poll (after Cannonball Adderley and Paul Desmond).¹⁶⁶ He would place third

¹⁶¹ "Bandleader Sonny Stitt is about to make pretty secretary Pamela Gilmore his next wife." Major Robinson, "New York Beat," *Jet*, December 29, 1960, 63.

¹⁶² "Entertainment," *Jet*, February 2, 1961, 59; "Entertainment," *Jet*, June 29, 1961, 62.

¹⁶³ For example, *Jet* announced in 1960 that Stitt was "recovering from a bout of pneumonia"; and in 1961, that he had been "hospitalized a week" after a car accident. Major Robinson, "New York Beat," *Jet*, November 17, 1960, 64; "Entertainment," *Jet*, May 11, 1961, 59.

¹⁶⁴ "Jazz saxman Sonny Stitt intends to go pop now that he has joined Stax records." Bobbie Barbee, "New York Beat," *Jet*, March 13, 1969, 63.

¹⁶⁵ "Entertainment," *Jet*, March 15, 1962, 62.

¹⁶⁶ "Jet Announces First Annual Readers' Jazz Poll Winners," *Jet*, January 26, 1961, 59–60.

again in the mid-1970s in the alto saxophone category of the *Ebony* Music Poll (after Grover Washington Jr. and Cannonball Adderley).¹⁶⁷

New Recording Opportunities

From the time of his release from prison in 1949 until the end of the 1950s, Stitt recorded mainly for a small number of labels—Prestige, Roost, Verve, and Argo. He recorded a large amount of material, at times producing over ten albums in a single year.¹⁶⁸ In the 1960s, Stitt received several new recording opportunities. His recording output dropped slightly, but the number of labels drastically increased. As Yanow notes: “Stitt led no less than 33 albums during the 1961–67 period for such labels as Verve, Argo, Roost, Jazzland, Atlantic, Black Lion, Pacific Jazz, Impulse, Prestige, Cadet, MPS, Colpix, and Roulette.”¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Phyl Garland, “Ebony Music Poll: The Winners for 1976,” *Ebony*, June 1976, 62.

¹⁶⁸ He did this in 1950, for example. Lord, *Jazz Discography Online*.

¹⁶⁹ If live performances, sessions recorded as a sideman, and material released years after its recording date are considered, the number of albums is much greater than 33, and labels like Blue Note, Candid, Everest, Jazz Up, Philology, RCA Victor, Ronnie Scott’s Jazz House, and UpFront Records must also be included. *Ibid.*; Yanow, *Jazz on Record*, 593.

In 1960, while still employed with the Miles Davis Quartet, Stitt recorded two quartet albums for Roost under his own name.¹⁷⁰ In 1961, he continued with *The Sensual Sound of Sonny Stitt*, “an ambitious album for Verve with a full scale orchestra arranged by Ralph Burns.”¹⁷¹ In 1961–62, Stitt reunited with tenor saxophonist and former band co-leader Gene Ammons. The two saxophonists recorded albums for Argo, Verve, and Prestige during this period; sessions for the latter two labels also featured organist “Brother” Jack McDuff. Within a year of reuniting with Ammons, Stitt began working with a new recording and touring band, where organ, guitar and/or a second saxophonist substituted for piano and double bass. Most of Stitt’s 1960’s work for Prestige and Argo/Cadet was recorded using this combination of musicians.¹⁷²

Stitt and Ammons ended their collaboration in February 1962.¹⁷³ Stitt then began recording for other labels. In April, he recorded a single album for New

¹⁷⁰ Stewart, liner notes to *The Complete Roost Sonny Stitt Studio Sessions*, 16.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁷² Lord, *Jazz Discography Online*. Stitt’s reunion with Ammons, his recording and touring band, and his use of the organ trio format are discussed in the following section.

¹⁷³ Kernfeld, “Stitt, Sonny,” *African American National Biography*.

York-based Jazzland Records with his new organ-based group.¹⁷⁴ In May, he led an aborted session for Blue Note Records with the same group, plus former Billy Eckstine-bandmate Dexter Gordon.¹⁷⁵ In July, Stitt recorded the first of three albums for Atlantic Records, *Sonny Stitt & the Top Brass*, featuring a five-piece brass section and arrangements by Tadd Dameron and Jimmy Mundy.

In 1963, Stitt recorded albums with organ for Pacific Jazz, Argo, and Prestige. Between June and September, he also recorded three albums for Impulse! Records. Stitt led the first of these albums (*Now!*), and co-led a second with Duke Ellington tenor saxophonist Paul Gonsalves (*Salt and Pepper*); both albums included Hank Jones on piano. A third album was led by drummer Art Blakey (*A Jazz Message*); it featured McCoy Tyner, who was then the pianist in the John Coltrane Quartet. In November and December, Stitt recorded two Latin jazz sessions. These sessions produced the albums *Stitt Goes Latin* (Roost) and *Primitivo Soul!* (Prestige). Both albums featured a drummer and two

¹⁷⁴ The discographical information contained in the rest of this subsection was found in Lord, *Jazz Discography Online*, except where otherwise indicated.

¹⁷⁵ “Blue Note producer Alfred Lion and Stitt... clashed from the minute the session started.” Only a single piece from the session, “Lady Be Good,” was released. Stewart, liner notes to *The Complete Roost Sonny Stitt Studio Sessions*, 18.

percussionists; the former also included trumpeter Thad Jones and then twenty-year-old pianist Chick Corea.

1964 saw collaborations with trombonist Bennie Green in March (*My Main Man*, Argo) and tenor saxophonist Booker Ervin in August (*Soul People*, Prestige). Between recording these two albums, Stitt held a residency at Ronnie Scott's Club in London. Live recordings from the residency were later released on Ronnie Scott's Jazz House label.

In January 1965, Stitt co-led an album with tenor saxophonist Zoot Sims for Cadet Records (*Inter-Action*). In February, he recorded *Broadway Soul* for Colpix Records. The band contained a seven-piece horn section that included Thad Jones and saxophonists Phil Woods, Zoot Sims, and Jerome Richardson. In April, Stitt recorded *Sax Expressions* with Harold Mabern on piano, Ben Tucker on bass, and Roy Haynes on drums. It was his final album for Roost Records.

In 1966, Stitt again used a medium-sized ensemble for *The Matadors Meet the Bull*, his first album for Roulette Records. The ensemble included trumpeters Joe Newman and Clark Terry, trombonists J. J. Johnson and Urbie Green, tenor saxophonist Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis, percussionist Tito Puente, and arrangements by Henry Glover. In subsequent albums for Roulette, Stitt would record using

saxophones augmented with Selmer's new Varitone effects unit, and return to using bands that included electric organ.

The Organ Bands

Stitt expressed an interest in organ-based jazz in a 1959 interview; he also owned an organ himself.¹⁷⁶ Stitt began working with groups that included the instrument in 1962. Like those of the classic Hammond B-3 organ trios of the late-1950s and 60s, the organists in Stitt's groups were responsible both for basslines (performed on the foot pedals of the organ) and chordal accompaniment.¹⁷⁷ Stitt tended to favor tenor saxophone over alto in these groups, and sometimes performed on tenor exclusively. The groups often also included a guitarist in the rhythm section, and a second tenor saxophonist who shared billing with Stitt.

¹⁷⁶ "Stitt's own taste runs the gamut from Louis Armstrong to organ jazz. He has an organ at home, and likes 'to fiddle with it.'" Bittan, "Don't Call Me Bird!"

¹⁷⁷ For more about the organ trio format and the music genre associated with it, soul jazz, see Bob Porter, "The Blues in Jazz," in *The Oxford Companion to Jazz*, ed. Bill Kirchner (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 75–77; and Kenny Mathieson, *Cookin': Hard Bop and Soul Jazz, 1954–65* (Canongate, 2012), Google eBook edition, "Jimmy Smith."

Stitt's turn to organ-based jazz began following a reunion with his former musical partner Gene Ammons. Stitt and Ammons regrouped in Chicago in 1961, performing at McKie's Disc Jockey Lounge in May.¹⁷⁸ This group had a similar instrumentation to their previous groups from the early 1950s. It contained pianist John Houston—who recorded with Stitt and Ammons in 1952—bassist Buster Williams, and drummer George Brown.¹⁷⁹ In August 1961, this group recorded for Argo and Verve in Chicago. Stitt and Ammons then returned to McKie's from late 1961 to February 1962, and briefly expanded their front line to three horns (adding Bennie Green and tenor saxophonist James Moody).¹⁸⁰

After the residency at McKie's, Stitt returned to New York City for two weeks of performances at the Half Note Club. He made his first albums with organ during this time. Two of these albums were recorded with organist "Brother" Jack McDuff; one of them (*Soul Summit*) included Ammons and was released under his name.

¹⁷⁸ Stewart, liner notes to *The Complete Roost Sonny Stitt Studio Sessions*, 18.

¹⁷⁹ Lord, *Jazz Discography Online*.

¹⁸⁰ Stewart, liner notes to *The Complete Roost Sonny Stitt Studio Sessions*, 18; Kernfeld, "Stitt, Sonny," African American National Biography; Leonard Feather and Ira Gitler, *The Biographical Encyclopedia of Jazz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), Google eBook edition, "Moody, James."

In addition to the McDuff sessions, Stitt recorded several sessions from February to May 1962 with a second organ-based group that would become Stitt's working band. The group contained organist Don Patterson, guitarist Paul Weeden, and drummer Billy James. Weeden remained in the group until May. After Weeden's departure, Stitt retained Patterson and James, and continued to perform and record with them until 1971.¹⁸¹ The group worked both as a trio and as an expanded unit that included (at various times) Ammons, Booker Ervin, alto saxophonist Charles McPherson, and guitarists Billy Butler, Pat Martino, and Grant Green.

In 1966, Stitt began to record using the new Selmer Varitone, an amplification and effects system for the saxophone. Marketed as an "electronic saxophone," the Varitone was Selmer's attempt to address the increasing use of

¹⁸¹ Stitt's final album with the trio was *Just the Way It Was: "Live" at the Left Bank*. The album captures a March 1971 performance and was released posthumously in 2000. Patterson recorded a final session with Stitt in July for his Prestige album *Black Vibrations*. Lord, *Jazz Discography Online*; "Prestige Records Discography: 1971–1972," *Jazz Discography Project*, accessed September 28, 2017, <https://www.jazzdisco.org/prestige-records/discography-1971-1972>.

electric guitar and other amplified instruments in popular music.¹⁸² The Varitone consisted of a pickup mounted on the saxophone's neck, an amplifier, and a control box for a variety of dynamic and timbral effects.¹⁸³ Stitt had an endorsement deal with Selmer, and used the Varitone on a string of albums for Roulette Records. The first of these, *What's New!!! Sonny Stitt Plays the Varitone*, was Stitt's "best-selling album of the period."¹⁸⁴ Stitt's earliest albums with Varitone featured medium-sized ensembles with horn sections. Stitt soon enlisted his working band, however, recording several sessions on the Varitone with organ.

In 1971, Stitt made his final records with the electric organ and the electronic saxophone. He then returned to performing almost exclusively in acoustic jazz contexts.¹⁸⁵ In some ways, Stitt's work with organ bands was a ten-year parenthesis in a career that consisted mostly of bebop and hard bop playing.

¹⁸² A 1967 advertisement claims that the Varitone puts "the saxophone in charge of any combo, amplified or not. The Varitone's sustained power will cut a whole chorus of guitars." ("Selmer's Electronic Saxophone Will Make You the Six Busiest Musicians in Town," *Billboard*, February 18, 1967, 47.)

¹⁸³ The control box contained switches for three brightness settings ("bright," "normal," and "dark") and knobs to control volume, echo, and an octave harmonizer (the "Octamatic").

¹⁸⁴ Porter, *Soul Jazz*, "Funk and Fusion."

¹⁸⁵ Not everything Stitt played was acoustic jazz. In the mid-1970s, record labels Cadet, Jazz Masters, and Flying Dutchman recorded Stitt in a variety of R&B, funk, and other popular music settings.

In other ways, however, it was a logical extension of Stitt's earlier R&B and blues-tinged work with Ammons in the 1950s. Because Stitt continued to perform the standard jazz repertoire, his work of this period has been referred to as "bebop played in an organ group context."¹⁸⁶ However, his albums also contain material written by Stitt's bandmates that is closer to gospel, soul jazz—and in Stitt's final organ recordings—R&B, funk, and acid jazz.

¹⁸⁶ Porter, *Soul Jazz*, "Funk and Fusion."

CHAPTER IV

LITERATURE REVIEW

(The following section is an overview of the literature on Sonny Stitt and the culture of bebop. For information regarding selection criteria and the means of evaluating this material, see the following chapter.)

Introduction to the Sonny Stitt Literature

The literature on Sonny Stitt is substantial and consistent with that of a major jazz artist. It covers Stitt's entire life, spanning his childhood, early musical experiences, and the full length of his professional career. The majority of the literature dates to after Stitt's move to New York City in 1944–45; it then follows Stitt throughout his working life down to the present, decades after his death. The literature spans multiple media, including audio and video recordings, personal interviews, references in album and performances reviews, oral histories, popular magazines and newspapers, album liner notes, articles in jazz periodicals and journals, dissertations, encyclopedia entries, and jazz textbooks.

Stitt's Early Life and Music Career

Information about Stitt's childhood and early musical activities comes from numerous sources. Details regarding Stitt's family comes, in part, from studies of his father Edward Boatner, Sr., who was an influential composer, director, and teacher of choral music. Throughout his mature career, Stitt discussed his life in Saginaw and musical influences in music periodicals like *Down Beat*,¹ *Melody Maker*,² and *CODA*.³ Toward the end of his life, Stitt supplied additional information about his musical upbringing through long-form interviews with Paul Rubin, Wayne Enstice,⁴ and Felix Grant.⁵

Other information about Stitt's years as a high school musician and young professional come from sources who knew Stitt in Saginaw and Detroit. For instance, a 2013 tribute to Stitt in the Michigan publication *Review* includes interviews and quotations from people who knew Stitt and his mother in

¹ Bittan, "Don't Call Me Bird," 19–20.

² Max Jones, "Stitt and the Parker Sound," *Melody Maker*, October 1960, 8.

³ Roger House, "Sonny Stitt: A Fond Reminiscence," *Coda*, August/Sept 1988, Issue 221, 4–5.

⁴ Published in Enstice and Rubin, *Jazz Spoken Here*, 240–253.

⁵ Stitt, interview by Felix Grant.

Saginaw.⁶ Statements from musicians like “Big Nick” Nicholas, Willie Cook, Earl Van Riper, and Miles Davis shed further light onto Stitt’s music during this period.⁷

Detailed biographical and career information can be found in Woodrow Witt’s dissertation “Sonny Stitt: His Life and Music”;⁸ in retrospectives, such as Zan Stewart’s liner notes for *The Complete Roost Sonny Stitt Studio Sessions*⁹—and in entries in *The Biographical Encyclopedia of Jazz*,¹⁰ *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*,¹¹ and *The African American National Biography*.¹²

Given the length and complexity of Stitt’s career, it is difficult to piece together a comprehensive timeline of Stitt’s professional commitments, projects, and movements. However, certain sources offer a wealth of information in this regard. In addition to the works cited in the previous paragraph, there is

⁶ White, “Remembering the Musical Genius of Sonny Stitt.”

⁷ For examples and analysis of such statements, see the section Stitt’s Musical Influences in Chapter VI, Historical Analysis I: Stitt’s Career.

⁸ Witt, “Sonny Stitt.”

⁹ Stewart, liner notes to *The Complete Roost Sonny Stitt Studio Sessions*.

¹⁰ Feather and Gitler, *Biographical Encyclopedia of Jazz*.

¹¹ *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, ed. Barry Kernfeld, 2nd ed (London: Macmillan, 2002), s.v. “Sonny Stitt.”

¹² Kernfeld, “Stitt, Sonny,” *African American National Biography*.

Salemann's *Sonny Stitt: Solography, Discography, Band Routes, Engagements, in Chronological Order*. This work, cited extensively in Chapter I of Witt's dissertation, traces Stitt's career activities from his early years until August 1951.¹³ Stitt's career movements are also confirmed through references in musician biographies, oral histories, album liner notes, and jazz periodicals. Finally, there are detailed discographies, like Tom Lord's *The Jazz Discography Online*, and the record label and artist discographies of the *Jazz Discography Project*. Since Stitt recorded voluminously, these discographies make it possible to assemble a rough chronology of Stitt's various musical projects. There is especially true of Stitt's later career, where more of his live performances were recorded.

Sonny Stitt's career is not all covered in equal detail. For instance, Stitt's first New York period (1944/45–47) was short, lasting less than three years, but is well documented. This was a confluence of factors for Stitt: a move to a major music center, a maturing musical style, and higher visibility due to working with Dizzy Gillespie and other name artists. In addition, this period coincides with the

¹³ Witt, "Sonny Stitt," 3–10.

rising popularity of Charlie Parker and bebop music, which have long been areas of historical interest to jazz biographers and critics.

Stitt appears in contemporaneous accounts, such as a concert review of the Dizzy Gillespie Sextet from April 1946.¹⁴ He made his first recording session with Gillespie a month later—winning him *Esquire*'s New Star award for alto saxophone in 1947—and received a small entry in Leonard Feather's *Inside Be-Bop*, the first book to introduce bebop music to the broader public.¹⁵ Stitt also appears in later discussions of this period. For example, Ira Gitler's classic work *Swing to Bop: An Oral History of the Transition in Jazz in the 1940s* contains interviews and anecdotes about Stitt.¹⁶ This is true of the memoirs and biographies of Stitt's contemporaries as well, like Dizzy Gillespie and Al Foster's *To Be, or Not—to Bop*, Miles Davis and Quincy Troupe's *Miles: The Autobiography*, and Robert Reisner's *Bird: The Legend of Charlie Parker*.

After the mid-1940s Stitt's career underwent major changes, which are reflected in the composition of the literature. After losing his cabaret card—preventing him from working in New York—Stitt left for Chicago and Detroit,

¹⁴ Vail, *Dizzy Gillespie*, 38.

¹⁵ *Inside Be-bop*, republished as Feather, *Inside Jazz*, 98.

¹⁶ Gitler, *Swing to Bop*, 73–74, 99, 105, 128, 131ff., 152–153, 184, 259, 266–267.

where he was arrested for the sale of narcotics and incarcerated until late 1949. Upon his release, Stitt returned to New York, performing on the tenor saxophone primarily, and recorded his first album under his own name. This was the start of Stitt's mature career, and it is documented through a steady string of recording dates. The literature of this period focuses on Stitt's own ensembles—including a long collaboration with saxophonist Gene Ammons—as well as his association with high profile acts like Dizzy Gillespie, Norman Granz's "Jazz At The Philharmonic" series, and a brief stint in the Miles Davis Quintet. Stitt's visibility during this period is seen through coverage in trade periodicals and newspapers, as well as in the African-American press, which provided the latest gossip on Stitt's personal life and business dealings.¹⁷

Although Stitt worked tirelessly until the end of his life, his late career was covered less frequently by the jazz press. The late 1960s and 1970s were trying times for many more traditional jazz musicians. Critical tastes had changed, and

¹⁷ Periodicals like *Jet*, for instance, had entertainment sections devoted to the lives of black artists. A typical entry: "Barbara Lancaster, wife of bandleader Sonny Stitt, and Gloria Marshall, ofay Harlem night club owner, slugged it out in the ladies' room at the Birdland cafe after engaging in a heated argument." Major Robinson, "New York Beat," *Jet*, November 25, 1954, 63.

the music had developed away from conventional bebop and hard bop styles. This affected the kind of work that Stitt received: “Stitt was able to maintain a full touring schedule, but he had to travel alone and use local rhythm sections almost exclusively.”¹⁸ While he had his own working bands during this later period, Stitt’s work in “all-star” ensembles—including a Giants of Jazz tour in 1971–1972 with Gillespie, Thelonious Monk and Art Blakey—received far more attention.

As critical interest in his music waned, the composition of the literature changed yet again. In the early to mid-1970s, there were scattered articles and reviews of Stitt’s live performances and recordings in newspapers and the jazz press. From a historical perspective, many of these items are superfluous, repeating existing information in the literature, and providing little analysis of Stitt and his music.

By the end of the 1970s, there seemed to be newfound interest in Stitt. The last few years of Stitt’s life saw a noticeable increase in historically valuable material: longform retrospective interviews, articles in music periodicals, and reflections from Stitt’s musical contemporaries. This material often discussed or

¹⁸ Witt, “Sonny Stitt,” 22.

evaluated Stitt's early music and career, his musical legacy and style, and the nature of his relationship to Charlie Parker.

Stitt's Recordings

One striking feature of the Sonny Stitt literature is the sheer number of audio recordings. Because Stitt was twenty years old when he was first recorded, and he recorded prolifically throughout his life, Stitt's professional career is documented nearly from start to finish. In 1974, Stitt claimed he recorded "over 160 albums" and had a hard time telling them apart: "I've made so many I forget."¹⁹ Accordingly, Morgenstern writes: "Stitt made more records as a leader than any other jazz instrumentalist."²⁰

Stitt's earliest recording dates from 1944 with the Tiny Bradshaw Orchestra, where he plays a brief solo on "Ready, Set, Jump." A recording with

¹⁹ Sonny Stitt, "Blindfold Test," *Down Beat*, 21 Nov 1974, 27.

²⁰ Morgenstern and Meyer, *Living with Jazz*. Morgenstern then clarifies: "This sweeping statement may seem incredible, but it is literally true, provided only that you join me in applying the term 'jazz instrumentalist' strictly to individual artists, [and] excluding from the category... bandleaders like Duke Ellington and Count Basie."

Billy Eckstine was made the following year.²¹ After 1944, Stitt recorded every single year until his death in 1982, with only one exception.²²

1946 marked Stitt's first recording session with Dizzy Gillespie. Sessions with Bud Powell, Kenny Clarke and Fats Navarro followed the same year. Stitt continued to record after leaving New York; it wasn't until his release from prison, however, that the solo sessions began in earnest. The 1950s saw Stitt recording on three saxophones—alto, tenor, and baritone—mostly under his own name and in various small group formats. He recorded mostly in the studio, but sometimes live, and occasionally with string orchestras or in other permutations.

²¹ In a 1981 interview, Stitt appeared to deny recording with Eckstine. (Stitt: "I spent some time in Billy Eckstine's band, too." Interviewer: "The famous one that was never recorded?" Stitt: "That's the one.") In the same interview, Stitt cited his 1946 recording of "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" with Dizzy Gillespie as his first record. These statements are incorrect. Stitt is listed as recording with Eckstine at a May 2, 1945 session for Savoy Records (Stitt was also in Eckstine's band at the time). Stitt, interview by Felix Grant; Billy Eckstine, *Mister B. and the Band: The Savoy Sessions*, Savoy SV-0264, 1994, CD; for session information, see "Fats Navarro Discography," *Jazz Discography Project*, accessed December 8, 2017, <https://www.jazzdisco.org/fats-navarro/discography/#billy-eckstine-and-his-orchestra-450502>.

²² The exception was in either 1947 or 1948, depending on when Stitt's recordings under the pseudonym "Lord Nelson" were made. Lord, *Jazz Discography Online*; Stewart, liner notes to *The Complete Roost Sonny Stitt Studio Sessions*, 4.

Stitt's work as a sideman was equally prolific. His recorded output with Gillespie, for instance, spans four decades. Even with groups that did not go into the studio—like the Miles Davis Quintet of 1960—there are numerous live recordings available. The spate of recordings and reissues has continued since Stitt's death. For example, a recording from the last year of Stitt's life—ominously titled *Just in Case You Forgot How Bad He Really Was*—was released in 1997, and has been re-released since that time.²³

Stitt and Parker

Apart from the sheer number of recordings, the most striking feature of the Sonny Stitt literature is the repeated references to Charlie Parker. As Brian Morton has written, "It's difficult to find a reference to Stitt without getting some sense of him as a 'follower' of Charlie Parker."²⁴

The ubiquity of references to Parker in the Stitt literature is discussed in considerable detail later in this study (see for example, Chapter VII, Historical Analysis II: Stitt's Critics). For now, it will suffice to note that the literature

²³ Lord, *Jazz Discography Online*.

²⁴ Brian Morton, "Sonny Stitt: Leaving the Pack," *Jazz Journal* 64, no. 3 (March 2011), 9.

comparing Stitt to Parker spans the entire length of Stitt’s mature career and includes all the media listed above. Jazz books, periodicals, interviews, oral histories, liner notes, and even album titles—e.g., *Stitt Plays Bird, I Remember Bird*, and *Don’t Call Me Bird!*—draw pointed similarities between the two musicians.

Omissions in the Stitt Literature

Despite the size of the Stitt literature, the breadth and depth of coverage is sometimes lacking. References to Stitt’s music and career abound, but detailed analysis and discussion is harder to come by. There are also noticeable omissions in the literature. For example, Stitt has yet to be the subject of a major biography. Academic engagement with Stitt’s music remains small, even if recent theses and dissertations (by Witt, Rosén, Weremchuk, and Meier) have helped to address this imbalance.²⁵ In books about jazz, Stitt’s name is often mentioned in passing, and

²⁵ Witt, “Sonny Stitt”; Rosén, “Saxofonisten”; George Weremchuk, “A Comparative Analysis of Improvised Solos Based on the Popular Songs *Body and Soul*, *Night and Day* and *Out of Nowhere* as Performed by Selected Jazz Tenor Saxophonists Representing Different Style,” DMA diss., University of Miami, 1998; Steven Raymond Meier, “Edward ‘Sonny’ Stitt: Original Voice or Jazz Imitator,” DMA diss., University of Alabama, 2014. The music analysis methods and findings of the Witt, Weremchuk, and Meier dissertations are discussed in the following chapter.

with a frequency one would expect from a major jazz figure. The lack of detail, however, is striking. In such books, Stitt's music and career are referred to regularly, but seldom discussed.

The situation in jazz history is similar. W. W. Norton & Company's acclaimed textbook *Jazz* (to cite a recent and high-profile example) references Stitt only twice: once in a list of musicians who played with Billy Eckstine, and once in a single sentence comparing him to Parker.²⁶ Stitt does not appear at all on *The Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz*, a well-known compilation of 95 recordings by various musicians drawn from different periods in jazz history.²⁷ And in the bebop installment of Ken Burns's documentary miniseries *Jazz*, Stitt is mentioned by name only once: in a list of "gifted musicians" who were "lost for a time to narcotics."²⁸

This is not to suggest that Stitt has been unjustly ignored in general. Again, compared with other musicians, Stitt would be considered a major jazz

²⁶ Gary Giddins and Scott DeVeaux, *Jazz* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009), pp. 305, 321.

²⁷ Martin Williams, comp., *The Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz*, rev. ed., New York: Sony Music Special Products, 1997, 5 CDs.

²⁸ *Jazz: A Film by Ken Burns*, "Risk," episode 8, DVD, directed by Ken Burns (PBS DVD, 2000).

figure on coverage alone. It does, however, lend support to the words of writer Barry McRae, quoted earlier, that Stitt's "real struggle was for recognition by the critics."²⁹

Bebop and the Jazz Worldview

Oral histories are essential to a well-rounded knowledge of jazz history. The present author's understanding of early Sonny Stitt and the 1940's New York music scene owes much to oral histories like Ira Gitler's *Swing to Bop* and Nat Hentoff and Nat Shapiro's *Hear Me Talkin' to Ya*. This study also draws heavily from the Smithsonian Jazz Oral History Program, done in conjunction with the National Endowment of the Arts, and the unabridged transcripts of interviews conducted for the PBS Ken Burns *Jazz Series*.

These last two projects—the Smithsonian Jazz Oral History Program, and the Ken Burns *Jazz series*—produced a number of long-form interviews with older jazz musicians, many of whom knew and worked with Charlie Parker and Sonny Stitt. Many of these interviews are cited throughout this study. Even where not explicitly cited, the interviews have been very useful for research, because 1)

²⁹ McRae, *Jazz Cataclysm*, 21.

they are sustained, firsthand accounts of the jazz music industry; 2) they present a side of Stitt rarely seen in the critical literature; and 3) taken together, they constitute a full picture or “worldview” of jazz musicians and their professional lives.

Paul Lopes’ *The Rise of a Jazz Art World* has been helpful for similar reasons. Lopes writes convincingly about the history of jazz as a form of popular entertainment and its gradual reinvention as a musical art form beginning in the 1930s and 40s. Through careful interaction with the literature, Lopes explains how the idea of the jazz artist arose in history, as well as the role that bebop music played in this development. According to Lopes, bebop was not merely a stylistic departure from swing. It was “advanced modern music”³⁰ that marked a radical ideological break and a turning point in the history of the music. Statements from contemporary musicians (as recorded in Gitler, Shapiro and Hentoff, Gillespie and Fraser, etc.) largely confirm Lopes’ theory.³¹

Scott DeVeaux’s *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History* is the single greatest treatment of bebop music. Ambitious in scope, it employs detailed

³⁰ The expression is Parker’s. Quoted in Lopes, *Rise of a Jazz Art World*, 209.

³¹ Interviewer: “[W]ere you making any statement about the world around you?” Kenny Clarke: “Yeah, in a way... somebody’d say, ‘Yeah, that Dizzy, man, sure gave us the word.’” Interviewer: “What was the word?” Clarke: “Wake up.” Gillespie and Fraser, *To Be*, 142.

music analysis and copious historical sources to both explain the music and place it in a wider social context. Major themes include the role of pioneering swing musicians like Coleman Hawkins, the life of New York jazz musicians in the 1930s and 40s, the musical features of bebop, and the ideology and consciousness that undergird it. As with Lopes' work, this book clarified the revolutionary character of bebop and its worldview in this study. From that vantage point, it was eventually possible to reevaluate Sonny Stitt—the bebopper—and how he should fit in such a scheme.

CHAPTER V

METHOD

Introduction

This study employs historical research and musical analysis of recorded solos in addressing the problem of Sonny Stitt's critical legacy and contribution to popular music. This method for research is modeled in works like Lewis Porter's *John Coltrane: His Life and Music*¹ and Scott DeVeaux's *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History*. These are landmark works in jazz studies that combine historical argumentation with musical analysis. They synthesize a wealth of historical data into a narrative intercut with short musical examples and longer sections of sustained music analysis.

Sonny Stitt was critically compared to Parker throughout his career, and is regarded as a Parker imitator to this day. This study aims to determine, through historical and musical analysis, if that critical reputation is accurate. Historical

¹ Lewis Porter, *John Coltrane: His Life and Music* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).

and musical analysis allow for an examination of this problem. Through analysis of the jazz literature, one can determine the standard critical view of Stitt and his music. It is then possible to compare this view with the views of other musicians, dissenting critics, and Stitt himself. Through analysis of recorded works, one can compare Stitt and Parker's music directly. Recorded solos can be studied to reveal features of Stitt and Parker's playing styles. It is then possible to discover which features of Parker's playing style are also present in Stitt's music. Finally, it is possible to compare the findings of music analysis with the jazz literature to see if they corroborate or challenge the critical view.

This research method reflects the composition of the Stitt literature, which contains both commentary on Stitt and his music, and a large number of audio recordings. The research method also reflects the content of the Stitt literature. Since so much of the historical literature focuses on Stitt's relationship to Parker, there is sufficient data from which to draw a common critical view. Likewise, since Stitt and Parker's music is well-documented through recordings, it is not difficult to find appropriate pieces for musical analysis. It is even possible to find recordings from the same time period, as Stitt and Parker recording careers overlapped.

Historical Analysis

As described above, the literature on Sonny Stitt is substantial. It spans a variety of media—recordings, reviews, interviews, liner notes, journal articles, dissertations, and more—produced over a period of seventy years.²

The literature includes material directly relevant to the dissertation problem and sub-problems. It covers the specifics of Stitt’s career—who he worked with, when—as well as numerous points of intersection with Parker. The literature is replete with works covering what critics and musicians thought of Stitt as a saxophonist and musician, as well as discussions of his relationship to Parker. Interviews and articles assess Stitt’s career and contribution to jazz music, and speak to the nature of his musical influence. Finally, the literature includes many interviews with Stitt, reflecting on the above issues.

Selection Criteria

The selection criteria for literature in this study are the relevance of a given item to the problem of Stitt’s reputation as a Parker imitator, the depth and

² “Over seventy years” refers the length of time from the beginning of the Stitt literature (i.e., the mid-1940s, when the first recordings of Stitt are produced, and the first printed references to Stitt appear) until the present day.

nuance expressed in that item, and the familiarity of that item's author with Stitt and the music he made. For the most part, the context of the items used in this study is directly relevant to the dissertation problem—namely Sonny Stitt's career, musical style, and relationship to Charlie Parker.

When establishing the critical view of Stitt and his music, strong preference is given to sources that exhibit the criteria above. This means, for example, that an extended discussion of Stitt by a well-known music critic in a trade periodical would receive priority over a passing observation recorded by a music producer in album liner notes, especially for purposes of establishing the critical view.

The majority of sources quoted in the study below are well-known, respected sources in the jazz literature. In the case of periodicals, this means publications known for covering jazz and popular music, such as *Down Beat*, *Melody Maker*, *Billboard*, and *The Village Voice*, as well as journals like *Jazz Journal*, *Jazz Monthly*, and *The Kenyon Review*. Most music critics cited below are well-known historians and journalists with long careers in publishing about jazz, e.g. Leonard Feather, Ira Gitler, Dan Morgenstern, Gary Giddins, and Stanley Crouch. In addition, most of the books cited below were written on jazz-related topics—oral histories, musician biographies and memoirs, collections of

journalistic essays, and works in jazz studies (i.e., books on jazz music theory, history, and criticism).

The sources cited in the study below span a large time period (roughly from the mid-1940s to the present). In establishing a common critical view of Stitt's music, preference was given to works written by those with firsthand knowledge of his music—either through interviewing Stitt and his contemporaries, hearing Stitt perform in person, reviewing his albums when they were first released, etc. Preference was also given to works that are frequently cited in the jazz literature.³

Quotes from musicians are also selected based on their relevance and familiarity with Stitt and his music. Most musicians cited below have worked in music their entire adult lives and are well-known figures in jazz history, e.g., Cannonball Adderley, J. J. Johnson, Kenny Clarke, Quincy Jones, and Lee Konitz. The few exceptions are musicians from Stitt's youth and early New York years—musicians who sometimes changed professions or did not make major names for themselves. Quotes from musicians who worked with both Stitt and

³ An example of such a work is Ira Gitler's *Swing to Bop: An Oral History of the Transition in Jazz in the 1940s*.

Parker (e.g. Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis) or who worked with Stitt extensively are given more weight.

Points of correspondence between critics and musicians are highlighted in the text. When discussing Sonny Stitt, some musicians referenced his similarity to Parker without additional comment. Others went further, arguing positively that Stitt sounded like Parker and offering reasons why. This study notes specifically when the comments and conclusions of musicians and critics intersect. For example, if 1) a critic described a feature of Sonny Stitt's musical style; and 2) a saxophonist addressed that same feature in acknowledging Stitt as a musical influence—this would be brought out in the text.

Likewise, musical analysis that supports the critical literature on Stitt will be emphasized. Few music critics are technical in their discussions of Stitt's style. Even where not informed by analysis, however, critical opinions on musical matters can be tested against the music itself. Statements about a musician's "soloing" (broadly speaking) can be shown, through analysis, to correspond to the timbre, melodic materials, or musical architecture present in a given musical recording. This is explained in greater detail in the Musical Analysis method section below.

Challenges in Historical Research

In historical research, it is important to be aware that sources are sometimes wrong in the facts they report. At times these errors are made unintentionally. Sources can be mistaken or forgetful when recounting the details of events, especially if the events occurred long ago. Examples of errors of this sort are mistakes about dates, place names, or the musicians present on a given recording. In this study, these kinds of errors are noted wherever they appear in a cited source. In most cases, the error will be mentioned in a footnote. When the error is directly relevant to one of the dissertation sub-problems, however, it will be discussed and be included as part of the analysis.

Sources can also make mistakes intentionally. This can occur when a source wants to change public perception, is trying to make themselves sound better, or has something to hide. These kinds of deceptive mistakes pose a potential challenge in this study. The dissertation problem centers on Sonny Stitt's reputation as a Charlie Parker imitator—a reputation that Stitt often denied. Given that this reputation reflected poorly on him, Stitt had reason to overemphasize evidence in his favor and underplay that adduced by his critics. This does not, by itself, suggest that Stitt was dishonest. It does mean, however, that any statements

from Stitt that conflict with the historical record, or that appear to help his reputation, must be examined closely.

Finally, sources can make mistakes due to negligence. These kinds of errors occur where sources repeat facts and arguments they have heard without investigating them first. Given the prevalence of comparisons of Stitt to Parker in the literature, it is possible that sources were lazy and repeated what they heard about Stitt uncritically. For example, a musician or critic could state that Stitt copied or sounded like Parker without testing to see if it was true, having heard the claim many times before.

While this sort of error is difficult to prove, it can be guarded against by being discriminating with one's choice of sources. Choosing the best sources involves choosing notable, respected sources with a history of publishing on jazz-related issues. It also involves choosing early and relevant sources who were familiar with the music of both Stitt and Parker. To accomplish this, this study focuses on major critics and publications, especially those contemporaneous with Stitt's recording career. This study also omits, for the most part, works that mention Stitt's similarity to Parker *without* explaining how or why, or without providing additional details.

Musical Analysis

The present section explains the use of musical analysis in this study. It includes an overview of various approaches to jazz analysis, including those used in previous studies of Charlie Parker and Sonny Stitt. It then describes the approach to analysis used in this particular study, and how it is calibrated to address the relationship between Stitt and Parker. Also included is a discussion of music notation and its limitations in jazz analysis. The subsection ends with an explanation of the selection criteria for musical works and a brief introduction of those works.

In this study, the goal of musical analysis is to determine the similarities and differences between Stitt and Parker's playing styles through analysis of select recorded solos. The basic process of analysis is as follows: First, a number of improvised solos are selected and transcribed. Then, the solos are examined using a checklist of musical parameters described below. Throughout the examination, musical features are identified and discussed in the text. These features are compared, contrasted, and finally used to make arguments about Stitt and Parker's playing styles and the relationship between them.

Musical analysis is also used to corroborate aspects of Stitt's critical legacy. Since the 1940s, critics have written about Stitt's relationship to Parker. In

their writing, critics discuss the similarities and differences between their playing styles, referring to specific musical features like sound, melodic vocabulary, solo construction, and so on. Because these same features figure prominently in musical analysis, there will be places where Stitt's critics and the findings of this study overlap. For this reason, the musical analysis chapters close with a conclusion that incorporates material from the historical analysis chapters. This material will be compared with the results of the musical analysis to see both where the findings agree (i.e., where the findings of musical analysis corroborate the common critical view) and where they do not.

Overview of Approaches to Analysis of Jazz Improvisations

The jazz literature contains numerous examples of ways to analyze recorded improvisations. In his article "Analyzing Improvised Jazz," Gary Potter identifies six commonly-used approaches.⁴ They include: relating pitches of a solo to the underlying harmony, analyzing melodic patterns and formulas, Schenkerian analysis, implication-realization theory, analysis that relies on the

⁴ Gary Potter, "Analyzing Improvised Jazz," *College Music Symposium*, 30, no. 1 (Spring 1990), 64–74.

analogy of language, and pitch class set analysis.⁵ Potter summarizes each approach and provides examples demonstrating their use by scholars in jazz studies. He admits that his list is not exhaustive: there are variations on these approaches, and additional approaches beyond them.

After his summary, Potter suggests a synthesis approach that “draws upon various focused analytic approaches, combining them into a single presentation.” Potter recommends a standard visual format where multiple levels of analysis are displayed simultaneously. In this format, a solo is first transcribed into musical notation. An analysis of the solo is then written underneath on additional musical staves.⁶

Potter’s format is visually attractive, and presents a considerable amount of analytic information in parallel, where it can be reviewed at a glance. It also presents the information graphically, providing more of the analysis in musical notation and less of it through words. This emphasis on notation is an important

⁵ Ibid., 64–68.

⁶ Ibid., 64, 68–73.

part of Potter's analytic method, and he recommends it explicitly.⁷ Potter does not predetermine which analytic approaches to use or which staves to place them in. Rather, "the analytic perspective should be eclectic, holistic, using whatever approaches help explain a solo's effectiveness."⁸

An alternate means of analyzing improvised solos is represented by the work of jazz historian Lewis Porter. Unlike Potter, Porter avoids using a predetermined visual format, which he calls "a 'cookbook' approach to analysis."⁹ In personal correspondence with Potter, Lewis Porter explains his eclectic approach: "For me analysis is an inspirational activity, like making music.... Every piece suggests its own approach.... I tend to resist any kind of standardized analysis where each piece will be presented along with a standardized chart or the staff set up as you suggest."¹⁰

An example of Porter's eclectic approach can be found in his influential biography of tenor saxophonist Lester Young. The work begins with a long

⁷ "As much of the analysis as possible should be displayed in musical notation. Some verbal description is inevitable, but it should be kept to a minimum." *Ibid.*, 70.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 70, note 19.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

biographical chapter followed by several chapters of musical analysis. In the musical analysis chapters, Porter aims for “the reader... to understand Young’s style and its development through a close examination of its facets—melody, rhythm, and so forth.”¹¹ From this examination, “an overall picture emerges.”¹²

Porter examines Young’s playing style one facet at a time by analyzing material drawn from his recorded solos. The chapters are organized by headings named after stylistic aspects, like dynamics and expression, range and register, tone, alternate fingerings, rhythmic organization, and long-range structural connections. These stylistic aspects are analyzed in many different ways. At least two of the approaches listed in “Analyzing Improvised Jazz” are present—identification and use of melodic formulas, and relation of pitches to the underlying harmony. Other approaches involve graphing types of melodic contour, identifying Young’s use and development of motives, classifying types of phrasing, use of intervals, and many others.

Facets of Young’s style less amenable to music notation are explained non-graphically, using both the terminology of Western music theory and non-technical language. Porter presents his conclusions about Young’s style

¹¹ Lewis Porter, *Lester Young* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985), ix.

¹² *Ibid.*

diachronically (e.g., “development of tone or rhythm through the years”) and synchronically (e.g., “a summary of tone [and] rhythm... as they appear during one particular period.”)¹³

Analysis of Charlie Parker Improvisations

The music of Charlie Parker has been analyzed in detail in several academic works. Two of these works inform the understanding of Parker’s style in this dissertation, and are cited numerous times in the musical analysis chapters below.

The first work is Carl Woideck’s *Charlie Parker: His Music and Life*. As with Porter’s study of Lester Young, the book consists of a long biographical chapter followed by an extended examination of musical style. Woideck divides his examination into four chapters, each covering a different period of Parker’s career. The chapters are further divided into sections that cover Parker’s musical style in specific bands and on specific recordings.

¹³ Ibid., ix–x.

In an introduction to the musical analysis chapters, Woideck grounds his study “in a survey of some [of] the subjective and objective qualities, traits, and techniques associated with Charlie Parker’s best music.”¹⁴ There are thirteen in all: 1) Facility and virtuosity; 2) Intensity of swing and drive; 3) Inventiveness; 4) Playfulness, sense of humor; 5) Bluesiness, poetic qualities; 6) Characteristics of repertoire; 7) Range of tempos; 8) Range of note values; 9) Use of implied double time; 10) Accents, syncopation; 11) Vibrato and timbre; 12) Characteristics of melodic line; and 13) Harmonic vocabulary.¹⁵

Woideck refers to these qualities throughout his analysis, and argues that they “provide context and criteria for study and enjoyment of Parker’s art of any period.”¹⁶ Like Porter, Woideck’s analysis is eclectic, calling upon whatever approach best makes sense of a given aspect of Parker’s style. These approaches include analyzing solo pitches against the background harmony, showing Parker’s use of signature licks, comparing multiple takes of a recording, demonstrating

¹⁴ Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 54.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 54–57.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 54.

Parker's approach to embellishing a melody, and highlighting the voice leading implied in Parker's improvised lines, among other approaches.

The second work on Parker is Thomas Owens' dissertation "Charlie Parker: Techniques of Improvisation."¹⁷ Spanning two volumes, it is the fullest study of Parker's melodic vocabulary available. Volume I contains various topics related to Charlie Parker and his music. An early chapter discusses the features of Parker's style, such as articulation and accentuation, phrasing, tone quality and vibrato, harmonic vocabulary, and preferred musical repertoire;¹⁸ later chapters contain Schenkerian analyses of Parker solos.¹⁹

The majority of both volumes, however, is dedicated to cataloguing and analyzing Parker's melodic vocabulary. The dissertation includes transcription and study of some 250 solos, organized by period, key, or chord progression type. Owens enumerates Parker's most commonly-played motives, demonstrating how Parker combined them to form phrases and listing their "probability" of appearing under various circumstances (e.g., how frequently a given pitch collection is used on alternate takes of the same recording, on the IV⁷ chord of a blues, on the tune

¹⁷ Thomas Owens, "Charlie Parker: Techniques of Improvisation," 2 vols. (PhD diss., UCLA, 1974).

¹⁸ Owens, "Charlie Parker," 1:10–16.

¹⁹ Ibid., 1:210–266.

“Hot House,” etc.). Volume II is made up primarily of Parker transcriptions, with melodic motives labeled throughout.

Woideck and Owens cover the same career and many of the same recordings, but differ considerably in their goals and approaches to analysis. By focusing primarily on pitches at the level of the sub-phrase, and by including so much of Parker’s music in his analysis, Owens solves the problem of *what notes* Parker played most often under *what circumstances*. Woideck, on the other hand, is concerned with the characteristics of Parker’s style, of which note choice is just a part. Woideck’s study is less comprehensive, but he covers the extraordinary and the exceptional cases more often, showcasing Parker’s virtuosic flourishes, advances in harmonic concept, and motivic development, alongside more abstract qualities like Parker’s bluesiness, unpredictability, and the particulars of his sound. Consequently, Woideck captures less of Parker’s notes than Owens does, but more of his musical personality. The two works are complementary, and considered together, they provide a much fuller picture of Parker’s music.

Analysis of Sonny Stitt Improvisations

Unlike the music of Parker, the music of Sonny Stitt has received little sustained academic attention. While Stitt's early work has attracted the attention of music critics, few academics have taken up the task of analysis.

Three helpful exceptions to this are the dissertations of Weremchuk, Witt, and Meier. Weremchuk and Witt's dissertations discuss Stitt's musical style and include analysis of Stitt's improvisations on the tenor saxophone. Meier's dissertation deals with the nature of the musical relationship between Stitt and Parker, and includes comparative analysis of Stitt and Parker solos.

Weremchuk's dissertation—"A Comparative Analysis of Improvised Solos Based on the Popular Songs *Body and Soul*, *Night and Day* and *Out of Nowhere* as Performed by Selected Jazz Tenor Saxophonists Representing Different Styles"—contains analysis of solos recorded by nine different tenor saxophonists. Weremchuk analyzes a solo that Stitt recorded on "Out of Nowhere" in 1982 (alongside other "Out of Nowhere" solos by saxophonists Stan Getz and David Liebman).²⁰

²⁰ The recording of "Out of Nowhere" was recorded at Stitt's "penultimate recording session" a month before his death. Weremchuk, "Comparative Analysis," 44.

While Weremchuk’s analysis of Stitt’s solo is short, it identifies many features of Stitt’s late musical style. Using short transcribed excerpts, Weremchuk demonstrates Stitt’s embellishment of the melody, and his use of chromatic passing tones, dominant chord alterations, chord arpeggios, melodic ornaments, blues “licks” and inflections, alternate fingerings, and legato articulation.²¹

Witt’s dissertation—“Sonny Stitt: His Life and Music”—provides a more thorough analysis of Stitt’s musical style than Weremchuk. In an introductory chapter on “I Got Rhythm,” Witt mentions some of the characteristics of Stitt’s style, which include quoting other musicians and the use of tritone chord substitutions.²² In two subsequent chapters, Witt analyzes four Stitt solos recorded between 1949 and 1960 on the chord changes to “I Got Rhythm,” and discusses the relationship between Stitt and tenor saxophonist Lester Young.²³

Witt covers various features of Stitt’s playing style in detail, including the “building blocks of [his] improvisational vocabulary,”²⁴ his musical phrasing, use of alternate fingerings, common playing range, signature phrases, the clarity and

²¹ *Ibid.*, 44–47.

²² Witt, “Sonny Stitt,” pp. 29, 36.

²³ *Ibid.*, 44–78.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 46.

uniformity of his playing, use of three against four cross-rhythms, and awareness of solo structure. Witt draws parallels between Stitt's music and that of swing saxophonist and bebop forerunner Lester Young, arguing that "Stitt's saxophone style shows a very direct link to Young's style."²⁵

Meier's dissertation—"Edward 'Sonny' Stitt: Original Voice or Jazz Imitator"—contains a comparative musical analysis of improvised alto saxophone solos by Parker and Stitt. Since this analysis is directly relevant to the present study, it will be useful to outline Meier's analysis method and findings in detail.

Meier analyzes three solos each by Parker and Stitt to "examine the development of Stitt as a jazz saxophonist and the extent of any musical influence Parker may have on Stitt."²⁶ The three Parker solos are drawn from the pieces "Honey and Body" (recorded acapella in 1940), "Swingmatism" and "Hootie Blues" (recorded with Jay McShann in 1941). The three Stitt solos are drawn from the pieces "That's Earl, Brother" and "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" (recorded with the Dizzy Gillespie Sextet in 1946), and "Ray's Idea" (recorded in 1972).

²⁵ Ibid., 65. Stitt's musical connection to Lester Young is discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

²⁶ Meier, "Edward 'Sonny' Stitt," ii.

Meier considers numerous musical features in his analyses, including “melody, timbre, harmony, and rhythm,”²⁷ as well as “articulation, pitch, vibrato, phrase length, and the use of repeated phrases.”²⁸ He writes that Stitt’s saxophone tone (on the analyzed solos) is like that of Duke Ellington saxophonist Johnny Hodges, while Parker’s tone is more reminiscent of Lester Young.²⁹ Stitt and Parker both have a similar “subtle” vibrato (which they borrowed from Young), but a different rhythmic swing feel.³⁰

Stitt’s saxophone tone is described as “rich and full,” “lean, focused... and vibrant,” with sparing use of vibrato.³¹ In his solos, Stitt “uses a wide variety of rhythmic gestures, including complicated double-time passages,” which he disperses “evenly throughout the improvisation.”³² Stitt uses chromatic enclosures and chromatic passing tones alongside scalar and arpeggiated gestures

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 27.

²⁹ Ibid., 19–20.

³⁰ Ibid., 19, 22–23.

³¹ Ibid., 41, 50.

³² Ibid., 41.

“to drive to the cadence.”³³ He “consistently constructs phrases in even, two- and four-measure lengths.”³⁴

Stitt’s musical style differs from Parker’s in several ways. His “rhythmic application is less complex” than Parker’s, and his phrases are more likely to begin on the beat.³⁵ Stitt’s eighth notes are also more “evenly centered in the pulse,” and his short quarter notes are less percussive.³⁶ There are differences in phrasing, as well: Stitt’s phrases “are more consistently symmetrical in length,” and his phrasing “clearly leads to cadence points and never cuts across the form of the tune.”³⁷ Despite similarities in melodic material, Parker “tends to incorporate more chromaticism” in his lines, and does not use “chromatic melody alteration to lead to chord or scale pitches,” like Stitt does.³⁸ This reflects Stitt’s approach to harmony, which is “more conservative.”³⁹

³³ *Ibid.*, 41–43.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 52.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 53.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 54.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 54, 56.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 59.

In his conclusion, Meier argues against Stitt’s reputation as a Parker imitator. He writes that “copying in a systematic manner never occurred”; rather than copying, “both [Stitt and Parker] were influenced by the saxophonists who laid the foundation for bebop—namely Young, Hawkins, and Hodges.”⁴⁰ In the end, Meier seems eager to give Stitt “credit for his role as an original voice in the development of the [bebop] idiom.”⁴¹

Analysis Method in the Present Study

Like many of the works discussed above, the present study is concerned with questions of musical style. It aims to explore Stitt and Parker’s relationship by comparing and contrasting the features of their playing styles through analysis of selected solos. Since Stitt’s playing style on the alto saxophone has received comparatively limited academic attention, analysis of his recorded works on that instrument is required. For this reason, the musical analysis section in this study relies primarily on new analyses of Stitt’s alto saxophone solos, despite being informed by previous studies of his tenor saxophone playing by Weremchuk and Witt.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 61.

⁴¹ Ibid.

For descriptions of Parker's style, the musical analysis section borrows heavily from earlier Parker studies. Unlike Stitt's alto saxophone playing, Parker's alto saxophone playing has been analyzed in detail, and many aspects of his musical style have been uncovered through previous research. Consequently, the musical analysis section in this study relies on the works of Woideck and Owens discussed above. Drawing from earlier Parker studies is useful for two additional reasons. It allows for a fuller examination of Stitt's music, while keeping the present study manageable in scope.

The approach to musical analysis used in this study roughly follows the approach used by Lewis Porter in his works on Lester Young and John Coltrane. The study contains long-form analyses of selected improvised solos from Stitt and Parker's recorded works. Each solo is considered against a large list of musical parameters. From this list, specific musical features are then identified and discussed.

As with Porter's works, this study adopts an "eclectic" approach to analysis. This means that the musical features discussed in the analyses below are not preselected based upon some overriding criteria, but rather chosen based upon what the analyst, through observing and studying various elements of a given solo, believes best can make sense of the solo's effectiveness.

The approach to musical analysis in this study is not entirely eclectic, however. Since this study aims to compare Stitt and Parker's musical styles directly, certain musical features are chosen specifically to facilitate such a comparison. For example, the musical analysis section would contain a discussion of Stitt and Parker's approaches to chromaticism, if chromaticism was a salient feature of their solos and it was fruitful to compare the two. Likewise, certain features of Stitt's style may be analyzed and highlighted in order to facilitate a comparison with descriptions of Parker's style in Woideck and Owens.

To be clear about expectations and set boundaries for the study that follows, it is important to list the musical elements one expects to draw from. In "Analysing Popular Music," musicologist Philip Tagg provides such a list, which he calls a "checklist of parameters of musical expression."⁴² The checklist, as Tagg describes it, is a methodological tool, "that no important parameter of musical expression is overlooked in analysis."⁴³ It includes seven categories, five of which have direct application to this study:⁴⁴

⁴² Philip Tagg, "Analysing Popular Music: Theory, Method and Practice," *Popular Music 2* (1982), 47.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* The two checklist categories not included here are "acoustical aspects" (e.g., reverb, characteristics of performance venue, etc.) and "electromusical and mechanical aspects" (e.g., panning, distortion, delay, etc.).

1. Aspects of time: duration; pulse, tempo, meter, periodicity; rhythmic texture and motifs.
2. Melodic aspects: register; pitch range; rhythmic motifs; tonal vocabulary; contour; timbre.
3. Orchestration aspects: type and number of voices; technical aspects of performance; timbre; phrasing; accentuation.
4. Aspects of tonality and texture: tonal centre and type of tonality; harmonic rhythm; type of harmonic change; chordal alteration; relationships between voices, parts, instruments; compositional texture and method.
5. Dynamic aspects: levels of sound strength; accentuation.⁴⁵

The checklist is broad, and incorporates most of the stylistic aspects discussed in the works of Porter, Woideck, Witt, and Meier discussed above. The checklist can be extended to include terminology commonly used in jazz performance: blues feeling and inflection; chord alteration, extension, substitution, and voicing; chord changes; groove; interaction between rhythm section and soloist; note placement (relative to other notes in a melodic phrase or to other instruments, being “behind” or “on top” of the beat); phrase lengths and

⁴⁵ Ibid., 47–48. The checklist has been adapted for this study. Items less relevant to a comparative analysis of Stitt and Parker solos have been omitted.

start/end locations; swing and swing feel; syncopation; terms of form (AABA, bridge, chorus, riff, trading fours, vamp, etc.); time and time feel; use of space.

The list should also include aspects particular to the saxophone: tone and timbral effects due to alternate fingerings, embouchure, equipment (reed, mouthpiece, make or type of saxophone), pitch bends, tonguing effects, and vibrato; and technical considerations like altissimo, articulation, fingerings, intonation, overtones, range, and register.

Musical parameters are considered both as they occur at a particular moment (e.g., a given pitch or loudness, an F⁷ chord, a raspy tone, an unaccompanied saxophone), and in time (two measures of a given pitch or loudness, a motion from F⁷ to F^{#7b5}, a raspy tone at the start of a long blues lick, an instrumental break leading into a saxophone cadenza). In analysis, the change or non-change of any of these parameters may be significant, and contribute to a work's sense of balance, contrast, narrative shape, transformation, unity, or variety.

This list of parameters is quite large. However, it is primarily a reference tool for the analyst's consideration, and "does not need to be applied slavishly."⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Ibid., 48.

In practice, this study will be similar to the works of jazz analysis cited above. It will focus on features that commonly appear in descriptions of bebop and in previous analyses of Stitt and Parker's music. Examples of these types of features include approaches to rhythm (e.g., eighth-note triplets, double-time swing feel), harmony (e.g., chord alterations, tritone chord substitutions), melodic vocabulary (e.g., bebop scales, chromatic passing tones), phrasing (e.g., phrase lengths, accentuation), and timbre (e.g., pitch bends, vibrato).

By focusing on these types of features, it becomes possible to bring this study into conversation with the relevant Stitt and Parker literature. Scholars like Woideck and Owens consider the same stylistic features in their analyses of Parker's recorded works. Critics describe Stitt and Parker's music in similar terms, referring to features like their saxophone tones and musical vocabulary. By focusing on these same features in music analysis, it becomes possible to see where the musical analysis findings and the jazz literature overlap. It also becomes possible to verify whether Stitt's critical reputation as a Parker imitator is supported by the music he recorded.

Notation

As with the works discussed above, this study includes transcribed excerpts of solos to illustrate points made in analysis. All musical excerpts are labelled with an example number. A full list of musical examples is found near the beginning of this document.⁴⁷

Musical excerpts are written out using standard five-line staff notation. Using staff notation is a convenient and quick way to identify pitches and rhythmic values. It is also helpful in visualizing a succession of pitches and the contour of a melodic line, and for comparing note choices against the underlying harmony. In some excerpts, accentuation and phrasing markings are included. Other excerpts include symbols indicating glissandi or pitch bends (scoops, doits, fall offs). Symbols like these are included when their corresponding musical effects are discussed in the analysis text, or when the effects are obvious enough in the recording that leaving them out might render the transcription unclear. Some excerpts include asterisks, brackets, or alternate chord symbols. These are included to highlight specific musical features that are discussed in the text.

⁴⁷ Page xii.

Like most music in the jazz tradition, the improvised solos and pieces discussed in this study *swing*, which means they are performed with swing feeling and in a swing rhythmic style. In this style, eighth notes are performed with uneven durations—the first note in a pair of eighth notes lasts longer than the second. This dissertation follows contemporary jazz practice: swung eighth notes are written simply as eighth notes, and not as triplets or in dotted eighth-sixteenth note combinations. Sometimes notes in a musical phrase appear to lag or rush compared to the surrounding rhythms. When prominent or discussed in the text, this effect will be indicated in the transcription with the words “lay back” or “rush,” respectively, and a line that identifies the notes in question.

Melodies of standard jazz compositions often divide neatly into four-measure phrases. This is true of bebop music, and includes most of the standard repertoire performed by Stitt and Parker, with thirty-two measure forms (consisting of four eight-measure sections) and the twelve-bar blues (three four-measure phrases) being the most common. To observe this tendency, transcriptions have been kept to four bars per system wherever possible. Divisions between formal sections are indicated with double-bar lines.

In jazz performance, song forms typically repeat. After the melody of a piece has been played, musicians take turns improvising over the chords, which

appear in the same order and with formal divisions intact. The term “chorus” is sometimes used to refer to a soloist’s successive repetitions through a song form. In this study, transcriptions of solos exceeding one chorus in length contain the chorus number inside a box at the beginning of each repetition. Full transcriptions of each of the analyzed solos appear in Appendix A and following.

Transcription Method

Pitches and rhythms were first transcribed by ear, verifying individual notes at the piano if necessary. Once transcribed, phrases were played on the saxophone at tempo. This was to check fingerings and confirm that the phrase sounded the same as the recording, and then to discern additional nuances (e.g., vibrato, time feel, subtleties of articulation). In a small number of instances where it was difficult to determine the exact pitch, the recording was reduced to half speed, and the passage was played multiple times with different combinations of notes until a fingering was found that best fit the sound of the original recording and the surrounding harmony.

To provide context for Stitt and Parker’s solos, the musical analysis section contains discussions of other aspects of the recording, such as the composition (its melody, chord progression, key, etc.) and solos by other

musicians. Frequently, it will be necessary to make several such references in a single passage.

To avoid confusion when switching between transposing and non-transposing instruments, all such references are in concert pitch. This means that Stitt and Parker's solos—recorded on the E \flat alto saxophone, a transposing instrument—are analyzed using their sounding pitch, not their written pitch, which is a major sixth higher. All chord symbols, musical excerpts, and transcriptions are likewise in concert pitch.

In some cases, it may be helpful to refer to the written alto saxophone key. The primary reason for this is to clarify discussion of aspects that are instrument specific (e.g., intonation of particular notes, alternate fingerings, range, changes in timbre between registers). The secondary reason is to present pitches or chords as they would have appeared from Stitt and Parker's perspective (e.g., a two-octave sweep starting on a low B \flat , a ii-V-I chord progression in C major). Wherever the written alto saxophone key is used, this will be explicitly stated in the text.

Musical excerpts and transcriptions include chord symbols, which are written above the staff. These symbols are included to show how a soloist's note choices interact with the underlying harmony. As Potter describes, however, one encounters numerous problems when deciding which chord symbols to use. For

starters, a piece of music might have “no authoritative set of changes.”⁴⁸ Another problem is that musicians in a band might not be playing—or thinking of—the exact same chords. Finally, deferring to published sheet music is problematic, as the published chords are sometimes incorrect, and may not represent the chords used on a particular recording.⁴⁹

While the problem of choosing what chords to use is complicated, it is manageable. Indeed, musicians deal with this problem whenever they perform together. For purposes of this study, professional musicians are assumed to be working from a similar set of chord changes unless there is clear evidence in the recording to the contrary.

In the musical analysis section, chords of analyzed pieces are determined in two ways. For pieces that are part of the standard jazz repertoire (like “Ko Ko,” a composition derived from the popular standard “Cherokee”), a set of chord changes is first prepared, either by consulting a published fake book and iReal

⁴⁸ Potter, “Analyzing,” 64.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Pro,⁵⁰ or by drawing from the author's own knowledge and experience.⁵¹ The chord changes are then verified against the chords performed on the recording. Where the chords on the recording differ—particularly where differences in the rhythm section are consistent from chorus to chorus—the chord symbols used in this study are changed to reflect that.

For pieces that are not part of the standard repertoire, chords are determined first by transcribing at the piano, as closely as possible, the bassline and chordal accompaniment. These are then examined and compared with other voices in the recording: the melody, solos, and solo backgrounds. Chord symbols are then selected based upon which pitches are present, which pitches remain consistent across repeated formal sections, and which bass note functions as the chord root.

Following standard jazz practice, chord symbols indicate the chord root, chord quality, and the fifth and seventh used. They do not indicate chord function, chord voicing, or the rhythm and register that chords are played in. Chord

⁵⁰ A fake book is book of sheet music containing the melodies and chord progressions to commonly played pieces. iReal Pro is a mobile application for reading and creating chord charts; an active user community has uploaded chord progressions to over a thousand pieces from the standard jazz repertoire.

⁵¹ Many of the pieces analyzed in this dissertation are still performed by jazz musicians today.

symbols do not include chord alterations or extensions, unless they are an accepted part of the standard chord changes, or appear in multiple instruments across several choruses.

This approach to determining chords is far from perfect, as even Potter admits: “chord choice may be a compromise or an educated guess.”⁵²

Complexities like these, however, are unavoidable in a genre like jazz, where so much of the music is improvised. Ultimately, it is the task of the analyst to make sense of a situation where musicians often outline different chords at the same time.

In this study, the chord symbols are not absolute, but function similar to a chord chart. A chord chart provides basic harmonic information that musicians interpret, either by following it, altering it, or avoiding it altogether. Where the chord symbols in this study do not adequately reflect Stitt and Parker’s solos or the accompaniment behind them, this is mentioned in the text. Where necessary, transcriptions of rhythm section instruments are provided.

⁵² Ibid., 70.

Challenges in Jazz Notation and Analysis

The above discussion on the proper analysis of chords illustrates a difficulty inherent in musical notation itself. Using Western staff notation, many elements of music are difficult to notate precisely, and some elements are difficult to notate at all. This limitation is well-known to the musicians and scholars who work with staff notation. As the composer and theorist Walter Piston once wrote: “The imperfection and vagueness of our musical notation makes it impossible to indicate with accuracy dynamic and rhythmic quantities as well as pitch, to say nothing of shades of tone color, warmth and intensity.”⁵³

The problem is perhaps even greater in a jazz context, where fewer musical elements are notated, and those that are often vary from performance to performance. Pitch, to cite a parameter of music that five-line staff notation captures well, is complicated by issues of indeterminacy. Jazz saxophonists use a variety of styles of vibrato whose speed and width change considerably, even within a single piece of music. Pitches are regularly bent upward and downward,

⁵³ In the preface to his classic study of swing music, Gunther Schuller expressed a similar sentiment: “Musical notation has its inadequacies... it cannot capture tone, expression, subtle nuances and inflections. It is at best a blueprint which has to be fleshed out by the performer’s (or in this case the reader’s) imagination.” Walter Piston, *Orchestration* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1969), Foreword, viii; Schuller, *The Swing Era*, x.

especially around thirds and fifths as in the blues. The degree of bend varies with each instance; and both the attack and the release of a note can be bent in this way. Pitch bends can also be combined with fingered grace notes and glissandi, making not only the pitch but its start and end points hard to determine.

In a similar way, note values provide only approximations of the true length of a note. A written quarter note, for example, can be interpreted in a myriad of ways. Even allowing for the addition of accent markings (staccato, marcato, tenuto) to provide further definition, the possibilities are many—there is no one standard of a quarter note for a musician to defer to, nor any expectation that a note will be played the same on future performances.

In musical analysis of jazz works, there are additional challenges involved in discussing “swing”—an essential, highly individualized rhythmic feel that remains for all intents and purposes resistant to staff notation. Although swing is described as a feel, it is a feel with implications for many parameters involved in musical analysis, such as the length, placement, and accentuation of a musician’s notes. Swing feel is difficult to notate, in part, because it leads to changes in these parameters that are finer than commonly-used note values allow.

As mentioned earlier, the swing eighth notes in this study follow jazz convention and are transcribed as plain eighth notes. This convention is perhaps

necessary to keep the music readable. Resorting to sixty-fourth notes or even shorter note values would be more precise, but also hopelessly difficult to read or transcribe without mechanical assistance; and it would still fail to capture other aspects of swing feel, like gradations of intensity and accentuation. On the other hand, reducing the complexities of swing to mere eighth notes, as transcriptions of jazz music generally do, so flattens out rhythmic discrepancies that the “notational symbols really hide more than they make explicit.”⁵⁴

The issue of notation and rhythm has been problematized even in the world of classical music. As musicologist Jan LaRue wrote in *Guidelines for Style Analysis*, “contrary to much ‘received wisdom,’ *rhythm is not perfectly regular.*”⁵⁵ LaRue was not opposed to Western staff notation; he recognized the “need [for] an approximation of regularity for ensemble playing and a graphically exact representation of meter as a notational convention.” Such a system must lack precision, however, since “good musicians play with carefully graduated

⁵⁴ Nicholas Cook, quoting Schenker, in a sentence where Cook speaks of “the inadequacy of conventional musical notation as a means of specifying the intended musical sound.” Nicholas Cook, *Music, Imagination, and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 122, 124.

⁵⁵ Jan LaRue, *Guidelines for Style Analysis*, 2nd ed. (Warren, MI: Harmonie Park Press, 1992), 274, endnote E, emphasis in original.

manipulations of regularity and well-planned evasions of meter, drawing on indefinable conventions of rhythmic latitude that provide both freedom and control.”⁵⁶ While LaRue was discussing the notation of rhythms and meter in a classical music context, his observations are profitably applied to swing. Notation is useful and even necessary, but it only approximates the rhythmic subtleties that good musicians play with.

Given the strengths and limitations of staff notation, how should a stylistic analysis of jazz improvisation proceed? Ingrid Monson notes that “the traditional objects of analysis have been the parameters of musical sound most amenable to Western notation.”⁵⁷ This would include any parameters related to note pitch and note duration, such as melodic vocabulary and chord structures, as well as larger scale parameters like key relationships and musical form. As mentioned above: parameters like these can help to explain features of Stitt’s playing style, and will be used in this study.

It will not do, however, to focus on these parameters alone. Monson again: “Many of the nonnotatable aspects of jazz improvisation—including tone color,

⁵⁶ Ibid., 275.

⁵⁷ Ingrid Monson, *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 187.

phrasing, dynamics, rhythmic coordination, and intensity—as well as the intermusical connections that listeners hear in a jazz performance are among the seemingly ineffable physical qualities that produce emotional reactions in listeners.”⁵⁸ This is a strong argument for including parameters like tone color and phrasing in musical analysis. If, as Monson says, listeners respond strongly to nonnotatable aspects of jazz improvisation, then an analysis that ignores these aspects may be ignoring the most affective aspects of a musician’s style. In this study, therefore, musical analysis of Sonny Stitt’s playing style includes aspects of his music that do not notate well alongside aspects that do.

One way of analyzing the less notatable aspects of a musician’s style is to describe them in natural language. Both Porter and Woideck, for instance, refer to their subjects’ saxophone tones in their work. In one section, Porter describes Lester Young’s saxophone tone during different periods of his life, using words and phrases like “soft,” “cool,” “heavy,” “thicker and darker,” “raspy in the upper register,” “a dramatic pathos entered his work,” “pathetic and fluffy,” “thin, squeezing sound in the upper register,” and “low notes often sounded weak and uncertain.”⁵⁹

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 211.

⁵⁹ Porter, *Lester Young*, 44–45.

Other ways of describing timbre can be seen from the following abbreviated list. Timbre can be described in terms of harmonic profile: bright, brilliant, brittle, clear, colorful, dark, deep, dull, edgy, flat, lustrous, resonant, round. Timbral descriptions can also refer to sound production (a saxophonist's embouchure and equipment, or a performing technique): breathy, gruff, hoarse, muffled, muted, open, piercing, pinched, stuffy. Timbre can be described using simile: like an oboe, like a preacher, like John Coltrane circa the 1957 album *Blue Train*; or using cultural associations: commercial, country, down home, Gospel, highbrow, New York, South Philly, etc. Finally, timbre can be described using emotions that a musical sound is expressive of: calm, delicate, jocular, loose, mysterious, pained, plaintive, simple, soulful, unhurried, yearning, etc.

There is some overlap between these categories. A bright sound can refer to an emphasis on higher partials at the expense of the fundamental *as a result* of a mouthpiece that plays that way; it can also refer to music that is expressive of a cheery disposition. Descriptions of timbre can be related to other musical parameters, too. Soulful might mean a stronger attack *and* the presence of blues vocabulary; calm could be descriptive of a light sound that is slightly behind the beat and accompanied by longer note values, and so on. Descriptions of timbre

are explained, especially where their meaning might not be immediately clear to the reader.

Musical parameters—like note length, position, and intensity—can also be described in relative terms. This is useful when analyzing relationships between musical events that are easily heard in a recording, but may not be clear from a transcription. For instance, a quarter note can be described as being played earlier, louder, or longer compared to other quarter notes in a phrase or separate musical voice, even if the notes fall on the same beat and are both played *forte*. Relative terms can be qualified as well; e.g., a saxophonist’s quarter note could be “just slighter earlier,” “much louder,” or “even longer” than a coinciding quarter note in the piano part. In similar fashion, phrases can be said sound brighter, swing more intensely, be bluesier, and so on. Although some units—like decibels, cents, or milliseconds—may be difficult to measure precisely, they can still be used broadly or in relative terms. For example, a note could start more than a quarter-tone flat, be almost half a second behind the beat, and so on.

Since the musical analysis section includes discussion of parameters that do not notate well, at times it will make more sense to cite a recording than a transcribed excerpt. In cases like these, referring readers to a transcription would be less clear than having them hear the music for themselves. Both the score and

the recording have their strengths; while a score includes rhythmic values, pitches, chord symbols and other such information, the recording better captures aspects like timbre, vibrato, gradations of note placement and intensity, etc.

In this study the musical transcription and recording are both cited and used. Usually the transcription and recording are referenced together—if not in the main text, then in a footnote—and a musical excerpt is included. Occasionally the recording only is cited (i.e., without a musical excerpt provided in the text). This is in cases where the musical feature under discussion—a slight change in vibrato, say—is not captured through musical notation.

Where a musical feature can be better illustrated by referring to a recording, a time code is used (e.g., 2:13 for “two minutes and thirteen seconds from the start of the recording”). In cases where citing the transcript is more helpful, however, or where indicating a position within a song form is important, a location in the transcript is used (e.g., measure 34, beat 2, note 1; Stitt’s second quarter note in the bridge of his third chorus, etc.). Time codes are rounded to the nearest second, and may include descriptions of proximate musical events for clarity, like “the saxophone phrase at 2:13 that immediately precedes a loud crash in the drums.” In addition, to facilitate connecting transcribed excerpts to the recordings, time codes appear in the upper left-hand corner of all transcribed

excerpts and in full solo transcriptions. The words “measure,” “beat,” and “note” are sometimes abbreviated (e.g., m. 34, b. 2, n. 1). The pluralized forms “measures” and “beats” are also abbreviated (e.g., mm. 3–4; bb. 1–2, 4).

The text of the musical analysis section uses standard musical symbols when referring to note names, pitches, chords, chord functions, and formal sections. Often many different kinds of symbols are used within a single paragraph. To make it easy to differentiate between them, these musical symbols are formatted differently from the body text. The typographical conventions are as follows:⁶⁰

Note names are written in uppercase and in Verdana font (e.g., F#, G). Pitches are written in scientific pitch notation, with registration appearing in subscript (e.g., F#₄, G₅). Chord symbols are written in Tahoma font, with chord information following the root appearing in superscript (e.g., F#^{m7}, G^{maj9#11}). Chord function is indicated by roman numerals, which appear in Times New Roman font (e.g., III-VI-II-V-I). Roman numerals are generally written in upper

⁶⁰ The following typographical conventions are a slightly modified version of those used in Philip Tagg, “Discussion Document Concerning the Reform of Basic Music Theory Terminology,” accessed October 18, 2015, <http://tagg.org/articles/xpdfs/Terminology1309.pdf>, 1.

case regardless of chord quality. Where it is essential to indicate if a chord is major or minor, however, this can be differentiated (e.g., iii-vi-ii-V-I).

References to song form and specific sections are written in small caps (e.g., AABA, B section). Pitch ranges are indicated with an en dash (e.g., F#₄-G₅). Lists of pitches and chords are indicated by a comma separating each item (e.g., F#₄, G₅; F#^{m7}, G^{maj9#11}). Sequences of pitches and chords are indicated with a hyphen (e.g., F#₄-G₅-C₆; F#^{m7}-G^{maj9#11}). Harmonic progression is indicated with an arrow (e.g., D^{m7}→G⁷→C^{maj7}; II→V→I).

Selection Criteria

The solos analyzed in this study were selected based upon specific criteria. The first criterion is that the solos be representative of Stitt and Parker's playing styles and careers. For this reason, the solos chosen were recorded with musicians that Stitt and Parker either performed with frequently, or were employed by at the time of the recording. Some of the solos also come from compositions Stitt and Parker recorded more than once. This is to avoid analyzing improvisations that were recorded over unfamiliar repertoire, or in ensembles they were not used to playing with.

The second criterion is that the selected pieces be relevant to Stitt and Parker's relationship. For this reason, the year that the solos were recorded is considered. The Stitt solos analyzed below were recorded after Stitt was familiar with Parker and his music. For similar reasons, the selected Parker piece coincides with Stitt's first New York period. The selected solos also feature Stitt on alto saxophone as opposed to tenor. This is for two reasons. First, critics tended to find Stitt's tenor saxophone playing more original, while his alto playing was compared to Parker again and again. Second, Stitt's tenor saxophone playing has still received more attention from music analysts, notwithstanding the Meier dissertation discussed above.

The third criterion is that the selected solos show different sides to Stitt and Parker's playing. For this reason, the musical analysis chapters are divided into two groups, each focusing on Stitt and Parker's playing over a specific kind of musical material.

The first group draws from Stitt's early career, and includes pieces in a late swing or early bebop style. The second group focuses on Stitt and Parker's improvisations over fast tempos. It contains analysis of a Parker and a Stitt solo over Charlie Parker's "Ko Ko," a landmark bebop composition based on the chord progression on "Cherokee."

The fourth and final criterion is that the selected pieces be covered to some extent in the works of Woideck and Owens. This criterion was established for two reasons. First, it facilitates the inclusion of Woideck and Owens's considerable research on Parker. This research will be useful in the task of analysis, especially when drawing comparisons between Stitt and Parker's playing styles. Second, selecting pieces previously analyzed by Woideck and Owens will provide some structure to the musical analysis section, while also helping to keep the study manageable in scope.

The first set of musical analysis chapters includes detailed analyses of three solos recorded within a three-year period: two from Stitt and one from Parker. They include a Sonny Stitt solo from 1944, a second Stitt solo from 1946, and a Charlie Parker solo from 1944. The Stitt solos are taken from the recordings "Ready, Set, Jump" by the Tiny Bradshaw Orchestra (1944) and "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" by the Dizzy Gillespie Quintet (1946). Parker's solo is taken from the recording "Red Cross" by the Tiny Grimes Quintette (1944). All three solos are short and are selected from longer pieces that feature other soloists.

The two-year difference between "Ready, Set, Jump" and "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" is useful for purposes of musical analysis. The features of those two solos can be compared to look for differences in Stitt's playing style over time.

The goal of such a comparison is twofold: 1) to see whether Stitt's playing style changed after he moved to New York City; and 2) to determine whether or not Stitt's playing style became more like Parker's style during this period.

This information can be used to help determine whether Stitt's reputation as a talented Parker imitator is well-deserved. For this reason, the conclusion to the set of musical analysis chapters contains a discussion of changes in Stitt's style between 1944 and 1946. The conclusion also compares Stitt's playing on "Ready, Set, Jump" and "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" with an analysis of Parker's style from the same period.

The second set of musical analysis chapters includes detailed analyses of two solos recorded over Charlie Parker's "Ko Ko." The first solo is taken from Parker's classic 1945 recording of the piece. The second solo is taken from Stitt's 1963 recording of "Ko Ko" from the album *Stitt Plays Bird*.

Again, the goal of these chapters is to determine the features of Parker and Stitt's two solos. The chapters will close with a conclusion that compares the features of these solos directly in order to assess the similarities and differences between Parker and Stitt's improvisational approaches. These similarities and differences will then be considered in light of Stitt's reputation as a talented saxophonist who adopted characteristics of Parker's musical style.

CHAPTER VI
HISTORICAL ANALYSIS I: STITT'S CAREER

Introduction

Comparisons of Stitt to Parker began relatively early in Stitt's career, and followed him throughout the rest of his life. Stitt first moved to New York City in 1944–45, when he was in his early twenties. By 1946, critics were comparing him to Parker in print.¹ As Stitt's career progressed, the comparisons to Parker persisted, eventually solidifying into a reputation referenced and debated in the literature by critics, musicians, and Stitt himself.

When they compared Stitt to Parker, critics often discussed their music, citing similarities between the two saxophonists' playing styles. Beyond their playing styles, however, there were other important similarities between Stitt and Parker. Stitt's career intersected with Parker's at numerous points. These points of

¹ An example from April 1946: "young Stitt... sounds and looks amazingly like Charlie Parker and has better execution" (Vail, *Dizzy Gillespie*, 38). This and other statements from the period are discussed later in the chapter.

intersection are found throughout the Stitt literature, and were often noted by critics in their evaluations of Stitt's music.

Before looking at critical comparisons of Stitt and Parker's music, then, it will be useful to present and discuss points of intersection between Stitt and Parker's careers. Like Stitt and Parker's recordings, these points of intersection are an important part of the Stitt literature, and provide crucial context for comparing the two musicians. Many of these points of intersection have also frequently been raised by critics in their discussions of Stitt and his music, and have served to strengthen Stitt's reputation as a Parker imitator.

This chapter is divided into sections that introduce these points of intersection one at a time. The following topics are discussed: Stitt's early musical influences, how Stitt first encountered Parker's music, how Stitt and Parker met, Stitt's career in New York City in the mid-1940s, interactions between Stitt and Parker in New York, and Stitt's participation in Parker memorials and tribute recordings after Parker's death.

Stitt's Musical Influences

Stitt's musical influences are discussed by several sources in the literature. First, they are discussed by Stitt himself, who responded to questions about his

formative musical influences in interviews. Second, they are discussed by musicians who knew Stitt early in his career (i.e., before 1944, when he was first recorded). Third, they are discussed by musicians who knew and performed with Stitt and Parker—musicians like Miles Davis and Dizzy Gillespie. Fourth, Stitt’s musical influences are discussed by jazz critics.

Early Musical Influences

In a 1960 interview with British music periodical *Melody Maker*, Stitt answered questions about his formative musical influences. He said: “Do you know who started off my interest? Rudy Williams, who used to play with the Savoy Sultans. That’s the man that inspired me to play saxophone.”² When Stitt was “coming up, it was [Johnny] Hodges and Benny Carter, [Coleman] Hawkins and Lester [Young], then Ben [Webster] and Don Byas. I listened to Jimmy Dorsey and Toots Mondello, too.”³

In an interview later in life, Stitt provided a longer list of influences:

² Jones, “Stitt and the Parker Sound,” 8.

³ *Ibid.*

Well, when I got to be about sixteen or seventeen, I started listening to Lester Young quite a bit. And there were a few records—78's around, you know. And I would hear Benny Carter, Johnny Hodges. I remember Tab Smith, and I remember... I used to always live with a *Down Beat* magazine like all the kids did. And then there was Jimmy Dorsey and Toots Mondello, and Benny Goodman—he was my favorite clarinet player, Benny Goodman.⁴

Alto saxophonists Johnny Hodges and Benny Carter show up frequently in lists of Stitt's musical influences. As Stewart notes in a retrospective essay, Stitt “first came under the spell of [the] two great swing era saxophonists” (i.e., Hodges and Carter) early on, “before he discovered Bird on record.”⁵ In another interview late in life, Stitt said: “I love Benny Carter,” adding a minute later, “He was one of my first idols.”⁶

Musicians who knew Stitt early in his career agree. According to Willie Cook, a longtime Duke Ellington trumpeter who worked with Stitt in the Bama State Collegians in 1942–43,⁷ “at that time, Stitt played like Johnny Hodges when he was drinking, and like Benny Carter when he wasn't. He was good at

⁴ The interview was conducted in 1980. Enstice and Rubin, *Jazz Spoken Here*, 243.

⁵ Stitt heard Hodges on the radio with the Duke Ellington Orchestra. Stewart, liner notes to *The Complete Roost Sonny Stitt Studio Sessions*, 2–3.

⁶ Stitt, interview by Felix Grant.

⁷ “Willie Cook,” *The Telegraph*, last modified October 24, 2000, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1371481/Willie-Cook.html>.

[imitating] both of them.”⁸ Detroit keyboardist Earl Van Riper met Stitt even earlier—while Stitt was still in high school—and concurs with Cook’s account: “when he played he sounded just like Benny Carter.”⁹

Lester Young

The influence of tenor saxophonist Lester Young on Stitt’s musical style is often noted; in the relevant literature, the comparison is second only to comparisons between Stitt and Parker. Miles Davis wrote that “Sonny Stitt tried [to sound like Parker]... But Sonny had more of Lester Young’s style.”¹⁰ Jazz scholar Lewis Porter has compared Stitt to Young,¹¹ and Witt’s dissertation on

⁸ Stanley Dance, *The World of Duke Ellington* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2000), 179.

⁹ The same is true of tenor saxophonist “Big Nick” Nicholas, who heard and played with Stitt when he was still in Saginaw. Nicholas told writer Stanley Crouch that “when Stitt started playing the saxophone, he then sounded much like Benny Carter.” Bjorn and Gallert, *Before Motown*, 77; Stanley Crouch, liner notes to *Big and Warm*, Big Nick Nicholas, India Navigation 1061, 1983, LP.

¹⁰ “Nobody could play like Bird, then or now.” Davis and Troupe, *Miles*, 69.

¹¹ “Stitt... had absorbed the lessons not only of Young, but of Hawkins and Parker.” Porter, *John Coltrane*, 72

Stitt's tenor saxophone playing analyzes similarities between Stitt and Young's musical styles at length.¹²

In 1974, Stitt mentioned Young's name first in a list of influences on the instrument: "Lester Young, Coleman Hawkins, Don Byas, Ben Webster were my tenor influences. I couldn't copy them but I learned from them."¹³ Later, Stitt described Young as "the master" tenor saxophonist he wanted to "think like": "On tenor, I take a different approach, much more like Pres [Lester Young]... I like to think like Pres, if I could. He was the master by me. On alto, it's Bird and Johnny Hodges and Benny Carter."¹⁴

Critics often draw a dividing line between Stitt's alto and tenor saxophone playing. According to this view, Stitt's tenor saxophone playing was influenced primarily by Young, while his alto saxophone playing was influenced primarily (or even overwhelmingly) by Parker. McRae writes that while "constant reference

¹² Witt refers to Young throughout his dissertation, and devotes an entire chapter to a 1974 Stitt solo and "its connection to Lester Young." Witt, "Sonny Stitt," 65–79.

¹³ Herb Nolan, "Sonny Stitt: Blindfold Test," *Down Beat*, November 21, 1974, 27.

¹⁴ Quoted in Stewart, liner notes to *The Complete Roost Sonny Stitt Studio Sessions*, 4.

was made to the influence that Parker exerted on [Stitt's] style... almost from the start it was noticeable that he approached the larger horn in a different way. On tenor he acknowledges Lester Young."¹⁵ Gelly goes further when he writes that Stitt's "tenor playing is steeped in Young's influence... on alto, however, the influence of Parker appears to be total and exclusive."¹⁶

Others describe the differences between Stitt's tenor and alto saxophone playing using more nuanced language. For example, Larry Kart perceptively notes that Stitt "approaches [the tenor and alto] as though he were splitting the difference them. Within [Stitt's] Lester Young-derived tenor sound there is a keening, altoish cry, and he shades the edges of his hardcore Parkerish alto tone with a tenorlike breathiness."¹⁷ In a 1971 article, Stitt suggested he was influenced by Parker even when he played the tenor saxophone: "I got to be myself more... I didn't have to follow his [i.e., Parker's] script. But I was still influenced by him."¹⁸

¹⁵ McRae also notes that "at times" Stitt's tenor playing "calls to mind the style of Wardell Gray." McRae, *Jazz Cataclysm*, 21.

¹⁶ Dave Gelly, *Masters of Jazz Saxophone: The Story of the Players and Their Music* (London: Balafon Books, 2000), 60.

¹⁷ Larry Kart, *Jazz in Search of Itself* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 111.

¹⁸ Choice, "Sonny Stitt's Story," 55.

Stitt's musical connection to Young is all the more interesting given a similar musical connection between Parker and Young. If Stitt and Parker were both influenced by Young, then Stitt and Parker had similar (or at least overlapping) musical influences. This is perhaps not surprising, given Young's importance to bop musicians. Young's rhythmic approach, light, supple tone and grounding in the blues have been seen as a bridge between bebop and earlier jazz.¹⁹ Certainly Parker was heavily influenced by Young; the influence is well-documented²⁰ and comes across clearly on Parker's early McShann records.²¹

Whatever the extent of Parker's influence on Stitt, both saxophonists also shared an appreciation for Young that went back earlier. In his study of Stitt's improvisational style on the tenor saxophone, Witt discusses this relationship between Stitt, Parker, and Young:

¹⁹ DeVeaux, *Birth of Bebop*, 37, 111–112, 117.

²⁰ Woideck: "Although Parker had a wide range of listening habits and musical influences, a dominant influence was certainly Lester Young, who [like Parker] was based in Kansas City... Parker may have heard him play in person and definitely studied Young's recordings... Parker's pre-1944 recordings contain more references to Young than to any other musician." Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 80.

²¹ Priestley writes that Parker's first improvisations recorded with a group demonstrate "his early mastery of a combined Lester Young/Buster Smith style." Priestley, *Chasin' the Bird*, 30.

Many commentators have suggested a strong relationship between the improvisations of Sonny Stitt and Charlie Parker. It is the contention of this author that Lester Young primarily influenced both Parker and Stitt. It is also the belief of this author that Stitt's tenor saxophone style shows a very direct link to Young's style and incorporates some elements which are not as noticeable in Parker's approach.²²

While Lester Young is the most obvious and frequently-cited shared musical influence, Stitt and Parker shared other influences as well. Stitt cited Benny Carter and Johnny Hodges as his main early influences on alto saxophone. Parker "studied Carter and Hodges intently."²³ Stitt was influenced by tenor saxophonist Coleman Hawkins. Parker "studied" Hawkins, too.²⁴ When he was young, Stitt listened to Jimmy Dorsey. Dorsey was "one of Parker's early favorites."²⁵

There are other interesting musical connections between Stitt and Parker. Parker was influenced by pianist Art Tatum.²⁶ Stitt "used to go and listen to

²² Witt, "Sonny Stitt," 65.

²³ Woideck, *Charlie Parker Companion*, 233.

²⁴ Parker quoted from Hawkins's solos in his early recordings. Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 74, 77, 96–97.

²⁵ Dorsey was also an influence on Stitt and Parker's mutual saxophone influence, Lester Young. *Ibid.*, 80.

²⁶ Parker worked as a dishwasher at a Harlem nightclub where Tatum often performed. According to Woideck, "Art Tatum is a very likely direct influence upon the young Charlie Parker." *Ibid.*, 15.

him.”²⁷ Stitt cited Don Byas and Ben Webster as influences on the tenor saxophone. Parker “listened to and admired” them.²⁸ According to Parker, hearing Don Byas perform at Monroe’s Uptown House convinced Parker to move to New York.²⁹ Ben Webster was “an early Parker champion” who worked with Parker in New York in the mid-1940s, while Stitt was living there.³⁰

Charlie Parker

Parker’s influence on Stitt’s musical style is central to the present study, and therefore uncovering the extent and nature of that influence is essential. As Stitt’s statements quoted in the sections above indicate, Stitt regarded Parker as an important musical influence, and listed him alongside other influential alto saxophonists like Johnny Hodges and Benny Carter. The present section takes a closer look at Stitt’s statements regarding Parker as a musical influence.

²⁷ Stitt, interview by Les Tomkins.

²⁸ Michael Levin and John S. Wilson, “No Bop Roots in Jazz: Parker,” in Woideck, *Charlie Parker Companion*, 73.

²⁹ “And Don Byas was there, playing everything there was to be played... That was the kind of music that caused me to quit McShann and stay in New York.” Quoted in Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 25.

³⁰ Parker also quoted Webster with the Duke Ellington Orchestra in an early recorded performance. *Ibid.*, 27, 31, 100.

In 1959, four years after Parker's death, Stitt was profiled in an article in *Down Beat* magazine. The article by David Bittan, "Don't Call Me Bird: The Problems of Sonny Stitt," contained some of Stitt's earliest and strongest public statements about Parker and his influence on his music. In the article, Stitt said:

Bird was one of my favorite musicians... I haven't heard anybody better. Of course he had an influence on my playing! He influenced everybody in jazz today—brass, piano, even bass. Even veterans like Coleman Hawkins borrowed something from Bird. I don't think I sound that much like Bird.³¹

In this quote, Stitt praised Parker ("one of my favorite musicians") and acknowledged that he was influenced by him, only to then downplay the importance and nature of that influence. By saying that Parker "influenced everybody in jazz today," Stitt was arguing that Parker's musical influence was ubiquitous at the time, and was therefore not unique or special in his case. In the quote above, Stitt also downplayed the oft-cited musical resemblances between him and Parker, saying "I don't think I sound that much like Bird." Later in the article, Stitt hinted further at what he saw as the nature of Parker's musical influence, while defending his own style: "I may have a few of Bird's clichés, but I can only be myself."³²

³¹ Bittan, "Don't Call Me Bird!," 19

³² Ibid.

In other interviews—presumably when not responding to the suggestion that he was a Parker copyist—Stitt listed Parker as an influence alongside other musicians. For example, in one interview Stitt named Parker first in a list of alto saxophonists who gave him his “foundations”: “The alto players I knew were Bird, Johnny Hodges, Willie Smith, and Benny Carter, and that’s where I got my foundations. They never showed you nothin’, but they left something there for you.”³³

Stitt’s statements also suggest a preference for Parker’s earlier musical style. In a 1959 interview—released the same month as the “Don’t Call Me Bird” article cited above—Stitt stated that Parker “sounded even better when he was younger.”³⁴ This squares with observations of jazz critic Martin Williams, who writes that Sonny Stitt learned “from the earlier Parker.”³⁵

³³ Nolan, “Sonny Stitt,” 27.

³⁴ Les Tomkins, “Sonny Stitt Says There’s NO Successor to Bird,” *Melody Maker*, May 16, 1959, 16.

³⁵ Williams contrasts Stitt with altoist Cannonball Adderley, who drew inspiration from Parker’s later work. Martin Williams, “Charlie Parker: The Burden of Innovation,” in Woideck, *Charlie Parker Companion*, 21.

Encountering Parker's Music

In the mid to late-1940s, bebop music travelled quickly throughout the United States. The new music produced many early adopters, particularly in black neighborhoods of large American cities. Sonny Stitt was one of several Michigan-based musicians to get involved in bebop in the 1940s. Michigan-born vocalist Betty Carter said that by 1947, “be-bop was the thing. You know how everybody in Detroit really latched into the new music. Sonny Stitt, Charles Greenlee, Tommy Flanagan, Barry Harris, and Yusef Lateef...”³⁶

Stitt's involvement in the new style was earlier than most of his Michigan colleagues. According to multiple sources, Stitt heard recordings of Parker with McShann in 1943, well before Parker began recording with Gillespie and his own groups in New York City. By 1945, Stitt was living in New York himself, and was already an active contributor to the bebop scene.

³⁶ Quoted in Bjorn and Gallert, *Before Motown*, 97.

Charlie Parker with Jay McShann

Stitt's first exposure to Parker's music was likely through the 1941 and 1942 Decca recordings that Parker made with the Jay McShann Orchestra.³⁷ In a 1960 interview with *Melody Maker*, Stitt said: "I'd heard two or three records of Bird with McShann, and that was all... 'Swingmatism,' 'Sepian Bounce,' maybe 'Hootie Blues.'" ³⁸

The Decca recordings provide a glimpse into Parker's early musical style. As Woideck notes, they contain short solos ("the longest solo is about seventeen and half measures long"),³⁹ even though Parker's solos occupy a substantial part of the recordings (in "Hootie Blues" and "Sepian Bounce," between twenty and thirty seconds of a three-minute 78 rpm single). The Decca recordings were also "not truly representative of the McShann band"; solos were shortened, and the band was not playing its normal repertoire.⁴⁰ Still, while the solos were short,

³⁷ Stitt may have heard a homemade recording of Parker with Jay McShann around the same time. More information on that recording is below. "Charlie Parker Discography," *Jazz Discography Project*, accessed August 21, 2015, <http://www.jazzdisco.org/charlie-parker/discography>.

³⁸ Jones, "Stitt and the Parker Sound," 8.

³⁹ Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 64.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 90.

Parker's playing stood out, and made an impression on other musicians. As Priestley writes, "the five brief Parker solos recorded on the McShann band's 78 rpm singles during 1941–42 were immediately noticed by a handful of fellow musicians as denoting the arrival of something new."⁴¹

How Stitt came across these particular recordings is not known. It is not known, for example, who introduced the Decca recordings to Stitt. The date that Stitt first heard these recordings is also not known, although the year 1943 is frequently cited. The primary source for this appears to be Reisner's *Bird: The Legend of Charlie Parker* (1962), where Stitt is quoted as saying: "When I was nineteen, playing with Tiny Bradshaw, I heard the records he had done with McShann and I was anxious to meet him."⁴² An earlier article by Bittan (1959) suggests that Stitt heard Parker in 1939 or early 1940: "At 15, he was a disciple of

⁴¹ Priestley, *Chasin' the Bird*, 31.

⁴² Reisner, *Bird*, 216. If his recollection is accurate, Stitt "heard the records" sometime between February 2, 1943 and February 2, 1944. Later discussions in the Stitt literature appear to draw from this quote. See, for example, Gitler, *Masters of Bebop*, 42; Jim Burns, "Early Stitt," *Jazz Journal* 22, no. 10 (1969), 6. In the full context of this quote, however, it is possible that "when I was nineteen, playing with Bradshaw" refers to when Stitt met Parker in Kansas City, and not when he first heard Parker on record. (For a discussion of the Kansas City meeting, see the following section.)

Bird, whom he'd heard on a Jay McShann record."⁴³ However, this date is incredibly unlikely, as Parker did not begin recording with McShann until August of 1940, and the recordings were not commercially available.⁴⁴

Other Recordings

As Woideck notes, McShann's 1941–42 Decca recordings contained the only examples of Parker's early solo playing that were "available to most listeners" at the time.⁴⁵ In addition to these recordings, however, Stitt appeared to have access to a homemade February 1943 recording of Parker playing the tenor saxophone. The story surrounding that comes from tenor saxophonist "Big Nick" Nicholas, who knew Stitt in Saginaw and worked with him in 1943–1944 in the Tiny Bradshaw Orchestra:

At that time, Sonny was still sounding like Benny Carter, but one night Bob Redcross, who later became Billy Eckstine's valet, had an acetate of

⁴³ Bittan, "Don't Call Me Bird," 19; Witt, "Sonny Stitt," 5.

⁴⁴ Parker first recorded with McShann in August, November, and December of 1940. The recordings were made for the Kansas studio KFBI, but were not released; they were later "discovered by McShann on one of his visits to Wichita in the late 1960's." Ross Russell, liner notes to *Early Bird*, Jay McShann Orchestra featuring Charlie Parker, Spotlight 120, LP, 1974; "Charlie Parker Discography."

⁴⁵ Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 90.

Bird and Dizzy playing “Sweet Georgia Brown” with Shadow Wilson using his brushes on the seat of a chair in place of drums. Sonny listened and he said—even though Bird was playing tenor—“Who is that?” The next night he started playing like Bird!⁴⁶

One common thread in stories like these is Stitt’s excitement at hearing Parker’s saxophone playing. Nicholas’s story captures this excitement and connects it to changes in Stitt’s musical style. When Stitt listened to a then-recent recording of Parker, he immediately asked who it was: “Who is that?” The recording had such a strong effect on Stitt that “the next night he started playing like Bird!” Stitt’s excitement also comes across in the Reisner quote above. After Stitt heard Parker’s records with McShann: “I was anxious to meet him.”

A third story about Stitt’s encounters with Parker’s early recordings comes from Willie Cook, the trumpeter who played with Stitt in the Bama State Collegians. According to Cook, “Sonny Stitt was the first one who took me over to a juke box and made me listen to Charlie Parker. ‘This is going to be the man,’ he said.”⁴⁷

This quote from Cook is interesting for two main reasons:

⁴⁶ Quoted in Crouch, liner notes to *Big and Warm*.

⁴⁷ Dance, *World of Duke Ellington*, 179.

Stitt worked with Cook in 1942–1943, when Stitt was 19 years old. Since this is the same age Stitt claimed he first heard Parker’s music (in Reisner),⁴⁸ Cook’s quote provides a potential secondary source for the claim that Stitt was familiar with Parker’s music by early 1943. This would mean that Stitt heard Parker’s music with McShann before Stitt joined the Tiny Bradshaw Orchestra, i.e., earlier than he sometimes claimed.⁴⁹

The Cook quote is also interesting because of what it reveals about Stitt’s thoughts and feelings on Parker’s music. If the Cook anecdote is true, Stitt was not merely aware of Parker in 1943; he was enthusiastic about him. Stitt not only enjoyed Parker’s recordings with McShann, but proactively introduced them to other musicians. Stitt’s comment that Parker “*is going to be the man*” is also

⁴⁸ “When I was *nineteen*, playing with Tiny Bradshaw, I heard the records he had done with McShann and I was anxious to meet him.” Reisner, *Bird*, 216, emphasis added.

⁴⁹ The foregoing assumes that Stitt shared Parker’s music with Cook while the two of them were working together in the Bama State Collegians, and not later. Given that Parker’s 1941–42 McShann recordings were available at that time, it is a reasonable assumption, although Cook does not state when this event occurred. In *The Masters of Bebop*, Gitler writes that Stitt heard Parker’s music with McShann until *after* he joined the Bradshaw band: “Stitt himself says he did not hear the records Parker made with McShann until 1943. He was then 19 and was still with Bradshaw.” Gitler, *Masters of Bebop*, 42.

fascinating.⁵⁰ The comment suggests not only that Stitt liked Parker's music, but that he also believed Parker was playing something new and important.

Washington, D.C.

In addition to the early Parker recordings discussed above, Stitt encountered Parker's music live in Washington, D.C. in 1943. In a 1959 interview with *Melody Maker*, Stitt said: "I heard Bird, in 1943, at the Club Ballet in Washington, DC, and he was just electrifying. You could see mouths open all round."⁵¹

It is important to note that while Stitt participated in many interviews throughout his career, he publicly mentioned hearing Parker live in Washington, D.C. only once. Apart from this detail, however, the account is consistent with the anecdotes quoted above. Stitt's account is also similar to the above anecdotes: Stitt encountered Parker's music and it made a strong impression.

The foregoing indicates that Stitt heard Parker's music in three separate contexts in or around 1943. If the dates and recollections of those quoted are accurate, Stitt heard Parker's 1941–42 Decca records with McShann; he heard a

⁵⁰ Dance, *World of Duke Ellington*, 179, emphasis added.

⁵¹ Tomkins, "Sonny Stitt Says There's NO Successor to Bird," 16.

1943 recording of Parker on tenor saxophone; and he heard a live performance of Parker in 1943.

It is also clear that Stitt was fascinated and excited by what he heard. Stitt regarded Parker's early 1940's music as "electrifying." He praised it and shared Parker's recordings with his peers. In later accounts, bandmates Nicholas and Cook noted Stitt's enthusiasm for Parker's music, and—in Nicholas's case—connected it to Stitt's emulation of Parker's musical style.

Meeting Charlie Parker

According to Stitt, he and Parker met and played together in Kansas City in 1943, while Stitt was in town with the Tiny Bradshaw Orchestra. Stitt described this meeting in interviews throughout his life, often in response to questions about his relationship to Parker. It is one of the most ubiquitous anecdotes in the Stitt literature, appearing in numerous articles, oral histories, and discussions of Parker and Stitt.⁵²

In its simplest form, the anecdote is as follows: Stitt finds Parker in Kansas City and introduces himself. Parker suggests the two saxophonists play

⁵² "The meeting, as Stitt told it over the years... has become the stuff of legend." Stewart, liner notes to *The Complete Roost Sonny Stitt Studio Sessions*, 2.

some music together. Stitt then follows Parker to a place called the Gypsy Tea Room. The two saxophonists play, and Parker tells Stitt that Stitt sounds like him.

Here is one representative account of the Stitt-Parker meeting from

Gitler's *Swing to Bop*, quoted in full:

I picked him out of a crowd of people. I said, "That's him." He had a blue coat on with six white buttons, an alto saxophone in one hand, and handful of benzedrine in the other. And he had dark glasses on. We went down to the Gypsy Tea Room, as I remember. And I knew Chauncey Downs. He was a bandleader in the Midwest. They were rivals, and they hated each other. I don't know why. But Chauncey and I were from Michigan. I was from Saginaw, and he was from Flint.

I got into Kansas City with Tiny Bradshaw, and I had two overseers, "Heavy" Smith and Earl "Fox" Walker. They were my "fathers." We stayed next to the union. I threw my bag in there and took my saxophone down there and walked—and they followed me. They sure did, and looked after me 'cause I was crazy anyhow. And I went there at 18th and Vine. That's where it is. And I saw this dude come out. I said, "Are you Charlie Parker?" He showed me that gold tooth of his and said, "Yes, I'm Charlie Parker. I'm *Charles* Parker." You know, very dignified and all that stuff. "Who're you?"

I said, "I'm Sonny *Stitt*." And he said, "Well, let's go down to the Tea Room and play some." And we went down and played, with a piano player. That's all we had. And he said, "You sound too much like *me!*" And I said, "Well, you sound too much like *me!*" So we started going through a thing and Chauncey came in the joint, and Bird said, "Let's cut out." But he was a great man. I loved him.⁵³

⁵³ Gitler, *Swing to Bop*, 74, emphasis in original.

There is considerable detail in this account. For instance, Stitt states the name of the street corner where he and Parker met, as well as what clothing Parker was wearing and what he was holding in his hands at the time.⁵⁴ Significantly, Stitt also recalls the names of two people who with him shortly before the meeting occurred.⁵⁵ In other accounts of the Kansas City meeting, Stitt includes similar details.⁵⁶ In each of Stitt's accounts, the basic structure of the story remains the same.

Comparing Stitt's various accounts of his meeting with Parker provides hints about Stitt's thoughts on Parker. It also provides hints about his thoughts on his own musical style. In the earliest published version of the story (1959), Stitt

⁵⁴ The amount of detail in the Kansas City anecdote leads Witt to observe "it is clear that Parker created a deep and lasting impression." Witt, "Sonny Stitt," 5.

⁵⁵ Stitt's naming of Smith and Walker is not mentioned elsewhere in the Stitt literature, but it is an important detail. The historicity of Stitt and Parker's Kansas City meeting has been called into question (for example, see Morgenstern and Meyer, *Living with Jazz*). But by mentioning the names of the bandmates who were with him at the time, Stitt identified individuals who could disconfirm the details of his story, if the details were false. This does not seem (to the present author) like the behavior of someone who is fabricating a story from whole cloth.

⁵⁶ Sometimes Stitt leaves out certain details or recalls them differently. For example, in one interview Stitt states that he looked for Parker at "17th and Vine" (instead of 18th and Vine); in others, he mentions his "overseers" but not their names ("I think it was in '43, and I had two overseers—the bass and drummer"). Stitt, interview by Felix Grant; Enstice and Rubin, *Jazz Spoken Here*, 251.

seems more eager to find Parker, as he purposefully goes looking for him soon after arriving in Kansas City.⁵⁷ Stitt does not tell Parker “you sound too much like me” in the earliest accounts (1959 and 1962),⁵⁸ and perhaps this element of the story was added later. In some later accounts (1971 and 1981), Stitt includes this statement, but seems aware of how silly it sounds, since he was both younger than Parker, and Parker had never heard him play.⁵⁹ In yet another account (1981), Stitt’s response to Parker seems almost defensive (“I can’t help the way I sound, it’s the only way I know how to play”).⁶⁰

In many of the accounts, Stitt praises Parker. The Reisner account begins: “I’m not going to throw any dirt on the man. He was the greatest man I ever knew. He would find something beautiful about the ugliest person.”⁶¹ In the account from *Swing to Bop* above, Stitt ends the story with: “But he was a great

⁵⁷ “The Bradshaw band pulled into Kansas City on a bus... and this was home base for the Jay McShann band. It was also Bird’s home town. So I got me a hotel room and went out to look for him.” Bittan, “Don’t Call Me Bird,” 19.

⁵⁸ See the accounts in *Ibid.*, and Reisner, *Bird*, 216.

⁵⁹ In 1971: “Afterwards he said you sound just like me. And I was cocky and said, ‘No, you sound like me.’” And in 1981: “I said, ‘Man, you sound like me.’ Young and dumb, you know how it is.” Choice, “Sonny Stitt’s Story,” 55; Stitt, interview by Felix Grant.

⁶⁰ Stewart, “Sonny Stitt,” 41.

⁶¹ Reisner, *Bird*, 216.

man. I loved him.”⁶² Another account ends: “So we got to be good friends and he was always a gracious man in my life... I’m going to tell you right now, I don’t know anyone that can match him or beat him. I come a close second.”⁶³

The Kansas City story puts Stitt in a positive light. Indeed, it appears designed to do this. In the story, Parker is surprised that Stitt—a saxophonist he has never met—sounds so much like him. The implication is that Stitt developed a style similar to Parker’s on his own. This implication is especially strong in one of Stitt’s later accounts (1980). In that account, Parker says: “You sound like me.” Stitt replies: “Well, you sound like me, too, buddy.” Parker then replies: “I know what it is. God made two, like on Noah’s ark.”⁶⁴

Jazz historian Dan Morgenstern believes the Kansas City story to be apocryphal. He writes in *Living with Jazz* that the story should “be taken more as wish fulfillment than as reality, largely because by the time Stitt was on the road with Bradshaw, Parker had already left Kansas City.”⁶⁵ Morgenstern is more

⁶² Gitler, *Swing to Bop*, 74.

⁶³ W. Royal Stokes, *The Jazz Scene: An Informal History from New Orleans to 1990* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 47.

⁶⁴ Heron, “Stitt’s Sax Makes the ‘Willow Weep’.”

⁶⁵ Morgenstern and Meyer, *Living with Jazz*.

inclined to believe Stitt's 1959 interview in *Melody Maker* (cited above), where Stitt describes seeing Parker live in Washington, D.C. in 1943. Unlike Stitt's Kansas City story, which paints him in a positive light, the *Melody Maker* interview comes close to admitting that Stitt "idolized" Parker.⁶⁶

It is worth noting that the Kansas City story was published in *Down Beat* in 1959 *before* the *Melody Maker* interview, and that Stitt continued to tell that story with a remarkable degree of consistency for twenty years thereafter. If the Kansas City meeting never happened, the story would not be "wish fulfillment," but rather an elaborate and drawn-out lie. Also, if Stitt "idolized" Parker, he still could have met him in Kansas City (provided Parker was in town at the time). It is possible that Stitt saw Parker perform live in Washington, D.C. *and* met him in Kansas City, and later recounted the Kansas City story in terms favorable to himself.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ The *Melody Maker* interview is found in Tomkins, "Sonny Stitt There's NO Successor to Bird," 16.

⁶⁷ In response to Morgenstern's hypothesis that Stitt heard Parker in Washington, D.C. *instead of* Kansas City, Priestley observes that Stitt could have heard Parker perform in Washington, D.C. without introducing himself, and met Parker for the first time later. Admittedly, the chronology is difficult to piece together. Even Stitt is inconsistent on this matter: in a 1980 interview, Stitt suggested that the Kansas City meeting—not the Washington, D.C. performance—was "the first time [he]

Even though the Kansas City story appears to suggest that Stitt developed his style independently of Parker, a careful reading of the various accounts reveals that Stitt did not believe he was Parker's musical equal (neither in 1943, nor later).⁶⁸ The accounts also show that Stitt was enthusiastic about Parker's music, that he was eager to meet him, and that he went out of his way to praise him, even decades after Parker's death.

Stitt in New York

After leaving the Tiny Bradshaw Orchestra, Stitt moved to the New York area, where Parker was based. There he joined the New York bebop scene. Soon, he was performing in similar musical situations and with many of the same musicians as Parker.

When Stitt moved to New York, he was already well-acquainted with Parker and his music. There were the records with McShann, the acetate recording of Parker on tenor, the performance in D.C., and a face-to-face meeting and jam

heard Parker in person." Bittan, "Don't Call Me Bird," 19; Priestley, *Chasin' the Bird*, 207; Enstice and Rubin, *Jazz Spoken Here*, 251.

⁶⁸ In his accounts of the Kansas City meeting, Stitt's understanding of Parker's greatness comes across, both through self-deprecatory comments ("young and dumb, you know how it is"), and through statements that reflect Stitt's respect and admiration for Parker and his music ("But he was a great man. I loved him").

session in Kansas City. The number of Stitt's encounters with Parker's music is impressive, considering that they all occurred within the span of about a year, during a time when Stitt and Parker lived in different parts of the country.

By the time Stitt moved to New York, he had repeatedly expressed interest in the music Parker was making. He appeared to be developing his musical style along similar lines ("You sure sound like me"). Given Stitt's later comments on Parker, plus his preference for Parker's early music ("He sounded even better when he was younger"), it seems likely that Stitt already regarded Parker as a musical influence.

Billy Eckstine and Dizzy Gillespie

During his first few years in New York City, Stitt found work with the Billy Eckstine Orchestra, and with the Dizzy Gillespie Orchestra and Sextet. Eckstine and Gillespie were musical pioneers whose groups were important to bebop history. Stitt's association with them and participation in these groups immediately connected him to the new music and to those who made it.

With Eckstine and Gillespie, Stitt was hired to play saxophone in bands that Parker had previously worked with. Stitt joined Eckstine in April 1945, filling

an alto saxophone chair occupied by Parker the previous year.⁶⁹ He then joined Gillespie in early 1946, a short time after Parker had left.⁷⁰

In the Gillespie band, Stitt was a direct substitute for Parker. Throughout 1945, Parker played alto saxophone with Gillespie, mostly in small groups where Gillespie was billed as the leader.⁷¹ Parker separated from Gillespie in early 1946 after an eight-week engagement in Los Angeles.⁷² Stitt was then hired by Gillespie as Parker's replacement.⁷³ In one passage, Gillespie's language makes it

⁶⁹ Parker left the Eckstine band in August 1944. DeVeaux, *Birth of Bebop*, 350; Kernfeld, "Stitt, Sonny," *African American National Biography*; Witt, "Sonny Stitt," 6.

⁷⁰ According to Witt, Stitt joined Dizzy Gillespie's orchestra "in the spring of 1946" (Witt, "Sonny Stitt," 8). For details on Parker's departure from Gillespie's band, see below.

⁷¹ "For most of 1945... Parker and Gillespie worked together whenever possible... the personnel varied but always featured Parker and Gillespie in the front line." Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 30–31.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 32–33. Gillespie and his band returned to New York, while Parker remained in California. In the months following their separation, Parker suffered a mental breakdown and was admitted to Camarillo State Hospital. Woideck describes this as "one of the saddest and most tragic periods in Parker's life." Additional information about this period can be found in *Ibid.*, 32–37. For a detailed account of Parker's musical activities in California, see *Ibid.*, 117–137 and Lawrence O. Koch, *Yardbird Suite: A Compendium of the Music and Life of Charlie Parker* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1988), 68–97.

⁷³ According to Gillespie: "When we got ready to come back to New York, [Parker] wanted to stay out on the Coast... When I got back to New York, I hired Sonny Stitt, another marvelous musician." Gillespie and Fraser, *To Be*, 250.

clear that Stitt was hired as a replacement for Parker. Describing his band at the Spotlight: “In the small group I had Milt Jackson, Ray Brown, Sonny Stitt, *in place of Charlie Parker*, Stan Levy, and Al Haig.”⁷⁴

Stitt’s work with Gillespie in 1946 began a decades-long collaboration between the two musicians. Gillespie would continue to hire Stitt for his own projects; the two musicians also worked together in Norman Granz’s Jazz at the Philharmonic, and later, in a bebop all-star project called the Giants of Jazz. While Stitt performed with Gillespie on both tenor and alto saxophones, Gillespie connected Stitt’s alto saxophone playing directly to Parker. In a 1961 *Down Beat* interview, Gillespie said:

It sounds like a cliché to say that [Parker’s] music will be here forever, but that is the truth...

I haven’t heard an alto player who wasn’t close to Bird. Of course, the closest to him that I have heard is Sonny Stitt. When I hear a record sometimes, I won’t be sure at first whether it’s Sonny or Yard. Sonny gets down into all the little things of Charlie Parker’s playing. The others just

⁷⁴ Ibid., 251, emphasis added. Clark Monroe—the owner of the Spotlight Club and Clark Monroe’s Uptown House—suggested that Gillespie hire Stitt: “Look you come in here for eight weeks with a small group; you could get Sonny Stitt and then open up for eight more weeks with a big band. Build it in here.” (Ibid.)

play his music; Sonny plays his life. If they ever make a movie about Charlie Parker, Sonny Stitt is the man to play the part.”⁷⁵

This quote is telling for several reasons: First, Gillespie stated that Stitt was “the closest to” Parker he had heard, and that “sometimes [he was not] sure at first” which musician was which. The implication is that Gillespie—Parker’s longtime musical partner, who Parker once called “the other half of my heartbeat”⁷⁶—had difficulty immediately telling the two saxophonists apart. It is hard to overstate how significant this statement is. Music critics compared Stitt’s musical style to Parker’s constantly. But if musicians who worked extensively with both Parker and Stitt had difficulty distinguishing between them, is it any wonder that the critics did also?

Second, Gillespie said that Stitt got “down into all the little things of Charlie Parker’s playing” and played “his life.” Gillespie’s implication is that Stitt found and replicated something in Parker’s music that went much deeper than the notes themselves. Unlike other saxophonists, who could only “play his music,” Stitt evoked something essential about Parker. This was articulated in musical

⁷⁵ Dizzy Gillespie and Gene Lees, “The Years with Yard,” in Woideck, *Charlie Parker Companion*, 162.

⁷⁶ Quoted in Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 25.

terms (“the little things of Charlie Parker’s playing”), but it was also something deeper.

Third, despite comparing Stitt’s musical style to Parker’s, Gillespie’s statement is complimentary in tone. Gillespie does not fault Stitt for sounding very much like Parker. Rather, Gillespie praises Stitt, and sets him apart from Parker’s other imitators.

Gillespie’s thinking about Stitt and Parker is corroborated by Junior Mance, a pianist who performed and recorded with both Gillespie and Stitt. According to Mance, “Dizzy used to say that when Sonny was playing in his band, there were times Sonny would be on fire. [Gillespie] said, ‘In my mind, it was Charlie Parker playing next to me until I opened my eyes.’”⁷⁷

New York Music Critics, 1946–1949

Stitt’s first New York period was productive professionally as well as musically. Working for Eckstine and Gillespie with other talented young musicians was no doubt an incredible experience for Stitt, who then was still in his early twenties. Stitt’s work during this period also drew the attention of New

⁷⁷ Marc Myers, “Interview: Junior Mance (Part 3),” *JazzWax*, accessed December 3, 2013, <http://www.jazzwax.com/2011/01/interview-junior-mance-part-3.html>.

York's music critics, who heard Stitt perform in public and began to write about him in print.

On April 13, 1946, Stitt performed a concert with Gillespie at The Town Hall, a venue in Midtown Manhattan. The concert was presented as the first in a series featuring "modern, progressive jazz."⁷⁸ In his write-up of the performance, a reviewer singled out Stitt by name, referring to the band as "Dizzy Gillespie and his sextet from the Spotlight, augmented by alto man Sonny Stitt."⁷⁹ The reviewer continued:

Dizzy's set was interesting mainly for the work of young Stitt, who sounds and looks amazingly like Charlie Parker and has better execution. But a couple of the numbers were played so fast that intelligent phrasing and clean execution were impossible. Dizzy should watch this and keep his tempos at a point where there can be music instead of just technique.⁸⁰

This quote is short, but it says a lot about how Stitt's playing was perceived at the time. The reviewer suggests that Stitt sounded "amazingly" like Parker by April 1946, just shortly after Stitt replaced Parker in Gillespie's band. The reviewer also singles Stitt out for special praise by writing that "Dizzy's set

⁷⁸ Vail, *Dizzy Gillespie*, 38.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

was interesting *mainly*” for Stitt’s playing. Finally, the reviewer notes a perceived difference between Stitt and Parker’s musical styles: “young Stitt” sounds like Parker, “and has better execution” than him.⁸¹

On April 24, 1946—less than two weeks after the abovementioned Town Hall concert—Leonard Feather described Stitt’s work with the Dizzy Gillespie Orchestra this way: “Dizzy’s second attempt to run a big band seems certain to be more successful than his first... Saxes are led by Sonny Stitt, who’s a super Charlie Parker...”⁸² A few years later, Feather devoted a few lines to Stitt in *Inside Be-Bop*, his popular introduction to the new music style: “Exact information is scarce... owing to [Stitt’s] incarceration on and off in the past two years... he appeared in Newark and NYC 1945–6 and impressed musicians as the first young alto star to simulate Bird’s style effectively.”⁸³

⁸¹ The reviewer’s observation hints at the “clarity” of Stitt’s playing, a characteristic that music critics often identify as part of Stitt’s musical style. For more on Stitt’s clarity and execution (as seen by his critics), see the following chapter.

⁸² Vail, *Dizzy Gillespie*, 39.

⁸³ *Inside Be-bop* was first published in 1949, and was later reprinted under the name *Inside Jazz*. Feather, *Inside Jazz*, 98.

Again, the wording of these two quotes is interesting. Stitt was a “super Charlie Parker” who “simulate[d] Bird’s style effectively.” While many “young alto” saxophonists imitated Parker, Stitt was “the first” to do so successfully.⁸⁴

The quotes above, while short, are among the earliest published critical statements on Stitt and his musical style. They show that Stitt was compared to Parker early in his professional career, during a period when he was transitioning from a talented newcomer into a “young alto star.”

The preceding sections have covered several points of intersection between Stitt and Parker’s careers. It is now possible to consider many of these points together and see what they suggest about Stitt and Parker’s musical relationship:

Sonny Stitt was a talented young musician who grew up playing saxophone in Michigan’s music scene. Between 1943 and 1944, Stitt had several encounters with Charlie Parker’s music. Stitt was excited by what he heard, and moved to New York City shortly thereafter. Within a year and a half, Stitt had

⁸⁴ Note also that Feather describes Stitt as a “young alto star” who “impressed [other] musicians.” This is another indication of Stitt’s popular and professional success in New York in the mid-1940s. Stitt won an Esquire New Star award in 1947, in large part because of his work with Gillespie the previous year.

joined two of Parker's former ensembles, and critics were comparing him to Parker in print.

Parker's Death

The end of Parker's life (1954–55) was characterized by chaos and turmoil.⁸⁵ Stitt had several encounters with Parker during this period. Like Stitt and Parker's meeting in Kansas City, these encounters show up frequently in the bebop literature, and helped to strengthen Stitt's association with Parker after Parker's death.

Incident at the Apollo Theater

One disturbing story comes from Gene Ramey, the bassist who performed with Parker for years first in Kansas City and later in New York. Months before Parker's tragic death in March 1955,⁸⁶ Ramey was performing with Stitt at the

⁸⁵ See Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 47–50 for an overview of this period.

⁸⁶ According to Ramey, this event occurred "just before [Parker] died, in '55." Later in the same anecdote, however, he says it was "Christmas time." Since Parker died in March 1955, it seems likely that the event occurred in December 1954. Nathan Pearson, *Goin' to Kansas City* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 212.

Apollo Theater. Stitt had several saxophones at the gig. Parker came to the Apollo and asked Stitt to borrow one of his saxophones. Stitt refused. Parker pointed out that Stitt had stolen a saxophone from him once before.⁸⁷ Stitt again refused, and Parker replied icily, “You have your day; I’ll have mine.”⁸⁸

At this point, the story takes a morbid turn. Parker attempted to break into Stitt’s dressing room to steal one of his saxophones, but fell through a window into the dressing room of another act. The club owner came to investigate the noise. Parker then took a fire axe off the wall and threatened him with it.⁸⁹

Keys to the Kingdom

A second inauspicious anecdote concerns Parker handing Stitt the “keys to the kingdom” shortly before his death. This anecdote is ubiquitous in the Stitt

⁸⁷ According to Ramey, “Bird replied, ‘You stole my horn in Detroit when you were strung out. I never said anything to you. You’ve got three horns on stage.’” Reisner, *Bird*, 189.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ “Parker had gotten the fire ax off the wall and was going to kill [the club manager]... Said, ‘I’m going to kill you. Been making all us black guys suffer.’” Pearson, *Goin’ to Kansas City*, 212.

literature. It also appears frequently in discussions of Parker's late career and musical legacy.

The first published version of this anecdote is from Stitt's 1959 interview with *Melody Maker*. It goes as follows:

Sonny spoke of Bird in his last days, and his voice softened: "I saw him two weeks before he died. He came by and made a statement in front of people, and I wish he hadn't, because that's where this 'throne' business came from.

"He said: 'I'll give you the keys to the kingdom.' I said: 'All right, now. Come on, Bird, be cool....'"⁹⁰

The context in this quote is important. Stitt was describing an event that occurred two weeks before Parker died. Given that Parker seemed aware of his impending death,⁹¹ it is likely that he was commenting (or joking) about it in a morbid manner. Perhaps Parker also saw Stitt as someone who could carry on his musical style. From the context of this quote, however, the "keys to the kingdom" statement seems more about Parker wrestling with his own mortality, than about Parker earnestly bequeathing his musical legacy to Stitt. This can be seen in Stitt's

⁹⁰ Tomkins, "Sonny Stitt Says There's NO Successor to Bird," 16.

⁹¹ Less than two weeks before he died, Parker told bassist Charles Mingus, "I'm goin' someplace, pretty soon, where I'm not gonna bother anybody." Dizzy Gillespie believed that "Charlie had a premonition" of his own death. Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 49.

reaction to Parker's statement. Stitt was not honored to receive Parker's "keys."

Rather, he was uncomfortable ("All right, now. Come on, Bird, be cool").

The "keys to the kingdom" statement took on a different interpretation after Parker's death. Parker "made [the] statement in front of people," who presumably shared it with others. By 1959, four years after Parker's death, Stitt could speak of "this throne business" as an established narrative. Stitt was beginning to be seen—rightly or wrongly—as the heir to Parker's throne.

Accounts like Reisner's *Bird: The Legend of Charlie Parker* (1962) seem to confirm that Parker's statement was made in passing:

A week before he died, Bird ran into his friend Sonny Stitt. Sonny was one of the first alto sax men to play in Parker's style with a deal of cogency. Stitt says that Bird looked very beat. They exchanged a few pleasantries and Charlie said in parting, "Man, I'm handing you the keys to the kingdom."⁹²

In this version, Parker encounters Stitt ("his friend"). Parker makes the "keys to the kingdom" statement only "in parting," after "exchang[ing] a few pleasantries."

Gitler's version puts Parker's words slightly differently: "Man, I'm not long for this life. You carry on. I'm leaving you the keys to the kingdom."⁹³ Parker has

⁹² Reisner, *Bird*, 215.

⁹³ Gitler, *Masters of Bebop*, 44.

more to say in this version—three sentences instead of one. His words also seem less reflective and more earnest, as though Parker were consciously passing his musical mantle to Stitt.⁹⁴

The “keys to the kingdom” story appears many more times in the Stitt literature beyond those cited here. The story was mentioned in numerous interviews and jazz books while Stitt was still alive. It was also mentioned in numerous obituaries after Stitt’s death.⁹⁵

In interviews, Stitt tended to downplay the story when asked about it. Near the end of his life (1980), Stitt distanced himself from the story entirely:

To me he was the epitome of being a saxophonist. They write a lot of nonsense about things that was said back years ago about my getting the keys to the kingdom. That was a bunch of bunk. I don’t get it. You got to play your saxophone the best you can and your way and your way only. Can’t nobody provide the entrance to any kingdom for anybody, you know.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Gitler wrote in *Masters of Bebop*, and later confirmed to Brian Priestley (in 2004) that he “believe[d] this story to be apocryphal.” Ibid.; Priestley, *Chasin’ the Bird*, 215.

⁹⁵ For another account (originally published in 1972), see Ross Russell, *Bird Lives: The High Life and Hard Times of Charlie (Yardbird) Parker* (New York: Da Capo, 1996), 340. For an example from a high-profile obituary, see John S. Wilson, “Sonny Stitt, Saxophonist, Is Dead; Style Likened to Charlie Parker’s,” *New York Times*, July 24, 1982, Section 1, Final Edition.

⁹⁶ Enstice and Rubin, *Jazz Spoken Here*, 251.

Pallbearer at Parker's Funeral

After Parker's death in March 1955, Stitt was one of the pallbearers at his funeral. He considered being a pallbearer a "very great honour," although the experience left him "shaken for about a month afterwards."⁹⁷ Stitt described the experience in detail in a 1980 interview:

I was on my way in my car, going to a job, I think in Ohio, and I read the paper, and it said Charlie Parker had died. I just turned around, put my stuff in the house, you know, and I went up to the church on Seventh Avenue, parked my car. And the first one I saw was Dizzy, and then Charlie Shavers and umpteen of my buddies, you know. And Dizzy say, "Hey, Son." I say, "Hey, Dizzy, I ain't gonna work this week." He said, "Here are your gloves." I said, "Gloves for what?" He said, "You gotta carry him, man." He said, "I got mine on, here yours." Phew! It sure was a bitter pill. Because I had never felt like that before. After you put the gloves on and you—I didn't see him in the casket. I was on my way down to see him, and they started closing it. So I remember him like he was. I'm sure glad I didn't see him. And so, as we carried him up the stairs I felt like all the blood in my back was draining out through my legs and stuff like that, you know. And everybody's cryin' or singin'. I say, *man!*⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Tomkins, "Sonny Stitt Says There's NO Successor to Bird," 16.

⁹⁸ In this account, Stitt mentions that "the blood in my back was draining out through my legs." He might also have been responsible for "stumbling and almost dropping the coffin," as pianist Lennie Tristano described. There were eight pallbearers in total: Gillespie, Stitt, Tristano, Max Roach, Louie Bellson, Charlie Shavers, Leonard Feather, and Teddy Reig. Enstice and Rubin, *Jazz Spoken Here*, 248–249, emphasis in original; Peter Ind, *Jazz Visions: Lennie Tristano and His Legacy* (London: Equinox Publishing, 2005), 56.

From this account, it is clear that the experience left a deep impression on Stitt. The story also underscores the deep feelings Stitt had for Parker. As soon as he learned of Parker's death, Stitt called off his out-of-town job and went to Parker's funeral instead.

Like he did with the Kansas City story, Stitt often spoke of being Parker's pallbearer in interviews.⁹⁹ He also used the story to reminisce about Parker's music and impact in his life. In one interview, Stitt said: "He was a master musician, too, man. He was beautiful. Man, he could play. He could play anything... That's an awful feeling, you know? Having known somebody and *liked him so much.*"¹⁰⁰ In another interview Stitt followed the story by saying simply, "Bird was not like us."¹⁰¹

Memorials and Tributes

After Parker's death, Stitt continued to be associated with Parker and his music. This association was bolstered by Stitt's participation in various kinds of memorials and tributes, including live concerts, pieces written in commemoration

⁹⁹ In one interview, Stitt described it as "the worst gig I ever had in my life." Stitt, interview by Felix Grant.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

¹⁰¹ Tomkins, "Sonny Stitt Says There's NO Successor to Bird," 16.

of Parker, the frequent recording of Parker's own music, and the Parker tribute album *Stitt Plays Bird*.

Live Performances

In 1964, Stitt joined “perhaps the first” Parker tribute band marketed as such. The group was organized by jazz impresario George Wein, and consisted of drummer Max Roach, trumpeter Howard McGhee, and trombonist J. J. Johnson—all musicians who had performed and recorded with Parker.¹⁰² Stitt performed with the group at the Newport Jazz Festival that summer, and then at several European music festivals that fall.¹⁰³ He appeared again with the group at Carnegie Hall for the Charlie Parker 10th Memorial Concert the following year.¹⁰⁴

In the 1970s, Stitt continued to perform in Parker-related projects. He appeared at least twice at the Charlie Parker Memorial Concert, an annual event

¹⁰² Lord, *Jazz Discography Online*. The group also included pianist Harold Mabern and bassist Arthur Harper.

¹⁰³ The European tour featured Walter Bishop, Jr. on piano, Tommy Potter on bass, and Kenny Clarke on drums. *Ibid.*; Priestley, *Chasin' the Bird*, 130.

¹⁰⁴ Lord, *Jazz Discography Online*. The lineup was the same as the European tour, except for trombonist Bennie Green (in lieu of Johnson) and drummer Roy Haynes (in lieu of Clarke).

held in Chicago organized by jazz presenter Joe Segal.¹⁰⁵ In 1974, Stitt participated in Wein's "The Musical Life of Charlie Parker," a touring concert featuring music from various periods of Parker's career (his work with McShann, Earl Hines, and Dizzy Gillespie, plus the album *Charlie Parker with Strings*). The saxophonists included "Parker disciples" Stitt, Phil Woods, and Charles McPherson, who each took "on the performing role of Parker."¹⁰⁶

"The Musical Life of Charlie Parker" performed to a sold-out crowd at the Newport Jazz Festival in June,¹⁰⁷ then toured music festivals throughout Europe later that year.¹⁰⁸ In those concerts, Stitt was paired up with Gillespie, taking on the role of Parker in Gillespie's groups from the mid-1940s. The Newport show was reviewed as "a vast artistic and musical success," with Stitt and Gillespie's work singled out for special praise.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Russell, *Bird Lives*, 372; Choice, "Sonny Stitt's Story," 55.

¹⁰⁶ Is Horowitz, "George Wein Preens Down His Newport-New York Schedule," *Billboard*, June 29, 1974, 33.

¹⁰⁷ Jim Fishel, "Jazz Fest in Profit Turnabout From '73 Loss," *Billboard*, July 20, 1974, 22.

¹⁰⁸ Horowitz, "George Wein Preens Down," 33.

¹⁰⁹ "High points of the show were the series of bop exchanges between Gillespie, Parker's old accomplice, and Stitt." Fishel, "Jazz Fest in Profit Turnabout," 22.

Recorded Tributes

In addition to performing in memorial concerts, Stitt made several recorded tributes to Parker. These tributes varied in size from individual songs to album-length projects.

In 1956, a year after Parker's death, Stitt and Gillespie cowrote and recorded "Blues for Bird," a slow blues tribute to Parker. In 1957, Stitt wrote and recorded another slow blues tribute, "Blues for Yard." In 1972, he recorded a third slow blues tribute, "Blues for Prez and Bird." In 1976, Stitt recorded the Leonard Feather composition "I Remember Bird" with Frank Rosolino, and released it on an album of the same name.¹¹⁰

As well as recording individual song tributes composed after Parker's death, Stitt recorded compositions that were associated with Parker throughout his career. These included both compositions written by Parker (e.g., "Ko Ko," "Confirmation," "Au Privave"), as well as compositions written by others but recorded by Parker (e.g., "Cherokee," "Lover Man," "Star Eyes"). Over a dozen

¹¹⁰ Feather's "I Remember Bird" is a slow-tempo composition based on the blues. The four pieces listed in this paragraph are available on the albums *Modern Jazz Sextet*, *37 Minutes and 48 Seconds with Sonny Stitt*, *Tune Up!*, and *I Remember Bird*. Lord, *Jazz Discography Online*.

unique albums released under Stitt's name include a Parker composition; and several dozen albums contain compositions recorded by Parker. Over half of the albums in Stitt's vast recorded oeuvre include one or more compositions associated with Parker.¹¹¹

Stitt Plays Bird

Stitt's practice of recording compositions associated with Parker is seen most clearly in his 1963 Atlantic tribute album *Stitt Plays Bird*. The album consists of Stitt's versions of pieces composed and first recorded by Parker

¹¹¹ The above estimates come from a careful reading of Sonny Stitt's entry in Lord, *Jazz Discography Online*. The precise number of such albums depends on whether live albums, reissues, and compilations are counted as albums. To be specific: Stitt performed Parker's compositions in over a dozen individual recorded performances and sessions (later released as one or more albums); additionally, over half of the Stitt sessions listed in *Jazz Discography Online* include a composition previously recorded by Parker. Many compositions recorded by Parker were already—or later became—jazz standards. It could be argued, then, that the presence of such compositions in Stitt's discography is hardly extraordinary, and that many of the same compositions would appear in the discographies of other bebop musicians (like Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis, etc.). While this is true, it is still significant that over half of the recorded performances and sessions in Stitt's nearly thirty-eight-year recording career (1944–1982) contained compositions either written or recorded by Parker.

between 1945 and 1951, as well as “Hootie Blues,” a Jay McShann piece that Parker recorded with McShann in 1941–42.¹¹²

Stitt Plays Bird drew the attention of jazz critics when it was first released, and has continued to do so since. This attention was due in part to the quality of the album, which has been regarded as “excellent,”¹¹³ “an obvious classic,”¹¹⁴ and one of “Stitt’s best efforts.”¹¹⁵ Critics praised Stitt’s saxophone playing in particular. In a 1964 review for *Down Beat* magazine, for example, Pete Welding wrote of “Stitt’s incisive power... constant flow of invention... and conviction.”¹¹⁶

Stitt Plays Bird also drew attention from jazz critics because of its theme, which provided them an obvious opportunity to reflect and offer comment on Stitt’s musical relationship to Parker. Accordingly, *Stitt Plays Bird* is one of the

¹¹² “Charlie Parker Discography.”

¹¹³ Mathieson, *Cookin’*, “Sonny Stitt / Johnny Griffin.”

¹¹⁴ Yanow, *Bebop*, 98.

¹¹⁵ Owens, *Bebop*, 48.

¹¹⁶ Pete Welding, “Sonny Stitt: Stitt Plays Bird,” *Down Beat*, November 5, 1964, 22–23.

most frequently discussed albums in the Stitt literature, and is regarded as proof of both Stitt's prowess and his dependence of Parker's musical style.¹¹⁷

By 1964, when the album was released,¹¹⁸ Stitt's reputation as a Parker imitator was already well-established. Ira Gitler reflects and comments on this reputation in the album's liner notes:

Stitt has long insisted that he was playing this way before he heard Parker.

Whatever the case, Stitt was strongly influenced by Parker but, nevertheless, expressed his own personality very vividly within the same area...

No one is more suited to play an entire program of Parker numbers than Sonny, for while he plays his own turns of phrase, he embodies the Parker sound and spirit.¹¹⁹

In his liner notes, Gitler also recounts Stitt's meeting with Parker in Kansas City, adding that "after [this meeting], he could never be quite the same."¹²⁰ Gitler then ends his liner notes with the "keys to the kingdom" story. According to Gitler,

¹¹⁷ Statements from critics discussing *Stitt Plays Bird* from an analytical perspective are found in the introduction to Chapter XV, Musical Analysis of Sonny Stitt's Solo on "Ko Ko" (1963)

¹¹⁸ The album was recorded in January 1963, but not released until the following year.

¹¹⁹ Ira Gitler, liner notes to *Stitt Plays Bird*, Sonny Stitt, Atlantic SD 1418, 1964, LP.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

even if the “keys to the kingdom” story is apocryphal, and Parker did not bequeath his throne to Stitt, the album *Stitt Plays Bird* is proof that Stitt “has the key, and he knows where and how to use it.”¹²¹

The critical commentary on *Stitt Plays Bird* has continued to the present day. One notable example is found in Gerald Early’s essay “The Passing of Jazz’s Old Guard,” a reminiscence of the music of Mingus, Monk, and Stitt. Early describes Stitt’s recording in tragic terms: “*Stitt Plays Bird* was the best album Stitt ever made and all it did, at best, was make people think it was redundant or, at worst, make people put on their Bird sides to listen to the real thing.”¹²² Early praises the album as Stitt’s best, while suggesting it was a mistake for him to record it. For Early, despite the high quality of Stitt’s playing, *Stitt Plays Bird* offered nothing new musically and served mainly to highlight Stitt’s musical dependence on Parker.

Because *Stitt Plays Bird* is an album composed entirely of Parker’s music, it is tempting to interpret it as an artistic statement. For example, by making a

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² “Even Fate played the most horrible trick by seeing to it that Stitt’s most memorable and artistically acclaimed album should be filled with Parker’s compositions.” Gerald Early, “The Passing of Jazz’s Old Guard: Remembering Charlie Mingus, Thelonious Monk, and Sonny Stitt,” *Kenyon Review*, Spring 1985, 34.

Parker tribute album, Stitt could be encouraging direct comparisons between himself and Parker, or capitalizing on his reputation as a Parker imitator. Many of the other “career intersections” discussed in this chapter—the Kansas City story, Stitt’s move to New York, the “keys to the kingdom” anecdote, Stitt’s participation in memorials and tributes—can be interpreted in similar ways.

At least at the end of his life, however, Stitt did not view *Stitt Plays Bird* in these terms. Asked in 1980 if the album was his idea, Stitt replied:

No, that’s the company’s idea. I made another, too—a tribute to Charlie Parker. But they are commercializing. I don’t resent it, but I really think that they are putting a feather in my cap that I don’t deserve. I don’t think anyone can fill his shoes. Nobody.¹²³

¹²³ Enstice and Rubin, *Jazz Spoken Here*, 250–251.

CHAPTER VII

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS II: STITT'S CRITICS

Introduction

Like other major figures in jazz history, Sonny Stitt has been the subject of considerable critical attention and commentary. Critics wrote about Stitt throughout his mature career, from his first collaboration with Dizzy Gillespie in 1946 until his death in 1982. The critical commentary has continued up until the present. Posthumous album releases and the rise of jazz studies as an academic discipline have presented opportunities for critics to discuss Stitt's music and evaluate the nature of his contribution to the artform.

The vast majority of such commentary includes references to Stitt's reputation as a Parker imitator. Whether addressed in passing, defended, or evaluated on its own merits, it is found throughout the Stitt literature. As a result, his reputation as a Parker imitator has accumulated a critical literature of its own.

This chapter is an attempt to evaluate such literature, divided into two main sections:

The first section contains a collection of statements from critics and musicians regarding Stitt's reputation as a Parker imitator. The statements are short and concise. Most of the statements were made and published while Stitt was still alive. The goal of this section is to establish a consensus on Stitt's reputation as a Parker imitator by presenting short, representative statements from Stitt's critics and peers.

The second section contains longer statements from established jazz writers and critics. These statements are generally longer, more nuanced and include discussions of Stitt's music from an analytical perspective. In this section, the arguments of each writer and critic are presented and discussed in their own subsection. Topics covered in these subsections include Stitt's musical relationship to Parker, the features of Stitt's musical style, specific similarities and differences between Stitt and Parker's improvisational styles, and a general evaluation of Stitt's music and place in jazz history.

Establishing a Critical Consensus

This section presents statements from critics and musicians to establish Stitt's reputation as a Parker imitator. The statements show not only that such a reputation existed, but that this reputation began early in Stitt's career. Statements

from critics commenting *on the critical commentary* in 1960 reveal how pervasive Stitt's reputation as a Parker imitator was.

Before the Critical Consensus

As shown in the previous chapter, the first references to Stitt among New York music critics referenced his similarity to Parker. In mid-April 1946, a reviewer wrote that Stitt “sounds and looks amazingly like Charlie Parker [with] better execution.”¹ During the same month, Leonard Feather described Stitt as a “super Charlie Parker.”² Before the end of the decade, he was described in the first published book on bebop music as “the first young alto star to simulate Bird's style effectively.”³

At that time, there was no critical consensus about Stitt and his music. The earliest quotes about Stitt only mention him in passing. The quotes are positive in tone. Stitt was seen by critics as a talented newcomer whose style resembled that of Charlie Parker. Critics came to this opinion independently and in good faith after hearing Stitt perform live.

¹ Vail, *Dizzy Gillespie*, 38.

² *Ibid.*, 39.

³ Feather, *Inside Jazz*, 98.

After the Critical Consensus

By 1960, it was clear that a critical consensus had formed. In 1959, *Down Beat* magazine featured Stitt in an article titled “Don’t Call Me Bird: The Problems of Sonny Stitt.” The article used his musical relationship to Charlie Parker as a framing device; it began and ended with Stitt’s thoughts on his reputation as a Parker imitator.⁴ Under normal circumstances, being featured in *Down Beat* would be an honor. In this case, nearly half of Bittan’s two-page article was devoted to a discussion of Stitt and Parker.

Soon critics were referring to the critical consensus as an established fact—something that reviewers needed to reckon with. In 1960, the English periodical *Jazz Monthly* published a Michael James article titled “Stitt, Parker, and the Question of Influence.” In the article, James wrote: “To mention [Stitt’s] playing without invoking Parker’s name is a luxury few reviewers seem able to afford; one can only lament their parsimoniousness.”⁵ The implication was that critics seemed unable to review Stitt’s music without mentioning Parker, and that this practice had kept Stitt’s music from receiving a fair evaluation.

⁴ Near the beginning of the article, Stitt is quoted as saying: “I don’t think I sound that much like Bird.” The article ends with the following words: “I’m no new Bird, man... Nobody’s Bird! Bird died!” Bittan, “Don’t Call Me Bird,” 19–20.

⁵ James, “Stitt, Parker, and the Question of Influence,” 9.

In 1967, English writer and critic Barry McRae mentioned Parker in his discussion of Stitt in *The Jazz Cataclysm*, a book on modern jazz. McRae then observed: “In mentioning Parker I am doing what almost every biography of Stitt does. It seems that he is always typed as a ‘Bird’ copier who slowly moved away to a style of his own... constant reference was made to the influence that Parker exerted on his style.”⁶ According to McRae, “almost every” writer who discussed Stitt could not help but mention Parker as well. Stitt was portrayed as a “Bird copier,” albeit one who gradually came upon his own musical style.

It is worth noting that James and McRae saw the constant references to Parker in a negative light. Mentioning Parker was an overused critical shortcut that avoided discussing Stitt’s music on its own terms.

“Parker’s Best Heir”

To critics, Stitt was not merely a “Bird copyist,” or the first alto saxophonist to “simulate Bird’s style effectively.” He was Parker’s heir. Stitt had inherited Parker’s musical style after his death, and was tasked with carrying it forward.

⁶ McRae, *Jazz Cataclysm*, 21.

In 1959, jazz critic Benny Green wrote the following in London's *The*

Observer:

Since the death of Charlie Parker, Stitt has usually been described as Parker's echo, and it is certainly true that the style of one has been dependent on the originality of the other. But Stitt is not just a clever mimic. He does have a musical personality of his own, a most cultured and literate one.⁷

According to Green, Stitt was "usually" described as Charlie Parker's "echo," and had been seen that way since Parker's death in 1955. It is an interesting metaphor. As the echo repeats the sound of its source, so Stitt repeats the sound of Parker. Stitt was a "mimic" who was "dependent on the originality" of Parker's style.⁸ However, Stitt's mimicry was not total, and he retained "a musical personality of his own."

At times critics alluded to the "keys to the kingdom" story to describe Stitt as Parker's heir. Gerald Early wrote that Parker had "singled out... Stitt as his saxophone successor."⁹ In the 1966 article "'The Bird' Lives," Hazel Garland wrote that "in the minds of many, Sonny Stitt has emerged as *Parker's best*

⁷ Benny Green, "Primeval Chaos," *The Observer*, August 16, 1959, 12.

⁸ The phrasing "Stitt is not *just* a clever mimic" implies that Green believes Stitt *is* in fact a mimic (though he is also more than that). *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

⁹ Early, "The Passing of Jazz's Old Guard," 34.

heir.”¹⁰ The language of musical royalty was used throughout Stitt’s career.

Toward of the end of his life, for example, Stitt was described as the “executor of the opulent musical estate left by the genius of Parker.”¹¹

The idea that Stitt carried on Parker’s musical legacy was not limited to critics, but was held by jazz audiences and musicians as well.

In 1960, five years after Parker’s death, Stitt was a member of the Miles Davis Quintet. Stitt brought both his alto and tenor saxophones with him on tour. Davis had asked Stitt to perform mainly on the alto saxophone, but Stitt wanted to perform on both saxophones “all the time.”¹² However, “when he played the alto, people went crazy. They’d say, ‘Yeah!,’ because he was reminiscent of Charlie Parker.”¹³

This story suggests that the public fascination with Parker continued after his untimely death. Jazz audiences in 1960 were eager to hear Parker’s music

¹⁰ Hazel Garland, “‘The Bird’ Lives,” *The Pittsburg Courier*, December 3, 1966, 13, emphasis added.

¹¹ Owen McNally, “‘Horizons’ Pure McPherson,” *The Hartford Courant*, December 31, 1978, 7D. The original quote refers to pianist Barry Harris and Sonny Stitt as the “executors of the musical estates” of Bud Powell and Charlie Parker.

¹² Cobb, interview by William Brower.

¹³ *Ibid.*

again. Stitt's alto saxophone playing reminded them of Parker, and they cheered him for that.

Musicians associated Stitt with Parker's music as well. Recall that Dizzy Gillespie said, while Stitt was a member of his band, that it was like "Charlie Parker playing next to me until I opened my eyes."¹⁴ Sometimes musicians hired Stitt specifically because of his resemblance to Parker. In the late 1940s, Miles Davis sought out Stitt to ask for his participation in his *Birth of the Cool* project. Davis later said, "when we started to get the nonet together... I wanted Sonny Stitt on alto saxophone. Sonny sounded a lot like Bird, so I thought of him right away."¹⁵

"Almost a Carbon Copy"

In the quotations above, Stitt's resemblance to Parker was understood in various ways. The resemblance to Parker was a critical observation, and a reviewer's cliché. It was a sign that Stitt was carrying on Parker's legacy, and a reason to hire Stitt and celebrate his music.

¹⁴ Myers, "Interview: Junior Mance." Gillespie's thoughts on Stitt and Parker are discussed at length in the preceding chapter.

¹⁵ Davis and Troupe, *Miles*, 116, emphasis added. Gerry Mulligan eventually convinced Davis to hire Lee Konitz instead "because he had a light sound rather than a hard bebop sound."

At other times, Stitt's resemblance to Parker—and his critical reputation as a Parker imitator—was understood in more negative terms. This could take the form a backhanded compliment. For example: "*Frequently compared to Charlie Parker*, Stitt today uses a more varied palette in spreading the colors of sound from his horn."¹⁶ Stitt's reputation as a Parker imitator was also something to defend Stitt against. For example, "his use of musical quotation... reflects his sense of humor and not, *as some critics have said*, a lack of inventiveness."¹⁷

The problem of "inventiveness" has remained with Stitt since his death in 1982. In a more recent work, Gelly writes that "there has always been a question mark over Sonny Stitt, since both he and Bird agreed he was working along similar lines before they met, but his achievements were *only* those of a less inventive imitator."¹⁸ Did Stitt develop his musical style independently of Parker? For Gelly, it is difficult to say for certain ("there are always been a question

¹⁶ Charles Hanna, "Saxist Stitt Doesn't Need That Apology," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, May 29, 1960, 3, emphasis added.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

¹⁸ Gelly, *Masters of Jazz Saxophone*, 50, emphasis added. The present author is not aware of any evidence for the claim that "Bird agreed [that Stitt] was working along similar lines before they met." Perhaps Gelly is referring to Stitt's account of his meeting with Parker in Kansas City. Even in that story, however, Parker does not agree that the two saxophonists were "working along similar lines." He is merely surprised that Stitt sounds like him.

mark”). What is known, however, is that Stitt’s music was the work of a “less inventive imitator.”

Some critics represented Stitt’s resemblance to Parker in explicitly negative terms. In 1963—the same year that Stitt recorded *Stitt Plays Bird*—English broadcaster Steve Race reportedly “accused Sonny Stitt of copying Charlie Parker as hard as he could, and of having ‘given up all pretense of individuality.’”¹⁹ Said Race: “I think it’s time he stopped playing Parker and went back to playing Stitt.”²⁰ The implication is that Stitt was no longer interested in having a personal musical style. He copied Parker “as hard as he could,” and lost himself in the process.

An even harsher evaluation was made by jazz reviewer Scott Yanow. In his book *Bebop*, Yanow wrote: “In jazz, one of the main goals is to achieve one’s own sound, but Stitt’s alto playing was often identical to Charlie Parker’s although without the genius.”²¹ Stitt was “a master of the Bebop vocabulary.”²² However, unlike his frequent collaborator Gene Ammons, Stitt was “not all that

¹⁹ Stitt, interview by Les Tomkins.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Yanow, *Bebop*, 96.

²² Ibid.

flexible.”²³ Stitt’s imitation of Parker’s style began early in his career. By 1945, “he already sounded like a near-clone of Charlie Parker’s.”²⁴

The Race and Yanow quotes differ from the earlier quotes mainly in tone. Early reviewers did not describe Stitt as “identical [to Parker] although without the genius,” “a near-clone,” etc. However, the quotes do not differ greatly in content. All of the quotes cited in this section either state or imply that Stitt sounded like Parker. This position is expressed in a variety of ways—some complimentary, some not—but it remained the consensus view.

Referring to Stitt as a “near-clone” of Parker was also not unique to jazz critics. In the December 11, 1958 issue of *Jet* magazine, the Entertainment section included a piece on Stitt and alto saxophonist Julian “Cannonball” Adderley. The piece quoted critic Ralph J. Gleason, who “rocked the jazz world” with the “blasphemous edict” that Adderley had earned the “mantle of Charlie Parker.”²⁵ Stitt, meanwhile, was criticized for remaining “more Parker” than himself.²⁶ To this Adderley added: “Stitt, I think tries to emulate Bird... he is almost a carbon copy.”²⁷

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ “Jazzmen Stitt and Adderley,” *Jet*, December 11, 1958, 60.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 61.

Stitt's Contemporaries

As this quote from Adderley reveals, at least some of Stitt's contemporaries held similar opinions as the critics. This is an important point, because it demonstrates that music critics were not alone in hearing Stitt as a Parker imitator. On the contrary, this view was often expressed by musicians who knew and worked with Stitt personally.

For example, a similar sentiment to Adderley's was expressed by J. J. Johnson, a trombonist who performed and recorded with Stitt throughout his career, including at the Newport Jazz Festival Tribute to Charlie Parker in 1964. Johnson said of Stitt: "He was accused, and rightfully so, of being a Bird clone. He made no bones about his attempts to sound as close to Charlie Parker as he could. And he did. He came very close to being Charlie Parker as far as the style of his playing was concerned."²⁸

Drummer Stan Levey worked frequently with Dizzy Gillespie in the 1940s and 50s. Through his relationship with Gillespie, Levey recorded with both Parker

²⁸ J. J. Johnson, interview by Lida and David Baker, February 26–27, 1994, accessed November 2011, http://www.smithsonianjazz.org/oral_histories/pdf/joh_JJJohnson_transcript.pdf.

(in the 1940s) and Stitt (in the 1950s).²⁹ Levey said of Stitt's relationship to Parker: "[Stitt] was a copyist... [although] he definitely could play, no doubt about that."³⁰

Kenny Clarke was a drummer and bebop innovator who worked with both Parker and Stitt. Clarke saw an essential connection between the two musicians, while also defending Stitt's originality: "Even if there had never been a Bird, there would have been a Sonny Stitt... *although he's the essence of Bird*, he is quite individual in his style."³¹

Trumpeter, arranger, and band leader Quincy Jones collaborated with Stitt on the 1955 album *Sonny Stitt Plays Arrangements from the Pen of Quincy Jones* for Roost Records. In a review of the 1957 album *Sonny Side Up*, Jones wrote that "Stitt is of the Bird school" and suggested that Stitt—unlike saxophonist Sonny Rollins—was "a carbon copy."³²

²⁹ "Dizzy Gillespie Discography."

³⁰ Quoted in Stewart, liner notes to *The Complete Roost Sonny Stitt Studio Sessions*, 1–2.

³¹ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 1, emphasis added.

³² Jones further contrasts Stitt and Rollins by writing of Rollins: "He's influenced by Bird, but by his spirit." Quincy Jones, "Review: Sonny Side Up," *The Jazz Review* 2, no. 4 (May 1959), 32.

“Imagine how Charlie Parker felt when [so many saxophone players] were really playing his *notes*, and every inflection,” said alto saxophonist Lee Konitz—a near contemporary of Stitt—in an interview for his book *Conversations on the Improviser’s Art*.³³ Konitz continued: “Sonny Stitt identified so much that he thought he invented it! That’s a very intense psychological disturbance, I think, and obviously Charlie Parker couldn’t deal with it ultimately.”³⁴

Konitz reserved high praise for Parker: “Charlie had truly dynamic feeling for the music, and these great phrases that he put together ingeniously. A very special kind of expression only known to a major player.”³⁵ His praise for Stitt was more qualified: “Sonny managed to integrate all those Charlie Parker phrases, or Lester Young or Dexter Gordon or whoever he was emulating, and make a musical statement. It’s some kind of an art form, but not the work of a true adventurous, chance-taking spirit.”³⁶

³³ Lee Konitz and Andy Hamilton, *Lee Konitz: Conversations on the Improviser’s Art* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 85, emphasis in original.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 109–110.

Konitz's criticism of Stitt is more than simply a charge of imitation. Konitz alleges a failure of musical approach. For Konitz, Stitt's playing not only owed much to Parker; it was lacking in imagination and risk.

At least two musicians who worked with Stitt testified that they knew from personal experience that Stitt had imitated Parker.

Pianist Junior Mance said that "Stitt *worshiped* Charlie Parker—I know that for a fact... *All the time*, he would speak up whenever anybody would say anything bad about him."³⁷ Elsewhere Mance observed that Stitt had a picture of Parker in his saxophone case.³⁸ Mance said, "Sure, he played a lot of Charlie's riffs, but he had his own thing going, too. He was one of the best, even back then."³⁹

Saxophonist Red Holloway co-led a two-saxophone band with Stitt from the mid-1970s until Stitt's death. In an interview with jazz writer Zan Stewart, Holloway said: "Sonny told me that before he heard Bird, he was heading in

³⁷ Aaron Cohen, "Sonny Stitt: Original Voice," *Down Beat*, August 2012, 36, emphasis added.

³⁸ Myers, "Interview: Junior Mance." According to Mance, both he and saxophonist Sonny Rollins has pictures of Parker in their cases.

³⁹ Cohen, "Sonny Stitt," 36, emphasis added.

Parker's direction, but didn't have his stuff together... But once he heard Bird, he knew exactly what he had to do."⁴⁰

Summary

The quotes in this section have been cited to show and establish Stitt's reputation as a Parker imitator. Statements from critics reveal that comparisons to Parker appeared in print as early as the mid-1940s. The comparisons continued after Parker's death in 1955. By 1960, the comparisons were a fixture of the Stitt literature, and had ossified into a critical reputation.

This reputation was itself an object of discussion among critics. Some critics cited Stitt's reputation as a Parker imitator approvingly. Others argued against it, and believed that it was a pat explanation of Stitt that sold his music short. Still other critics used the reputation to highlight a difference in the level of accomplishment between the two saxophonists, and to chastise Stitt for a lack of individuality.

Works published in the decade after Stitt's death sometimes offered a more charitable view of Stitt and his musical relationship to Parker. These works

⁴⁰ Stewart, liner notes to *The Complete Roost Sonny Stitt Studio Sessions*, 2.

are worth citing here. The works consider Stitt's resemblance to Parker in a more sympathetic light, and hint at some of the musical features that will receive more attention in the section that follows.

Lyons and Perlo's book *Jazz Portraits* describes Stitt's relationship to

Parker this way:

Stitt perpetuated the bebop-saxophone style of Charlie Parker. Burdened, perhaps unfairly, with the nickname "Little Bird,"⁴¹ Stitt nonetheless developed a style that was similar to Parker's musical language... A less dynamic soloist than Parker, Stitt was nevertheless creative, passionate, and technically superb. Like Bird, he had a sharp-eyed, yet rich tone.⁴²

Lyons and Perlo bring up Stitt's reputation as a Parker imitator, adding that this reputation "burdened" him. They also refer to specific musical features.

Stitt had a similar "sharp" and "rich tone" to Parker. He was "a less dynamic

⁴¹ The nickname "Little Bird" is more commonly associated with saxophonist Jimmy Heath than with Stitt. In a 2010 interview with David Schroeder, Heath said he was first called Little Bird for "trying like hell to play everything Charlie Parker played." Heath "never succeeded" at this, but "Sonny Stitt came close." Saxophonist Albert Ayler was also called "Little Bird" early in his career. David Schroeder, *From the Minds of Jazz Musicians: Conversations with the Creative and Inspired* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 86; Todd S. Jenkins, "Ayler, Albert," in *Free Jazz and Free Improvisation: An Encyclopedia* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 1:20.

⁴² Len Lyons and Don Perlo, *Jazz Portraits: The Lives and Music of the Jazz Masters* (New York: William Morrow, 1989), 485–486.

soloist than Parker,” but “was nevertheless creative,” and like Parker, had “superb” technique.

In the *African American National Biography*, musicologist Barry Kernfeld wrote that it was “certainly” true Stitt was “Parker’s closest imitator.”⁴³ However, Stitt was “also the most talented and well-rounded of the early alto saxophonists influenced by Parker.”⁴⁴ Stitt differed from other imitators in that he “understood both the erudite side of Parker’s playing and his deep connection to the blues.”⁴⁵ Stitt’s music reflects this understanding of Parker, while the attempts of his mid-to-late-1940’s contemporaries “seem halting by comparison.”⁴⁶

Enstice and Rubin’s *Jazz Spoken Here* presents a mostly sympathetic portrait of Stitt, but describes how Stitt’s reputation as a Parker imitator haunted him throughout his career. The following quote captures the upsides and downsides of being a talented alto saxophonist with a style so close to Parker’s:

Enormously talented in his own right, saxophonist Sonny Stitt had the misfortune to develop a sound and approach that were uncannily similar to

⁴³ Kernfeld, “Stitt, Sonny,” *African American National Biography*, emphasis added.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

those of his slightly older contemporary Charlie “Bird” Parker, one of the pioneering figures in twentieth-century music.

Stitt never wholly escaped the comparison with Parker. Even after Stitt’s death in 1982, one obituary writer noted that he “was respected for independently developing a Parkeresque bop style in the 1940s.” Parker’s ghost loomed over Stitt’s career for more than a quarter century after Parker’s death at age thirty-five in 1955; this is a tragic irony, since Parker reportedly held Stitt’s playing in high esteem.⁴⁷

Far from being a mere copyist, Stitt was “enormously talented.” But Stitt also had the “misfortune” of developing a musical style—“a sound and approach”—that were “uncannily similar” to Parker’s. Stitt was only partially able to transcend his reputation as a Parker imitator. He “was respected” by reviewers and critics, but in a qualified way usually reserved for lesser musicians. Such was the intensity of this reputation that “Parker’s ghost loomed over Stitt’s career” until the latter’s eventual death in 1982.

Analytical Statements from Jazz Writers and Critics

The present section is devoted to jazz writers and critics who wrote longer, more detailed statements about Stitt and his relationship to Parker. These statements discuss Stitt’s music and career in analytical terms. Many of these

⁴⁷ Enstice and Rubin, *Jazz Spoken Here*, 241.

statements also enumerate specific similarities and differences between Stitt and Parker's musical styles.

Michael James

In his 1960 article "Stitt, Parker, and the Question of Influence," English critic Michael James provided the first detailed analysis of Stitt and Parker from a musicological perspective. James's article discussed the elements of Stitt's improvisational style in depth, as well as which of those elements had been borrowed from Parker.

Near the beginning of his article, James offered the following interpretation and defense of Stitt's improvisational style:

Even leaving aside structural differences—Stitt's style has been far more symmetrical, never so adventurous rhythmically—I fail to see how the meanest intelligence could mistake his playing for anything but the act of impassioned creation it is. Many of the devices, agree, are secondhand, but they are completely fused with the original melodic thoughts, no more separable from them than flesh is from bone... Stitt's skill in relating his phrases, his fertile imagination, and his tonal control, all mark him out as a soloist of the first rank. The material gleaned from Parker is not used to prop up some despicable piece of jerry-building but implements the basic structure of an edifice well designed in itself. He has few peers as far as technical dexterity is concerned, and can carve out a shapely line a tempo approaching eighty bars to the minute.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ James, "Stitt, Parker, and the Question of Influence," 9. "Eighty bars to the minute" is equivalent to 320 beats per minute in 4/4 time.

In the paragraph above, James referenced specific commendatory qualities of Stitt's playing. Stitt was creative, skillful, and a "soloist of the first rank." His improvisations were marked by "original melodic thoughts," "tonal control," and great "technical dexterity." While Stitt was an original improviser, he also "gleaned" Parker's melodic material for use in his own solos. James's wording suggests that this melodic material formed part of the "basic structure" of Stitt's solos. That is, Stitt built his solos out of—or on top of—Parker's melodic material.

James goes on to praise Stitt further. While Stitt's "technique and imagination" were indeed impressive, the "paramount feature of his style" was "the amazing verve of his playing."⁴⁹ In Stitt's best work there was "a constant impulse, a direct rhythmic current that flows straight out of the long unbroken lines" of his "immaculately placed" notes.⁵⁰

James then discusses some of the differences between Stitt and Parker's improvisational styles. Stitt's playing was "far more symmetrical" than Parker's, and was less "adventurous rhythmically." These are not minor points, but rather

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

“structural differences.”⁵¹ Stitt’s solo “choruses are much less complex than Bird’s”; as a result, the “surface tension of his style [is] considerably more uniform.”⁵²

James argues that Stitt’s use of Parker’s melodic material was well-integrated, and did not hinder Stitt’s music on an emotional level—after all, “the appropriation of another musician’s phrases does not necessarily inhibit communicative power.”⁵³ Nevertheless, “Stitt’s emotive range is a good deal narrower than Parker’s.”⁵⁴ Stitt tended to draw from the earlier (i.e., “before 1945”) and “less advanced aspects” of Parker’s music.⁵⁵ Consequently, Stitt’s music lacked Parker’s “freedom of line,” his sense of “intricacy” and “balance,” as well as the “infinite variety of suggestions with which Parker’s improvisation teems.”⁵⁶

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 10.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Stitt used Parker's melodic material in his solos, but he was most like Parker in aspects like "inflection, attack and tone."⁵⁷ Critics who noted similarities between Stitt and Parker were not mistaken. On certain recordings, "the resemblance between the two [saxophonists] is undeniable," and Stitt "evokes the flavour" of Parker's playing "more accurately than any other altoist's."⁵⁸

Finally, the similarities between Stitt and Parker went beyond concrete musical features to include more ineffable qualities. If Stitt had access to Parker's note choices and saxophone tone, he also had access to "a certain area of the Parker aesthetic."⁵⁹ However, it would be a mistake to believe that Stitt relied on this aesthetic "out of a sense of inadequacy."⁶⁰ Rather, Stitt "was prompted by a conviction that the borrowed material [from Parker] was in perfect accord with what he had to say."⁶¹

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

Martin Williams

In 1962, jazz critic Martin Williams attended Stitt's recording session for the Atlantic album *Sonny Stitt & the Top Brass*. Williams later wrote an article about the session, which he began with a fascinating discussion of Stitt and

Parker:

Alto saxophonist Sonny Stitt was one of the first jazzmen to grasp Charlie Parker's style, and he had apparently recognized an aesthetic kinship with Parker long before most followers of jazz had heard of either man. His absorption of Parker's ideas is so complete that, as one commentator has put it, Stitt is the kind of player who refutes every concept we have about originality, even personal expression, in jazz. Yet Stitt plays with spontaneity, involvement, and conviction. If he lacks Parker's brilliance and his daring quickness of imagination in rhythm, harmony, and melody, Stitt nevertheless is not playing an imitation, and his work is far from pastiche or popularization. He simply finds his own voice in Parker's musical language. He may construct a solo almost entirely out of Parker's ideas, but he will play them so as to convince you that he discovered each of them for himself.⁶²

In this quote, Williams corroborates Leonard Feather's 1949 statement that Stitt was the "first young alto star to simulate Bird's style effectively,"⁶³ by stating that Stitt was "one of the first jazzmen to grasp" Parker's style. Stitt did

⁶² The article has been reprinted in Martin Williams, *Jazz in Its Time* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 112.

⁶³ Feather, *Inside Jazz*, 98.

not merely “grasp Charlie Parker’s style.” Stitt’s music betrayed an “aesthetic kinship with Parker”⁶⁴ and a “complete” “absorption of Parker’s ideas.” Stitt found “his own voice in Parker’s musical language,” and could “construct a solo *almost entirely* out of Parker’s ideas.”⁶⁵ The implication is that Stitt did not adopt Parker’s vocabulary here and there, but rather took up Parker’s musical language as his own.

Like James, Williams praises Stitt, noting the saxophonist’s “spontaneity, involvement, and conviction.” Williams also notes that “Stitt is not playing an imitation” of Parker, like a less inspired copyist would do. At the same time, however, Stitt should not be mistaken as Parker’s equal, for he lacked “Parker’s brilliance and his daring quickness of imagination.”

⁶⁴ Note the similarity between Williams’s expression “aesthetic kinship” and Michael James’s reference to “Stitt’s use of a certain area of the Parker aesthetic” (James, “Stitt, Parker, and the Question of Influence,” 10).

⁶⁵ Williams, *Jazz in Its Time*, 112, emphasis added.

Barry McRae

In his 1967 book *The Jazz Cataclysm*, McRae mentions Stitt's struggles with his critics and the ubiquity of his reputation as a Parker imitator.⁶⁶ He acknowledges that Stitt "used the Parker conception,"⁶⁷ but highlights the differences between Stitt and Parker's musical styles. For McRae, Stitt's reputation as a "Bird copier" "oversimplifies the truth"⁶⁸:

[W]hile *nobody could deny* the way in which he used the Parker conception, he remained rhythmically more straightforward than his mentor. This was true even in his earlier days. Stitt was endowed with an incredible technique [even early on, when he worked] with Dizzy Gillespie during 1945–6. His playing at this stage was less urgent than it later became, but this was compensated for by his relaxed sense of swing and well-constructed choruses.⁶⁹

Stitt regarded Parker as a musical "mentor." Like Parker, he had "incredible technique." However, Stitt was "rhythmically more straightforward" than Parker. There were also differences in swing feel and solo architecture. Stitt played with a "relaxed sense of swing," and improvised in "well-constructed

⁶⁶ "His real struggle was for recognition by the critics." McRae, *Jazz Cataclysm*, 20–21.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

[solo] choruses.” On the alto saxophone, he played with a “fierce bluesy tone,” and was less “willing to vary his phrase lengths.”⁷⁰

McRae believes that Stitt was misunderstood by critics. In 1967, Stitt was performing in what was by then a conservative music style. This led to frustration and “critical misunderstanding.”⁷¹ Nevertheless, Stitt:

has fashioned a niche for himself in the jazz world. *He is no longer a modernist* in the accepted sense of the word and has made no attempt to curry favour by playing in an alien style. He remained as he is today, an essentially hot musician who continued to play as he believed jazz should be played.⁷²

Many musicians found in bebop a “radical jazz ethos,” and pursued its “anti-commercialism and anti-racist militancy” into the 1960’s avant-garde.⁷³ While Stitt was an important figure in bebop music, he did not share his contemporaries’ desire to extend the more radical aspects of the style. Consequently, by the mid-1960s Stitt was “no longer a modernist.”

⁷⁰ Ibid., 22.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., emphasis added.

⁷³ Lopes, *Rise of a Jazz Art World*, 134.

Brian Morton

In his article “Sonny Stitt: Leaving the Pack,” Scottish writer Brian Morton expresses similar thoughts to McRae regarding Stitt and the avant-garde. Morton writes that Charlie Parker “nursed avant-garde ambitions” that were “alien to Sonny’s nature.”⁷⁴ Morton also cites Stitt’s own thoughts on the avant-garde: “Longhair music, as we used to call it, doesn’t make me feel good. It’s too impersonal.”⁷⁵

Morton identifies several differences between Stitt and Parker’s musical styles. Stitt’s “harmonic sense... runs along different lines [than Parker], using more conventional resolutions and fewer extravagant modulations.”⁷⁶ For Morton, Stitt’s “understanding of the blues is, if anything, more profound and even more central, a source of narrative.”⁷⁷ Rhythmically, Stitt “played more heavily across the beat than Parker, but while Parker moved with... unexpected grace... Stitt’s leanness was backed by an unexpected power of delivery.”⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Morton, “Sonny Stitt,” 9.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ In his article, Morton also quotes alto saxophonist Jesse Davis on why “it is impossible to confuse” Parker and Stitt: “The phrasing, the tone and *direction* of

Stitt was also the more logical and consistent player. According to Morton, Parker “repeated himself but with infinite variation.”⁷⁹ By contrast, “Stitt’s solo development... emerges out of an ironclad logic that makes each note dependent on the last within a tree-diagram of possibilities.”⁸⁰ Stitt “rarely repeated himself,” but “he started so often from the same premises and the same two or three melodic steps that one often thinks one’s heard this solo before.”⁸¹

Jim Burns

In his 1969 *Jazz Journal* article “Early Stitt,” essayist and music reviewer Jim Burns discusses Stitt’s improvisational style on his early recordings (1946–early 1950s). Burns acknowledges Stitt’s similarity to Parker on these recordings, while examining his differences to Parker as well.

the music, it’s all completely different.” Davis seems to agree that Stitt’s resemblance to Parker hurt his reputation: “he thought Stitt was cruelly undervalued and in need of rapid rehabilitation.” *Ibid.*, emphasis in original.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

Stitt was one of a “handful of altoists” and “boppers” in the late 1940s who were “overshadowed by [the] genius” of Charlie Parker.⁸² By mid-1946, Stitt was “a member of [a] small but rapidly growing bop clique”⁸³ in New York City and a member of the Dizzy Gillespie Sextet. When he joined Gillespie in the studio that May, Stitt produced his first commercial recordings, and “the first *pure* bop discs.”⁸⁴

On these bop discs, Stitt plays with a “mature” alto sound that Burns describes as “an integral part of the ensemble.”⁸⁵ “[T]he similarity to Parker is discernible,” not only in Stitt’s choice of notes but in the “overall emotional impact” of his playing—which is where “Stitt most resembles Bird.”⁸⁶ On a recording three months later (“Serenade to a Square”), “Stitt’s style... is easily

⁸² These altoists “managed to assert their own personalities enough to create music which had vigour and originality... Unfortunately, the Bird-imitator tag was used rather indiscriminately at the time, with the result that the fans tended to dismiss all other altoists as copyists, whilst the musicians for their part found it difficult to impress on their own merits.” Burns, “Early Stitt,” 6.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, emphasis in original. While this session was not the first to use bebop musicians, earlier recordings “frequently had contributions from musicians whose links with the boppers were stylistically tenuous at best.”

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

recognisable, both in sound and playing.”⁸⁷ Burns writes: “one can’t help but compare Stitt’s work to Parker’s... and whilst it is not possible to rate Sonny’s as highly, it is just as difficult to write it off as second-hand Bird.”⁸⁸

In addition to the similarities in Stitt and Parker’s playing, Burns also notes differences in execution, note placement, and solo construction. Stitt’s early recordings demonstrate that “there is a vast difference in his phrasing. Stitt plays very much on the beat and his ideas flow in a smooth and ordered manner, much in the style of an altoist such as Benny Carter. True, Stitt occasionally leaps into double-tempo runs but even these are formally constructed.”⁸⁹

While Parker’s playing is frequently unpredictable, with Stitt “one can often guess just what is coming next.”⁹⁰ The predictability of Stitt’s playing makes it less surprising, but this is offset by “the best elements... in his music: the firm tone, long lines, and uncomplicated phrasing.”⁹¹

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Burns adds: “and the familiarity has a comforting aspect, one has to admit.” Note the similarity between Burns’s statement that “one can often guess just what is coming next” and Morton’s statement that “one often thinks one’s heard this solo before.” Ibid., 7; Morton, “Sonny Stitt,” 9.

⁹¹ Burns, “Early Stitt,” 7. Despite Burns’s obvious enthusiasm for Stitt’s early alto saxophone playing, he believes that Stitt’s “most individual and exciting work has been done on tenor.”

Dan Morgenstern

Like other jazz writers cited here, Morgenstern sees clear similarities between Stitt and Parker's musical styles. In the paragraph below, Morgenstern identifies three specific similarities (sound, speed, and vocabulary), as well as some overarching differences:

As amazingly close as Stitt could come to Parker in terms of sound (perhaps a bit edgier), speed (as fast, and more accurate in hitting each note in the sound-stream clearly on the head—though more mechanical and less maniacal), and vocabulary (he spoke Bird fluently, like a native), there always was a fundamental difference, originality aside. Stitt thought in bar-length phrases and always remained a symmetrical improviser, while Parker darted across bar line and where a phrase might land was never at all predictable.⁹²

For Morgenstern, Stitt's differences to Parker were apparent even in the areas they were similar. Stitt's saxophone sound was like Parker's, but it was also "edgier." His speed was "as fast," while his notes were "more accurate," "more mechanical," and "less maniacal." There was also "a fundamental difference" in how Stitt conceived and organized his solos.⁹³ While Parker's solos were unpredictable, Stitt "thought in bar-length phrases and... remained a symmetrical improviser."

⁹² Morgenstern and Meyer, *Living with Jazz*.

⁹³ Morgenstern adds in passing that there is also "fundamental difference" between Stitt and Parker in "originality."

This is not to say Stitt's similarities to Parker were imagined by his critics. On the contrary, Stitt came "amazingly close" to Parker's style. Morgenstern cites Stitt's version of "Ko Ko" from the 1958 Argo record *Burnin'* as an example. He calls Stitt's version "a masterful re-creation," and notes that "Stitt amazingly replicated some of Bird's exact phraseology."⁹⁴ Despite these obvious similarities, however, "the end result [of Stitt's "Ko Ko"] is much smoother than the original."⁹⁵

Stuart Nicholson

In the second volume of *The Essential Jazz Records: Modernism to Postmodernism*, jazz author Stuart Nicholson examines Stitt's improvisational style on pieces Stitt recorded with Bud Powell in 1949–1950.⁹⁶

According to Nicholson, Stitt had tremendous technique, and "could power through the chord changes at the fastest of" tempos with ease.⁹⁷ At fast

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ These pieces are available as tracks 1–9 on Sonny Stitt, Bud Powell, and J. J. Johnson, *Sonny Stitt/Bud Powell/J. J. Johnson*, Prestige 7024, 1990, CD.

⁹⁷ Harrison, Thacker, and Nicholson, *Essential Jazz Records*, 66.

tempos, Stitt played with “controlled abandon,” “precision,” and “fire.”⁹⁸ He also organized his melodic material clearly. “Certain thematic elements recur regularly,” which “give [his work] a sense of cohesion and logic.”⁹⁹

Nicholson mentions Parker and bebop to argue for an essential contribution that Stitt made to jazz. Nicholson notes that Stitt’s 1949–50 recordings on tenor saxophone were “*extremely influential* in smoothing out... [and helping to] unlock the complexities of the ‘new music’” (i.e., bebop).¹⁰⁰ In other words, for many musicians, Stitt’s saxophone playing made bebop intelligible.

Bebop—and the music of Charlie Parker in particular—was “[un]predictable and rhythmically complex.”¹⁰¹ This complexity “seemed beyond the ken of mere mortals. Stitt helped unravel such complexities by systematically applying patterns to negotiate his way through the complex, extended chord

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 65, emphasis added.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

progressions of bop.”¹⁰² This “methodology... became widely influential,” and influenced a generation of younger saxophonists.¹⁰³

Gerald Early

In his essay on jazz, race, and black working musicians, “The Passing of Jazz’s Old Guard,” Early discusses the lives and travails of Thelonious Monk, Charles Mingus, and Sonny Stitt, three influential African-American jazz musicians who all died around 1980.¹⁰⁴ Early portrays these musicians as tragic figures: “great black artists who had lived beyond the term of their greatness.”¹⁰⁵

In his essay, Early recalls Nicholson’s view of Stitt as an influential saxophonist who made the “angular contours of bop” intelligible.¹⁰⁶ According to Early, Sonny Stitt was “*the popular disseminator* of the virtuosic technique of the language of bop.”¹⁰⁷ In assuming this role, however, Stitt became inseparable

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Nicholson refers to Sonny Rollins, Dexter Gordon, Wardell Gray, Joe Henderson, George Coleman, and Frank Foster as saxophonists who “cited Stitt as an influence on their style in this respect.” Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Mingus died in 1979, and Monk and Stitt in 1982.

¹⁰⁵ Early, “The Passing of Jazz’s Old Guard,” 25.

¹⁰⁶ Harrison, Thacker, and Nicholson, *Essential Jazz Records*, 65.

¹⁰⁷ Early, “The Passing of Jazz’s Old Guard,” 24, emphasis added.

from his reputation as a Parker imitator, despite decades of public protest to the contrary.¹⁰⁸

Referring to the “keys to the kingdom” story examined in the previous chapter, Early writes:

When Charlie “Yardbird” Parker singled out Edward “Sonny” Stitt as his saxophone successor, he did not present a compliment so much as chant a curse, an extremely successful curse. One wonders if Stitt spent his life trying to live up to Parker’s pronouncement or trying to live it down. No matter: Stitt was, all his life, haunted by the ghost of Bird.¹⁰⁹

For Early, “Stitt was an incredibly gifted saxophonist who really did have a sound that was distinct from Parker’s.”¹¹⁰ But Stitt also sounded “enough” like Parker “to be forced to go through his career... [known as] one of Bird’s better imitators.”¹¹¹ Stitt was unable to break free from this reputation, despite changing instruments—from alto to tenor saxophone—and music styles—from bebop and hard bop to soul jazz and rhythm and blues. On alto saxophone, Stitt “seemed [to

¹⁰⁸ As early as 1959, Stitt was saying in interviews: “I hate to be compared to him.” Bittan, *Don’t Call Me Bird*, 19.

¹⁰⁹ Early, “The Passing of Jazz’s Old Guard,” 34.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

critics] to be playing Bird verbatim; and when he played tenor, he was merely doing Bird in a different voice.”¹¹²

While Stitt’s improvisational style was different from Parker’s, his life and career were different too. For example, “Stitt was a survivor.”¹¹³ Unlike Parker, who “allowed his excesses or his frustrations to destroy him as a young man,” Stitt worked through these problems, constantly recording and touring until his death at 58 years old.¹¹⁴ Stitt’s music also “reached an entirely different audience from Bird’s.”¹¹⁵ Parker appealed to “white and black hipsters and intellectuals,” while Stitt appealed to “ordinary, working-class folk.”¹¹⁶

These differences help to explain why Stitt was “important to jazz as Parker’s alter ego”: “he *demystified* Bird’s music; he made it accessible and freed it from the charismatic burden of its creator’s shadow.”¹¹⁷ Parker was a “prophet,”¹¹⁸ while Stitt was a road musician. Although he adopted Parker’s musical language, Stitt did not speak like a prophet. Instead, through Stitt’s life,

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 35.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 34–35.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 35.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., emphasis added.

¹¹⁸ Taylor, *Notes and Tones*, 193.

music, and career, he interpreted Parker's musical prophecies into everyday language. Stitt made Parker "accessible" to "ordinary" people.

Early's portrait of Stitt calls to mind Stitt's rejection of post-bop modernism and the avant-garde. As Morton and McRae noted above, "avant-garde ambitions... were alien to Sonny's nature"; and after spending years on the road, Stitt was "no longer a modernist."¹¹⁹ This, too, was a clear difference between Stitt and Parker. As a result of his career choices and stylistic predilections, "Stitt had forsaken any possibility of taking on Parker's highbrow audience."¹²⁰

Gerald Majer

Gerald Majer's book chapter "Stitt's Time"¹²¹ covers some of the same themes as Early's essay. In the chapter, Majer addresses Stitt's reputation as a Parker imitator, his life on the road, and the tragic side of his career. Majer also raises the concept of "control" as an important characteristic of Stitt's improvisational style.

¹¹⁹ Morton, "Sonny Stitt," 9; McRae, *Jazz Cataclysm*, 22.

¹²⁰ Early, "The Passing of Jazz's Old Guard," 35.

¹²¹ Gerald Majer, *The Velvet Lounge: On Late Chicago Jazz* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 15–34.

According to Stitt, Parker told him in Kansas City that “You sound like me.” This statement should have been “the ultimate praise coming from Parker the genius, the fiery all-consuming sun of the bebop revolution. Stitt had Bird’s blessing, and when Parker passed, it might have been the road was clear: Stitt was the heir to the throne, held the keys to the kingdom, was the main man.”¹²² Instead, as Early wrote, Parker’s blessing was also a curse. “Being the heir was [Stitt’s] glory, but it cast a heavy shadow, offered a distorting mirror.”¹²³

For Majer, the conventional reputation of Stitt as a Parker imitator is problematic. Unlike later saxophonists, Stitt did not descend from Parker genealogically, but rather “developed musically at the same time... next to him, parallel.”¹²⁴ After all, the two musicians were born only four years apart. Rather than studying his music in the 1950s, Stitt came to “Parker’s innovations”¹²⁵ in real time. “And what did Stitt do with [these innovations]? He worked. That was all he did, forty years on the road, night after night.”¹²⁶

¹²² Ibid., 25.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 25–26.

For Majer, while “Stitt’s musical idiom is very close to Parker’s... there’s an unmistakable difference.”¹²⁷ Majer uses Stitt and Parker’s respective recordings of “Cool Blues”¹²⁸ to illustrate this difference. In Parker’s original version, Parker “kind of stutters.”¹²⁹ His saxophone playing is “fluid,” has “intense blues-fire,” and is “on the delirious edge of losing it.”¹³⁰ In Stitt’s version, there is “a tempering, a smoothing [out].”¹³¹ Despite the obvious similarity to Parker’s original version, the sense of abandon in Parker’s playing is gone, “those same impassioned stutterings distributed and managed with exacting care.”¹³²

Majer then introduces the idea of “control” as a guiding characteristic of Stitt’s improvisational style. This concept differentiates Stitt from Parker—as well as from other jazz figures—and may explain, in part, why some critics found Stitt’s music lacking:

¹²⁷ Ibid., 26.

¹²⁸ Charlie Parker, “Cool Blues,” *The Complete Savoy and Dial Master Takes*, Savoy Jazz, 2002, 3 CDs; Sonny Stitt, “Cool Blues,” *Sonny Stitt*, Argo LP-629, 1958, LP.

¹²⁹ Majer, *Velvet Lounge*, 26.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

What leaps and erupts [out of Stitt's saxophone] is measured out, under control... a sort of precision machining...

Stitt might be too perfect, too controlled. Mechanical, designed, lacking the creative imperfection of a Monk or a Miles, lacking the productive distance from Bird that powers McLean and Cannonball, Rollins and Coltrane.¹³³

Majer's language here is similar to the analysis of Morgenstern, above.

Like Majer, Morgenstern hears in Stitt's music a clear resemblance to Parker's saxophone style, and regards Stitt as the "more accurate" and "mechanical" player.¹³⁴

Summary

The preceding pages have examined quotes from jazz writers and critics to provide a deeper understanding of Stitt's reputation as a Parker imitator, his music and career, and specific similarities and differences between Stitt and Parker's musical styles.

While each of the writers and critics cited above offer their own analysis of these issues, they also express many similar opinions. A previous section in this chapter established that Stitt's reputation as a Parker imitator is a consensus view

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Morgenstern and Meyer, *Living with Jazz*.

among critics, and a common view among Stitt's musical contemporaries. The last section established that there is also a consensus view regarding how and why Stitt's reputation as a Parker imitator obtained. Critics write about Stitt's music and career from a variety of vantage points, and examine different aspects and periods of his music and career. Notwithstanding this diversity in approach, critics frequently overlap in their conclusions.

The view that Stitt drew from aspects of Charlie Parker's style is ubiquitous. Critics agree that Stitt borrowed from Parker. Furthermore, they agree that these borrowed aspects of Parker's style are present in Stitt's music, such that Stitt's music noticeably resembles Parker. Some critics mention the possibility that Stitt developed his style independently—citing Stitt's claims to that effect, or mentioning Stitt and Parker's closeness in age—but most do not. None of the critics cited above argue that Stitt developed a musical style free from Parker's influence.

There is consensus about what aspects of Stitt's style resemble Parker. The three most commonly cited musical features are Parker's language (his melodic material/vocabulary), tone (his saxophone sound), and technique. Other musical features include Parker's inflection and attack. Multiple critical statements

suggest that Stitt had access to emotional, conceptual, or aesthetic aspects of Parker's playing that other alto saxophonists did not.

There is also consensus about the differences between Stitt and Parker's improvisational styles. Critics describe Stitt as having a different approach to rhythm and phrasing than Parker, and many call Stitt a more "symmetrical" improviser. Critics describe Stitt as less creative and imaginative than Parker, and also more predictable. Critics use words like "smooth," "ordered," "logical," and "controlled" to describe Stitt's improvisational style, but do not use these words of Parker. Critics also refer to Stitt's more conventional approach to harmony; his greater consistency; differences in his approaches to tone, attack, and the blues; and his lack of Parker's sense of "freedom," "intricacy," and "balance."

Here it is important to note that many additional quotes could be furnished to support these consensus views. For example, jazz critic Gary Giddins believes that Stitt "idolized Charlie Parker and... adapted Parker's light, bright sound, speed, and a lexicon of his riffs that he never stopped using."¹³⁵ *The Biographical Encyclopedia of Jazz* states that "Stitt had a wealth of ideas that were often similar

¹³⁵ Gary Giddins, "Work for Hire: Sonny Stitt and Bobby Hackett Survive the Marketplace," *The Village Voice* 47, no. 4 (January 29, 2002): 66.

to Parker's but with a distinctive rhythmic thrust."¹³⁶ Dave Gelly writes: "for all their undoubted similarity in tone, the two altoists differ considerably in their phrasing and rhythmic attack."¹³⁷ Max Harrison argues that Parker's solos emphasize "asymmetry and discontinuity," while Stitt's phrases are "superficially very similar yet far more four-square."¹³⁸ Larry Kart writes that Stitt improvised in "relatively uniform phrases,"¹³⁹ and chose not to incorporate "Parker's asymmetrical rhythmic thinking."¹⁴⁰ Zan Stewart: "While there are similarities in the two men's styles (both have bubbling tones and astounding technical facility)," Parker's phrases are characterized by "rhythmic complexity and melodic ingenuity," while Stitt phrases are "rhythmically more symmetrical."¹⁴¹

Several critics suggest that Stitt was more stylistically conservative than Parker. They cite Stitt's stated dislike for "longhair music" as evidence, and note that Stitt eschews the avant-garde in his music. Unlike Parker, whose modern way of playing represented a radical departure from the swing style, Stitt remained

¹³⁶ Feather and Gitler, *Biographical Encyclopedia of Jazz*.

¹³⁷ Gelly, *Masters of Jazz Saxophone*, 60.

¹³⁸ Max Harrison, "A Rare Bird," in Woideck, *Charlie Parker Companion*, 209.

¹³⁹ David Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 127.

¹⁴⁰ Kart, *Jazz in Search of Itself*, 124.

¹⁴¹ Stewart, "Sonny Stitt: The Resurrection of a Reedman," 41.

connected to that earlier tradition, even despite his adoption of the bebop language.

This, too, is reflected in the broader literature. According to Mathieson, Stitt's early recordings (1949–52) “reveal a player in full command of the bop idiom, but with an equally sharp awareness of pre-bop styles... and [who] always seemed at home with players from the so-called Swing era.”¹⁴² For Gelly, while “it would wrong to call Stitt's rhythmic conception ‘old-fashioned,’” there are on some recordings “definitive evidence of the saxophonist's swing roots.”¹⁴³ Of Stitt's 1946 bebop recordings with Gillespie, Burns argues that Stitt's “ideas flow... in the style of an altoist such as Benny Carter.”¹⁴⁴

Finally, critics point out that Stitt was essentially a road musician. He had a deep grounding in the blues, and his playing appealed to “ordinary, working-class folk.”¹⁴⁵ It is true that Parker was a blues player who reached “ordinary”

¹⁴² Mathieson, *Cookin'*, “Sonny Stitt / Johnny Griffin.”

¹⁴³ Gelly, *Masters of Jazz Saxophone*, 60.

¹⁴⁴ Burns, “Early Stitt,” 6.

¹⁴⁵ Early, “The Passing of Jazz's Old Guard,” 35. For more on the bluesy side of Stitt's playing see Gerald Early, interview by Ethan Iverson, July 14, 2010, accessed January 15, 2015, <http://dothemath.typepad.com/dtm/interview-with-gerald-early.html>. In the interview, Early notes that his uncles in Philadelphia saw Stitt as a blues player, not a “bopper.” Iverson adds: “Even on Stitt's boppiest records, there's an element in his music which is as deeply mysterious as any other type of feeling, emotion, or technique: It's the blues.”

people. But the bebop style Parker pioneered was also the music of “hipsters and intellectuals.” This was a clear difference between Parker and Stitt, whose music did not cater to a “highbrow audience.” Stitt was influential in part because he demystified Parker and made his musical style accessible to working people and younger musicians. Parker was a bebop prophet, while Stitt was a bebop practitioner.

CHAPTER VIII

MUSICAL ANALYSIS OF SELECT STITT AND PARKER SOLOS FROM 1944 TO 1946

Introduction

The goal of the following chapters is to further explore the relationship between Sonny Stitt and Charlie Parker through musical analysis of selected works. As explained in the method section above, the musical analysis component of this study is divided into two separate parts, each devoted to a different type of repertoire and period of Stitt and Parker's careers. This first part is concerned with Stitt's early career and contains analysis of two Stitt solos and a Parker solo recorded in the mid-1940s.

This chapter includes relevant background information that sets each solo in its wider historical context. The chapter is followed by an analysis of the three solos one at a time and a concluding summary.

“Ready, Set, Jump” and “Oop Bop Sh’Bam”

The mid-1940s were a period of professional and musical growth for Stitt. After spending much of his teenage years in regional bands, Stitt began working with well-known musicians and ensembles.

Stitt’s first major opportunity came in 1943, when he was offered a position in the Tiny Bradshaw Orchestra. Stitt performed with Bradshaw for a year, then left the band and moved to New York City. Once in New York, Stitt continued to find work in high-profile groups. In 1945, Stitt joined the Billy Eckstine Orchestra. A year later, he accepted an invitation from trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie to join his newly-formed big band and sextet.

Stitt’s work with these bands brought him to the attention of other musicians and eventually the New York music press. Stitt met a number of musicians while on tour with Bradshaw, including Charlie Parker (in Kansas City), and Miles Davis (in St. Louis).¹ Parker and Davis would later become two of the most famous musicians in jazz history. Both figured prominently in Stitt’s career.

¹ Gitler, *Masters of Bebop*, 42; Davis and Troupe, *Miles*, 45; Morgenstern and Meyer, *Living with Jazz*.

The Billy Eckstine Orchestra was “heavily populated with future bebop musicians,”² including Gillespie, Davis, Gene Ammons, Dexter Gordon, Fats Navarro, and Art Blakey.³ Stitt’s work with the Dizzy Gillespie Orchestra and Sextet won acclaim from musicians and critics alike.⁴ His 1946 recordings with Gillespie resulted in unprecedented attention. By 1947, Stitt had won an *Esquire* New Star award and was recognized as a rising saxophone talent.⁵

“Ready, Set, Jump” and “Oop Bop Sh’Bam” were recorded during this three-year period. The first solo is excerpted from “Ready, Set, Jump” by the Tiny Bradshaw Orchestra. It was recorded in 1944.⁶ The second solo is excerpted from “Oop Bop Sh’Bam” by the Dizzy Gillespie Sextet. It was recorded in 1946.⁷ Both

² *Contemporary Musicians*, “Sonny Stitt.”

³ Many of these musicians were also future collaborators. Davis and Troupe, *Miles*, 94; Kernfeld, “Stitt, Sonny,” *African American National Biography*; *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, “Sonny Stitt.”

⁴ Vail, *Dizzy Gillespie*, 38. At the time, the two groups were “among the top ensembles in the country” (*Contemporary Musicians*, “Sonny Stitt”).

⁵ Gitler, *Masters of Bebop*, 42; Feather, *Inside Jazz*, 98.

⁶ Tiny Bradshaw and His Orchestra, “Ready, Set, Jump,” *Big Band Jazz: The Jubilee Sessions, 1943 to 1946*, Hindsight Records, 1996, 3 CDs.

⁷ Dizzy Gillespie, “Oop Bop Sh’Bam,” *Odyssey: 1945–1952*, Savoy Jazz, 2002, 3 CDs.

recordings are among Stitt's earliest recorded works, and contain the earliest extant examples of Stitt's solo playing.⁸

"Ready, Set, Jump" was a live recording for AFRS Jubilee, a radio program for African American servicemen overseas. It was recorded by the Bradshaw band in August 1944 at NBC Studios in Hollywood, California.⁹

Gillespie's "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" was recorded May 15, 1946 in New York City.¹⁰

As discussed in the chapters above, Stitt was familiar with Parker and his music before he recorded with Bradshaw. Stitt first heard recordings of Parker with Jay McShann in the early 1940s. According to trumpeter Willie Cook, Stitt was enthusiastic about Parker. Stitt made Cook listen to Parker on a jukebox and said of him: "This is going to be the man."¹¹

⁸ "Ready, Set, Jump" contains Stitt's first recorded solo. Stitt made other recordings with the Bradshaw and Eckstine bands, but did not solo on them. "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" was recorded at Stitt's first small group session with Gillespie. It was Stitt's first recorded solo since "Ready, Set, Jump" in 1944. The session included three additional pieces—"One Bass Hit," "A Handfulla Gimme," and "That's Earl Brother"—which also contain solos from Stitt. "Dizzy Gillespie Discography."

⁹ Spragg, Hällström, and Scherman, "Jubilee," 118.

¹⁰ "Dizzy Gillespie Discography."

¹¹ Gitler, *Masters of Bebop*, 41–42; Morgenstern and Meyer, *Living with Jazz*. The biographical information contained in this section is unpacked in the chapter Stitt and Parker I: Stitt's Career above.

In 1943, Stitt heard Parker in person on two occasions: once in Washington, D.C.¹² and once in Kansas City. According to his own account, Stitt “was anxious to meet” Parker,¹³ and went out looking for him in Kansas City. Stitt found Parker and introduced himself. Parker then invited Stitt to follow him, and the two musicians played saxophones together.¹⁴

By 1944, Stitt was also familiar with bebop music. While on tour with Sabby Lewis in early 1943¹⁵ and with Bradshaw in 1944,¹⁶ Stitt visited New York City, where bebop was developing. During these visits, Stitt experienced the music firsthand by attending jam sessions at clubs frequented by bebop musicians.¹⁷

By the time Stitt recorded “Oop Bop Sh’Bam” with Gillespie in 1946, he was well acquainted with Parker’s music. This was due in part to changing career

¹² Morgenstern and Meyer, *Living with Jazz*.

¹³ Reisner, *Bird*, 216.

¹⁴ This is the occasion where Stitt and Parker first met. According to Stitt, Parker invited him “to go and jam with him” and they “played for an hour.” Ibid.; Gitler, *Swing to Bop*, 74.

¹⁵ Witt, “Sonny Stitt,” 3–4.

¹⁶ Stewart, liner notes to *The Complete Roost Sonny Stitt Studio Sessions*, 3.

¹⁷ These include the clubs on 52nd Street and Minton’s Playhouse. Witt, “Sonny Stitt,” 3–4.

circumstances that brought him and Parker closer together. The first of these circumstances was a change of location. After leaving the Tiny Bradshaw Orchestra, Stitt moved to the New York area, where Parker was then living.¹⁸ Once in New York, Stitt began performing with many of the same musicians as Parker.

By 1945, Stitt was being hired to play in bands that Parker had previously worked with. The Billy Eckstine and Dizzy Gillespie orchestras are two examples of this. Stitt joined Eckstine in April 1945, filling an alto saxophone chair occupied by Parker the previous year.¹⁹ He then joined Gillespie in early 1946, a short time after Parker had left.²⁰

In the Gillespie band, Stitt was a direct substitute for Parker. Throughout 1945, Parker played alto saxophone with Gillespie, mostly in small groups where

¹⁸ According to Feather, Stitt “appeared in Newark and NYC 1945–6.” Feather, *Inside Jazz*, 98.

¹⁹ Parker left the Eckstine band in August 1944. DeVaux, *Birth of Bebop*, 350; Kernfeld, “Stitt, Sonny,” *African American National Biography*; Witt, “Sonny Stitt,” 6.

²⁰ According to Witt, Stitt joined Dizzy Gillespie’s orchestra “in the spring of 1946” (Witt, “Sonny Stitt,” 8). For details on Parker’s departure from Gillespie’s band, see below.

Gillespie was billed as the leader.²¹ In late 1945, Parker travelled with Gillespie to Los Angeles for an eight-week club engagement. When the engagement was complete, the musicians separated. Gillespie and his band returned to New York, while Parker remained in California.²² Stitt was then hired by Gillespie as Parker's replacement.²³

Stitt's playing with Gillespie was compared to Parker's at the time. In May 1946, a journalist noted that Stitt "sounds and looks exactly like Parker, but with better execution."²⁴ In June 1946, Gillespie recorded "Oop Bop Sh'Bam." Gil Fuller, who wrote arrangements for Gillespie and was present for the recording session, later said that Stitt was "playing alto like Charlie Parker" that

²¹ "For most of 1945... Parker and Gillespie worked together whenever possible... the personnel varied but always featured Parker and Gillespie in the front line." Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 30–31.

²² *Ibid.*, 32–33. In the months following their separation, Parker suffered a mental breakdown and was admitted to Camarillo State Hospital. Woideck describes this as "one of the saddest and most tragic periods in Parker's life." Additional information about this period can be found in *Ibid.*, 32–37. For a detailed account of Parker's musical activities in California, see *Ibid.*, 117–137 and Lawrence O. Koch, *Yardbird Suite: A Compendium of the Music and Life of Charlie Parker* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1988), 68–97.

²³ According to Gillespie: "When we got ready to come back to New York, [Parker] wanted to stay out on the Coast... When I got back to New York, I hired Sonny Stitt, another marvelous musician." Gillespie and Fraser, *To Be*, 250.

²⁴ Vail, *Dizzy Gillespie*, 38.

day.²⁵ Stitt's similarity to Parker was noticed by musicians as well. In his book on the 1940s New York bebop scene, Leonard Feather wrote that Stitt "impressed musicians as the first young alto star to simulate Bird's style effectively."²⁶

Between 1944 and 1946, therefore, Stitt's professional and musical relationship to Parker changed considerably. In 1944, when "Ready, Set, Jump" was recorded, their relationship was comparatively simple. Stitt was a young musician on his first high-profile job. He had met Parker and was enthusiastic about his music, but was not yet being compared to him in public. By mid-1946, when "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" was recorded, their relationship was more complex. Stitt and Parker now lived in the same city and worked with many of the same musicians. Stitt had replaced Parker in two well-known bands, and was being compared to him by musicians and the jazz press.

²⁵ Gillespie and Fraser, *To Be*, 255.

²⁶ Feather, *Inside Jazz*, 98. The book was first published in 1949.

“Red Cross”

The Charlie Parker solo analyzed below is drawn from this same period. It is excerpted from “Red Cross” by the Tiny Grimes Quintette,²⁷ and was recorded in New York City on September 15, 1944.²⁸ This recording date is one month after Stitt recorded “Ready, Set, Jump” for the Bradshaw band. It is also within months of Stitt’s departure from Bradshaw and move to New York City. The closeness of these dates makes Parker’s “Red Cross” solo a fitting choice for musical analysis. “Red Cross” is an example of the kind of playing Stitt would have heard from Parker after moving to New York. It is also suggestive of what critics in the mid-1940s were *comparing Stitt* to.

“Red Cross” coincides with a major change in Parker’s own career. Starting in mid-1944, Parker moved away from working with big bands in favor of small groups. In August 1944, he left the Billy Eckstine Orchestra,²⁹ “disillusioned with the band’s direction... [and] the lack of individual freedom of

²⁷ Charlie Parker, “Red Cross,” *The Complete Savoy and Dial Master Takes*, Savoy Jazz, 2002, 3 CDs.

²⁸ “Charlie Parker Discography.”

²⁹ Scott DeVeaux describes the Eckstine band as “Parker’s swan song as a dance band musician.” DeVeaux, *Birth of Bebop*, 349–50.

big bands in general.”³⁰ Parker then spent the next year performing in various small groups in New York City.

Parker’s post-Eckstine music is documented in numerous 1944–45 recordings. These recordings include Parker’s first studio sessions in Gillespie’s sextet, as well as his first sessions as a leader. Among these recordings is “Red Cross,” made just one month after Parker left the Eckstine band and marking the beginning of his shift toward small group playing.³¹

“Red Cross” also captures important changes in Parker’s musical style. In August 1942, the American Federation of Musicians went on strike, preventing union musicians from making commercial recordings. From then until September 1944, Parker’s music was captured only sporadically, and mostly through bootleg recordings.³²

“Red Cross” marked Parker’s return to commercial recording work. The music produced at the session is highly regarded by Parker scholars, both because it showed how Parker developed musically between 1942 and 1944, and because

³⁰ Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 30.

³¹ “Charlie Parker Discography.”

³² *Ibid.*

it signaled a new stage in his artistic development. Thomas Owens has argued: “In September 1944, when Parker first reentered a studio after the ban ended, his improvising style had evolved into its mature state.”³³ Woideck agrees with Owens on this point. He writes: “by that 1944 record date, most of Parker’s characteristic musical qualities were in place, making 1944 a good starting point for his first ‘mature’ musical period.”³⁴

Note on Selection of Repertoire

Although Stitt and Parker both recorded several times in the mid-1940s, they did not record any solos over the same repertoire. For this reason, it is not possible to compare Stitt and Parker solos over identical compositions during this period. It is possible, however, to compare Stitt and Parker solos over similar compositions.

The three solos discussed in this section are taken from compositions that share several musical characteristics in common. “Ready, Set, Jump,” “Oop Bop Sh’Bam,” and “Red Cross” are each similar in length, tempo, rhythmic foundation, key, and song structure. These similarities are relevant to the analysis

³³ Owens, “Charlie Parker,” 1:5.

³⁴ Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 103.

below and will be helpful in drawing meaningful comparisons between Stitt and Parker's playing styles.

Each of the pieces is short, lasting approximately three minutes long. Each of the solos is likewise short: Stitt's solos are half a chorus (sixteen measures) in length, while Parker's solo is one chorus (thirty-two measures) in length. The pieces have similar tempos, ranging from medium to medium-fast. The slowest of the three pieces, "Oop Bop Sh'Bam," is 158 beats per minute; the fastest, "Red Cross," is 208 beats per minute. All three pieces are performed in the swing rhythmic style, using swing eighth notes (as opposed to straight eighth notes) as a rhythmic foundation.³⁵

The main melody of each piece is in the key of B♭ major. Each melodic theme is thirty-two measures long and in AABA format, with A sections in B♭ major and a B section (or bridge) in a contrasting key. This song structure is common in jazz, and is known as "Rhythm changes," after the chord progression to the George Gershwin song "I Got Rhythm."³⁶ "Ready, Set, Jump," "Oop Bop

³⁵ The term "swing eighth notes" refers to repeating pairs of eighth notes of uneven duration and intensity. For an explanation of the use of swing rhythm in this study, see the Notation subsection in the Musical Analysis Method, above.

³⁶ Levine, *The Jazz Theory Book*, 237.

Sh’Bam,” and “Red Cross” are variations on the “I Got Rhythm” song structure. They have similar formal and harmonic layouts to the original, but differ in other ways (e.g., in their chord progressions, in the key of the B section, etc.).³⁷

Each of the three pieces consist of a melodic statement followed by improvised solos and a closing melodic statement. In “Oop Bop Sh’Bam” and “Red Cross,” soloists improvise over the chords of the main melodic theme, i.e., the Rhythm changes. In “Ready, Set, Jump,” the chords of the main melodic theme do not repeat, and each soloist improvises over a different set of chords.

“Oop Bop Sh’Bam” and “Red Cross” were recorded with small ensembles. The pieces have simple arrangements, a repeating song structure, and an emphasis on improvisation. “Ready, Set, Jump,” by contrast, was recorded with a big band of fourteen musicians.³⁸ The piece has a complex arrangement;

³⁷ The differences in harmony between the three pieces are discussed in the respective musical analysis subsections. Differences in chord symbols can be compared at a glance by looking at the solo transcriptions, which appear in Appendices A–C. The form and harmony of Bradshaw’s “Ready, Set, Jump” diverges from “I Got Rhythm” more than “Oop Bop Sh’Bam” and “Red Cross” do. This is because the latter two pieces were arranged for small group, while “Ready, Set, Jump” is a through-composed big band composition (see below).

³⁸ The musicians are arranged in the standard configuration of three sections of wind instruments (trumpets, trombones, and saxophones) and a rhythm section. Spragg, Hällström, and Scherman, “Jubilee,” 118.

detailed, written out parts; multiple distinct and non-repeating sections; and prominent horn backgrounds behind each soloist.

CHAPTER IX
MUSICAL ANALYSIS OF SONNY STITT'S SOLO ON
"READY, SET, JUMP"

Introduction

Tiny Bradshaw's "Ready, Set, Jump" is a big band swing composition that incorporates elements of the bebop style. The piece is an arrangement of an earlier big band composition by bandleader Al Cooper titled "Gettin' in the Groove." First recorded by Cooper and His Savoy Sultans in 1938, "Gettin' in the Groove" is a straightforward riff-based composition in the swing style.¹ Bradshaw's "Ready, Set, Jump" updates the original piece with modern harmonies; a new B section; and a faster, more intricate arrangement.

¹ "Gettin' in the Groove" was originally released on Savoy Records; it has been rereleased as Al Cooper and His Savoy Sultans, "Gettin' in the Groove," in *Al Cooper*, Doxy Records, 2014, MP3. Information about the history of this piece can be found in Anthony Barnett; "Corrections and Additions to AB Fable CD Liner Notes and Other Liner Notes by Anthony Barnett," accessed March 2015, <http://abar.net/cdd.htm>.

Stitt's Bandmates and the Swing Style

Before discussing Stitt's solo in detail, it will be useful to describe the horn section playing in general. In "Ready, Set, Jump," horn section musicians perform their parts in a loose, exaggerated style. The style is expressed at a rhythmic level. Eighth notes swing heavily: notes on off-beats arrive late; pairs of eighth notes differ markedly in intensity; and accentuation changes throughout each phrase.²

The loose, exaggerated style is also expressed at a timbral level. Horn section phrases are enhanced through a variety of timbral manipulations. When playing in harmony, for example, the saxophone section adopts a rich, wide vibrato; the trumpet section uses pitch bends, shakes, and volume swells.³ This results in an extroverted and dynamic performance style.

Soloists in "Ready, Set, Jump" also perform in this kind of style. As with the horn section parts, the trumpet and tenor saxophone solos are loose and

² A clear example of this kind of line is found in opening A section melody (0:05–0:15).

³ The rich, wide vibrato can be heard at 0:05 on the recording, the pitch bends at 0:47, the shakes at 1:18, and the volume swells at 2:19.

exaggerated.⁴ Again, this is expressed in terms of rhythm and timbre. Both soloists have a “heavy” approach to eighth-note swing rhythms.⁵ They also employ a number of expressive devices throughout their solos, including exclamatory cries and inflections; bending of notes; repetition of a single note for emphasis; and wide, fast vibrato at the ends of phrases.⁶

Timbre and Expressive Devices

In these respects, Stitt differs from his bandmates. His solo is not loose and exaggerated, but precise and simply stated. While the other soloists’ playing is unrestrained—gruff tone, raucous blues inflections, prominent vibrato—Stitt’s playing is more controlled. His tone is clear, subtly inflected, and accurate in pitch. His approach to rhythm is also smoother. Eighth notes vary in intensity, but notes on off-beats arrive earlier in the beat, resulting in a more even swing feel.

⁴ The trumpet and tenor saxophone solos are found at 0:57–1:18 and 1:39–2:20 on the recording, respectively. The tenor saxophone solo is performed by Stitt’s former teacher George “Big Nick” Nicholas.

⁵ A “heavy” swing feel, in this context, refers to a conspicuous difference in the duration and intensity of notes on and off the beat.

⁶ The trumpet and tenor saxophone soloists’ exclamatory cries and inflections can be found at 1:02–1:04, 1:07–1:12, and 1:39–1:49 on the recording. Bending of notes can be found at 1:07–1:12 and 2:08–2:10. Repetition of a single note for emphasis can be found at 1:39–1:44 and 2:10–2:16. The wide and fast vibrato at the end of a phrase can be found at 0:57–1:02, 1:05–1:08, 1:13–18, and 1:57–1:59.

Stitt’s use of expressive devices is also more restrained. Unlike the other “Ready, Set, Jump” soloists, Stitt does not punctuate his phrases with ecstatic utterances, or repeat single notes for emphasis. Instead, he improvises in long lines of eighth notes not broken up by rests.

An example of this can be seen by comparing the beginning of Stitt’s solo with that of tenor saxophone soloist “Big Nick” Nicholas (Example 1). While Stitt begins his solo with an extended and uninterrupted eighth-note phrase, Nicholas begins with a single note, which he repeats several times in succession over the following four measures.

The image shows a musical score for two saxophone solos. The top staff is for Stitt, starting at 1:18, and the bottom staff is for Nicholas, starting at 1:39. Both are in a key with two flats (B-flat major/D minor). The top staff begins with a melodic line of eighth notes, with a triplet of eighth notes in the third measure. The bottom staff begins with a single note (B-flat) that is repeated several times in succession, marked with 'x' symbols, indicating a rhythmic pattern. Chord symbols above the top staff include Ab7, D7, Ab7/D, and Db.

Example 1: Opening of Stitt and Nicholas’s solos on “Ready, Set, Jump”

Stitt’s approach to timbral manipulation differs from that of his bandmates as well. In “Ready, Set, Jump,” most instances of timbral manipulation occur on

long notes, or on notes immediately preceding or following a rest.⁷ Stitt’s long eighth-note lines do not contain many long notes or rests, leaving little room for timbral inflection.

When Stitt does make use of timbral inflection, it is often on the first and last notes of a phrase, or just before a change in direction (Example 2). Stitt bends notes near the beginning of phrases, like the F₅ in m. 9 and D_{b5} in m. 12.⁸ He also adds fast vibrato to a dotted quarter note F₄ in m. 14.⁹

The image shows two staves of musical notation in G minor. The first staff begins at measure 8 and contains several eighth-note phrases. Annotations include 'F7' above the first measure, 'bend *' above the first note of the second measure, 'Bbm' above the second measure, 'F7' above the third measure, and 'Bbm6' above the fourth measure. The second staff begins at measure 12 and contains similar eighth-note phrases. Annotations include 'bend *' above the first note of the first measure, 'Bbm' above the second measure, 'F7b9' above the third measure, and 'vibrato *' above the final note of the fourth measure.

Example 2: Stitt’s use of timbral inflection in “Ready, Set, Jump”

Even here, however, the effect of Stitt’s inflections is different from that of his bandmates. While his bandmates’ inflections function as exclamations (cries,

⁷ Long notes and rests make timbral inflections more noticeable by providing space for them to be heard.

⁸ The note bends can be heard at 1:29 and 1:33, respectively.

⁹ The dotted quarter note F₄ can be heard at 1:36.

shouts, etc.), Stitt’s inflections function as timbral accents, highlighting and adding color to his lines.

Eighth-Note Phrasing

The contrast between Stitt and his bandmates is most striking when Stitt’s solo ends and Nicholas’s solo begins. Stitt finishes his solo with an eighth-note line that is five measures long and contains no rests (Example 3).¹⁰



(Example 1, above). He holds and repeats the note over several measures, using alternate fingerings and adding blue notes for emphasis.¹¹

Compared with his bandmates, Stitt's approach to phrasing is more horizontal. His phrases consist of long strings of eighth notes played without break or repetition in predominantly conjunct motion. Stitt's delivery is also tamer. While the tenor saxophone solo is loose, exuberant, and outwardly expressive, Stitt's solo is tighter, cleaner, and more restrained.

Harmony

Throughout his solo, Stitt maintains a close relationship to the underlying harmonic progression. He does this by referencing the harmony directly, playing the tones of each chord as it goes by.

In most measures, Stitt plays several chord tones a third apart. He connects these tones by step and by leap. When connecting by step, Stitt places chord tones on successive beats with non-chord tones on the off-beats between them. When connecting by leap, he proceeds directly from one chord tone to another, either by

¹¹ This can be heard at 1:39–1:44 on the recording. The note is a high C on the tenor saxophone (B \flat ₄ in concert pitch).

ascending and descending using a chord arpeggio, or by leaping to a chord tone a fifth or sixth away.

Stitt’s use of chord tones is shown most clearly in Example 4, below.

Notes that are played on the beat are marked with an asterisk, as are the first and last notes of the phrase. Every one of these notes is a chord tone—a root, third, fifth, seventh, or ninth.¹² The chord tones are connected by step (the first six beats), but also by leap (the last six).



Example 4: Stitt’s use of chord tones on “Ready, Set, Jump”

Stitt approaches and uses chord tones in different ways. In mm. 5–6 of the example above, Stitt descends a Bb bebop dominant scale from the ninth, connecting the root and seventh of the Bb⁷ chord with a chromatic half-step: Bb₄-

¹² In conventional jazz harmony, the ninth is an extension, a chord tone above the seventh in a standard seventh chord. Levine, *The Jazz Theory Book*, xii, 35.

$A\flat_4$ - $A\flat_4$.¹³ In mm. 6–7, Stitt outlines a $B\flat^{7(\flat 9)}$ chord by leap—using the chord tones $B\flat_3$ ($C\flat_4$), D_4 , and $B\flat_3$ —before ascending an $E\flat^{m9}$ chord: ($B\flat_3$)- F_4 - $G\flat_4$ - $B\flat_4$ - $D\flat_5$ - $G\flat_5$.

Stitt also uses ninths throughout his solo (Example 5):

Example 5: Stitt’s use of ninths in “Ready, Set, Jump”

In the first five measures, Stitt uses ninths as a temporary high point on three separate occasions (mm. 1, 3, and 4–5), placing them on strong beats before

¹³ A bebop dominant scale is a mixolydian scale with an added $\flat 7$ tone, i.e., 1-2-3-4-5-6- $\flat 7$ - $\flat 7$ -1. The use of this scale in bebop is discussed in David Baker, *How to Play Bebop: The Bebop Scales and Other Scales in Common Use*, vol. 1 (Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Publishing, 1987), 1–11.

a change in direction.¹⁴ Stitt's second phrase segment both begins and ends on the ninth of the chord (C_5 in m. 4–5; F_5 in m. 7).

Stitt plays both the natural and lowered ninths of the Bb^7 chord (C_5 in m. 5; Bb_3 in m. 6).¹⁵ Stitt also uses lowered ninths twice when resolving from an F^7 chord in Bb minor (mm. 10 and 13).¹⁶

Stitt's consistent use of chord tones brings the solo's harmonic progression to the foreground. By playing the tones of each chord, Stitt reinforces the underlying harmony and highlights the measure-to-measure changes therein.

Stitt's approach is different from that of his bandmates, whose tones often fit the key center but not the chord. While Stitt's solo consists primarily of long eighth-note lines that highlight the tones of individual chords, the solos of his bandmates contain few long lines and rely on different improvisational devices. While Stitt's phrases reinforce the chords, his bandmates' use of repeated notes

¹⁴ See the Bb_4 on the Ab^7 chord (m. 1), the Eb_5 on the Db chord (m. 3), and the C_5 of the Bb^7 chord (mm. 4–5). The two C_5 pitches in mm. 4–5 arrive on off-beats, but are heard prominently; Stitt leaves rests on either side.

¹⁵ The ninth of Bb^7 in m. 6, b. 3 is written as Bb_3 (instead of Cb_4) to highlight the stepwise direction of the line.

¹⁶ See the Gb_4 in m. 10 and $F\#_4$ in m. 13. In mm. 13–14, Stitt targets an F^7 chord on each beat. It is likely that Stitt is playing two measures of F^7 , rather than one measure of Bb^m and F^7 each, as the pianist plays (compare m. 13, bb. 3–4 and m. 10, bb. 1–2).

and figures, raucous blues inflections, and frequent return to the tonic all serve to reinforce the key, and suggest a static approach to harmony.

Chromatic Chord Substitution

This difference can be clearly seen by examining Stitt and the trumpet soloist's contrasting approaches to chromatic chord substitution. Example 6 shows the beginning of the trumpet solo, where the chords alternate between $B\flat^m$ and $B7\flat^5$ with a static $B\flat$ in the bass.¹⁷

(0:57) $B\flat^m$ $B7\flat^5$ $B\flat^m$ $B7\flat^5$

Example 6: Opening of trumpet solo in “Ready, Set, Jump”

During the two $B7\flat^5$ chords (mm. 2 and 4), the trumpet soloist does not play a $B\flat$, even though the note is audibly present in the background chord

¹⁷ $B7\flat^5$ and its tritone substitute $F7\flat^5$ are enharmonically equivalent. The chord symbol $B7\flat^5$ was chosen instead of $F7\flat^5$ because $B\flat$ is prominent in the chord voicing (saxophones: 0:57–1:02, 1:08–1:12).

voicing. Instead, he reinforces $B\flat$ minor by placing $B\flat_4$ and $D\flat_5$ on successive beats in m. 2, and then by moving stepwise from $B\flat_4$ to F_4 in mm. 3–4.

Stitt’s solo also begins with a tritone chord substitution. Example 7 shows the solo’s first four measures, whose harmonies move from $A\flat^7$ to D^7 to $D\flat$ in the key of $D\flat$ major.

Example 7: Opening of Stitt’s solo in “Ready, Set, Jump”

The D^7 chord (m. 2, b. 1) lasts only a single beat, but Stitt emphasizes its tones by playing the pitches $A\flat_4$ - $F\sharp_4$ - $D\flat_4$. These three pitches highlight the D^7 chord, but they are dissonant in the key of $D\flat$ major. By causing these tones to coincide with the background harmony, Stitt reinforces the tritone chord substitution and brings harmonic dissonance to the foreground.

In Example 7, Stitt’s attention to harmonic detail is not limited to the D^7 chord. It is found throughout the excerpt: Stitt plays the root, third, and fifth of every chord in the phrase.

Phrase Construction

Stitt's sixteen-measure solo is divided into four phrases. Each phrase is similar in position, length, and rhythmic content.

In each phrase, Stitt plays the first note at or slightly before the beginning of a four-measure grouping. He then plays three to four measures of notes before resting until the beginning of the next phrase. As mentioned above, Stitt's phrases consist of long strings of eighth notes. The eighth notes are supplemented by the occasional eighth-note triplet, quarter note, and dotted quarter note. There are pauses between phrases, but not in the middle of his phrases—Stitt's lines proceed from beginning to end without rests.¹⁸

The similarities in the position, length, and rhythmic content of Stitt's phrases suggest a remarkably consistent approach to solo structure. This consistency is remarkable not mainly because of Stitt's use of long eighth-note lines—long eighth-note lines were common by the 1940s.¹⁹ It is remarkable because of the way that Stitt's long eighth-note lines are composed and organized.

¹⁸ A single exception is found at the start of Stitt's second phrase (mm. 4–5), where he pauses for half a beat between the first two notes.

¹⁹ Scott DeVeaux, for example, speaks of saxophonist Coleman Hawkins's "long, undifferentiated strings of eighth notes" in "his solos from the late 1930s and early 1940s." This "rhythmic approach [had] a strong influence on the new idiom." DeVeaux, *Birth of Bebop*, 70.

Although Stitt's melodic lines vary in pitch content, they contain the same rhythms, are the same length, and begin and end in the same places. This results in a kind of textural sameness.

Stitt's consistency extends to other musical parameters, like range. Each of Stitt's phrases has a similar range, spanning between a perfect tenth and a minor thirteenth, a difference of only a minor third.²⁰ Stitt traverses this range in mostly stepwise motion. He also uses eighth-note triplet arpeggios, which span an interval of a perfect fifth in a single beat.

The range of Stitt's phrases is considerable, especially when compared with those of other soloists. Again, this difference is a consequence of Stitt's approach to phrasing. While other soloists repeat narrower, singable collections of notes, Stitt plays long triplet-accented lines that traverse the full range of his instrument.²¹ Stitt's cumulative solo range is wider as well, despite the tenor

²⁰ That is, they span between an octave plus a perfect fourth and an octave plus a minor sixth. The range of each phrase, in order, is B \flat ₃-E \flat ₅ (mm. 1-4), B \flat ₃-G \flat ₅ (mm. 5-8), A \sharp ₃-F₅ (mm. 9-12), and F₃-D \flat ₅ (mm. 13-16).

²¹ Example 1, which shows the first four bars of the Stitt and tenor saxophone solos, is instructive in this regard. In four bars, Stitt traverses an octave plus a perfect fourth (B \flat ₃-E \flat ₅), while the tenor saxophone soloist traverses only a perfect fifth (G₄-D₅).

saxophone solo being twice as long (thirty-two measures versus Stitt's sixteen measures).²²

Melodic Contour

Stitt makes his phrases more interesting by changing their melodic contour. One way Stitt does this is by accenting a pitch, descending from that pitch for one or two beats, then abruptly leaping back to the original pitch area. This type of change is common in Stitt's solo, occurring at least once per phrase.

Example 8, below, shows four changes in melodic contour taken from three different phrases.²³ Notes marked with an asterisk indicate where the changes in contour occur. In most cases, Stitt leaps back up to the original pitch area on a strong beat before continuing to descend.²⁴

²² The trumpet and tenor saxophone solos span a minor thirteenth and a major thirteenth, respectively ($B\flat_3-G\flat_5$ and F_3-D_5), while Stitt's solo spans two octaves plus a minor second ($F_3-G\flat_5$).

²³ An additional instance is found in Stitt's second phrase (mm. 5–7), between the G_4 (m. 6, b. 3, n. 2) and F_4 (m. 7, b. 1).

²⁴ That is, Stitt returns to the original pitch area on beat 1 or 3. A contrasting case is the $A\flat_4$ in m. 2, which lands not on a strong beat but on the off-beat of two.

Example 8: Changes in melodic contour in Stitt’s “Ready, Set, Jump” solo

In addition to indicating changes in melodic contour, notes marked with an asterisk form interior stepwise lines (i.e., $Bb_4 \rightarrow A_4 \rightarrow Ab_4$, $F_5 \rightarrow Eb_5$, $Db_5 \rightarrow C_5$, and $Eb_4 \rightarrow D_4 \rightarrow Eb_4$). These interior lines contribute to the melodic structure of Stitt’s phrases, while softening the impact of his wide leaps and frequent changes of direction.

A noteworthy example of this can be seen in the solo’s final phrase (Example 9).

Example 9: Stitt’s use of wide leaps and stepwise motion in “Ready, Set, Jump”

Stitt changes the melodic direction of the phrase at least once per measure.

These changes in direction are often immediately preceded by a wide interval leap.²⁵ Between two of these leaps, Stitt plays notes in continuous conjunct motion (mm. 12–14) for seven beats, traversing an octave plus a diminished fourth ($D\flat_5-A_3$) entirely by step.²⁶

On one level, Stitt's wide leaps and frequent changes of direction are moderated by the smooth stepwise motion of his line. On a deeper level, however, they are moderated by the interior stepwise lines indicated with asterisks in Example 8 above ($D\flat_5 \rightarrow C_5$, $E\flat_4 \rightarrow D_4 \rightarrow E\flat_4$), which reinforce the original pitch area on metrically accented beats.

Conclusion

Sonny Stitt's "Ready, Set, Jump" solo is a strong, forward-looking performance by a young jazz saxophonist. Recorded when Stitt was only eighteen years old, the solo reflects the early stages of a modern, logical, and developing musical style.

²⁵ E.g., leaps of a diminished fifth ($D\flat_5-G_4$ in m. 12), minor sixth (A_4-F_3 in m. 14), and minor seventh ($F_3-E\flat_4$ in m. 15).

²⁶ These seven beats constitute the line segment from $B\flat_4$ (m. 12, b. 4, n. 2) to A_3 (m. 14, b. 3).

Analysis reveals that Stitt's approaches to timbre, rhythm, harmony, and phrasing were well-defined. Throughout his solo, Stitt plays with a clear, subtly-inflected tone. His solo consists of long phrases made up predominantly of eighth notes. These eighth-note phrases stay close to the written chord progression, and are each similar in length, position, and melodic contour.

Stitt carries out these approaches to rhythm, harmony, and phrasing in each phrase of his solo. This is evidence of a logical and consistent approach to solo structure. The consistency of these approaches also suggests that the characteristics of Stitt's early musical style were not haphazard, but rather carefully considered and worked out in advance.

The preceding analysis also reveals a modern musical style—one that stood out in the Tiny Bradshaw Orchestra of 1944. Compared with the solos of his bandmates, Stitt's solo is less rambunctious and more restrained. In lieu of emphatic, bluesy utterances and short, repetitive phrase segments, Stitt improvises in long, winding musical statements that proceed from beginning to end without pause or repetition. Stitt's phrases are more abstract and less singable than those of his bandmates, but they reflect an internal logic that his bandmates' do not.

Throughout his solo, Stitt references changes in the harmonic structure by targeting chord tones on downbeats. Then, as his solo unfolds, Stitt moves

continuously from the tones of one chord to the next. This gives Stitt's solo a sense of melodic and harmonic direction. Stitt moves between chord tones in predominantly stepwise motion; however, his lines also include eighth-note triplet arpeggios and abrupt wide leaps that disrupt an otherwise smooth melodic contour. This approach to harmony and phrasing is unique to Stitt's solo; there is nothing in his bandmates' solos like it.

The preceding analysis has helped to identify several features of Stitt's early musical style. What remains is to clarify these features through further analysis of Stitt's early work, and to identify the features of Parker's musical style during the same period.

"Ready, Set, Jump" is the earliest and only pre-1946 recording of Stitt's solo playing. Analysis of its solo reveals a number of stylistic features, including a persistent rhythmic feel; the use of eighth-note triplets as chord arpeggios; a clear and straightforward saxophone sound; the persistent use chord tones on strong beats, even during chromatic chord substitutions; wide leaps; long stretches of stepwise motion; and frequent changes in melodic contour.

The following chapter contains an analysis of Stitt's solo on "Oop Bop Sh'Bam," a piece recorded two years after "Ready, Set, Jump" in New York City. Analysis of that solo will help to determine if the musical features discussed

above remained a part of Stitt's early soloing style and, if so, how these features developed over time.

Following that, an analysis of Charlie Parker's solo on "Red Cross" will be used to identify features of Parker's mid-1940's musical style. Parker's "Red Cross" and Stitt's "Ready, Set, Jump" were both recorded in the same year.

Analysis will help to determine how Stitt and Parker's styles were similar and different in 1944, and what these similarities and differences suggest about the nature of their musical relationship.

CHAPTER X
MUSICAL ANALYSIS OF SONNY STITT'S SOLO ON
"OOP BOP SH'BAM"

Introduction

The second analyzed Sonny Stitt solo is drawn from Dizzy Gillespie's "Oop Bop Sh'Bam," recorded in May 1946. As mentioned in Chapter VIII above, this solo was recorded after Stitt had lived in New York City for nearly two years, working alongside colleagues of Charlie Parker and even replacing him in two bands.

"Oop Bop Sh'Bam" was recorded at Stitt's first recording session with Gillespie, and marked the beginning of a long musical relationship that lasted until Stitt's death in 1982. The session also contained Stitt's first recorded solos since his work with Bradshaw in 1944. Stitt was proud of his performance on "Oop Bop Sh'Bam." In an interview late in life, he credited the solo with earning

him an Esquire New Star Award in 1947, adding “and all I played was eight bars.”¹

“Oop Bop Sh’Bam” was recorded with a small group, the standard ensemble format for bebop that Stitt used most throughout his career. This particular small group was a sextet consisting of Gillespie on trumpet, Stitt on alto saxophone, Al Haig on piano, Milt Jackson on vibraphone, Ray Brown on upright bass, and Kenny Clarke on drums.²

Like “Ready, Set, Jump,” “Oop Bop Sh’Bam” is comprised of a short introduction and a melodic theme followed by three solos, a closing melodic theme, and an ending. The melodic theme is thirty-two measures long and uses a standard AABA song form that repeats for solos. Jackson and Stitt improvise for half a chorus each, with Stitt beginning his solo halfway through the form on the B section. Gillespie, the leader on the session, takes a complete chorus.

¹ Stitt, interview by Felix Grant. The solo is actually sixteen measures long.

² “Dizzy Gillespie Discography.” The recording also contains a vocal call and response: “Oop bop sh’bam a klook a mop.” The Jazz Discography Project lists Gil Fuller and Gillespie as vocalists on the session. The recording contains additional voices; as with other versions of this piece, they were likely members of the band. Alice Roberts is also listed as a vocalist on the session, but she sings on a different song.

“Oop Bop Sh’Bam” is in the key of B \flat major and is a contrafact of the George Gershwin composition “I Got Rhythm.”³ A sections in “Oop Bop Sh’Bam” use conventional “I Got Rhythm” chord changes, but the B section—where Stitt’s solo begins—does not. Here the harmony differs, modulating to the subdominant key of E \flat major before returning to B \flat major for the final A section.

The musical context of Stitt’s “Oop Bop Sh’Bam” solo is quite different from that of his earlier solo with Bradshaw. In “Ready, Set, Jump,” Stitt’s solo stood out compared with those of his bandmates. This was due to the presence of modern musical features like long eighth-note lines, harmonic precision, and an understated approach to timbral inflection. In “Oop Bop Sh’Bam,” all of the solos contain these types of features. Soloists play in characteristic bebop style: long stretches of stepwise motion;⁴ chord tones that fall on downbeats;⁵ rapid

³ A contrafact is “a new melody composed upon the chord changes of a pre-existing piece.” Owens, *Bebop*, 276.

⁴ In bebop piano and horn playing, melodies “are often more scalar than chordal, and normally include long strings of eighth notes.” “Most bebop wind players [play in] long, eighth-note-dominated phrases.” Owens, *Bebop*, 137, 247.

⁵ “[M]uch of the improvised music created by Parker and his followers was based on the practice of disguising essential chord tones in a melody by surrounding them with nonessential, nonchord tones.” Richard J. Lawn and Jeffrey L. Hellmer, *Jazz: Theory and Practice* (Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Publishing, 1996), 73.

sixteenth-note lines;⁶ chords outlined through triplet arpeggios; and frequent use of chromatic ornaments and passing tones.⁷ In lieu of short, repeated figures and expressive tonal effects, solos consist of long lines, which are subtly inflected and do not repeat. Since each solo contains these types of features, Stitt no longer stands out from his bandmates; the piece reflects a modern style from start to finish.⁸

⁶ “By fusing traditional blues gestures with a speeded-up double-time feeling and couching their language in chromatic dissonance, [the beboppers] imposed a new feeling of swing on the old.” DeVeaux, *Birth of Bebop*, 343.

⁷ For examples of chromatic and triplet-based melodic figures common in bebop, see Owens, *Bebop*, 5–6.

⁸ “Oop Bop Sh’Bam” is frequently cited in the jazz literature as an important early bebop recording. Producer Gil Fuller referred to it as “Dizzy’s first bebop hit.” The recording introduced other young musicians to the style: “‘Have you heard bebop?’ ‘*Be-bop?*’ ... He put on a record, Sonny Stitt and Dizzy Gillespie. On one side was “Salt Peanuts” and on the other was “Oop Bop Sh’Bam...” Ahahaha! ... They had gone from one decade to another, one culture to another.” Even the title of the recording, “Oop Bop Sh’Bam,” refers to scat symbols used in bebop drumming—specifically, a rhythmic figure associated with drummer Kenny Clarke. Gillespie and Fraser, *To Be*, 255; Art and Laurie Pepper, *Straight Life: The Story of Art Pepper* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1994), Kindle edition, Chapter 20, emphasis in original; Shapiro and Hentoff, *Hear Me Talkin’ to Ya*, 349.

Double-Time Rhythm

One of the more striking features of “Oop Bop Sh’Bam” is the use of double-time rhythm. Sixteenth-note phrases are present in every solo, including Stitt’s. Due to the relatively brisk tempo (150+ beats per minute),⁹ sixteenth notes go by quickly and are used to virtuosic effect. They are also executed in a specific way: while eighth notes in “Oop Bop Sh’Bam” tend to lay back in the beat, sixteenth notes are played more aggressively, arriving earlier and with stronger accents.

A good example of double-time rhythm is found at the beginning of the recording (see Example 10 below). Following a leisurely horn introduction, pianist Al Haig performs a double-time solo fill. The fill begins unexpectedly and contrasts with the prevailing eighth-note rhythmic texture.¹⁰ Other examples of

⁹ During the three solos, tempos range from approximately 150 to 158 beats per minute.

¹⁰ The sixteenth notes begin suddenly, continuing for seven whole beats and stopping cleanly on the downbeat two measures later. This type of precision is similar to Stitt’s approach (see below). The suddenness is typical of most sixteenth-note figures in the piece.

double-time rhythm include the sixteenth-note figures found in the Milt Jackson and Dizzy Gillespie solos.¹¹

The image shows a musical score for the introduction to "Oop Bop Sh'Bam". It consists of two staves. The top staff is for trumpet and saxophone (tpt, sax) and is in 4/4 time. It starts with a 3-beat triplet of eighth notes (G4, A4, B4) on the first beat, followed by a quarter note (C5) on the second beat, and a quarter note (B4) on the third beat. The bottom staff is for piano (pno) and is in 4/4 time. It starts with a 3-beat triplet of eighth notes (G4, A4, B4) on the first beat, followed by a quarter note (C5) on the second beat, and a quarter note (B4) on the third beat. The score includes chord symbols Cm7 and F7 above the top staff and Bb above the bottom staff.

Example 10: Introduction to “Oop Bop Sh’Bam”

Like Gillespie, Stitt uses sixteenth notes twice in his solo (Example 11 and Example 12, below). Both examples are approximately two measures long and are played in a single sweep, without long notes or rests to break up the rhythm. As with the notes in Haig’s solo fill above (Example 10), Stitt’s sixteenth notes are clean and rhythmically exact. The articulation is crisp. Notes are spaced evenly, resulting in clear pitches that are easily discerned and distinguished.

¹¹ Milt Jackson’s sixteenth-note figure can be heard at 1:16–1:20 on the recording. Gillespie’s solo contains two sixteenth-note figures; they can heard at 1:56–2:06 and 2:15–2:17. The first of Gillespie’s figures is a full seven measures long, and is shown and discussed in Example 15, below.



Example 11: Stitt's use of sixteenth notes in "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" 1



Example 12: Stitt's use of sixteenth notes in "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" 2

Stitt's sixteenth-note figures have clearly-defined beginning and end points. They begin on the first and third sixteenth notes of beat one, and end neatly on strong beats.¹² The placement of these figures also serves to reinforce the song form. The first figure is located at the beginning of the solo's second four-measure segment; the second figure falls squarely on the last two measures of the form. Like Haig and Jackson, Stitt ends his solo with double-time rhythm.

¹² Starting a phrase on the first or third sixteenth note of a beat is less abrupt than starting on the second or fourth sixteenth note, since it aligns with the rhythmic pulse and is likely to coincide with notes played by other instruments. The phrases in Example 11 and Example 12 end on the first sixteenth note of beats one and three, respectively.

In his sixteenth-note figures, Stitt places a pronounced accent on the first note of every four-note grouping. These accents are especially prominent in his second figure, which seems to pulse with every beat. The accents continue through the entire length of each figure, despite numerous leaps, changes of direction, and notes on off-beats that might otherwise be accented (see the tones G₄, C₅, and F₄ in Example 13 below).¹³

The image shows a musical staff in B-flat major (one flat) with a treble clef. The time signature is 4/4. The piece is at 1:41. The notation consists of sixteenth-note figures. Annotations include:

- A box labeled "persistent accents on the beat" pointing to the first note of each four-note group.
- Three arrows labeled "(unaccented) off-beat" pointing to notes on the second and fourth sixteenth notes of each group.
- Chord symbols: B \flat , F7, and B \flat .
- A box labeled "leaps and changes of direction off the beat remain unaccented" pointing to notes on the second and fourth sixteenth notes.
- A measure number "15" is written below the first measure.

Example 13: Accentuation of sixteenth notes in Stitt’s “Oop Bop Sh’Bam” solo

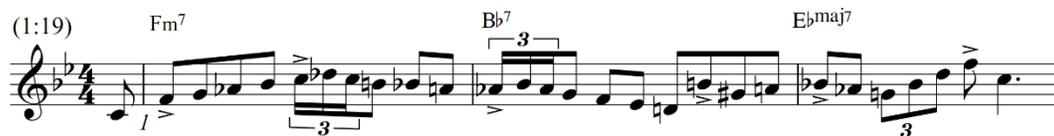
At the same time, Stitt’s sixteenth notes land consistently “on top” of the beat.¹⁴ In this respect, Stitt is more like his “Oop Bop Sh’Bam” bandmates, whose sixteenth-note figures also arrive early and aggressively push ahead of the beat.

¹³ Specifically: G₄ (measure 1, beat 2, note 2); C₅ (m. 1, b. 4, n. 2); and F₄ (m. 2, b. 2, n. 2).

¹⁴ Notes that are “on top” are played “slightly ahead of the center of the beat.” J. Richard Dunscomb and Willie L. Hill, Jr., *Jazz Pedagogy: The Jazz Educator’s Handbook and Resource Guide* (Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Publishing, 2002), 29, 219.

Certain aspects of Stitt’s sixteenth-note playing are at odds with one another. His phrases are precise and have regular accent patterns, which suggests control. At the same time, his phrases push well ahead of the beat, which—in Stitt’s case—suggests haste and a lack of control.

This is true to a lesser degree of Stitt’s eighth-note playing as well. Like his sixteenth notes, Stitt’s eighth notes are downbeat heavy and tend toward the front of the beat. However, unlike his sixteenth notes, Stitt’s eighth notes are not always accented in groups in fours (see Example 14, below). They also have greater dynamic variety and tend to rush less.



Example 14: Accentuation of eighth notes in Stitt’s “Oop Bop Sh’Bam” solo

This approach to eighth notes can be heard from the opening of Stitt’s solo. Stitt begins his solo with three measures of eighth notes decorated with eighth and sixteenth-note triplets (see above). Throughout the line, Stitt places accents on consecutive strong beats (beats one and three of most measures). He

breaks this pattern once with a syncopated accent on an off-beat $B\sharp_4$ (m. 2, b. 3, n. 2) following a leap of a major sixth.

Approaches to Phrasing: Stitt and Gillespie

Comparing Stitt and Gillespie's use of sixteenth notes brings aspects of Stitt's phrasing into deeper focus.

Consider, for instance, the long sixteenth-note figure in Gillespie's solo (Example 15, below). The figure is impressive in part because of its seven-measure length, which fills an entire A section and is far longer than any of Stitt's melodic lines. Gillespie's figure is also abrupt. It contains pauses, changing rhythmic values, and an unexpected ending on the second sixteenth note of beat three.¹⁵

¹⁵ Gillespie begins his sixteenth-note figure on a downbeat, but breaks the rhythm on beat two, only to resume less than a beat later. This abruptness is made more effective by the high register the beginning of the figure occupies. Gillespie breaks the figure on a D_6 (or transposed for $B\flat$ trumpet, a high E_6). This is quite high, especially for a fast-moving line. Gillespie then resumes the figure, only to play a D_6 again on the fourth sixteenth note of the following beat.

Example 15: Gillespie's long sixteenth-note phrase on "Oop Bop Sh'Bam"

By contrast, Stitt's sixteenth-note figures are both two measures long.

Unlike Gillespie, Stitt's figures are clean and rhythmically precise. They consist almost entirely of uninterrupted sixteenth notes, contain no breaks, and end solidly on strong beats (Example 16).

Example 16: Clarity and precision in Stitt's "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" solo

These differences become more pronounced when considering their approaches to accentuation, note grouping, and note placement. In Gillespie's

long sixteenth-note figure above, the accents are unpredictable; their position changes with the melodic contour of the line, which itself varies. Because of this, Gillespie's phrasing is asymmetric and does not neatly divide into groups of four. In addition, while Gillespie's sixteenth notes push ahead of the beat, his eighth notes lay back considerably, resulting in a pronounced contrast between rhythmic levels.

Stitt's eighth and sixteenth-note lines are far different. Stitt consistently places accents on the beat, despite numerous changes in melodic contour. This approach to accentuation reinforces four-note groupings, and is therefore not asymmetric, but regular and predictable. There is also far less contrast between rhythmic levels in Stitt's playing. Since Stitt's eighth and sixteenth notes *both* push ahead of the beat, the effect is an overall rhythmic sameness.

One final important difference between Gillespie and Stitt is found in the clarity of their notes and phrases. In Gillespie's long sixteenth-note phrase, notes are ghosted, squeezed out, and pressed together, leading to pitches that bleed into one another and are difficult to distinguish. However, in Stitt's phrases, sixteenth notes are evenly spaced and cleanly articulated, leading to demarcated pitches that are easy to identify.

This difference in clarity is demonstrated through the musicians' differing approaches to note grouping, note placement, accentuation, and rests, but it can be heard even in their approaches to register and range. Gillespie frequently changes registers; he also plays up into the highest register of his instrument. This results in phrases that sound wild, unpredictable, and can be difficult to follow. Again, Stitt's approach is quite different. Although his phrases occupy a wide range, Stitt largely avoids the highest and lowest tones of his instrument, and he transitions between registers more gradually.¹⁶ This results in a smoother and clearer melodic line that is easier to follow.

Phrase Construction

While Stitt's approach to accentuation, note placement, and note grouping is consistent throughout his solo, his approach to phrase construction is more varied.

¹⁶ The vast majority of Stitt's solo is traversed in melodic intervals of seconds and thirds. The entire solo ranges A₃–F₅ (concert pitch), an interval of an octave plus a minor sixth, slightly more narrow than Stitt's solo in "Ready, Set, Jump" (F₃–G_{♭5}).

The “Oop Bop Sh’Bam” solo contains six musical statements of varying length that cut across four-measure groupings. In his first eight measures, Stitt plays a long musical statement followed by two shorter ones (long-short-short).¹⁷ In his second eight measures, Stitt changes this order (short-long-short).¹⁸ This is a departure from Stitt’s earlier solo on “Ready, Set, Jump,” which contains four musical statements of similar length.

The difference in phrase construction suggests a change from four to eight measures as the default formal unit. This is due in part to the lengths of Stitt’s phrases in the second half of his solo (2+4+2), which cut across four-measure groupings. It is also due to the placement of phrases within each solo half. In both halves of his solo, Stitt begins his first musical statement around beat one of the first measure, and ends his third statement on beat three of the eighth and final measure.¹⁹ This reinforces the preexisting song form (8+8), even as Stitt’s phrase lengths vary within each half.

¹⁷ mm. 1–8. The statements are roughly three, two, and one-and-a-half measures long, not including rests.

¹⁸ mm. 9–16. The statements are roughly two, four, and two measures long, with fewer rests.

¹⁹ The first half begins with an anacrusis on the off-beat of four. The second half begins on the off-beat of one. Note that both halves of Stitt’s solo end on beat three, a strong beat.

Stitt's phrases in "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" fall into three simple categories: ornamented eighth-note phrases, blues-inflected eighth-note phrases, and sixteenth-note phrases. These three kinds of phrases are used throughout the solo, with ornamented eighth-note phrases used most frequently.

Beyond this basic categorization, however, Stitt's phrases do not appear to be thematically related. Phrases have dissimilar melodies and large interval gaps between them (Example 17).²⁰ For this reason, Stitt's phrases do not flow together as a connected whole. Rather, they are experienced as individual phrase units, and Stitt's solo is heard as a collection of separate and contrasting melodic lines.

(1:34)

ornamented eighth-notes

B \flat 3 G 7 Cm 7 F 7 B \flat 7

11

3

3

14

E \flat large interval gap B \flat F 7 B \flat

sixteenth notes

Example 17: Thematic discontinuity in Stitt's "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" solo

²⁰ That is, there is a gap between the last pitch of a phrase and the first pitch of the following phrase. This intervallic gap is between a perfect fourth and a minor sixth in most cases.

One notable exception occurs at the midpoint of Stitt’s solo (Example 18):



Example 18: Midpoint of Stitt’s solo in “Oop Bop Sh’Bam”

The last note of the solo’s first half (C₅) is only a semitone away from the first note of the second half (D \flat ₅). Because of this, the phrases flow smoothly and are heard as a connected whole, with the second line answering the first. The half step C₅-D \flat ₅ also reinforces the song structure, as it occurs over a V→I chord progression connecting the bridge to the final A section.²¹

Harmony

Stitt’s “Oop Bop Sh’Bam” solo is characterized by a high degree of harmonic accuracy. Chord tones fall on strong beats, connecting to other chord tones by horizontal step (e.g., linear playing) and vertical leap (e.g., by chord

²¹ The melodic motion C₅-D \flat ₅ over F⁷→B \flat is a non-diatonic (but bluesy) 2- \flat 3. Stitt plays a tonic B \flat ₄ two notes later, but then moves away, returning to C₅. A strong 2-1 motion finally occurs (twice) at the final cadential F⁷→B \flat at the end of the solo (mm. 15–16).

arpeggio). This approach to harmony was seen in Stitt’s earlier solo on “Ready, Set, Jump.” In “Oop Bop Sh’Bam,” Stitt extends the approach, introducing chromatic pitches and connecting his chord tones in new and interesting ways.

In Example 19, Stitt is shown targeting the thirds of nearly every chord of a phrase (see the notes marked with an asterisk below).

The image shows a musical staff in 4/4 time, starting at measure 11 (1:34). The key signature has two flats (Bb and Eb). The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes. Above the staff, chord changes are indicated: Bb* (measure 11), G7* (measure 12), Cm7* (measure 13), F7 (measure 14), Bb7* (measure 15), and Eb* (measure 16). The notes marked with asterisks are the thirds of these chords: Bb (measure 11), G (measure 12), C (measure 13), F (measure 14), Bb (measure 15), and Eb (measure 16). The notation includes triplets and slurs to show the melodic connections between these notes.

Example 19: Stitt’s targeting of thirds on “Oop Bop Sh’Bam”

Stitt’s thirds land on consecutive strong beats and coincide with changes in the harmony. Stitt connects these pitches using both a downward stepwise approach from the seventh of the previous chord (see Stitt’s playing over $G^7 \rightarrow C^{m7}$ and $F^7 \rightarrow Bb^7$)²² and a chromatic approach from below (see $Bb, Bb \rightarrow G^7$, $Bb^7 \rightarrow Eb$). Stitt’s targeting of thirds is consistent. He breaks the pattern only once—when raising the fifth of the F^7 chord (m. 12, b. 3).

²² In jazz education this is known as a 7-3 resolution. See for example: Jerry Coker, *Elements of the Jazz Language for the Developing Improvisor* (Miami: CPP/Belwin, 1991), 19–25.

In addition to targeting thirds, Stitt also uses pitch and rhythm in interesting ways (Example 20):

Example 20: Stitt’s use of melodic and rhythmic contour in “Oop Bop Sh’Bam”

In this phrase, each complete measure begins with the same melodic gesture: an upward 3-5-7-9 chord arpeggio (mm. 11–13, bb. 1–2). In addition, each complete measure ends with a similar rhythmic gesture: a downward sixteenth or sixteenth-note triplet rhythm on beat three, followed by eighth notes (mm. 11–13, bb. 3–4). Due to these characteristics, the phrase has a regular melodic and rhythmic contour, rising steadily in the first half of every measure and falling sharply in the second.

Chromaticism

In addition to its harmonic precision, Stitt’s “Oop Bop Sh’Bam” solo is characterized by a developed chromatic vocabulary. Compared with Stitt’s earlier solo on “Ready, Set, Jump,” there is an increased use of chromatic ornaments and

embellishments—non-diatonic passing tones, neighbor tones, and appoggiatura—as well as alterations of fifths and ninths on dominant seventh chords.

Chromaticism can be found throughout the solo, including in the solo opening (Example 21):

Example 21: Stitt’s use of chromaticism in “Oop Bop Sh’Bam”

The phrase above is densely packed with chromatic devices, including chromatic sixteenth-note triplets (m. 1, b. 3), a descending chromatic half-step motion from $D\flat_5$ to $A\flat_4$ (m. 1, b. 3 to m. 2, b. 1), and chromatic enclosures (m. 2, bb. 3–4).²³

Stitt’s sixteenth-note lines contain additional examples of chromaticism.

Stitt uses one particular device—a chromatic five-note figure—three times in two

²³ Chromatic pitches are indicated with an asterisk. In this example, “chromatic” refers to pitches that are non-diatonic to $E\flat$ major, since the chords F^{m7} - $B\flat^7$ - $E\flat^{maj7}$ all belong to that key ($E\flat$: ii-V-I).

different keys. The figure consists of an accented chromatic lower neighbor tone and a descending minor triad followed by an upward skip. The figure is shown in Example 22, below.²⁴



Example 22: Five-note figure in Stitt's solo in "Oop Bop Sh'Bam"

In the context of Stitt's solo, the figure can be interpreted as outlining both 5-3-1 of a ii^7 chord and 9-7-5 of a V^7 chord. This harmonic flexibility is useful when playing over $ii-V-I$ progressions, where the same melodic material can fit multiple chords.

Stitt uses this flexibility at the end of his solo. On beat two of his second sixteenth-note line, Stitt places the five-note figure over a $B\flat$ major chord (Example 23). For that beat and the following several beats, Stitt's line appears to toggle between C^{m7} and F^7 , while a $B\flat-F-B\flat$ chord progression is outlined in the bass.

²⁴ To view the figure in context, see Example 11 above (m. 1, b. 3; m. 2, b. 3) or Example 23 below.

(1:41)
(sax)

(five-note figure)
Cm or F⁷

B^b F B^b F Cm⁷ F

15 B^b F⁷ B^b (F⁷)

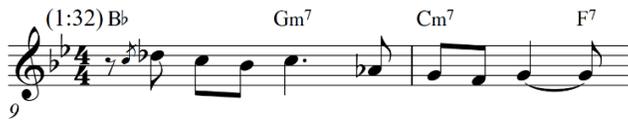
(bass)

Example 23: Stitt’s use of a five-note figure in “Oop Bop Sh’Bam”

The chromatic five-note figure also allows Stitt to control the descent of his line. Since the first and last notes of the figure are only one semitone apart (F[#]₄→F₄), Stitt is able to play a string of notes without ending in a different register from where he started. This is useful for double-time playing, where—compared with eighth-note playing—twice as many notes are required per beat, making control of vertical space essential.

Blues Inflection

At the start of the second half of his solo, Stitt breaks the harmonic precision with a blues-inflected line (Example 24). The line stands out from the rest of Stitt’s solo. In addition to its harmonic relaxedness—the line does not target chord tones on strong beats—it is bluesy, tuneful, and free from guided chromaticism, triplet ornaments, sixteenth notes, and other features of Stitt’s phrases discussed above.



Example 24: Blues-inflected line in Stitt's solo in "Oop Bop Sh'Bam"

Stitt's blues-inflected line consists of two descending melodic segments beginning on a blue third and blue seventh, respectively. Stitt bends into the blue third, adding a grace note from below for greater effect. He also adds a pronounced vibrato to the end of the C₅ dotted quarter note (m. 9, b. 3).

The blues-inflected line is short, but effective. By starting a semitone higher than the end of the previous phrase, Stitt connects the two halves of his solo.²⁵ Additionally, by beginning with a bent blue third rather than a chord tone, Stitt marks the second half of his solo as aurally distinct from the first, clarifying the form.

A closer look at the beginning of Stitt's solo hints at another aspect of his playing style. Stitt's opening phrase, which falls on the B section of piece's AABA form, is remarkably similar to the B section melody. Example 25 shows both phrases in parallel:

²⁵ The phrase is shown in context in Example 18, above.

(Stitt solo)
(1:19) Fm7 B \flat 7 E \flat maj7

(melody)
(0:31)

Example 25: Stitt’s solo and bridge melody in “Oop Bop Sh’Bam”

While the phrases have different pitch levels—the lines are a second or third interval apart—their melodic contour is nearly identical. The rhythms are also strikingly similar. Stitt’s opening phrase is in fact a rhythmic superset of the B section melody, differing only by the inclusion of several eighth notes and a sixteenth-note triplet. These similarities suggest that Stitt was alluding to the “Oop Bop Sh’Bam” melody in his solo.

Timbre

One final musical feature to discuss is Stitt’s saxophone sound. In “Ready, Set, Jump,” Stitt’s sound stood out—it was more controlled, more subtly inflected, and less outwardly expressive than those of his bandmates. In “Oop Bop Sh’Bam,” these timbral qualities are still present. Stitt’s tone remains tightly controlled and sparingly inflected. In some ways, these qualities are more

noticeable: Stitt's tone is dry—almost to the point of harshness—and even more restrained.

The difference between the two Stitt recordings is heard most clearly by contrasting Stitt's saxophone sound on "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" with the saxophone *sol*i sound on "Ready, Set, Jump."²⁶ The saxophone section sound is round and warm, with prominent vibrato and a full dynamic range. By contrast, Stitt's solo tone is edgier, with few inflections, sparing vibrato, and a narrow dynamic range.²⁷

Conclusion

Sonny Stitt's "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" solo is an impressive performance by a maturing young musician. Compared with Stitt's earlier work, the "Oop Bop

²⁶ For example, contrast Stitt's performance on "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" with the section playing on the opening melody (0:05–0:25) and the bridge of the last chorus (2:41–2:52) of "Ready, Set, Jump."

²⁷ At least part of the difference in tone may be attributed to a difference in recording conditions. "Ready, Set, Jump" was recorded with a big band in front of a live audience, while "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" was recorded with a small group in a closed professional studio. The latter seems more likely to produce crisp, well-defined horns, and a dryer, less reverberant sound. There are also important differences in the arrangements of the two pieces. Stitt's "Ready, Set, Jump" solo occurs over blaring trumpet backgrounds, while Stitt's "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" solo is accompanied by the rhythm section alone. This, too, has implications for volume and timbre: when the backgrounds are louder and more intense, musicians must play louder to be heard.

Sh’Bam” solo is surer, more cohesive, and more virtuosic. The solo is also evidence of a maturing personal style. This style is expressed through particular musical features: rapid sixteenth-note phrases, an advanced chromatic vocabulary, regular accentuation patterns, an on-top-of-the-beat rhythmic feel, even note spacing, and a dry, subtly-inflected saxophone tone.

“Oop Bop Sh’Bam” was recorded after Stitt had been living and performing among bebop pioneers for nearly two years. This fact is reflected in numerous musical features throughout the solo. Like those of his bandmates, Stitt’s solo contains features characteristic of a bebop style: long stretches of stepwise motion, double-time rhythm, triplet arpeggios, frequent use of chromaticism, and chord tones that consistently fall on the beat.

The presence of these features is strong evidence that Stitt had internalized the New York style by 1946. On “Ready, Set, Jump,” recorded two years earlier, Stitt stood out from his bandmates as a modern player. On “Oop Bop Sh’Bam,” he fits in comfortably. Stitt’s fluency and proficiency in this new musical language speaks to the value of joining a community of committed young musicians, and is a marked improvement over his earlier 1944 work.

Despite these improvements, Stitt’s “Oop Bop Sh’Bam” solo is best seen as an extension of his earlier style, rather than a radical departure from it. Many of

the stylistic features discussed above—Stitt’s harmonic precision, clear attack, sparing vibrato, and penchant for long phrases that end on strong beats—are present in both the “Oop Bop Sh’Bam” and the “Ready, Set, Jump” solos.

Furthermore, two overarching qualities of Stitt’s solo playing—its clarity and consistency—are present in both recordings.

The clarity and consistency of Stitt’s solo playing is observable even in the aspects of his solo more commonly associated with a bebop style. In Stitt’s double-time playing, for instance, each pitch can be clearly heard. Despite their high speed, Stitt’s sixteenth notes are evenly spaced and crisply articulated, with clear divisions between notes, consistent accents on downbeats, and beginning and end points that reinforce the solo form.

Stitt’s approach to chromaticism is also an extension of his earlier style. Chromatic tones abound in Stitt’s “Oop Bop Sh’Bam” solo. These tones decorate and elaborate his eighth-note phrases, but Stitt uses them to a familiar end: the consistent targeting of chord tones on strong beats.

The “Oop Bop Sh’Bam” solo is evidence of Stitt’s musical progress in the mid-1940s. In the years between leaving the Tiny Bradshaw Orchestra and joining groups led by Dizzy Gillespie, Stitt improved as a saxophonist, drew from the

modern experiments of the New York beboppers, and solidified aspects of his own musical style.

Now that stylistic features of Stitt's mid-1940's solo playing have been identified, it is time to turn to the music of Charlie Parker during the same period. An analysis of Parker's recorded solos will reveal which features of Stitt's developing style were also present in Parker's music, and provide insight into the nature of their musical relationship.

CHAPTER XI

MUSICAL ANALYSIS OF CHARLIE PARKER'S SOLO ON "RED CROSS"

Introduction

The third and final solo analyzed in this section is taken from Parker's "Red Cross," a composition recorded with guitarist Tiny Grimes on September 15, 1944 in a session for Savoy Records.¹

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the "Red Cross" session coincides with major changes in Parker's career. After years of performing in large ensembles—big bands led by Jay McShann, Earl Hines, and Billy Eckstine—Parker began working primarily in smaller groups of five to six musicians.² The "Red Cross" session came at the beginning of this change. It was Parker's first

¹ Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 30.

² "Upon leaving the Eckstine band, Bird sought employment on [Fifty-Second Street]; his earliest gigs were with Ben Webster in the early fall of 1944." Parker "became acquainted with Clyde Hart and Tiny Grimes" during this time, and went on to record "Red Cross" with them. Koch, *Yardbird Suite*, 43.

recording session after leaving the Billy Eckstine Orchestra, and marked the beginning of a year-long transition from sideman into solo artist.³

The “Red Cross” session is important to Parker’s career for two additional reasons:

First, it marks the end of a year-long period during which Parker did not record. The “Red Cross” session was Parker’s first recording since the so-called Redcross discs, a set of impromptu private recordings from 1943 with Parker on tenor saxophone.⁴

The “Red Cross” session was also Parker’s first studio recording in several years. Between 1942 and 1944, the American Federation of Musicians went on strike, preventing union musicians from making commercial recordings. Like most professional jazz musicians in the United States, Parker was a union member

³ “Charlie Parker Discography.” The transition was complete by November 1945, when Parker recorded his first session as a leader. This session produced the landmark bebop recording “Ko Ko,” which is analyzed in [Chapter XIV](#).

⁴ The similarity between these two titles is not a coincidence. Both names refer to Bob Redcross, who was Billy Eckstine’s chauffeur and a friend to Parker and many other musicians. Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 27, 103; Gary Ginell, *Mr. B: The Music and Life of Billy Eckstine* (Hal Leonard Books, 2013), Google eBook edition; Gitler, *Swing to Bop*, 133.

and was affected by the strike. “Red Cross” was Parker’s first recording session after the strike ended and his first commercial recording since 1942.⁵

Second, “Red Cross” captures crucial changes in Parker’s musical style. Between 1942 and 1944, Parker’s saxophone playing matured considerably.⁶ Due to the recording strike, however, these changes were poorly documented.⁷ The “Red Cross” session was the first session to capture Parker’s “new mastery”⁸ in a commercial recording setting. It also captured this mastery at length, as Parker was asked to improvise a solo on each piece.⁹ For these reasons, jazz scholars consider “Red Cross” to be a milestone in Parker’s musical development, and cite 1944 as the beginning of his mature musical period.¹⁰

The timing of the recording session is relevant for one additional reason. “Red Cross” was recorded in September 1944. This date is one month later than

⁵ Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 95, 103.

⁶ Parker’s early 1940s were “marked by a stunning pace of growth, a strong sense of discovery, and a rare appetite for new ideas.” *Ibid.*, 102.

⁷ Between 1942 and the 1944 “Red Cross” session, the only examples of Parker’s saxophone playing that survive are from scattered bootleg and live recordings (“Charlie Parker Discography”).

⁸ Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 106.

⁹ The “Red Cross” session “represents [Parker’s] longest exposure on records prior to his own first date fourteen months later.” Priestley, *Chasin’ the Bird*, 44.

¹⁰ “By that 1944 record date, most of Parker’s characteristic musical qualities were in place, making 1944 a good starting point for his first ‘mature’ musical period.” Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 103; Owens, “Charlie Parker,” 1:5.

Stitt's August 1944 recording of "Ready, Set, Jump" with the Tiny Bradshaw Orchestra, and within months of Stitt leaving the Bradshaw band to move to New York City. Because these dates are so close, "Red Cross" offers a glimpse into Parker's saxophone playing as Stitt would have heard it at the time. It also provides a point of reference for understanding statements by musicians and critics comparing Stitt to Parker in the mid-1940s.

Recording and Composition

"Red Cross" was recorded with a small group led by guitarist Lloyd "Tiny" Grimes. The group consisted of Grimes on tenor guitar and vocals, Parker on alto saxophone, Clyde Hart on piano, Jimmy Butts on double bass, and Harold "Doc" West on drums.¹¹ Together the group recorded four pieces: two vocal features for Grimes and two instrumental numbers.¹² "Red Cross" was one of the

¹¹ "Charlie Parker Discography."

¹² Ibid. The other recorded pieces were "I'll Always Love You Just the Same" (vocal), "Romance Without Finance" (vocal), and "Tiny's Tempo" (instrumental). As originally conceived, the session was intended to feature Grimes on vocals, with the "instrumentals [serving as] the 'B' sides of the records." Due to the Parker's prominence in jazz history, however, the instrumentals have become more widely known. Koch, *Yarbird Suite*, 43.

two instrumental numbers. The piece was composed by Parker; it is notable for being “the first composition to be copyrighted under Parker’s name.”¹³

Like “Ready, Set, Jump” and “Oop Bop Sh’Bam,” “Red Cross” consists of a short introduction and an opening melodic statement, followed by three solos and a closing melodic statement. The musical arrangement is simple: aside from a four-measure introduction, the piece consists entirely of repetitions through the AABA form, with no interludes, codas, solo backgrounds, or variations to the basic song structure. “Red Cross” is faster than “Ready, Set, Jump” and “Oop Bop Sh’Bam,” with a tempo slightly over 200 beats per minute. The difference in speed is less noticeable during the melodic theme, but becomes obvious in the solo section, particularly during Parker’s double-time playing.

Like the other two pieces discussed in this chapter, “Red Cross” is modeled after the composition “I Got Rhythm.” The melodic theme is thirty-two measures long, in AABA form, and in the key of B \flat major. B sections use a standard cycle of dominant seventh chords (III-VI-II-V), while A sections are non-standard (during the melody chorus), featuring simplified harmonies in the

¹³ Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 30.

first half and rising chromatically from B \flat to B \natural in the second half.¹⁴ During solos, A section harmonies are closer to standard “Rhythm changes,” with a few important differences that are discussed below.¹⁵

Musical Maturity

What follows is a detailed analysis of the musical features of Parker’s “Red Cross” solo. At the outset of this analysis, however, it is important to highlight one conspicuous feature of the solo: its maturity. According to Woideck’s characterization of this period, the “Red Cross” solo is among “Parker’s first expressions of maturity and mastery.”¹⁶ This maturity is evident throughout the solo, and sets Parker’s performance apart from those of his “Red Cross” bandmates.

¹⁴ In the first four measures of the A section, the bass outlines a B \flat major chord, and the piano and guitar do not provide chordal accompaniment. This is a simplification of the standard “I Got Rhythm” chord progression, a slowing of the harmonic rhythm by replacing the original chords (B \flat -G⁷ | C^{m7}-F⁷) with static B \flat harmony.

¹⁵ Hart and Grimes’s solos follow standard “I Got Rhythm” changes, but Parker’s solo differs. During the first two A sections of Parker’s solo (0:41–1:00), the chordal instruments outline a generic B \flat tonality in lieu of the standard chords. This has ramifications for interpreting Parker’s solo and is discussed below.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 103. Woideck uses this expression to describe Parker’s music

Parker's maturity manifests in two main ways: 1) a highly advanced and developed improvisational style; and 2) confident and virtuosic execution. The "advanced improvisational style" is revealed through sophisticated approaches to rhythm, harmony, and phrase construction. "Virtuosic execution" refers to the fluid, polished, and engaging way that these approaches are carried out; it is revealed through Parker's swing feel, saxophone tone, and musical technique.

These musical approaches and features are discussed individually in the sections that follow.

Rhythm

Parker's one-chorus solo¹⁷ is brimming with rhythmic ideas. Like most jazz soloists of this period,¹⁸ Parker uses swing eighth notes as his rhythmic foundation. These eighth notes are then broken up and embellished with several other kinds of rhythm. Amid his eighth-note phrases, Parker includes triplet and sixteenth-note ornaments, fast flurries of notes, heavily syncopated eighth notes, and double-time segments (Example 26).

¹⁷ The complete solo can be heard at 0:40–1:18 on the recording.

¹⁸ The importance of swing eighth notes in the 1930s and 40s is outlined in Lawn and Hellmer, *Jazz: Theory and Practice*, 161.

The musical notation is presented in three staves. The first staff (measures 4-6) features a 16th-note ornament on beat 4, followed by a 16th-note triplet on beat 5, and another 16th-note ornament on beat 6. The second staff (measures 7-9) includes an 8th-note triplet on beat 7, successive notes on off-beats on beat 8, and another 8th-note triplet on beat 9. The third staff (measures 10-12) shows an 8th/16th-note triplet on beat 10, a long 16th-note line on beat 11, and an 8th-note triplet on beat 12. Chord changes are indicated above the notes: Cm7, F7, Bb7, Eb, Ab7, Bb, Gm7, Cm7, F7, Bb, Gm7, Cm7, F7, Bb, Gm7, Cm7, F7.

Example 26: Parker’s rhythmic ideas in his “Red Cross” solo

The example above shows Parker mixing each of these rhythmic values together over the course of nine measures. Changes in rhythmic values are frequent and abrupt, occurring on average once per measure and on various beats without warning. While these changes are unexpected, Parker executes them so smoothly that boundaries between rhythmic values are not immediately apparent. The effect is a fluid and unpredictable rhythmic texture.

Parker’s approach to rhythm stands out even more compared with those of his “Red Cross” bandmates. While Parker’s approach to rhythm is unpredictable, those of Clyde Hart and Tiny Grimes are far more static (Example 27).

(Parker)
(0:59)

17 D⁷

(1:36)(Hart)

G⁷

3

17 (2:12)
(Grimes)

D⁷ G⁷

Example 27: Parker, Hart, and Grimes solo on the B section in “Red Cross”¹⁹

Example 27 shows the first four measures of the B section of each soloist in parallel. Parker’s phrase (the uppermost staff) is a tour de force: at once rhythmically loose, harmonically advanced, and virtuosic.²⁰ Hart and Grimes’s phrases are rhythmically far simpler, consisting entirely of quarter notes and eighth notes. Like Parker, Hart and Grimes’s playing reflects a modern conception, making use of the whole-tone scale (Hart) and half-step chromaticism (Grimes). The effect is heavier and less impressive, however, compared with Parker’s fluid performance over the same four measures.

¹⁹ Following standard notational convention, notes played on the guitar (notes in the bottom staff) are written one octave higher than their sounding pitch.

²⁰ The virtuosity of the phrase may not be apparent from the printed excerpt, but it is obvious on the recording. Besides its changing rhythmic values, the phrase contains wide intervals, frequent changes in contour, and double-time passages. This phrase is discussed in further detail in the Chord Substitution section, below.

Swing Feel and Note Placement

The effectiveness of Parker's "Red Cross" solo lies not only in his rhythmic ideas, but also in how those ideas are executed. An important part of this execution is Parker's timing—his swing feel and note placement.

In his "Red Cross" solo, Parker plays with a deep and pronounced swing feel. Eighth notes placed on-the-beat arrive early and have longer durations. Those placed off-the-beat arrive late and have greater intensity. These qualities are characteristic of eighth-note swing in general,²¹ but in Parker's "Red Cross" solo they are exaggerated, resulting in a lively and elastic swing feel.

Parker also increases the effectiveness of his rhythmic approach by varying the placement of his eighth notes. At various points throughout his solo, Parker pushes his eighth notes forward or pulls them back for rhythmic effect. These changes are subtle and frequent, often occurring several times within a single phrase.

²¹ The difference between the position and intensity of eighth notes on and off the beat is one of the defining characteristics of swing. Shelton G. Berg, *Essentials of Jazz Theory*, vol. 1 (Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Publishing, 2006), 4.

Example 28 shows a typical instance of Parker’s changing eighth-note placement. Parker begins with a burst of notes. He then retards slightly, before speeding up again.

Example 28: Parker’s changing note placement in “Red Cross” 1

Changes in note placement often coincide with changes in other characteristics of the melodic line:

Example 29: Parker’s changing note placement in “Red Cross” 2

In Example 29, changes in note placement coincide with changes in Parker’s rhythmic values and melodic contour. As Parker ascends and his rhythmic values get smaller, the phrase accelerates. As the line descends, Parker switches back to eighth notes and the tempo relaxes.

Accentuation

Parker's approach to accentuation works in a similar way. Parker adds dynamic accents to each phrase of his "Red Cross" solo. These accents land both on and off the beat, upsetting the established swing feel and making his phrases less predictable.

(0:41) Bb Gm7 Cm7 F7 Bb Gm7

Cm7 F7 Bb7 Eb

Example 31: Parker's changing accent placement in "Red Cross"

Example 31 shows the opening measures of Parker's "Red Cross" solo. The example is typical of his approach to accentuation throughout the solo. Accented notes (indicated with an accent mark) are performed with a combination of strong air impulses and tongue attacks. The accents vary in intensity, but are typically strong, and create disturbances in the smoothness of the melodic line. There are several accented notes per measure. The accents occur both on and off the beat, and their position changes as the phrase unfolds.

Despite the unpredictability of Parker’s accents, some patterns in accent placement may be observed (see Example 32, below).

Example 32: Parker’s changing accent placement in “Red Cross” (detail)

Parker frequently accents notes a quarter note apart (e.g., mm. 1–2; m. 4, bb. 2–3), and a dotted quarter note apart (e.g., m. 1, bb. 3–4; m. 4, bb. 1–3; m. 5, bb. 1–3). Accents coincide with other features of the melodic line, including blue notes (e.g., mm. 1–2, 5), the highest notes of a phrase (e.g., m. 4, bb. 1–3; m. 5, b. 1), notes at the beginning and end of phrase segments (e.g., mm. 1–2, 4–5),²³ and notes preceding a change in direction.

²³ That is, Parker’s accents coincide with notes immediately preceding or following a rest.

Parker sometimes uses accents in a way that plays with listener expectations. At the end of the first half of his solo (Example 33), Parker establishes an accented rhythmic pattern over two measures, only to break it in the following measure.



Example 33: Parker's use of accent patterns in "Red Cross"

At the beginning of the excerpt (m. 13–14), Parker accents three notes per measure. The accented notes fall on the downbeat of one, the off-beat of two, and the downbeat of four, establishing a rhythmic pattern (two dotted quarter notes followed by a quarter note). After setting up this pattern, Parker breaks it in the third measure (m. 15). He reduces three accented notes to two, delays the second accented note until beat three, then abruptly ends the phrase.²⁴

²⁴ In addition, many of the accents fall on alternating natural (♮3) and lowered thirds (♭3), emphasizing a blues feeling. This is discussed in greater detail in the Blues Figures section below.

Parker's approach to accentuation works in concert with his approaches to swing feel, dynamics, and note placement. Slight variations in tempo are made more effective by subtle changes in volume and sudden, punctuated accents. Melodic lines accelerate and crescendo as they ascend, hit a strongly accented peak, then fall away dramatically. Parker brings these various musical approaches together into a cohesive whole. The result is a unique and compelling improvisational style.

Parker's Influence on the Rhythm Section

Parker's style is compelling enough to influence the performance of other musicians on the recording. Bassist Jimmy Butts and drummer Doc West seem especially influenced by Parker, responding to him in a way they do not respond to the other "Red Cross" soloists.

During the statement of the melodic theme, Butts and West establish a basic quarter-note pulse.²⁵ West keeps time on the bass drum and hi-hat with continuous quarter notes, opening and closing the hi-hat on successive beats.

²⁵ The melodic theme can be heard at 0:05–0:40 on the recording.

When Parker's solo begins, West switches from the hi-hat to the ride cymbal, leading to longer phrases and a smoother, more uniform sense of time.²⁶ Butts adopts a stronger attack and pushes his quarter notes slightly earlier in the beat. This establishes a bouncier pulse and provides forward momentum for Parker's solo.²⁷

As the solo unfolds, West responds to Parker by changing his drum pattern (see Example 34 below). West creates a backbeat at the end of Parker's first A section by striking the snare drum on beat four of every second measure.²⁸ The backbeat continues throughout Parker's solo, gradually increasing in volume.²⁹ At the beginning of Parker's final A section, West's ride cymbal pattern becomes exaggerated, approximating a dotted-eighth–sixteenth-note rhythm on beats two and four.³⁰ The combination of the West's backbeat and exaggerated ride cymbal

²⁶ Parker's solo—and West's switch to the ride cymbal—begins at 0:40 on the recording.

²⁷ The bouncy pulse is muddied somewhat by Grimes and Hart—the other two rhythm section musicians—who both play chords and short melodic figures throughout Parker's solo.

²⁸ This can be heard at 0:50 on the recording.

²⁹ That is, it continues from 0:50–1:18 on the recording. West also varies the backbeat frequency: at times, it falls on beat four of every measure, instead of every two measures.

³⁰ This can be heard at 1:10 on the recording.

pattern has the effect of extending and drawing out Parker’s long phrases, while also increasing the rhythmic intensity.

(Parker)
(1:09) B \flat Gm 7 Cm 7 F 7 B \flat Gm Cm 7 F 7

exaggerated ride cymbal pattern

(West)

accented snare drum backbeat

Example 34: West’s changing drum pattern in Parker’s “Red Cross” solo

These changes are unique to Parker’s solo; Butts and West do not respond to the guitar and piano solos the same way. The accompaniment during Parker’s solo is interactive and marked by increased forward momentum, suggesting a more modern style. After Parker’s solo ends, however, the rhythm section returns to a simpler timekeeping role.³¹ The pulse becomes quarter-note heavy and almost choppy, suggesting a reversion to a pre-bebop style.

³¹ Parker’s solo ends at 1:18 on the recording. At this point, Butts’s quarter notes pull back and his attack weakens. West returns to keeping time on the hi-hat, and does not use the ride cymbal again. West reintroduces a backbeat during Grimes’s solo (1:54–2:30), but at a much lower volume.

Harmony

Like other elements of his solo playing, Parker's approach to harmony is multifaceted, and changes as his solo unfolds. Parker treats the standard "I Got Rhythm" chords in several different ways: outlining their chord tones, altering and replacing them, and eliding them with bluesy melodic material. The following sections will discuss these different approaches in detail.

During the first two A sections of Parker's solo, there are discrepancies between the chords used by Parker and those used by the rhythm section. Parker often references the "I Got Rhythm" chord progression directly, and thus appears aware of the standard chords even when he avoids them. Parker's accompanists—Hart, Grimes, and Butts—take a different approach, beginning the solo using a stripped-down version of the "I Got Rhythm" harmony. Rather than outline the standard chord progression, they outline a generic B \flat major tonality.³² (Because the present analysis is concerned with the features of Parker's style, musical

³² Many of the characteristic "I Got Rhythm" harmonies—e.g., B \flat -G^{m7}-C^{m7}-F⁷, the move from B \flat ⁷ to E \flat —are missing, especially from the playing of Grimes and Hart. This harmonic simplification is a carry-over from the melodic theme, which remains on B \flat major for extended periods during the A sections. The rhythm section eventually switches over to the "I Got Rhythm" chords in the bridge of Parker's solo. They continue to use these chords through the final A section and the solos that follow.

excerpts follow his approach, and are written using the standard “Rhythm changes.”)

At times, Parker remains close to the written chord progression. He does this by highlighting chord tones at structurally significant parts of the solo form. For instance, during A sections, the harmony moves from B \flat major to E \flat major and back again. In the fifth and sixth measure of each A section, Parker references this change with melodic material clearly belonging to E \flat major (Example 35).

The image displays three musical excerpts from Parker's solo in "Red Cross". Each excerpt is written in B \flat major (one flat) and consists of two measures. The first excerpt, starting at 0:46, is marked with a 5 and shows a chord change from B \flat 7 to E \flat and then A \flat 7. The second excerpt, starting at 0:55, is marked with a 13 and shows a chord change from B \flat 7 to E \flat 7 and then A \flat 7. The third excerpt, starting at 1:13, is marked with a 29 and shows a chord change from B \flat 7 to E \flat 7 and then A \flat 7. In all three excerpts, asterisks are placed above notes that are chord tones of the E \flat major chord (G \flat , B \flat , and D \flat), highlighting their presence in the melodic line during the E \flat major sections.

Example 35: Parker's use of chord tones in “Red Cross”

The example above shows the fifth and sixth measure of each A section of Parker's solo. Chord tones belonging to E \flat 7 are indicated by an asterisk above the note. The abundance of these tones both emphasizes the local chord progression (B \flat 7-E \flat), and reinforces harmonic movement to the subdominant (I-IV).

In another instance, Parker highlights the tones of four successive chords with the following double-time figure (Example 36):



Example 36: Parker's use of double-time in "Red Cross"

In the space of two measures, Parker outlines each chord of a I-VI-II-V chord progression. In doing so, Parker uses many of the same approaches as Stitt in the solos analyzed above. Parker connects chord tones on consecutive beats both by step and by leap. Parker highlights the thirds of each chord. He also embellishes his double-time figure with a number of melodic devices, including arpeggios (m. 11, bb. 2 and 4), appoggiaturas (m. 11, b. 3), and chromatic lower neighbor tones (m. 11, bb. 1 and 4). All of this is executed at rapid speed: sixteenth notes at over 200 beats per minute.

In his double-time figure, Parker organizes chord tones in interesting ways, shown in Example 37 below (chord tones are indicated with an asterisk above the note).

Example 37: Parker’s use of double-time in “Red Cross” (detail)

Although Parker states the tones of each chord, these tones do not always fall on strong beats. For example, the chord tones that first outline the G^{m7} chord in the second half of m. 11 ($B\flat_4$ - G_4 - G_4) all land off the beat—one sixteenth note later than expected.³³ In addition, the C_5 on beat three (m. 11, b. 3) is harmonically ambiguous. It is both the ninth of the $B\flat^{maj9}$ chord that precedes it (m. 11, b. 1–2), and an appoggiatura that resolves to the third of G^{m7} on the second sixteenth note of beat three.

Parker’s approach to chord tones is elaborated further through the use of chromatic neighbor tones. In his two-measure figure (Example 37 above), Parker places several of these tones both on and off the beat.³⁴ These include the

³³ The three notes (m. 11, bb. 3–4) are indicated with a bracket and the words “unaccented chord tones” in Example 37 above.

³⁴ E.g., the anacrusis $C\sharp_4$ (m. 1, b. 1) and the flat-nine $G\flat_4$ on the F^7 chord (m. 2, b. 2, n. 4) are incomplete neighbor tones that land on off-beats. The $F\sharp_4$ on the G^{m7} chord (m. 11, b. 4) is a chromatic lower neighbor tone that lands on the beat. All three notes are indicated with arrows in the example above.

anacrusis C \sharp ₄ (m. 11, b. 1) and the lowered ninth G \flat ₄ on the F⁷ chord (m. 12, b. 2, n. 4), two incomplete neighbor tones placed on off-beats. It also includes the F \sharp ₄ on the G^{m7} chord (m. 11, b. 4), a chromatic lower neighbor tone placed on the beat.

Finally, Parker speeds up the harmonic rhythm of his double-time figure. This is most noticeable at the end of the line, where Parker compresses the one-measure progression C^{m7}→F⁷ into two beats (m. 12, bb. 1–2).³⁵

Chromatic Passing Tones

In addition to the chromatic ornaments listed above, Parker's solo contains many instances of chromatic passing tones. These tones add depth and complexity to Parker's harmonic approach. Unlike Stitt, Parker does not generally use chromatic passing tones to force chord tones onto strong beats. Many of Parker's chromatic passing tones do not resolve to chord tones at all.

Parker's innovative approach to these tones can be seen in the excerpt below (Example 38). The phrase begins with three short chromatic segments (indicated by angled lines). Each of these segments consists of a pair of pitches

³⁵ The implied chord changes are written under the staff in the example above.

connected by one or more chromatic passing tones: C₅ to A^b₄, C₄ to D₄, and G₄ to F₄. The segments travel in different directions and are separated by two wide leaps: a minor sixth A^b₄–C₄ (m. 4, b. 3) and a major fourth D₄–G₄ (m. 4, b. 4–m. 5, b. 1).



Example 38: Parker’s use of chromatic passing tones in “Red Cross”

The excerpt is interesting for additional reasons. First, by using leaps and chromatic passing tones, Parker embellishes the pitches C₅-A^b₄-D₄-F₄, the upper four tones of a B^b₉ chord: C-A^b-F-D-(B^b). Parker outlines the first pair of notes—C₅ and A^b₄—by descending chromatic step (m. 4, bb. 1–3). He then highlights the second pair of notes—D₄ and F₄—by leaping past them, then approaching by chromatic step in the opposite direction (m. 4, b. 4–m. 5, b. 2).

Parker also anticipates the B^b₇ chord (mm. 4–5). The pitches A^b and D (in m. 4) do not belong to either of the standard chords (C^m₇ and F⁷), nor are they supported by the rhythm section accompaniment. By emphasizing these pitches

over the chords $Cm^7 \rightarrow F^7 \rightarrow (Bb^7)$, Parker anticipates the Bb^7 chord, effectively superimposing it over the ii-V progression that precedes it.

Melodic Contour

In addition to his use of chromatic passing tones, Parker further obscures the written harmony by making sudden changes to the melodic contour. One of these changes is the use of frequent wide leaps, including leaps to and from non-chord tones (Example 39).

(0:45) Cm^7 F^7_{m6} $P4$ Bb^7 Eb $P8+m3$ Ab^7

(0:59) D^7 $P4$ $P4$ G^7 $d5$

(1:10) Cm^7 F^7 Bb Gm Cm^7 $M6$ F^7

Example 39: Wide leaps in Charlie Parker’s “Red Cross” solo

The example above includes three selections taken from three different phrases of Parker’s solo. Each selection contains one or more large-interval leaps

(indicated with brackets), as well as leaps to non-chord tones.³⁶ As with Parker’s use of unaccented chord tones and chromatic ornaments, these leaps are harmonically ambiguous and blur the standard “Rhythm changes.” They also make the melodic contour of Parker’s lines more abrupt.

Another notable aspect of Parker’s melodic contour is the insertion of small groups of fast notes into his phrases. Many of Parker’s eighth-note lines contain triplets and sixteenth notes squeezed in (Example 40). These inserted notes (indicated with angled lines) function as melodic embellishments. They contribute to the solo’s dynamic and irregular rhythmic texture. They also provide additional harmonic information—reinforcing (mm. 11, 21–24) and altering (m. 19) the written chords.

Example 40: Parker’s insertion of fast notes in “Red Cross”

³⁶ In this case, a large-interval leap is a leap spanning a perfect fourth or greater. The second selection in Example 39 (mm. 17–20) is more complicated in terms of harmony and melodic contour. It is discussed separately in the Chord Substitution section below.

Chord Substitution

Another important part of Parker’s harmonic approach is his use of chord alteration and substitution. Unlike chromatic ornaments, which decorate and obfuscate the standard harmony, chord alteration and substitution modify and replace the standard harmony directly.

Parker’s use of chord alteration and substitution is most obvious—and striking—in the first half of the B section of his solo (Example 41).

(0:59)

17 [D⁷ Eb⁷ D⁷ Eb⁷] [G⁹(b5) Ab⁹ G⁹(b5) G¹³(^{b9}_{b3})]

Example 41: Parker’s use of chord substitution on the bridge of “Red Cross”

Over the standard chord progression—two measures each of D⁷ and G⁷—Parker inserts additional chords (Eb⁷ and Ab⁷). He alternates between the written chords and the substituted chords (e.g., D⁷-Eb⁷-D⁷-Eb⁷), starting on the original chord, ascending by half-step, then descending back to the original chord.

Parker also increases the harmonic rhythm fourfold, changing from one chord every two measures (two chords total) to two chords per measure (eight chords total). His phrase has a regular melodic contour. In each measure, Parker

ascends for two beats, then descends for two beats. When ascending, Parker uses the written chord; when descending, he uses the chord a half step above.³⁷ Parker strengthens this pattern by approaching chord tones on downbeats by descending half step ($E\flat_4 \rightarrow D_4$, $B\sharp_3 \rightarrow A\sharp_3$, and $C\sharp_4 \rightarrow B\sharp_3$).³⁸

Parker does not merely move up and down chords a semitone apart; he makes slight changes to the chords with each repetition. This can be seen in Example 41, above (standard chord changes are written above the staff; Parker's inserted chords are below). Parker's chord arpeggios move mostly in thirds, but also somewhat unconventionally in intervals of seconds, fourths, and fifths. Because of this, some tones are left out of the chords, and many other tones are added.

Parker's approaches to harmony and rhythm are connected. The phrase begins with eighth notes, but ends with quarter notes, eighth-note triplets, and sixteenth notes. As the speed increases, Parker's harmony becomes more

³⁷ This use of half-step relationships echoes the A section melody, which ascends from $B\flat$ to $B\sharp$ and back again.

³⁸ Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 107. Some notes and chords in the example above differ from those in Woideck's transcription. After careful listening and playback, however, the present author believes that the notes and chords in this transcription are correct.

complex, changing from simple triads—(D⁷) D₄-A₄-D₅—to chords with multiple alterations and extensions—(G^{13♭5♭9}) E₅-D_{♭5}-B₄-A_{♭4}-F₄. This is a complicated phrase; as Woideck notes, Parker prepared it beforehand.³⁹ It is impressive for its harmonic sophistication, but also for its rhythmic variety, speed, and the ease with which Parker performs it.

Blues Figures

The third characteristic of Parker’s harmonic approach is his use of the blues. In several places, Parker uses bluesy material to color and supplant the written chords. Parker’s use of the blues is more than just an approach to harmony, however. It is an integral part of his solo playing. As scholars like Woideck note, there is a “profound sense of the blues permeating [Parker’s] music.”⁴⁰ “Bluesiness” is “associated with Charlie Parker’s mature and best-known music,” and contributes to the “compelling nature” of his solo playing.⁴¹

³⁹ Ibid., 107, 109. A version of this phrase can be found on both takes of “Red Cross,” as well as Parker’s solo on “Shaw Nuff,” recorded with Dizzy Gillespie the following year.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 55.

⁴¹ Ibid., 54.

Parker employs bluesy material throughout his “Red Cross” solo. In this context, “bluesy material” refers both to bent thirds, fifths, and sevenths, and to any figures and licks that include these tones.⁴² In Parker’s single-chorus solo, bluesy material appears in six separate places.⁴³ Parker uses it in every A section (twice per section), including the beginning of each A section (Example 42).

(0:41) 1st A section
 B \flat Gm 7 Cm 7 F 7 B \flat

(0:50) 2nd A section
 B \flat Gm 7 Cm 7

(1:09) 3rd A section
 B \flat Gm 7 Cm 7 F 7 B \flat

Example 42: Parker’s use of bluesy material in the A sections of “Red Cross”

The openings of Parker’s first and third A sections (mm. 1–3, 25–27) are related, containing a bent blue fifth followed by a long note on the fourth scale degree. The opening to Parker’s second A section (m. 8–10) contains bent major

⁴² A “lick” is a “brief melodic cell” or “motive,” often containing “blue notes [that] release into a strong chord tone.” Berg, *Essentials of Jazz Theory*, 36, 40.

⁴³ See mm. 1–3, 4–5, 8–10, 13–15, 25–27, 31–32 in the transcription (Appendix C). Most of these specific examples are shown and discussed below.

and minor thirds. On the bent major third (m. 9, b. 1), Parker's pitch bend is long and pronounced, continuing for the full duration of the note. In each of these examples, Parker's use of blue notes is conspicuous. By beginning each A section (and therefore his solo) with bluesy material, Parker places the blues front and center, and reinforces the solo form.⁴⁴

Parker's blues figures unfold over several chords, effectively supplanting the standard "I Got Rhythm" harmonies (Example 42, above). Starting on the off-beat of four of m. 1, for example, Parker performs a five-beat blues figure ($E\flat_4$ - $E\flat_4$ - $D\flat_4$ - $E\flat_4$ - $D\flat_4$ - $B\flat_3$). While some of these pitches are chord tones,⁴⁵ Parker does not attempt to connect one chord to another by step. The blues figure "glides" over the written chords G^{m7} - C^{m7} - F^7 - $B\flat^7$, softening the tonal differences between them and reinforcing a generic $B\flat$ major tonality.

In addition to his standalone blues figures—where blue notes are prominently placed—Parker inserts individual blue notes within longer phrase segments. This adds a slight blues flavor to lines that would otherwise not have them.

⁴⁴ The B section of Parker's solo does not contain bluesy material.

⁴⁵ For instance, $E\flat$ is a note in the $B\flat$ blues scale, but it is also a chord tone of C^{m7} and F^7 (m. 2).

One way that Parker does this is by alternating bent blue thirds with major thirds (Example 43):

Musical notation for Example 43, showing a sequence of chords and intervals. The notation is in a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of two flats. The time signature is 3/4. The sequence of chords is B \flat , Gm 7 , Cm 7 , F 7 , and B \flat . The intervals are labeled as $\flat 3$, $\sharp 3$, and $\flat 3$. A triplet of eighth notes is marked with a '3' and a bracket. A measure rest is marked with a '3/4' and a bracket. A measure with a whole note is marked with an asterisk (*).

Example 43: Parker’s use of blue thirds in “Red Cross”

Parker also alternates thirds in a more sophisticated way. In one section, Parker switches back and forth between accented major and minor thirds over the course of three measures (Example 44).⁴⁶

Musical notation for Example 44, showing a sequence of chords and intervals. The notation is in a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of two flats. The time signature is 3/4. The sequence of chords is B \flat^7 , E \flat^7 , B \flat , and F 7 . The intervals are labeled as $\sharp 3$, $\flat 3$, $\flat 3$, and $\sharp 3$. A triplet of eighth notes is marked with a '3' and a bracket. A measure with a triplet of eighth notes is marked with a '13' and a bracket.

Example 44: Parker’s use of blue thirds in “Red Cross” 2

In the second full measure (m. 14, above), Parker accents the pitch D \flat_4 three separate times. D \flat_4 is the seventh of an E \flat^7 chord, but it also a blue third in

⁴⁶ Parker’s use of accents in this line is discussed in the [Accentuation](#) section, above.

the context of $B\flat$ major. The melodic motion from $D\sharp_4$ to $D\flat_4$ (see the dotted line above the staff) is both a bluesy lowering of a major third to a minor third, and a 3-7 chord tone resolution (from the third of $B\flat^7$ to the seventh of $E\flat^7$).

In a third example, Parker embeds a blues figure within a longer bebop line (Example 45):

Example 45: Parker's embedding of a blues figure in "Red Cross"

At the beginning of the phrase (m. 4), Parker highlights the upper structure of a $B\flat^7$ dominant chord. This includes an $A\flat_4$ (the seventh of $B\flat^7$) on beat three. In the next measure (m.5), Parker inserts a blues figure (indicated with a square bracket above the staff). The figure consists predominantly of notes belonging to the $B\flat$ blues scale: 5-4- $\flat 5$ -4-2-1- $\flat 7$ (over $B\flat^7$).

Parker strengthens the blues feeling with a sixteenth-note triplet containing an $E\sharp_4$ (a blue fifth) on beat three. The figure then ends with the

pitches $B\flat_3$ and $A\flat_3$. These two pitches are both the root and lowered seventh of $B\flat$, and part of a linear descent that resolves to G_3 (the third of $E\flat$) on m. 6.⁴⁷

The above examples show how frequently Parker uses bluesy material, and how closely integrated the blues is with his other harmonic approaches.

Sound and Inflection

An essential part of Parker's musical personality is his saxophone sound. This is perhaps the most important aspect of Parker's execution, since it is through his sound that his musical ideas are expressed and conveyed. As jazz critics and scholars have noted, a musician's sound is one of the most important elements of their musical style.⁴⁸

Discussions of sound and tone quality figure prominently in the Parker literature. Owens describes Parker's saxophone sound as having "a hard, brittle edge, rich in upper partials [and] far removed from the sweetness produced by

⁴⁷ This is another 7-3 chord tone resolution.

⁴⁸ In the jazz literature, a "personal sound" is often described as an essential and highly sought-after musical characteristic. Eric Nisenson, for instance, writes that establishing "your own distinctive sound" is "the most important thing in jazz" and a prerequisite "to be a great jazz artist." Quoted in Paul Rinzler, *The Contradictions of Jazz* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2008), 19–20.

older alto saxophonists such as Johnny Hodges or Benny Carter.”⁴⁹ Woideck agrees with Owens’s description, noting a “consensus among critics” that Parker’s “timbral concept differs from the richness and sensuousness of the prevalent models of Hodges and Carter.”⁵⁰ For Woideck, Parker’s saxophone sound is “streamlined,” “stripped-down,” and “cutting.”⁵¹

The above timbral descriptions are mostly supported by Parker’s “Red Cross” performance. As Woideck argues, there is no hint of “sensuousness” in Parker’s solo playing. Parker’s saxophone tone is “streamlined,” but the “hard, brittle edge” that Owens refers to is less apparent. This discrepancy may be due to the early date. “Red Cross” was recorded in 1944, right at the beginning of Parker’s mature musical period. The timbral divide between Parker and the swing-era alto saxophonists was noticeable, but less pronounced than it would later become.

⁴⁹ Owens, “Charlie Parker,” 1:15.

⁵⁰ Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 56.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 56, 84, 133.

In “Red Cross,” Parker’s saxophone sound is full and wide. Despite its fullness and width, however, Parker’s sound is controlled and does not “spread.”⁵² For the most part, Parker’s saxophone sound is consistent throughout the range of the instrument, although slight differences between registers exist. His tone is broadest in the low and middle registers, especially with the notes directly below middle C.⁵³ Parker’s tone thins somewhat in the upper register and lacks brilliance in the palm keys. This can be heard on the bridge of the “Red Cross” melody statement.⁵⁴

As he does with rhythm and dynamics, Parker makes frequent changes to his saxophone sound. He does this using a variety of timbral inflections. These timbral inflections draw attention to particular notes, add color to Parker’s phrases, and contribute to the solo’s unpredictable musical texture. The inflections

⁵² A “spread” saxophone tone is very wide and full, almost to the point of being out of control. This type of sound is sometimes seen as desirable, but may result in the loss of a “center or focus to the tone.” The tenor saxophone solo in Stitt’s “Ready, Set, Jump” (1:39–2:20) is an example of a spread saxophone tone. Richard Colwell and Michael P. Hewitt, *The Teaching of Instrumental Music*, 4th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2016), 182–183.

⁵³ That is, from low F on the alto saxophone to middle C (A \flat ₃–E \flat ₄ in concert pitch).

⁵⁴ The bridge can be found at 0:23–0:32 on the recording. For an example of Parker’s thinning upper register, listen to the high E (a concert G₅) in the third and fourth measure of the B section melody (0:25–0:27).

include vibrato, scoops and bends, ghost notes, air impulses, and small changes in embouchure.

Pitch bends are by far the most common of the inflections, occurring in every phrase of the “Red Cross” solo. The pitch bends vary in length and depth, but are most prominent (and most common) in lines containing blues figures.

Parker also uses air impulses for timbral coloration. Example 46 shows Parker attacking two notes with a sudden, strong burst of air (m. 4, b. 1; m. 6, b. 2). The burst of air on the second note ($B\flat_4$) is especially strong, causing the saxophone tone to flare and distort.

(0:41) $B\flat$ Gm^7 Cm^7 F^7 $B\flat$ Gm^7 Cm^7 F^7

phrase segment ends on weak, unaccented note

$(B\flat_3-C_5)$ sudden, strong attack

$B\flat^7$ 3 $E\flat$ ($G_3-B\flat_4$) $A\flat^7$

sudden, strong attack

Example 46: Parker’s use of air impulses on “Red Cross”

In both instances above, Parker’s air accents occur on high notes following a decrease in intensity and a descending melodic line. The result is a three-fold

contrast: in timbre, in dynamics (from soft to loud), and in range ($B\flat_3$ to C_5 , G_3 to $B\flat_4$).

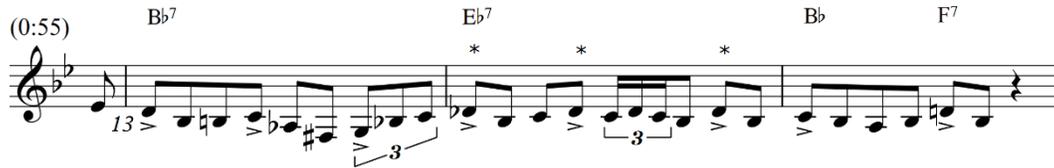
Parker’s ghost notes are used most effectively in his prepared B section phrase. In the second part of this phrase (Example 47), Parker deemphasizes the lowest pitches, causing the bottom of each arpeggio to become muffled or barely audible. As each arpeggio ascends, however, his notes rapidly increase in intensity, creating a pronounced dynamic contrast. Parker’s ghost notes also coincide with faster rhythms and denser harmonies, further contributing to the phrase’s effectiveness.



Example 47: Parker’s use of ghost notes on “Red Cross”

Occasionally, Parker makes small changes to his embouchure to bring out certain notes within a phrase. In one such phrase, Parker accents a series of notes over the course of three measures (Example 48). Three of the accented notes are blue notes ($D\flat_4$, m. 14). When Parker plays these notes, he makes minor adjustments to his embouchure, resulting in a slightly wider and more “open”

tone.⁵⁵ These subtle adjustments draw attention to the accented pitches and strengthen the blues feeling of the line.⁵⁶



Example 48: Parker's timbral changes on "Red Cross"

In "Red Cross," Parker uses vibrato sparingly. This is due perhaps to rhythmic considerations; the solo contains few notes longer than a quarter note. When Parker does use vibrato, it is slow and wide, though the precise speed and width vary from phrase to phrase. Like the vibrato of the swing soloists in "Ready, Set, Jump," Parker's vibrato is loose and expressive. While loose, however, Parker's vibrato is not nearly as wide or as manic as those of the swing soloists. Rather, Parker's vibrato has a relaxed and unhurried quality.

Parker's most striking examples of vibrato are found at the beginning of Parker's first and last A sections (Example 49). In both sections, Parker adds

⁵⁵ The slight change in openness is due to a change of voicing that can be likened to the difference in the syllables "aye" and "awe."

⁵⁶ For more analysis of this phrase, see Example 33 and Example 44, above.

vibrato to a sustained $E\flat_4$ in the second measure (mm. 2 and 26). The vibrato strengthens the effect of Parker’s blues figure, and is slow and broad.

The image displays three staves of musical notation for Charlie Parker's "Red Cross". The first staff, starting at 0:41, shows a melodic line with notes on a staff with a key signature of two flats and a 4/4 time signature. Chords above the staff are $B\flat$, Gm^7 , Cm^7 , F^7 , $B\flat$, and Gm^7 . A box labeled "slow, broad" with a downward arrow points to the Cm^7 chord. The second staff, starting at 1:09, continues the melody with chords $B\flat$, Gm^7 , Cm^7 , F^7 , $B\flat$, Gm , Cm^7 , and F^7 . Boxes labeled "slow, broad" and "slow, narrow" with downward arrows point to the Cm^7 and F^7 chords respectively. The third staff, starting at 1:29, shows a melodic line with chords $B\flat^7$, $E\flat^7$, and $A\flat^7$. A box labeled "faster, narrower" with a downward arrow points to the $E\flat^7$ chord.

Example 49: Parker’s use of vibrato in “Red Cross”

In his last A section, Parker adds vibrato to two additional notes (mm. 28 and 30, above) that are not part of a blues figure. The vibrato on these notes is executed differently. This vibrato is faster and narrower, while Parker’s “bluesy” vibrato is slow and broad.

Conclusion

Charlie Parker’s recording of “Red Cross” is a mature work by a young artist who was already pushing musical boundaries in 1944. Analysis of his solo reveals a highly advanced improvisational style marked by sophisticated

approaches to rhythm, harmony, and phrase construction. Analysis also reveals a solo that is grounded in the blues, executed with virtuosic technique, and supported by a deep and elastic swing feel.

Parker's solo consists of long eighth-note lines that are embellished and broken up by other rhythms. These rhythms include triplet and sixteenth-note ornaments, double-time lines, short bursts of notes interpolated within longer lines, and syncopated quarter and eighth-note passages. Parker mixes these rhythms together throughout his solo, resulting in a dynamic and unpredictable rhythmic texture.

This rhythmic texture is reinforced by dynamic and unpredictable approaches to note placement and accentuation. Parker performs his phrases with a pronounced contrast between notes on and off the beat, leading to an exaggerated swing feel. Parker also varies his note placement within each phrase, pushing and pulling on individual notes for rhythmic effect. This effect is strengthened by Parker's approach to accentuation. Parker peppers his phrases with dynamic accents, creating further contrast and adding to the unpredictability of the solo's rhythmic texture.

Another essential characteristic of Parker's playing is his saxophone sound. Like his swing era forbears, Parker's tone is full and broad. Unlike them,

however, the tone is not rich and sensuous, but nimble and streamlined. As with other elements of his musical approach, Parker's sound constantly changes.

Throughout his solo, Parker executes a steady stream of timbral manipulations: vibrato, pitch bends, air impulses, ghost notes, and other subtle adjustments in embouchure. Through these manipulations, Parker draws attention to specific notes—blue notes especially—and makes his phrases more interesting.

The above musical elements form the core of Parker's musical personality in this piece. Parker combines these musical elements into a fluid and well-integrated whole, resulting in a modern, compelling, and mercurial improvisational style.

The content of Parker's solo—its use of harmony, rhythm, melody, and form—is as compelling and modern as its execution. This can be seen in Parker's approach to harmony. At times, Parker stays close to the standard chord progression by outlining chords at structurally significant parts of the song form. Parker also decorates and obscures the chords through a number of melodic devices, including chromatic embellishments, blue notes, wide leaps, and the use of non-chord tones on strong beats.

At other times, Parker departs from the standard harmonies, both through chord alteration and substitution, and through the interposition of bluesy material.

These methods allow Parker to color, supplant, and elide the preexisting “Rhythm changes,” while suffusing his solo with a blues feeling.

Taken as a whole, the above solo features constitute a mature and masterful musical statement. Parker’s “Red Cross” solo is imaginative and sophisticated. The solo is at once bluesy, complex, unpredictable, and adeptly performed. The solo is also evidence that, despite his young age, Parker had developed a unique musical style by 1944.

The preceding analysis has identified many features of this style. In so doing, it has elucidated the details of an improvisational style that Sonny Stitt was often accused of imitating, a style that critics likened to Stitt’s own mid-1940’s work.

CHAPTER XII

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS OF SELECT SOLOS FROM 1944 TO 1946

The preceding chapters contain detailed analyses of three Stitt and Parker solos recorded in the mid-1940s. The goal of these analyses has been to identify important features of these solos to shed light on Stitt and Parker's early musical styles. Now that several features have been identified, it is possible to compare them, and to assess the similarities and differences between Stitt and Parker's musical styles directly.

Review of Solos

“Ready, Set, Jump” and “Oop Bop Sh’Bam”

Musical analysis of Stitt's 1944 “Ready, Set, Jump” solo reveals the makings of a modern improvisational style. This style is reflected in specific musical features: long eighth-note lines; stretches of stepwise motion punctuated by eighth-note triplet arpeggios; the persistent use of chord tones on strong beats; frequent changes in melodic contour; a uniform approach to phrase lengths and phrase position; and a clear, understated saxophone tone. These musical features

are not found in the solos of Stitt's bandmates in the Tiny Bradshaw Orchestra. They are unique to Stitt, suggesting a deliberate and rehearsed improvisational style.

Analysis of Stitt's 1946 "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" solo reveals a more fully developed style. Compared with his earlier effort on "Ready, Set, Jump," Stitt's "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" performance is surer, more virtuosic, and more consistently modern. Analysis also reveals the introduction of new musical elements, like rapid sixteenth-note figures and increased use of chromatic ornaments. These elements are present in Dizzy Gillespie and Milt Jackson's solos as well. This suggests that Stitt improved as a musician between 1944 and 1946, and internalized the features of the New York bebop style.

Despite the introduction of these elements, Stitt's "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" solo is best seen as a development of, and not a departure from, his earlier musical style. While the double-time figures and chromatic embellishments were new to Stitt's rhythmic and harmonic language, they were used in familiar ways: the construction of long, predominately stepwise lines; and the targeting of chord tones on strong beats.

Analysis also reveals a fleshing out of musical concepts seen in Stitt's earlier solo. In "Oop Bop Sh'Bam," Stitt's approaches to rhythm, harmony, and

form are similar to those used in “Ready, Set, Jump.” However, in “Oop Bop Sh’Bam,” these approaches are better defined and more consistently carried out. For example: Stitt continuously puts eighth and sixteenth notes “on top” of the beat; he places double-time passages and blues figures adjacent to eight-measure formal divisions; and he consistently accents notes on beats one and three. Stitt’s approach to timbre is also more refined. Compared with “Ready, Set, Jump,” Stitt’s tone is dryer and more accurate in pitch, and his use of vibrato and other expressive devices is more restrained.

“Red Cross”

Analysis of Parker’s 1944 “Red Cross” solo reveals the advanced improvisational style of a young radical. The improvisational style is expressed through a battery of well-integrated musical approaches, as well as through modern musical features like long lines, double-time passages, chromatic embellishment, and rapid changes in melodic contour. Each of these features is performed in a relaxed and virtuosic manner. Despite the complexity of his style, Parker’s execution is fluid and natural, resulting in a polished and engaging solo.

The complexity of Parker’s solo is most clearly seen in the sophistication and variety of his musical approaches. For instance, Parker treats chords in a

variety of ways: referencing their chord tones; obscuring them through chromaticism, syncopation, and leaps to non-chord tones; changing them through chord alteration and substitution; and replacing them with bluesy material. Parker's rhythmic approach is similarly brimming with ideas. Eighth notes form the foundation of Parker's melodic lines, but these notes are broken up by other rhythmic values—quarter notes, sixteenth notes, eighth and sixteenth note triplets, syncopated eighth-note passages, long notes, and rests—leading to a constantly changing and unpredictable rhythmic texture.

The solo is effective for two additional reasons. First, Parker often changes multiple musical parameters at once. Changes in rhythmic values, for example, coincide and overlap with changes in accentuation, note placement, timbre, and melodic contour. Second, Parker balances the solo's complexity with bluesiness, timbral manipulation, and an exaggerated swing feeling. By changing multiple parameters simultaneously, Parker makes them more effective and keeps his phrases interesting and unpredictable. Through bluesiness, timbral manipulation, and swing feeling, Parker keeps his solo grounded and expressive, offsetting its complexity.

Similarities

Stitt and Parker's improvisational styles share many similarities. The solos contain the following features: long, ornamented eighth-note lines; triplet chord arpeggios; a generally linear melodic contour; blues figures (and bent thirds) at the beginning of formal sections; chromatic embellishments (passing tones, appoggiatura, and neighbor tones); few long notes; use of the bebop dominant scale; and double-time rhythm. Phrases in each solo also contain an abundance of chord tones, most often on strong beats.

Some of the features listed above—triplet chord arpeggios, use of the bebop dominant scale, etc.—relate to tonal organization. That is, they refer to what tones were used, and in what order. Similarities in tonal organization are important to identify, because critics accused Stitt of borrowing Parker's actual notes. Gary Giddins wrote that Stitt "adapted" several aspects of Parker's style, including "a lexicon of his riffs."¹ Dan Morgenstern wrote that Stitt "spoke Bird fluently, like a native" and came "amazingly close... to Parker in terms of... vocabulary."²

¹ Giddins, "Work for Hire," 66.

² Morgenstern and Meyer, *Living with Jazz*.

Stitt's "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" solo contains some of the same "riffs" and "vocabulary" that Parker used, both in his "Red Cross" solo and in his solo playing more generally. In his dissertation on Parker, Owens catalogues Parker's most frequently used melodic patterns, which he calls "the building blocks of his improvised melodies," or Parker's "motives."³ Stitt's "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" solo contains several of these motives. Stitt's solo also contains motives that Parker frequently used when soloing over "Rhythm changes," the chord progression on which the harmony of "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" is based.⁴

The relevant melodic motives are shown in the musical examples below.

On the left-hand side of each example is one of Parker's motives along with Owens's motivic designation.⁵ On the right-hand side of each example are

³ Owens, "Charlie Parker," 1:viii. In standard jazz theory terminology, these "motives" would be referred to as melodic "patterns" or "cells." They are short melodic fragments that a soloist uses and combines in the construction of a melodic line. "Discrete patterns and melodic cells" constitute "the building blocks of improvisations." For pianist Barry Harris, melodic cells were "short figures of eighth notes and sixteenth notes occasionally embellished with eighth-note triplets and sixteenth-note triplets." Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz*, 101, 150. In his later book, *Bebop: The Music and Its Players*, Owens replaces "motives" with the term "melodic formulas."

⁴ Owens discusses the most common motives by key and composition type. See "B-Flat 'I Got Rhythm' Motives" (Owens, "Charlie Parker," 1:103–107). Stitt's "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" solo also contains examples of "E-Flat Major Motives" (Ibid., 1:84–85). This is significant because the "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" bridge—where Stitt's solo begins—is in E \flat major.

⁵ A complete list of Parker's "motives" can be found in Ibid., 2:1–10.

excerpts from Stitt's "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" solo, with horizontal brackets to indicate which motive appears.

Example 50 consists of three staves of musical notation in B-flat major, illustrating the use of Parker motive M.1A. The first staff shows M.1A at measures 1:23 (Ebmaj7) and 1:26 (Gm7). The second staff shows M.1A at measure 1:35 (Bb) and G7. The third staff shows M.1A at measure 1:27 (C7) and Cm7. Brackets and labels identify the occurrences of M.1A, which is characterized by ascending arpeggios and triplets.

Example 50: Stitt's use of Parker motives on "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" (ascending arpeggios)

Example 51 consists of two staves of musical notation in B-flat major, illustrating the use of Parker motive M.2A. The first staff shows M.2A at measure 1:34 (Bb7). The second staff shows M.2A at measure 1:21 (Bb7). Brackets and labels identify the occurrences of M.2A, which is characterized by triplet ornaments.

Example 51: Stitt's use of Parker motives on "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" (triplet ornaments)

Example 52: Stitt’s use of Parker motives on “Oop Bop Sh’Bam” (connected chord arpeggios)

Example 53: Stitt’s use of Parker motives on “Oop Bop Sh’Bam” (chromaticism)

In the examples above, most of the identified motives are identical to Parker’s versions (i.e., they are the same note for note). Other motives have slight differences in rhythm (e.g., they contain sixteenth notes instead of triplets) or in pitch (e.g., they differ by a single note or accidental). The examples demonstrate that Stitt’s “Oop Bop Sh’Bam” solo contains material that is identical to material Parker used over the same chords. This supports the argument that Stitt “applied the same [melodic formulas] to the same harmonic situations that Parker did, and... often connected them in similar ways.”⁶

⁶ Owens, *Bebop*, 48.

Another important similarity is found in Stitt and Parker's saxophone tones. This may be surprising given the analysis above, which described their sounds in different language: Stitt's sound was described as "dry," "clean," and "restrained," while Parker's sound was described as "streamlined," "full," and "expressive."

Despite this difference in timbral descriptors, Stitt and Parker's saxophone tones share a striking resemblance.⁷ The resemblance is heard most clearly between Stitt's "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" solo and Parker's "Red Cross" solo. In these two solos, both musicians play with a focused saxophone sound. While there are differences between Stitt's and Parker's approaches to ghost notes and other timbral inflections, the two saxophonists' tones are clear, centered in pitch, and are not gruff or spread. Stitt and Parker also use vibrato sparingly.

The clarity, directness, and comparatively unadorned character of their saxophone sounds reflect a modern conception of saxophone tone. Because of this shared timbral conception, Stitt and Parker sound more like each other than like

⁷ The differences between Stitt and Parker's saxophone tones are summarized in the following subsection.

the generation of “sweet,” “rich,” and “sensuous” swing alto saxophonists who preceded them.⁸

Differences

There are also many differences between Stitt and Parker’s improvisational styles. These differences are heard across various musical parameters—accentuation, dynamics, note placement, phrase beginning and end points, rhythmic values, timbral inflection, and use of chord tones.

Many of these differences are the result of more overarching musical traits. In the two solos analyzed above, Stitt’s improvisational style is characterized by consistency, uniformity, and clarity. In the “Red Cross” solo, Parker’s improvisational style is characterized by spontaneity, variety, and complexity. These musical traits are wide-ranging in their effects, impacting an array of musical parameters and improvisational approaches.

For instance, while Stitt’s improvisational approaches (to phrasing, rhythm, timbre, etc.) remain relatively consistent in each of his two solos, Parker’s improvisational approaches frequently change. While Stitt’s accent

⁸ These timbral descriptors are taken from Owens, “Charlie Parker,” 1:15; Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 56.

patterns are uniform—there are pronounced dynamic accents on the first note of most four-note groupings—Parker’s accents vary from measure to measure.

While Stitt’s eighth and sixteenth notes reliably push ahead of the beat, Parker pushes notes forward and pulls them back for effect, resulting in a rhythmic feel that is alternatively tight and loose. While Stitt consistently targets chord tones on the beat, tracing the contours of each harmony as it appears, Parker employs a variety of melodic and harmonic techniques, most of which do not highlight the chords but rather obscure them. While Stitt’s phrases occupy a narrow dynamic range, Parker’s phrases are more volatile, containing large dynamic changes in each measure.

Parker’s “Red Cross” solo is also more experimental and complex than either of Stitt’s two solos. Both saxophonists employ chromatic embellishments, blues material, and double-time rhythm, but Parker’s approaches to these devices are more aggressive and involved.

The B section of Parker’s “Red Cross” solo, for instance, contains more harmonic and rhythmic variation than anything in Stitt’s “Ready, Set, Jump” and

“Oop Bop Sh’Bam” solos.⁹ Parker’s B section also contains changes in multiple musical parameters at once (chord alteration, melodic contour, rhythmic values, timbre). This level of harmonic detail, the “extraordinary rhythmic diversity,”¹⁰ and the synchronizing of musical parameters are characteristic of Parker’s phrases, and combine to create an experimental and complex solo. However, these features are not characteristic of Stitt’s improvisational style. Despite sharing a similar tonal and rhythmic language with Parker, Stitt organizes his phrases in a more logical and orderly way. This results in solos that are clearer and more straightforward than Parker’s, rather than experimental and complex.

Again, this contrast can be heard in terms of specific musical approaches. While Parker’s phrasing and execution tend to obscure the established harmony, rhythmic pulse, and form, Stitt’s phrasing and execution tend to reinforce them. In Stitt’s “Oop Bop Sh’Bam” solo, for example, chromatic pitches consistently resolve to chord tones, dynamic accents land on consecutive strong beats, and double-time figures are located near the boundaries of eight-measure formal units.

⁹ The bridge of Parker’s solo is discussed in the Chord Substitution subsection of the “Red Cross” analysis, above.

¹⁰ Jerry Coker, *Listening to Jazz* (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1982), 111.

Through his unpredictable and varied style, Parker obscures these solo elements.

Through his consistent and logical style, Stitt presents and positions them clearly.

Despite both possessing direct and focused saxophone sounds, Stitt and Parker have dissimilar timbral approaches. Stitt's tone is clear, dry, and comparatively uninflected. These qualities result in a clean and unadorned saxophone sound that reinforces the clarity of Stitt's musical ideas. By contrast, Parker's tone is less clear and more complex. As with other elements of his solo playing, Parker's sound is decorated and frequently changes.

While Stitt takes a reserved approach to timbral inflection—especially in his “Oop Bop Sh’Bam” solo—Parker is looser and more outwardly expressive. Parker's melodic lines are filled with pitch bends, ghost notes, and timbral shading. His vibrato speeds and widths vary more than Stitt's do, and his use of timbral inflection to embellish bluesy material is far more frequent.

Conclusion

The preceding chapters have been devoted to analysis of Stitt and Parker solos recorded in the mid-1940s. The purpose of this analysis has been to uncover musical features of Stitt and Parker solos to shed light on Stitt's early improvisational style and reputation as a Parker imitator.

Through a careful examination that took multiple musical parameters into account, the preceding analysis identified key features of a handful of Stitt and Parker solos. It is now possible to compare these features to draw inferences about Stitt and Parker's approaches to improvisation and the characteristics of their early musical styles.

Certain key musical features were found in each of Stitt and Parker's solos. Other key musical features were found in some solos, but not others. To the extent that they accurately reflect Stitt and Parker's improvisational styles in the mid-1940s, these musical features show that (1) Stitt's early improvisational style was clearly similar to Parker's style. The musical features also show that (2) Stitt's early style was distinct from Parker's style, although in ways that may not be apparent to an untrained listener.

The similarities include Stitt and Parker's musical vocabulary—melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic—and saxophone sound.

Similarities in musical vocabulary refer primarily to the use of identical melodic and rhythmic material in similar harmonic situations. Stitt and Parker's solos often contain identical pitches, in a similar order, over the same chords. Similarities in musical vocabulary also refer to aspects of phrasing and harmony. These aspects include an inclination toward long eighth-note lines; a

predominately stepwise melodic contour interrupted by wide leaps and chord arpeggios; the frequent use of eighth- and sixteenth-note triplet ornaments; double-time passages; the outlining of chord tones, often on strong beats; and the use of chromatic ornamentation.

A similarity in saxophone sound refers, at its most basic level, to a likeness in tone. Stitt's tone in "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" (1946) is like Parker's tone in "Red Cross" (1944). Both are clear and focused. Fundamental pitches are easily discerned. Vibrato is sparingly used. Stitt and Parker share a "modern" conception of alto saxophone sound, in contrast to earlier—spread, sensuous, and rich—conceptions held by their swing era forbears.

The differences between Stitt and Parker's solos are less immediately apparent than the similarities. However, the differences are also more extensive.

In general, Stitt's solos are clear, uniform, and consistent, while Parker's solo is complex, varied, and unpredictable. These differences are evident across a wide variety of musical parameters, including accentuation, bluesy material, chord alteration and substitution, chromaticism, dynamics, melodic contour, note duration and placement, phrasing, swing feel, and timbral inflection. In Stitt's two solos, these parameters are handled in a mostly set way that maximizes clarity and does not detract from the melodic line. In Parker's solo, these parameters are

constantly manipulated, often in abrupt and spontaneous ways that intrude upon the listener's attention.

In Stitt's solo, for example: notes arrive ahead of the beat; accents fall on the first note of four-note groupings; phrase segments begin and end near formal boundaries; chord tones land on successive beats, reinforcing the underlying harmony; and melodic lines are performed with a clear and mostly uninflected saxophone tone. In Parker's solo, by contrast, each of these parameters are manipulated: note position and accentuation change throughout each phrase; phrase segments vary in position and length; chord tones are often played off the beat, or are avoided altogether; and timbral inflection is far more common.

The extent of these differences suggests that Stitt and Parker differ not only in their treatment of individual musical parameters, but in execution, musical personality, and solo architecture. Stitt's solos reflect a tamer and more logical improvisational approach. His solos are tighter, cleaner, and more restrained. Stitt's delivery is also more consistent and faithful to the written chords and song structure. By contrast, Parker's solo reflects a more radical and volatile improvisational approach. His "Red Cross" solo is asymmetric, freewheeling, and unpredictable. While he underlines the written chords and song structure at many points in his solo, Parker freely departs from them at many others.

Stitt and Parker's solos also reflect a difference in playing ability. The "Ready, Set, Jump" and "Red Cross" solos—both recorded in 1944—suggest that Stitt and Parker were not musical equals. Parker's "Red Cross" solo is complex, sophisticated, and fluid, indicating a more advanced and mature musical style. Stitt's "Ready, Set, Jump" solo is competent, but not nearly as developed or sophisticated as "Red Cross." Stitt's later "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" solo is a noticeable improvement over his earlier work, but still does not match the depth and flexibility of Parker's approach.

The similarities between Stitt and Parker's improvisational styles are most evident when comparing Stitt's "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" solo to Parker's "Red Cross." However, the differences between Stitt and Parker's styles are also more apparent.

The most conspicuous similarities—the presence of Parker's musical vocabulary and the likeness in saxophone tone—are far more pronounced in "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" (1946). Other similarities with Parker's improvisational style—the use of chromatic ornaments, long eighth-note phrases, and triplet arpeggios—can be found in both of Stitt's solos. Certain other features associated with the bebop style, like double-time rhythm, are found in the "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" solo only.

The most distinctive elements of Stitt's style are also more pronounced in the later solo. Compared with "Ready, Set, Jump," Stitt's playing on "Oop Bop

Sh’Bam” is cleaner and more consistent. His eighth and sixteenth notes land almost uniformly ahead of the beat. His use of timbral manipulation is more conservative. Many of his phrases end on beats one or three. This suggests that even as Stitt became more like Parker in terms of musical vocabulary and sound, Stitt became less like him in aspects of form, phrasing, rhythm, and timbre.

The increased similarities and differences between Stitt and Parker’s styles coincide with important changes in Stitt’s career. Shortly after recording “Ready, Set, Jump,” Stitt left the Tiny Bradshaw Orchestra and moved to New York City. In New York, Stitt had greater access to Parker and his music. He began working with Parker’s contemporaries, and even replaced him in two bands (the Billy Eckstine and Dizzy Gillespie Orchestras). At the time, Stitt was still in his early twenties. It was in this milieu that his improvisational style developed, and that the similarities to Parker began to show.

This was also a period when many other young musicians were influenced by Parker. For example, when a young Miles Davis moved to New York in 1945, he “spent [his] first week... and [a] month’s allowance looking for Charlie

Parker.”¹¹ Saxophonist Phil Woods said of this period: “I’m one of Bird’s children, absolutely... You’ve got to remember... it was *impossible* to be in that milieu—especially if you were an alto player—and not be touched by Bird.”¹²

The period had additional significance for Stitt’s career. Stitt’s work with Gillespie led to attention from New York music critics and comparisons of Stitt to Parker in print. Some of the critical comparisons correlate with the similarities between Stitt and Parker’s improvisational styles identified above.

For example, in April 1946 (one month before “Oop Bop Sh’Bam”), Stitt performed with Gillespie at Town Hall in New York City. A contemporaneous review stated that “young Stitt... sounds and looks amazingly like Charlie and has better execution.”¹³ This statement is consistent with the preceding analysis. The reviewer’s claim that Stitt “sounds” like Parker correlates with Stitt’s Parker-like saxophone sound on “Oop Bop Sh’Bam.” The claim that Stitt “has better execution” than Parker correlates with both the clarity and consistency of Stitt’s saxophone playing and improvisational approach, and the looseness and unpredictability of Parker’s playing and approach.

¹¹ Quoted in Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 31.

¹² Quoted in Owens, *Bebop*, 48. A fuller discussion of Parker’s influence on young New York saxophonists is found in Chapter II (Bebop and the Influence of Charlie Parker), above.

¹³ Vail, *Dizzy Gillespie*, 38.

Recent scholars continue to compare Stitt's work with Gillespie to Parker's early recorded work. In his book *Bebop: The Music and Its Players*, Owens follows an extended discussion of Parker's musical style with a brief discussion of Stitt's.¹⁴ After introducing Stitt as one of the first of Parker's "children," Owens claims that "Stitt's 1946 recordings contain very little that Parker had not already played."¹⁵ While Owens's claim may be hyperbolic, it is partially supported by the preceding analysis, which revealed conspicuous similarities in musical vocabulary between Stitt's 1946 "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" solo and Parker's earlier work.

It is important to note that the similarities just mentioned—musical vocabulary and saxophone sound—are among the most recognizable aspects of a musician's style. Similarities in vocabulary and sound can be discerned by ear, without resorting to in-depth musical analysis. It is not surprising, then, that critics who reference Stitt's mid-1940's work often make mention of them.

The more distinctive elements of Stitt's improvisational style—those that relate to musical personality and solo architecture—are more abstract and difficult to observe. Consequently, critics often mention Stitt's notes and saxophone sound,

¹⁴ Owens, *Bebop*, 28–45 ("The Parker Style"), 46–48 ("Alto Saxophonists").

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.

but not his note placement or penchant for chord tones on strong beats. The observation that Stitt had “better execution” than Parker, however, suggests that some critics were on some level aware of the differences between Stitt and Parker in this regard.

The goal of the preceding chapters has been to analyze Stitt and Parker solos from the mid-1940s to shed light on Stitt’s critical reputation as a Parker imitator. Musical analysis of Stitt solos from 1944 and 1946 revealed similarities with Parker’s style that become more pronounced over time. The increasing similarities suggest that Stitt’s improvisational style became more like Parker’s during this period. The preceding musical analysis, therefore, is at least consistent with Stitt’s critical reputation as a Parker imitator.

The preceding analysis also lends support to contemporaneous critics who likened Stitt’s mid-1940’s playing to Parker. In his “Oop Bop Sh’Bam” solo, Stitt’s musical vocabulary and saxophone sound are similar to Parker’s. Stitt and Parker’s solo also share numerous features that today are associated with the 1940’s New York bebop music style. This suggests that critics who compared Stitt to Parker were observing real similarities between the two.

The increased similarities between Stitt and Parker’s improvisational styles in the mid-1940s can be partially explained by the musical atmosphere in

New York City and coincident changes in Stitt's career. Stitt's improvisational style became more like Parker's at a time when Parker had great influence on younger musicians, and when Stitt had regular access to Parker and his musical world.

As discussed in the Historical Analysis chapters above, later critics and musicians also observed differences between Stitt and Parker. To these observers, Stitt was not merely a Parker imitator, but had an identifiable style of his own. For example, Dan Morgenstern argued that "as amazingly close as Stitt could come to Parker in terms of sound... speed... and vocabulary... there always was a fundamental difference."¹⁶

This, too, is supported by the preceding analysis. If Stitt's improvisational style became more Parker-like between 1944 and 1946, it also developed in a direction *away* from Parker. Compared with "Ready, Set, Jump," Stitt's 1946 "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" solo is cleaner, more consistent, and more precise. These changing characteristics may reflect a change or maturation in Stitt's improvisational style. However, these same characteristics indicate a departure from Parker's improvisational style, which on "Red Cross" was not clean,

¹⁶ Morgenstern and Meyer, *Living with Jazz*.

consistent, or precise, but rather spontaneous, varied, and unpredictable. The cleanness, consistency, and precision of Stitt's "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" solo suggests that even as Stitt adopted certain features of Parker's improvisational style, he was developing the contours of his own.

This chapter has dealt with Stitt and Parker solos from the mid-1940s. It is essential to consider this period. The mid-1940s coincide with Stitt's closer proximity to Parker, his first recordings, and major changes in his career. However, musical analysis of later solos is also needed. Analysis of solos after 1946 can help determine if and how Stitt's improvisational style continued to change. Musical analysis can also be used to assess whether Stitt retained his Parker-like musical vocabulary and saxophone sound, and whether he developed the more distinctive elements of his own improvisational style. In short, musical analysis can help determine if Stitt and Parker's improvisational styles converged or diverged over time.

The following chapters seek to address these problems. They are devoted to musical analyses of select Stitt and Parker solos recorded on the composition "Ko Ko" in the 1940s and 60s. Analysis of this material will allow for a fuller understanding of Stitt's improvisational style and its development. It will also

allow for direct comparison with Parker's style, shedding further light on Stitt's reputation as a talented Parker imitator.

CHAPTER XIII

MUSICAL ANALYSIS OF SELECT PARKER AND STITT SOLOS ON “KO KO”

The present chapter serves as an introduction to the composition “Ko Ko” and to the two musical analysis chapters that follow.

“Ko Ko” occupies a prominent place in Stitt and Parker’s career. Along with “Cherokee”—the composition upon which it is based—“Ko Ko” was performed and recorded by Stitt and Parker several times over a period of many years (and decades, in Stitt’s case). “Cherokee” and “Ko Ko” are also associated with Parker’s musical development in the 1940s, and with bebop music more generally. Because of their prominence in Stitt and Parker’s recorded oeuvre and their importance in bebop history, “Cherokee” and “Ko Ko” are among the most discussed and analyzed compositions in the Stitt and Parker literature.

Below is an introduction that discusses these two compositions in the context of Stitt and Parker’s careers. The introduction also discusses the importance of “Cherokee” and “Ko Ko” in bebop history and to Stitt and Parker’s musical relationship. The introduction closes with a discussion of the

compositional characteristics relevant to the musical analysis below. This introduction is followed by an analysis of two “Ko Ko” solos recorded by Parker and Stitt in 1945 and 1963.

As with the analysis of “Red Cross” above, this chapter relies on existing research for a fuller understanding of Parker’s musical style. Owens and Woideck’s works contain additional analyses of Parker’s “Cherokee” and “Ko Ko” solos. Their research informs the present study and is cited in the analysis below.

Introduction to “Cherokee”

“Cherokee” is a composition by British composer and bandleader Ray Noble. It was first recorded by Noble and his orchestra in 1938.¹ New arrangements of the piece were recorded by the Count Basie and Charlie Barnet orchestras the following year.² In these early recordings, “Cherokee” was performed as a big band instrumental in the swing style.

¹ Ray Noble and His Orchestra, “Cherokee,” Brunswick 8247, 1938, 78 rpm disc.

² Barnet’s version became a popular hit. The recordings have been reissued as Count Basie and His Orchestra, “Cherokee (Parts 1 & 2),” *Count Basie: Ken Burns Jazz*, Verve, 2000, CD; Charlie Barnet, “Cherokee,” *The Charlie Barnet Collection: 1935–1947*, Acrobat Music, 2014, 2 CDs.

In the 1940s, young musicians reimagined “Cherokee” as an aggressive, solo-driven piece for small ensembles. Through the influence of bebop pioneers like Charlie Parker, Bud Powell, and Sonny Stitt, “Cherokee” was transformed from a medium-tempo big band swing composition into “a show-off piece for beboppers” and an “up-tempo sparring number for jazz progressives.”³

“Cherokee” and Parker

“Cherokee” is closely tied to Charlie Parker’s musical development and the genesis of bebop. This association was described early on by jazz critics. In an article for *Down Beat* in 1949, Michael Levin and John S. Wilson wrote:

Charlie’s horn first came alive in a chili house on Seventh Avenue... Working over *Cherokee* with [guitarist Bidley] Fleet, Charlie suddenly found that by using higher intervals of a chord as a melody line and backing them with the appropriately related [chord] changes, he could play this thing he had been “hearing.” Fleet picked it up behind him and bop was born.⁴

³ Ted Gioia, *The Jazz Standards: A Guide to the Repertoire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 61.

⁴ Quoted in Owens, *Bebop*, 38.

This story has been described as Parker’s “great epiphany.”⁵ It is one of the most frequently cited anecdotes in the bebop literature. Over multiple retellings, the “Cherokee” story has become both a crucial account of Parker’s musical development, and “one of the key ‘quotations’ used to explain the origins of bebop.”⁶

By the early 1940s, “Cherokee” was part of Parker’s regular performance repertoire. Parker played the composition in a variety of musical settings, including public performances and informal jam sessions.⁷ He also recorded the composition on several occasions, including twice by 1943.⁸ Parker’s affinity for

⁵ Gary Giddins, quoted in DeVeaux, *Birth of Bebop*, 189. In later versions, the story was changed from a third-person to a first-person perspective (as though Parker were narrating the story himself).

⁶ Owens, *Bebop*, 38–39. Critics have since called various aspects of the story into question. As Owens notes, the quotation was later rewritten “so that it seemed to come from Parker’s mouth” (Ibid., 38; cf., Shapiro and Hentoff, *Hear Me Talkin’ to Ya*, 354). Owens further notes that “it is a fuzzy statement... [since] harmonic enrichment of this sort was part of jazz for years before 1939” (*Bebop*, 39). Brian Priestley observes that playing on higher intervals of a chord was not unique to the beboppers, and “the published song of *Cherokee* [abounds] in 13ths” (Priestley, *Chasin’ the Bird*, 117, 120).

⁷ Parker’s experience with “Cherokee” predates his move to New York City. Bassist Gene Ramey, who worked with Parker first in the Jay McShann Orchestra and later in New York City, said “we used to jam ‘Cherokee’ a lot” (quoted in Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 79).

⁸ The two recordings are from a Kansas City studio session in 1942 or 1943, and a live bootleg of a jam session at Monroe’s Uptown House in 1942 (“Charlie Parker Discography”; Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 83, 86).

“Cherokee” has been noted by jazz scholars. DeVaux and Woideck, for instance, describe it as “Parker’s favorite pop song showpiece,”⁹ “his favorite test-piece,” and “his signature tune.”¹⁰

A second “Cherokee” anecdote highlights the revolutionary character of Parker’s playing style. While working with Jay McShann, Parker was often featured on a head arrangement of “Cherokee.” The arrangement provided abundant solo space for Parker, and could “[last] up to half an hour.”¹¹ During one performance at the Savoy Ballroom in 1942, Parker’s “Cherokee” solo was broadcast over the radio and had a “pronounced effect on New York musicians.”¹²

Trumpeter Howard McGhee described the experience:

[A]ll of a sudden I heard this horn jump through there... when I heard this cat play, I said, “Who in the hell is that? I ain’t heard nobody play like *that*.” Of all the alto players I knew—I knew everybody—I didn’t know anybody who played like what was comin’ through the radio. We just listened till it was over with, then we heard the guy say it was at the Savoy, so that night, the whole band, we all went to the Savoy to hear this horn player, what this cat was playin’... He shattered the whole band. We all came unglued...¹³

⁹ DeVaux, *Birth of Bebop*, 431.

¹⁰ Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 24, 115.

¹¹ DeVaux, *Birth of Bebop*, 194.

¹² Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 23.

¹³ Gitler, *Swing to Bop*, 71–72, emphasis in original.

This anecdote from McGhee is instructive. It reveals both the effect that Parker had on other musicians (“he shattered the whole band”), and Parker’s use of “Cherokee” as a vehicle to showcase his unique talents.¹⁴

“Cherokee” and Stitt

Stitt’s connection to “Cherokee” is similarly well-established. The composition was part of his regular performing repertoire throughout his mature career. Stitt’s connection to “Cherokee” is also referenced several times in the jazz literature. As anecdotes about Stitt’s musical encounters with trumpeter Lee Morgan and saxophonist Art Pepper make clear, Stitt had a fondness for the composition and often called it in live performances.¹⁵

“Cherokee” also appears several times in Stitt’s recorded works. Stitt first recorded the piece in 1950, a few years after his first studio recordings in New

¹⁴ DeVeaux notes that Parker’s “Cherokee” performance “had a tremendous impact” on musicians like McGhee who “found Parker’s command of technique and expression nothing short of overpowering” (DeVeaux, *Birth of Bebop*, 200). Parker’s live recording of “Cherokee” at Monroe’s Uptown House (referenced above) is also from this period.

¹⁵ These musical encounters are discussed below.

York City.¹⁶ He recorded the piece a second time in 1957.¹⁷ In 1958, Stitt performed “Cherokee” at the Newport Jazz Festival; a recording of this performance was later released.¹⁸ Stitt made his final studio recording of “Cherokee” in December 1981, one year before his death.¹⁹

Stitt often performed “Cherokee” in competitive situations with other horn players. He used “Cherokee” as a “bebop test piece,” a medium for head-to-head matchups between him and other musicians.²⁰ The goal of these tests was to impel experienced players to higher musical levels, while showing inexperienced players their need to work harder. The Lee Morgan and Art Pepper anecdotes provide two examples of this:

In his biography of trumpeter Lee Morgan, Tom Perchard and his interviewees recount a career-changing encounter between Stitt and a then-fledgling Morgan. The anecdote shows how Stitt used “Cherokee” to test other

¹⁶ Rereleased as Stitt, “Cherokee,” in *Stitt’s Bits*.

¹⁷ This version was originally released on the LP *Sonny Stitt with the New Yorkers* for Roost Records. It has since been rereleased as Sonny Stitt, “Cherokee,” in *The Complete Roost Sonny Stitt Studio Sessions*, Mosaic MD9-208, 2001, CD box set.

¹⁸ Rereleased as Sonny Stitt, “Cherokee,” *Jazz Legends at Newport, Vol. 1*, 2009, MP3.

¹⁹ Sonny Stitt and Richie Cole, “Cherokee,” *Battle of the Saxes*, AIM Records, 1983, CD.

²⁰ Tom Perchard, *Lee Morgan: His Life, Music and Culture* (London: Equinox Publishing, 2006), 31.

musicians. The anecdote also highlights community among jazz musicians, specifically the ways that older, more established musicians supported younger players. While the anecdote is long, it captures Stitt's competitive persona and use of "Cherokee" as well as any anecdote in the literature, and is worth quoting at length:

Saxophone players also looked forward to Sonny Stitt's visits. Stitt was the model of the tough-loving jazz elder, as Sam Reed recalled.

He would always tell us something, musically. Whatever was happening, how to practice; like he always told me, when you breathing, fill your stomach up with air; make sure you get a good sound—like he said, try to blow that wall down. He was a nice fella. I mean he'd help you in any way he could. But, you know, he put you to the test at the end.

"Sonny Stitt was the one who bloodied Lee Morgan's nose and made him get together," said Leon Mitchell. Around 1954, Morgan was just making a name for himself, and he revelled in his growing celebrity and public status. One evening, Morgan and his friend Mitchell... attended a jam session at the instrument shop Music City, at which Sonny Stitt was the special guest.

So Sonny Stitt was there, and Lee had just started to make noise around town. He was one of them arrogant little dudes, you know. Cocky. And anybody that wanted to sit in with these name cats, like were bold enough, would get a chance to sit in. So they called, Anybody wanna?, and Lee raised his hand. So Sonny Stitt said Ah, Lee Morgan. I been hearing some real good things about you, Lee. Lee was like, Yeah man... Sonny said you wanna play something Lee? –Yeah man, that's why I'm here for. So he said, Well, what d'you wanna play? And Lee made the mistake of saying: Anything you wanna play. Sonny said, OK, let's play "Cherokee" in B – 1, 2, 3, 4!

“Cherokee” was the ultimate bebop test piece, always a tricky composition to play—and Stitt had called for the hardest key and the fastest tempo possible.

Lee started trying to pull the slide out to change the key of his horn so he could get an easier key to play in and stuff, but he just spluttered and stuttered and was so embarrassed.

“My goodness—I saw the panic in Lee’s face,” remembered Don Wilson. “Sonny Stitt had no pity on you. If you were three years old he would have done the same thing. His thing was Hey, kid, you go home and learn. You’re not ready yet...”

Leon Mitchell said: *That summer... Lee disappeared. Nobody knew where he was, he wasn't in any of the jam sessions, nothing. But when he came back out in the fall, he could play 'Cherokee' in any key. That's when he started getting together.*²¹

Sonny Stitt’s role in this story, notwithstanding his terrifying a young jazz musician, was essentially that of a mentor. He is described as a “tough-loving jazz elder” who’d “help you in any way he could.”²² He gave younger players free advice and encouragement; they looked up to him. Stitt’s tactics seem to have worked: Morgan went home to practice and eventually went on to greatness.

Another “Cherokee” anecdote involves Art Pepper, an alto saxophonist and friendly contemporary of Stitt. In the afterward of his memoirs, *Straight Life*, Pepper narrates a powerful musical encounter he once had with Stitt. Pepper was performing at the Black Hawk, a popular nightclub in San Francisco. Stitt asked

²¹ Ibid., 30–31, emphasis in original.

²² Ibid., 30.

to sit in with Pepper and his band. Pepper describes Stitt's motivations for coming on stage in these terms: "But Sonny is one of those guys, that's the *thing* with him. It's a communion. It's a battle. It's an ego trip. It's a testing ground. And that's the beautiful part of it..."²³

As in Lee Morgan anecdote, Stitt called off "Cherokee" at a very fast tempo. Pepper remembered:

"He was flying... He played, I don't know, about forty choruses. He played for an hour maybe, did everything that could be done on a saxophone, everything you could play, *as much as Charlie Parker could have played* if he'd been there. Then he stopped. And he looked at me. Gave me one of those looks, 'All right, sukkah, your turn.'"²⁴

This moment had special significance for Pepper, whose life was a mess and was strung out on drugs at the time. When it came time for him to solo, Pepper played something cathartic, beyond himself. "The people were clapping, and I looked at Sonny, but I just kind of nodded, and he went, 'All *right*.' And that was it. That's what it's all about."²⁵

²³ Pepper, *Straight Life*, Conclusion.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

In these two anecdotes, “Cherokee” operates both as a show piece for Stitt’s considerable talents and as a vehicle for a cutting contest—in Pepper’s words, “a battle” and “a testing ground.”²⁶

Introduction to “Ko Ko”

“Ko Ko” is a composition written by Parker. It was first recorded by Parker in 1945 for Savoy Records.²⁷ As with “Cherokee,” “Ko Ko” is associated with Parker’s musical development in the 1940s, and occupies an important place in bebop history.

“Ko Ko” is a contrafact of “Cherokee.” Parker composed the “Ko Ko” theme, but borrowed the “Cherokee” form and harmonic structure for solos. Parker also preserved—and increased—the fast tempos from his earlier “Cherokee” recordings.

The similarities between the two compositions can be clearly heard on Parker’s 1945 version of “Ko Ko.” Like Parker’s performances of “Cherokee”

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Rereleased as Charlie Parker, “Ko Ko,” in *Yardbird Suite: The Ultimate Charlie Parker Collection*, Rhino R2 72260, 1997, 2 CDs.

with McShann, “Ko Ko” is an extended feature for alto saxophone. Apart from the opening and closing themes and a drum solo by Max Roach, the recording consists entirely of Parker improvising over the “Cherokee” chord progression at high speed.²⁸

“Ko Ko” and Parker

“Ko Ko” occupies a crucial place in Parker’s recorded oeuvre. After leaving the Eckstine band in 1944, Parker spent a year developing his style in small groups in New York City. He then went into the studio and recorded his first session as a leader. The session, which produced “Ko Ko,” became “one of the most famous and most analyzed [sessions] in jazz history.”²⁹ It was a milestone in Parker’s career, and signaled the completion of his transition from big band musician into solo artist.³⁰

²⁸ The similarities between the two compositions are evidenced by the first, aborted take of “Ko Ko,” which includes trumpeter Miles Davis and Parker quoting the “Cherokee” theme verbatim. Charlie Parker, “Koko (Short Take 1),” *The Charlie Parker Story*, Savoy Jazz SV-0105, 1991, CD.

²⁹ Henry Martin and Keith Waters, *Jazz: The First 100 Years* (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2016), 203.

³⁰ The transition began with Parker’s departure from Eckstine and the “Red Cross” session the previous year.

Parker continued to record “Ko Ko” after 1945. Recordings of Parker from the mid-to-late 1940s contain the composition. These recordings include studio sessions with all-star bands (e.g., sessions for the music periodical *Metronome*) and live performances of Parker with his own jazz quintet.³¹ One of Parker’s live performances of “Ko Ko” was at the “Stars of Modern Jazz” Carnegie Hall Christmas Concert in 1949, which Stitt also attended.³²

Jazz scholars and critics are unanimous in regarding “Ko Ko” as a major artistic achievement. For Williams, it is the “climax” of “one of the most interesting documents in jazz.”³³ For Priestley, Parker’s 1945 recording is “justly considered one of [Parker’s] masterpieces.”³⁴ For Owens, it is “a classic of the jazz tradition.”³⁵ For Woideck, “Ko Ko” and Parker’s “breathtaking two-chorus

³¹ A complete list of Parker’s “Ko Ko” recordings has been compiled by the Jazz Discography Project (“Charlie Parker Discography”).

³² Stitt was performing at the concert. Ibid.; Kernfeld, “Stitt, Sonny,” *African American National Biography*.

³³ Williams, “Charlie Parker,” 20. The “document” Williams refers to is the Savoy LP containing the various material recorded at that session.

³⁴ Priestley, *Chasin’ the Bird*, 27.

³⁵ Owens, *Bebop*, 18.

solo... announced Parker's brilliance as an instrumentalist and a musical mind to the world."³⁶

Some scholars and critics believe that Parker's "Ko Ko" marks a turning point in jazz history. In *The Birth of Bebop*, DeVaux suggests that "Ko Ko" can be reasonably regarded as "the birth of modern jazz."³⁷ For Gary Giddins, "Ko Ko" "was the seminal point of departure for jazz in the postwar era."³⁸ Priestley regards the composition's musical theme as "overtly modernistic... and a direct influence on the future Ornette Coleman quartet."³⁹ Summarizing Giddins's view of "Ko Ko," DeVaux writes: "all of jazz modernity [flows] from this moment."⁴⁰

"Ko Ko" and Stitt

Unlike "Cherokee," "Ko Ko" was not part of Stitt's regular performance repertoire. In Stitt's vast recorded oeuvre, there are only three recordings of him

³⁶ Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 115.

³⁷ DeVaux, *Birth of Bebop*, 365.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Priestley, *Chasin' the Bird*, 122–123. Woideck agrees: "Ko Ko"'s opening and closing themes "effectively anticipate Ornette Coleman's more boppish pieces" (Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 115).

⁴⁰ Quoted in DeVaux, *Birth of Bebop*, 365.

performing the piece. The recordings were all made within a five-year period (1958–1963), approximately fifteen years after Parker’s original 1945 version.

Stitt’s first recording of “Ko Ko” dates to 1958, three years after Parker’s death.⁴¹ This version retains the form and tempo of Parker’s 1945 recording, but differs in other respects (e.g., the trumpet solo is replaced with a piano solo).

Stitt’s second recording of “Ko Ko” dates to 1962.⁴² In this performance, Stitt toys with the compositional similarities between “Ko Ko” and “Cherokee.” Stitt begins the piece with an acapella recitation of the “Ko Ko” theme. Then his band begins to play, and Stitt performs the “Cherokee” theme. Stitt reverses this order at the end of the piece. He performs “Cherokee,” then abruptly switches to “Ko Ko,” confusing his band and drawing laughter from the audience.⁴³

⁴¹ This version of “Ko Ko” is a studio recording for Chicago-based Argo Records. It was first released on LP as *Burnin’* in 1960; it has been rereleased in other formats, including Sonny Stitt, “Koko,” in *Burnin’/Personal Appearance*, Universe, 2013, MP3.

⁴² This version is from a live performance at Birdland, a New York City jazz club. It has been reissued as Sonny Stitt, “Cherokee,” in *Autumn in New York*, 1201 Music, 2000, CD. Despite being listed as “Cherokee,” the piece begins and ends with the melody to “Ko Ko.” See below.

⁴³ The band appears caught off guard by Stitt’s return to “Ko Ko,” and fumbles the change. It is possible that Stitt intended to play “Cherokee,” and bookended his performance with “Ko Ko” as a joke.

Stitt's third recording of "Ko Ko" dates to 1963. It is a studio recording taken from *Stitt Plays Bird*, an album of compositions written by and associated with Parker.⁴⁴

As discussed in Chapter VI above, *Stitt Plays Bird* is the album most clearly relevant to Stitt and Parker's relationship. Throughout his career, Stitt drew allusions to Parker by performing and recording compositions associated with him (like "Cherokee"). By recording a Parker tribute album, Stitt addressed this relationship directly, placing his reputation as a Parker copyist front and center for all to see.

Stitt Plays Bird is highly regarded by critics. Many critics single out Stitt's recording of "Ko Ko" for special praise, even as they use it to draw comparisons to Parker. In the 1964 review of *Stitt Plays Bird* for *Down Beat* magazine, Pete Welding describes "Ko Ko" as "stunning."⁴⁵ Ira Gitler's liner notes state that "Stitt's unrelenting drive" on "Ko Ko" makes it "one of the outstanding numbers in this set."⁴⁶ Gitler later stated that "the Parker-based material" inspired "Stitt to

⁴⁴ Sonny Stitt, "Ko-Ko," in *Stitt Plays Bird*, Atlantic SD-1418, 1990, CD.

⁴⁵ Welding, "Stitt Plays Bird," 22.

⁴⁶ Gitler, liner notes to *Stitt Plays Bird*.

his full powers.”⁴⁷ According to Owens, *Stitt Plays Bird* is one of “Stitt’s best efforts,” and “Ko Ko” “shows clearly that he had studied his role model’s work.”⁴⁸

Stitt Plays Bird is the culmination of Stitt grappling with “Cherokee” and “Ko Ko” on record. While several of Stitt’s albums contain recordings of the two compositions, *Stitt Plays Bird* is by far the best known. No other Stitt recording of “Cherokee” or “Ko Ko” received a comparable amount of critical attention or praise. After making *Stitt Plays Bird*, Stitt also stopped recording these compositions. Stitt first recorded “Cherokee” in 1950. Further recordings of “Cherokee” and “Ko Ko” followed beginning in 1957. After *Stitt Plays Bird* (1963), however, Stitt did not record “Cherokee” again until 1981, nor did he make another recording of “Ko Ko.”⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Gitler, *Masters of Bebop*, 44.

⁴⁸ That is, he had studied Parker’s work. Owens, *Bebop*, 47–48.

⁴⁹ Stitt recorded “Cherokee” in 1950, 1957, 1958 (live), and 1981. He recorded “Ko Ko” in 1958, 1962 (live), and 1963. Again, Stitt’s live 1962 recording of “Ko Ko” contains the themes to both “Ko Ko” and “Cherokee,” and was released under the title “Cherokee.” Lord, *Jazz Discography Online*.

Compositional Characteristics

Form and Melody

“Ko Ko” has a sixty-four-measure solo form. This is twice the length of a standard thirty-two-measure form (e.g., the forms of “Oop Bop Sh’Bam” and “Red Cross”).⁵⁰ Choruses are in AABA form and are divided into four sixteen-measure sections. Because of this double length, a single chorus takes longer to complete. This long length may have encouraged Parker and other bebop pioneers to perform “Cherokee” (and the contrafacts it inspired) at faster tempos.

The melody to “Ko Ko” is both well-suited for fast tempos and rhythmically challenging, containing short note values and syncopated lines. It is also abstract (compared with “Cherokee”).⁵¹ The “Ko Ko” theme is chromatic, performed without chordal accompaniment (no piano or bass), and is in a different key from the main part of the piece (the solo section).⁵²

⁵⁰ “The 32-bar AABA song form is one of the most common in jazz.” Martin and Waters, *Jazz*, 6.

⁵¹ The melodic similarities between “Cherokee” and “Ko Ko” are shown in Priestley, *Chasin’ the Bird*, 122–123.

⁵² Woideck notes: “‘Ko Ko’ is as much as a sketch for improvisation as it is a composition. Of the entire performance, only sixteen bars are ‘written’; most of the piece is improvised” (Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 115).

Harmony

The solo chord progression in “Ko Ko” is divided into two parts (the A sections and the B section). Again, this progression is borrowed from the Ray Noble’s “Cherokee,” the composition upon which “Ko Ko” was based.

The A section chord progression is “not particularly sophisticated for a 1930’s popular song,” and does not “present the improviser with particularly difficult problems.”⁵³ A sections begin and end in B♭ major, a familiar key for jazz soloists. From B♭ major, the harmony moves briefly to subdominant E♭ major, then returns to B♭. The chords on the A section are mostly diatonic, with a few exceptions—e.g., A♭⁷ (♭VII⁷) and C⁷ (II⁷). The chord progression is familiar to jazz soloists for an additional reason. As Owens observes, “the harmonic structure of the first six measures of each A section is identical to that of [the B♭] blues.”⁵⁴

By contrast, the B section harmonies are challenging and unconventional. The B section modulates away from B♭ major to three remote keys (and back again) via a series of ii-V-I chord progressions. In the space of sixteen measures, the harmony passes through B major (♭II in the context of B♭), A major (VII),

⁵³ Ibid., 84.

⁵⁴ Owens, “Charlie Parker,” 1:109–110.

and G major (VI), then returns to B♭ major (I). This rapid cycling through remote keys was “unusual harmonically for the period,” and the “Cherokee” B section “had a reputation of being difficult to improvise on” for this reason.⁵⁵

Tempo and Difficulty

Another important characteristic of these compositions is the speed at which they were performed. As mentioned above, “Cherokee” originally began as a medium-tempo big band composition. Later, it was transformed by bebop pioneers like Parker, Powell, and Stitt into a virtuosic showpiece for small groups and soloists.

At fast tempos, the challenges for the improviser are considerable. The rapid modulations on the “Cherokee” and “Ko Ko” B sections, for example, become especially difficult to improvise over. At high speeds (300+ beats per minute), the A sections act as a long runway to the B section, where the real harmonic difficulty lies.

⁵⁵ Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 84. Ted Gioia agrees; of “Cherokee,” he writes: “The melody is simple enough... but the rapid modulations of the chords in the bridge present a serious challenge to a soloist” (Gioia, *The Jazz Standards*, 61).

This difficulty can be appreciated by comparing the earliest “Cherokee” recordings to the “Cherokee” and “Ko Ko” recordings of Parker and Stitt. The earliest “Cherokee” recordings—those by Noble, Barnet, and Basie—do not contain any solos on the B sections.⁵⁶ By contrast, Parker and Stitt’s recordings of “Cherokee” and “Ko Ko” contain solos over the entire AABA form. Two of the early “Cherokee” recordings have moderate to moderate-fast tempos.⁵⁷ By contrast, Parker and Stitt’s studio recordings have very fast tempos, and their live recordings are faster still. For example, Parker’s 1945 recording of “Ko Ko” is over 300 beats per minute. Later live recordings by Parker (“Ko Ko,” 1949)⁵⁸ and Stitt (“Cherokee,” 1958) reach speeds of 360 to 380 beats per minute.

The harmonic complexity and “sheer velocity” of these recordings are instructive.⁵⁹ First, they speak to Stitt and Parker’s musical ability. It is very difficult to improvise in remote keys at fast tempos. In light of these difficulties,

⁵⁶ In Basie’s extended 1939 version of “Cherokee,” there are no solos on the B section, and “after the first two complete AABA choruses, the A section is repeated *fourteen* times, with the B never being heard again” (Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 84, emphasis in original).

⁵⁷ The versions by Noble and Barnet average 110 and 170 beats per minute, respectively. Basie’s version is considerably faster (260 beats per minute), but still much slower than the Parker and Stitt recordings analyzed in the following chapters.

⁵⁸ Charlie Parker, “Ko Ko,” in *1949 Concert & All Stars, 1950–1951*, Forlane UCD 19009, 1988, CD.

⁵⁹ Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 149.

Stitt and Parker's high-speed versions of "Cherokee" and "Ko Ko" imply great facility and skill.

Second, these difficulties provide insight into why Parker's performances of "Cherokee" and "Ko Ko" were so highly regarded. In the 1940s, jazz music underwent rapid and fundamental changes. Mastery of fast tempos and of "key signatures bristling with sharps" became necessary to prove oneself "in an increasingly competitive and specialized field."⁶⁰ With recordings like "Ko Ko," Parker epitomized this kind of mastery, and revealed a new way forward for younger musicians.

⁶⁰ DeVeaux, *Birth of Bebop*, 215. According to Dizzy Gillespie, the harmonic complexity of bebop caused the music to evolve, while keeping "the no-talent guys" away. Shapiro and Hentoff, *Hear Me Talkin' to Ya*, 337.

CHAPTER XIV

MUSICAL ANALYSIS OF CHARLIE PARKER'S SOLO ON "KO KO" (1945)

Introduction

The present chapter contains an analysis of Charlie Parker's "Ko Ko" solo from November 26, 1945. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Parker recorded "Ko Ko" for Savoy Records at his first session as a leader. At the time, Parker had been honing his craft in New York City small groups for over a year.¹ He had also recorded as a sideman for other New York-based musicians, including then-frequent collaborator Dizzy Gillespie. With "Ko Ko," Parker would finally produce his first major musical statement under his own name.

Again, it is important to emphasize that Parker's "Ko Ko" session is critically regarded as a watershed moment both in Parker's career and in the development of bebop music. The session is regarded as "one of Parker's best"

¹ After quitting the Billy Eckstine Orchestra in August 1944, Parker worked primarily in New York-based small groups.

recorded performances² and “a milestone in jazz history.”³ The importance of the session is due in large part to “Ko Ko,” a piece whose impact on jazz music is difficult to overstate. To musicians, Parker’s performance on “Ko Ko” was “a source book of ideas.”⁴ To critics, the piece was one of the “definitive statements of the new music,” and signaled no less than “the birth of modern jazz.”⁵

Recording and Composition

“Ko Ko” was recorded with a small ensemble consisting of alto saxophone, muted trumpet, piano, bass, and drums. The identity of the musicians in this ensemble has been hotly debated by jazz historians. This is because: 1) the first records that were released from the session listed incorrect personnel; 2) there were more than one pianist and trumpeter present at the session; and 3) the importance of Parker’s “Ko Ko” in jazz history has driven the debate.⁶ According

² Williams, “Charlie Parker,” 20.

³ Ira Gitler, “Charlie Parker and the Alto Saxophonists,” in Woideck, *Charlie Parker Companion*, 35.

⁴ Williams, “Charlie Parker,” 20.

⁵ DeVeaux, *Birth of Bebop*, 365.

⁶ The two trumpeters present at the session were Dizzy Gillespie and Miles Davis. The pianists were Sadik Hakim (also known as Argonne Thornton) and Gillespie, who played piano on most of the pieces that day. Hakim and Gillespie

to the majority view, the musicians who recorded “Ko Ko” were Parker on alto saxophone, Dizzy Gillespie on muted trumpet and piano, Curley Russell on bass, and Max Roach on drums.⁷ A minority view argues that Miles Davis—who performed on other pieces at the session and was then a member of Parker’s quintet—performed the muted trumpet part (not Gillespie).⁸

The musicians in Parker’s ensemble were key to establishing “Ko Ko” as a bebop masterpiece. The presence of Russell and Roach in the rhythm section was particularly crucial. Unlike “Parker’s previous 1944–45 sessions... both the bassist and the drummer [on “Ko Ko”] were solidly in the new style.”⁹ This

were replacements for the Bud Powell, who had “unexpectedly left town.” Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 112; Gitler, “Charlie Parker and the Alto Saxophonists,” 36.

⁷ See, for example, “Charlie Parker Discography.” The Miles Davis autobiography states that Gillespie, not Davis, played trumpet on “Ko Ko.” There are inaccuracies in its recounting of the session, however (e.g., the book states that Gillespie covered for Davis on pieces that contained no trumpet playing). Davis and Troupe, *Miles*, 75–76.

⁸ “The Music of Miles” argues convincingly, by comparing “Ko Ko” with contemporaneous recordings, that Davis played trumpet on “Ko Ko,” while Gillespie played piano. Thomas Owens observes that, in an earlier partial take of “Ko Ko,” the piano and trumpet are heard simultaneously; this suggests that Gillespie was not playing both instruments. “The Ko-Ko Session: November 26, 1945, Charlie Parker Reboppers’ Recording for Savoy,” *The Music of Miles*, accessed August 22, 2016, <http://www.themusicofmiles.com/articles/the-ko-ko-session/session.php>; Owens, *Bebop*, 19.

⁹ Parker’s 1944 session with Tiny Grimes is an example of a rhythm section in the older style. Parker’s 1945 studio sessions under Gillespie’s name included

created a “unanimity of rhythmic conception,” which freed up Parker to give rein to the more radical aspects of his musical style.¹⁰ This unanimity is heard in Russell and Roach’s pulse: aggressive but loose, with a rapid quarter-note bassline, the constant sound of cymbals, and frequent interjections on the bass and snare drums.¹¹

“Ko Ko”’s abstract, revolutionary character is also heard in the theme, which is “unlike any other Parker writing in [its] harmonic and rhythmic ambiguity.”¹² The theme is performed without chordal accompaniment (i.e., without piano or bass), so that any harmonic information is provided entirely by the horns. The theme is taken at a very fast tempo (approximately 310 beats per minute). It is also thirty-two measures long. Half of the measures contain written material, while the other half is improvised.¹³ Like the improvised material that

Curley Russell on bass, but had different drummers (either Sidney Catlett or Stan Levey). Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 110; “Charlie Parker Discography.”

¹⁰ Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 110.

¹¹ There is a marked stylistic difference between Russell and Roach’s “Ko Ko” and the heavy quarter-note pulse of the “Red Cross” rhythm section. As Priestley writes: “In the popular swing bands, the pulse was locked down by piano, guitar, bass and drums all working as one, but in bebop it was only heard (if you knew where to listen) through the walking bass-lines and the drummer’s right-hand cymbal rhythms. [Charlie Parker’s] comment was that ‘The beat in a bop band... has no continuity of beat, no steady chugging.’” Priestley, *Chasin’ the Bird*, 45.

¹² *Ibid.*, 115.

¹³ The theme consists of eight measures of written material, followed by two eight-measure solo breaks—performed by Gillespie (or Davis) then Parker—and another eight measures of written material.

follows, the theme is characterized by anticipation, syncopation, strong accents, and rapidly changing note values.

Parker's soloing on "Ko Ko" can be divided into two parts.

The first part comprises two eight-measure solo breaks that appear within the melodic themes at the beginning and end of the piece. Like the melodic theme itself, these breaks contain no chordal accompaniment; Parker solos with Roach alone.

The second part comprises a two-chorus solo over the chord progression to Ray Noble's "Cherokee." In contrast to the thirty-two-measure melodic theme, solo choruses are sixty-four measures long. They are in AABA song form, with A sections set in B \flat major and with B sections that pass through several keys via a series of ii-V-I chord progressions.

First Solo Break

While Parker's eight-measure solo breaks are technically part of the "Ko Ko" theme, they function as short, self-contained improvisations and are therefore worth discussing. Parker's first eight-measure break also sets the tone for the longer two-chorus improvisation that follows. The break is shown in Example 54 below.

(0:12)

Example 54: Parker's first eight-measure break in "Ko Ko"

Parker begins with a quarter note anacrusis on $E\flat_3$ (transposed: a low C, near the bottom of the alto saxophone's range). He then bursts into the break with a measure of eighth notes at high speed.

The material that follows is similar to Parker's "Red Cross" solo. Parker improvises in strings of eighth notes broken up by rests. His eighth notes move mostly by step and by consecutive leaping third. Parker varies the length of his eighth-note lines, as well as their start points and end points. Parker also varies his rhythm through rests and changing note values (quarter notes, dotted quarter notes, and long notes).

What sets Parker's "Ko Ko" break apart from his "Red Cross" solo are differences in speed and musical texture. Since "Ko Ko" is over 300 beats per minute, Parker's strings of eighth notes come out in rapid, virtuosic spurts. Long notes and rests interrupt these strings of notes in abrupt and unpredictable ways.

Parker’s solo unfolds against a similarly unpredictable drumbeat by Roach, who uses brushes for a barrage of accented attacks on the snare drum.

Given the lack of piano and bass accompaniment during the solo break, the harmonic structure of Parker’s solo is difficult to ascertain. However, certain chords can be surmised from the notes in Parker’s lines and arpeggios. These chords are indicated in Example 55, below.¹⁴

The image shows two staves of musical notation in G-flat major (one flat). The top staff begins at measure 17 and contains a melodic line with several notes marked with an 'x'. Above the staff, chord indications are shown: Cm at the start, (G) above a measure, (Cm) above a measure, and G7(b9) above a measure. The bottom staff begins at measure 21 and contains a melodic line with notes marked with an 'x' and a triplet of eighth notes. Above the staff, chord indications are shown: Cm above a measure, F7 above a measure, and an arrow labeled 'resolves to Bb' above a measure.

Example 55: Harmony of Parker’s first solo break in “Ko Ko”

¹⁴ Without a bass note, the identity of Parker’s intended harmonies is difficult to adjudicate. In mm. 19–20, for example, Parker may be playing a measure each of D^{m7b5} and G^{7b9}; in mm. 23–24, he could be playing B^b, C^{m7}, and F⁷. The precise identity of Parker’s chords is also not resolved by comparing this solo break with Parker’s later recorded versions of “Ko Ko,” because there are harmonic differences between them. Even on this 1945 recording, Parker’s second solo break differs harmonically from his first (see the section Second Solo Break, below).

Broadly, the break starts in C minor (m. 17) and moves toward B \flat , finally resolving in the new key at the beginning of the following section (m. 25).

Parker's notes in arpeggios and on downbeats imply the chord progression C m -G $^{7\flat 9}$ -C m7 -F 7 \rightarrow B \flat , a relatively straightforward progression in B \flat major.¹⁵ Parker uses dominant seventh chords to establish resolutions every four measures (G $^{7\flat 9}$ -C m7 , F 7 -B \flat), and uses lowered ninths when returning to C minor (mm. 19–21).

At the beginning of his solo break, Parker makes a peculiar choice of notes that establishes melodic continuity with the “Ko Ko” theme. Parker ends the first part of the melody and begins his solo break on notes a semitone apart, at the bottom of the alto saxophone range (Example 56):

The image shows a musical score for a saxophone. It is divided into two sections: 'melody' and 'solo break'. The 'melody' section starts at 0:05 and ends with a note on D₃. The 'solo break' section starts with a note on E \flat ₃, which is a semitone above D₃. A double bar line with a '7' above it separates the two sections. The solo break continues with a series of notes, including a note marked with an asterisk.

Example 56: Melodic continuity in Parker's “Ko Ko”

In aspects of rhythm, Parker departs from the “Ko Ko” theme. The “Ko Ko” melody begins with (and consists mostly of) longer note values that are

¹⁵ B \flat major: ii - V 7 /ii - ii 7 - V 7 - I.

connected by eighth notes. In his solo break, Parker reverses this trend (see

Example 57, below).

Melody phrase 1
(0:00)

longer note values

longer note values

Melody phrase 2
(0:18)

longer note values

longer note value

Solo break
(0:12)

shorter note values

shorter note values

Example 57: Rhythmic discontinuity in Parker's "Ko Ko"

Second Solo Break

Like the first, Parker's second eight-measure break functions as a short, self-contained solo. Since it is located near the end of the piece, it also functions as a summary of the improvised material that precedes it. The eight measures have been described in grandiose terms. As Ira Gitler notes: "Musicians have

called the last break that Parker takes at the close of the piece a condensed history of bop. ‘He says it *all* in there,’ has been a typical comment.”¹⁶

Parker’s second solo break is shown in Example 58 below:

(2:42)

209

213

3

Example 58: Parker’s second eight-measure break in “Ko Ko” (1945)

This break differs from the first in several respects. First, it is denser rhythmically. The second break consists of a single uninterrupted eighth-note line that Parker extends over eight measures. Unlike the first, this solo break contains no note values longer than an eighth note, and no rests to break up the phrase.

While both of Parker’s breaks end on the same pitch—F₄, the dominant note of B \flat —the endings are noticeably different. Parker’s first break ends squarely on the

¹⁶ Gitler, “Charlie Parker and the Alto Saxophonists,” in Woideck, *Charlie Parker Companion*, 36, emphasis in original.

downbeat of three, but Parker’s second break ends on an off-beat, and sounds far more abrupt (Example 59).¹⁷

The image shows two musical staves in G major. The first staff, labeled '1st break (0:16)', begins at measure 22. It contains a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note G, a quarter note A, and a quarter note B. A bracket labeled 'rests' spans the first two measures. A triplet of eighth notes (G, A, B) follows. The staff ends with a quarter note G on a strong beat. The second staff, labeled '2nd break (2:46)', begins at measure 214. It features a 'single continuous line' indicated by a double-headed arrow. It starts with a triplet of eighth notes (G, A, B), followed by a series of eighth notes and quarter notes. The staff ends with a triplet of eighth notes (G, A, B) on an off-beat, labeled 'abrupt ending on off-beat'.

Example 59: Comparison of Parker’s solo break endings on “Ko Ko”

Parker’s second break is also denser harmonically. While the first break contains a small number of chords (changing at a rate of once every two measures), the second break implies many chords (changing once per measure, or even once every two beats). This implied chord progression is shown in Example 60, below.

¹⁷ Parker’s use of an eighth-note triplet near the end of the line (m. 216, b. 2) intensifies this abruptness.

Example 60: Implied chord progression of Parker’s second solo break on “Ko Ko”

Again, it is difficult to ascertain the exact chord progression without piano or bass accompaniment, and Parker’s rapidly-changing harmony and use of chromaticism make this especially difficult. However, the identity of certain chords may be surmised based on Parker’s note choices, arpeggios, and downward 7-3 resolutions.¹⁸

Parker alters the tones of several dominant seventh chords (#5 and b9, indicated in parentheses in Example 60, above). He further elaborates the chords by superimposing chromatically descending arpeggios onto more conventional harmonies (Example 61 and Example 62):

¹⁸ Parker uses arpeggios in m. 209, bb. 2–3; m. 210; m. 212, bb. 3–4; m. 213, bb. 1–3; m. 215, bb. 1–2; m. 216, bb. 2–3. He uses downward 7-3 resolutions in mm. 211 and 214, bb. 2–3.

(2:42)
209

Gm^7 \longrightarrow $D^7(\flat_9)$ \longrightarrow $G^7(\flat_9)$

Gm^7 $G^{\circ 7}$ $F\#\circ^7$

m2 m2

Example 61: Chromatic superimposition in Parker’s second break on “Ko Ko” 1

In mm. 209–210 above, Parker places diminished chord arpeggios (G^{m7} - $G^{\dim 7}$ - $F\#\dim 7$) over a chord progression in G minor (G^{m7} - D^7 , resolving to G^7 in m. 211). The diminished chords descend by minor second ($G^{\dim 7} \rightarrow F\#\dim 7$). The chords are also connected melodically by descending minor second (F_5 - $E\flat_5$, G_4 - $F\#_4$).¹⁹ Parker cuts across the bar line by beginning his chord arpeggios on weak beats, and by alternating their direction.

Parker inserts another chromatically descending arpeggio four measures later (see Example 62, below). In m. 213, Parker outlines the tones of an ascending D^{m7} chord.²⁰ On beat four of that measure—again on a weak beat—Parker arpeggiates a descending $D\flat^{m7}$ chord, then leaps upward to the seventh and root of a C^{m7} chord (m. 214, b. 2). As with the previous example, Parker’s

¹⁹ The descending minor seconds are indicated in Example 61 with a bracket below the staff and the abbreviation “m2.”

²⁰ The tones in a D^{m7} chord also form the tones 3-5-7-9 of a $B\flat^{maj9}$ chord.

chords descend by minor second ($D^{m7}-D\flat^{m7}-C^{m7}$), and are connected melodically by descending half step ($C_5-B\flat_4$).²¹ In this case, however, Parker's superimposed arpeggio is a chromatic passing chord between two diatonic seventh chords.²²

Example 62: Chromatic superimposition in Parker's second break on "Ko Ko" 2

In the above two examples, Parker uses rhythmically-offset chromatic chord arpeggios at breakneck speed while accompanied only by drums. The arpeggios are unexpected, and serve to intensify the harmonic and rhythmic ambiguity of his solo break.

Parker's second solo break is characterized by harmonic density, virtuosity, and an experimental quality. These characteristics may help to explain why the break was regarded by musicians as a "condensed history of bop."

²¹ The descending half step is found in m. 213, bb. 3–4; it is indicated with the abbreviation "m2" in Example 62.

²² That is, $D\flat^{m7}$ is a chromatic passing chord between D^{m7} and C^{m7} , which are diatonic in context of $B\flat$ major ($B\flat$: iii- \flat iii-ii).

Phrasing and Accentuation

In terms of phrasing, Parker's two-chorus solo is similar to his eight-measure breaks. Parker's two-chorus solo contains strings of eighth notes broken up by longer notes and rests (like the first break). It also contains extended eighth-note passages that exhibit aggressive approaches to harmony, rhythm, and melodic contour (like the second break).

An example of these two types of phrasing is found relatively early in Parker's solo. In the middle of the first A section of his first solo chorus, Parker improvises two short melodic lines followed by a long one. The melodic lines vary in length and position—both in their start points and endpoints, and in their position within the phrase. Parker also peppers these melodic lines with dynamic accents. These accents make the lines more energetic and alive—an effect that is intensified by the rapid tempo (Example 63):

The image shows a musical score for Parker's "Ko Ko" solo, consisting of three staves of music. The first staff starts at measure 41 (0:32) and features a melodic line starting on beat three, lasting for two measures (8 beats) under a Bb chord, followed by a C7 chord. The second staff starts at measure 45 and features a melodic line starting on the off-beat of one, lasting for 6.5 measures (26 beats) under Cm7, G7, Cm7, and F7 chords, with a triplet of eighth notes. The third staff starts at measure 49 and features a melodic line starting on beat four, lasting for 3.5 measures (14 beats) under Bb, Fm7, and Bb7 chords, with a triplet of eighth notes. The score includes various musical notations such as rests, slurs, and dynamic markings.

Example 63: Parker's approach to phrasing in his "Ko Ko" solo

Parker begins the first melodic line on beat three (m. 41); it lasts for two measures. Parker rests, then begins a second line on the off-beat of one (m. 44). This line begins with an ascending flurry of sixteenth notes and ends one measure later. Parker rests again, then begins a third line on beat four (m. 45). It lasts over six measures. The line is embellished with eighth-note triplets and half-step chromaticism, and it ends on an unexpected held note (m. 51, b. 4). The line also cuts across the solo form: its midpoint is the beginning of the second A section, which Parker highlights with an upward skip (C₄-A₄) and a change of rhythm (m. 49, b. 1).²³

²³ The last four measures of this line (mm. 49–52) can be reasonably described as belonging to two phrases at once. The four measures constitute an extension of

Parker's approach to accentuation varies. Often, he accents notes on strong beats. From m. 47 to m. 51 he does so consistently, resulting in a melodic line that pulses on one and three.²⁴ Parker accents local high notes (notes that precede a change in direction) and notes following a rest. He also accents notes on off-beats, each time following with a scalar descent.²⁵

Parker's accentuation of notes on strong beats provides rhythmic stability to high-speed phrases whose rhythms are often unpredictable. As with his "Red Cross" solo, Parker's accents vary in intensity. Coupled with changes to line length and line position, Parker's approach to accentuation gives his melodic lines a stop-and-go quality.

Form

In certain places, Parker's unpredictable approach to phrasing blurs the solo form. In other places, it emphasizes it. Parker uses irregular phrasing to cut

Parker's first A section phrase and the opening of his second A section phrase. By cutting across sections in this way, Parker blurs the sixteen-measure divisions of the "Ko Ko" solo form.

²⁴ Parker's accents on strong beats are found in m. 41, b. 3; m. 44, b. 3; m. 45, b. 1; m. 47, b. 3; mm. 48–50, bb. 1, 3; and m. 51, b. 3.

²⁵ The off-beat accents are found in m. 41, b. 4; and m. 46, bb. 2, 4.

across formal divisions (see Example 63, above). Yet Parker also positions his phrases to accentuate these divisions.

For example, Parker signals the start of his solo choruses with long melodic lines that begin on the downbeat of one and are preceded by rests (Example 64 and Example 65, below):

Example 64: Beginning of first chorus of Parker's solo on "Ko Ko"

Parker also prepares the start of his second solo chorus with creative phrasing and an F_4 (the dominant note of $B\flat$ major),²⁶ which he holds for eight beats:

²⁶ Gillespie echoes Parker by playing an F_3 (on piano) on beat four of m. 96. He then repeats the note several times over the following five measures, establishing a dominant pedal point (1:14–1:19).

(1:08) melodic line →
 87 $A\flat^7$ (six measures) $B\flat$

90 $B\flat$ C^7

92 C^7 six beats of rests Cm^7 8 beats on V F^7 $B\flat$ six beats of rests →

97 2 $B\flat$ melodic line (six measures) Fm^7

100 $B\flat^7$ $E\flat^{maj7}$

Example 65: Beginning of second chorus of Parker’s solo on “Ko Ko”

The beginning of Parker’s second chorus is interesting for additional reasons. By this point in his solo,²⁷ Parker has been playing eighth notes for nearly a full chorus. Parker’s held note breaks this rhythmic and textural pattern. The held note also acts a pressure release valve, allowing the listener a moment to relax, while simultaneously building anticipation for the next chorus. Parker

²⁷ The beginning of Parker’s second chorus is also the midpoint of his solo.

increases the effectiveness of the note by padding it on both sides with six beats of rests.²⁸

Parker positions his phrases to emphasize other parts of the solo form as well. In addition to the beginning of each chorus, Parker highlights the beginning of each A section by playing notes on the downbeat of one. This is shown in Example 66, which contains the beginnings of A sections from Parker’s two choruses.²⁹

(1:03) B \flat 1st chorus, 3rd [A] 81

(1:28) B \flat 2nd chorus, 2nd [A] 113 3 3

(1:54) B \flat 2nd chorus, 3rd [A] 145

Example 66: Beginning of Parker’s A sections in his “Ko Ko” solo

²⁸ In Example 65, the rhythmic and textural contrast between Parker’s held F $_4$ note and rests (mm. 93–96) and his melodic lines (mm. 87–92 and mm. 97–102) can be observed visually.

²⁹ The beginnings of the first A section of Parker’s two choruses appear in Example 64 and Example 65, above. The beginning of the second A section of Parker’s first chorus appears in Example 63.

Parker marks his B sections as distinct from his A sections by avoiding the downbeat. Instead of playing on beat one, Parker rests, beginning the first lines of his B sections on beat two (Example 67):

(0:48) B \flat rests C \sharp m 7 3 F \sharp ⁷

(1:40) B \flat rests C \sharp m 7 F \sharp ⁷

Example 67: Beginning of B sections in Parker’s “Ko Ko” solo

Like other AABA compositions, the B sections in “Ko Ko” are melodically, harmonically, and rhythmically distinct from the A sections. Parker’s approach to phrasing highlights these distinctions. In doing so, Parker accentuates the solo form, and reinforces structure in an improvisation that—with respect to other musical features—is irregular and unpredictable.

Sequences

In addition to using long notes and rests, Parker uses sequences to produce contrast in his phrases. Parker’s sequences are short figures he repeats at changing

pitch levels. They produce contrast by differing in accentuation, melodic contour, and pitch content from his continuous eighth-note lines.

Parker’s first sequence is found near the start of his solo. After his opening melodic line, Parker performs a two-beat figure, which he modifies and repeats three times in quick succession (Example 68, below). The figure contrasts with the material that precedes it. It is rhythmically diverse and short (two beats of eighth notes, eighth-note triplets, and quarter notes, followed by rests), while the preceding melodic line is rhythmically static and long (three measures of nonstop eighth notes).

(0:25) B \flat Fm 7 B \flat 7

33

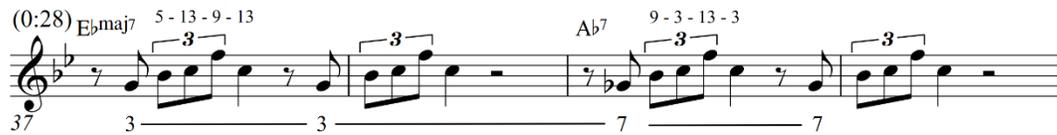
E \flat maj 7 A \flat 7

37 3 3 3 3

Example 68: Parker’s use of sequences in his “Ko Ko” solo 1

The figure is interesting for additional reasons. While Parker repeats the pitches of his mm. 37 and 39 figures verbatim, he modifies the figures’ starting point from the off-beat of one to the off-beat of four. Parker also changes the initial figure’s starting pitch from G $_4$ (m. 37) to G \flat $_4$ (m. 39), matching a change

in harmony from $E\flat^{maj7}$ to $A\flat^7$. This creates a 3-7 resolution and prevents a dissonant $G\flat_4$ over $A\flat^7$, while the figure's other tones remain consonant (Example 69).³⁰



Example 69: Parker's use of sequences in his "Ko Ko" solo 1 (detail)

Parker also uses sequences on the B sections of both solo choruses.

On the B section of his first chorus, Parker performs a figure that consists of alternate fingerings, an eighth-note triplet, ascending eighth notes, and syncopated rhythm (mm. 65–66 in Example 70, below). He then repeats this figure a major second lower, reflecting a harmonic shift from B major to A major (mm. 69-70). The two figures are nearly identical; however, Parker marks the second figure as distinct from the first with an abrupt eighth-note response (mm. 71–72).

³⁰ The 3-7 resolution can be seen by tracing the starting pitch of each figure (G_4 - $G\flat_4$). The note G is the third of $E\flat^{maj7}$; $G\flat$ is the seventh of $A\flat^7$.

Example 70: Parker’s use of sequences in his “Ko Ko” solo 2

In his second chorus, Parker uses a sequence based on the melody and chords of the song “Tea for Two” (Example 71, below). The sequence consists of a complex repeating arpeggio figure. As with the previous example, Parker repeats his figure at descending pitch levels, and ends the sequence with an unexpected eighth-note response (mm. 134–136).

Example 71: Parker’s “Tea for Two” sequence in his “Ko Ko” solo

Parker’s “Tea for Two” sequence is rhythmically offset in two ways. First, the sequence begins on beat two, while the C#m7 and Bm7 chords (mm. 129 and

133) arrive on beat one. Second, Parker compresses whole chords into a single beat, displacing the figure from a weak beat to a strong beat and back again.³¹

During the sequence, Parker also doubles the harmonic rhythm of the B section from one to two chords per measure. This doubling of the harmonic rhythm is shown in Example 72, below.

As Woideck observes, Parker’s “Tea for Two” sequence is a more sophisticated version of material that Parker had been using since at least 1942. The rhythmic displacement on “Ko Ko” makes this material more impressive, producing “a much less symmetrical and more boppish scheme.”³²

Example 72: Parker’s “Tea for Two” sequence in his “Ko Ko” solo (detail)

³¹ Parker compresses chords this way in m. 129, b. 4 (F#7); m. 131, b. 3 (Emaj7); and m. 133, b. 4 (E7).

³² Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 116–117. Parker’s 1942 recording of “Cherokee” contains a simpler version of the “Tea for Two” sequence (without rhythmic displacement). The recording also contains an earlier version of the alternate fingering/eighth-note-triplet sequence discussed in Example 70, above. For analysis of this recording, see *Ibid.*, 85–86.

Immediately after the “Tea for Two” sequence, Parker launches into another sequence (Example 73). This sequence consists of a two-beat arpeggiated triplet figure, which Parker immediately repeats. The top notes of Parker’s arpeggios are chord tones drawn from progression A^{m7} - D^7 - G^{maj7} . They also form a stepwise linear descent from G to D (mm. 137–139: G_5 - $F\#_5$ - E_5 - D_5).³³



Example 73: Parker’s use of sequences in his “Ko Ko” solo 3

Prepared Material

Many of the sequences discussed above are found in the first eight measures of the “Ko Ko” B section. They are examples of prepared material: melodic lines that Parker worked out in advance for specific musical contexts.

³³ G_5 (m. 137, b. 3) is the seventh of A^{m7} ; $F\#_5$ (m. 138, b. 1) is the third of D^7 ; and D_5 (m. 139, b. 1) is the fifth of G^{maj7} . The note E_5 (m. 138, b. 3) can be regarded as a passing tone between $F\#_5$ and D_5 .

Woideck argues that Parker designed these sequences to help him navigate the trickier keys of the “Cherokee” B section. This was necessary because “the rapid material and difficulty of the B section harmonies require rigorous preparation.”³⁴ Woideck cites Parker’s alternate fingering/eighth-note-triplet sequence and his “Tea for Two” sequence as two examples of this practice.³⁵ As stated above, Parker had been using these sequences in his playing since at least 1942. Despite being prepared by Parker in advance, however, the sequences do not “significantly detract from the overall freshness” of Parker’s “Ko Ko” solo.³⁶

An analysis of Parker’s B section playing supports Woideck’s argument. The “Ko Ko” B section consists of a series of ii-V-I chord progressions. These progressions begin in a remote key (B major), then cycle back to the A section tonic key (B♭ major). This is shown in Example 74, below:

³⁴ Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 115–116.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 116–117. The two sequences are shown and discussed in Example 70 and Example 71, above.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 116.

Example 74: Harmonic outline of the “Ko Ko” B section

In both solo choruses, Parker uses sequences over the remote keys (i.e., B major and A major)—keys that are both challenging on alto saxophone.³⁷ By contrast, he uses long, non-repeating strings of eighth notes over keys that are more closely-related to B \flat (i.e., G major, F major, and B \flat major). Parker uses prepared material over harmonically and technically challenging keys, and returns to more conventionally improvised linear material over simpler keys.³⁸

³⁷ Transposed for E \flat alto saxophone, the keys are A \flat major and F \sharp major. These are difficult keys (containing four flats and six sharps respectively), especially when compared to the transposed tonic key of G major (one sharp).

³⁸ This had been Parker’s practice on “Cherokee” for several years. Discussing Parker’s 1942 recording of “Cherokee,” Woideck notes that “Parker moves away from [sequences] in the second eight bars of the bridge, where the chord progression leads into musical keys that are easier to improvise upon.” Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 86.

Quotations

Parker's "Tea for Two" sequence is also an example of a musical quotation: the "interpolation of a portion of one song into the performance of another."³⁹ Quoting the melodies of other musical works was something Parker did often in his solos; the practice has been described as a feature of his mature musical style.⁴⁰

At the beginning of his second solo chorus, Parker inserts a musical quotation of the clarinet obbligato from the New Orleans jazz standard "High Society."⁴¹ Parker performs the opening two measures of the obbligato verbatim, then switches to melodic material of his own for an additional six measures (see Example 75, below).

³⁹ Ibid., 54. Parker's sequence differs from the original "Tea for Two" melody in several ways. It is far more elaborate, for example, and contains many additional notes. But Parker's sequence is also remarkably similar to the original "Tea for Two" melody, containing the same chords and melody notes on each strong beat.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 54, 57–58; Owens, "Charlie Parker," 1:29–30.

⁴¹ For a recording of the obbligato Parker referenced, listen to King Oliver's Jazz Band, "High Society Rag," *The Complete Joseph "King" Oliver Heritage 1923–1931, Volume 1: 1923*, King Jazz KJ 112 FS, 1992, CD.

Example 75: Parker’s “High Society” in his “Ko Ko” solo

The “High Society” quotation ends on a scalar segment that descends from C₅ to F₄; Parker extends this segment down to A_{b3}, then skips up an octave to B_{b4}. As Owens observes, Parker “integrates [the quotation] so seamlessly into the fabric of his phrase that anyone unaware of the New Orleans tradition upon which he is drawing will assume the entire phrase is Parker’s creation.”⁴²

Note Placement and Swing Feel

Parker’s approaches to phrasing and rhythm in “Ko Ko” result in a solo that has a very high concentration of lines and notes. Parker improvises in predominately stepwise eighth-note lines, which are broken up by long notes and

⁴² Owens, *Bebop*, 39. For more on Parker’s use of this quotation, see also Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 116.

rests, embellished with eighth-note triplets and sixteenth notes, and extended to six measures or more in length. These lines unfold at high speed—a tempo of around 310 beats per minute—against a “propulsive” and “discreetly interactive” drum beat by Max Roach.⁴³ The result is a solo that is dense from both a rhythmic and temporal perspective.

This density—the concentration of musical information in time—is coupled with a strong forward motion arising from Parker’s placement of notes within the beat. In “Ko Ko,” Parker maintains this feeling of momentum throughout his solo. He does this, in part, by placing his eighth notes toward the front of the beat, or (at times) slightly ahead of the beat.⁴⁴ This approach differs markedly from Parker’s approach on the mid-tempo “Red Cross.” On his “Red Cross” solo, Parker varied his note placement constantly, and often pulled groups of eighth notes back behind the beat for rhythmic effect.

One notable example of Parker placing eighth notes ahead of the beat is the melodic line at mm. 142–147 (Example 76):

⁴³ Priestley, *Chasin’ the Bird*, 122.

⁴⁴ Parker also maintains this feeling of momentum on “Ko Ko” through his use of dynamic accents, strengthening his long melodic lines by emphasizing notes on successive strong beats (for more on this, see the Phrasing and Accentuation section, above).

Example 76: Parker’s note placement in his “Ko Ko” solo

Parker begins the melodic line with a two-measure figure—indicated with a bracket above the staff—that features chromaticism and an unconventional syncopated accent pattern. This figure was familiar to Parker, who used it throughout his mature career.⁴⁵ Perhaps because of this familiarity, Parker’s melodic line rushes ahead of Russell’s bass notes in mm. 142–144, before slowing somewhat in m. 145. At this point in the piece, Russell’s bass notes are also slightly later in the beat.⁴⁶ This increases the temporal distance between Parker’s saxophone and Russell’s bass, creating an aggressive, almost manic swing feel.

(Note that Parker again cuts across the “Ko Ko” solo form by extending his melodic line past the A section divide at m. 145.)

⁴⁵ Woideck calls the figure “one of [Parker’s] favorite ii^7-V^7 patterns.” Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 113–114.

⁴⁶ That is, Russell’s bass notes arrive later in the beat here than they do at the beginning of Parker’s solo.

Harmony

As with his “Red Cross” solo, Parker’s “Ko Ko” solo demonstrates multiple approaches to harmony. At some points, Parker references the written chords clearly. He uses stepwise eighth-note lines to highlight chord tones on strong beats. He also uses arpeggios to state chord tones directly. At other points, Parker departs from the written chords. He alters fifths and ninths; he extends chords to the eleventh and thirteenth; he replaces chords through substitution. Parker uses chromatic non-chord tones—e.g., chromatic passing tones, chromatic neighbor tones—on and off the beat. He anticipates and delays the tones of certain chords, and he changes the harmonic rhythm.

In general, Parker’s “Ko Ko” solo is more harmonically adventurous than his earlier “Red Cross” solo. While melodic lines in “Ko Ko” outline the written chord progression in a broad sense, notes on downbeats often do not reflect the tones of the present chord. Chromaticism is more frequent and pronounced, and the tones of some chords are avoided completely.

The boppish line discussed above provides a good example of Parker’s harmonically adventurous approach. First, consider its chromatic tones (marked with asterisks in Example 77, below). Parker begins the line on a chromatic F#₄. He follows with two ascending line segments (D₅-D#₅-E₅, C₅-C#₅-D₅), both of

which contain a chromatic passing tone. On the downbeat of the new A section (m. 145, b.1), Parker plays a dissonant $F\sharp_4$. He then descends a major third chromatically by step ($C_4-C\flat_4-B\flat_3-A_3-A\flat_3$). Parker finishes the line with an unexpected $G\flat_4$ (m. 147, b. 3), a note that anticipates and alters the $B\flat^7$ chord in m. 148.

(1:52) C^7 * Cm^7 * F^7

142 $D - D\sharp - E$ $C - C\sharp - D$

A $B\flat$ * Fm^7 $\sharp 5 \rightarrow B\flat^7$

145 $C - C\flat - B\flat - A - A\flat$

Example 77: Use of chromaticism in Parker’s “Ko Ko” solo

In addition to his heavy use of chromaticism, Parker highlights chord tones in unconventional ways. In the first half of the line, for instance, Parker places the third of C^7 ($E\flat_5$) on an off-beat, and the third of F^7 (A_4) on a weak beat. He also postpones the third of Cm^7 ($E\flat_4$) until m. 144.⁴⁷ (These chord tones are shown in Example 78, below.)

⁴⁷ The arpeggio $E\flat_4-G_4-B\flat_4-D_5$ (m. 144, bb. 1–2) also suggests a change in harmonic rhythm from four beats of F^7 to two beats each of Cm^7 and F^7 .

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The first staff begins at measure 142 with a C7 chord. It features a triplet of eighth notes, an 'off-beat' annotation with an arrow pointing to a note, and a 'postponed' annotation with an arrow pointing to a note. The staff concludes with chords F7, (Cm7), and (F7), with an arrow pointing to the final note labeled 'weak beat'. The second staff begins at measure 145 with a Bb chord. It includes a bracketed section labeled 'A' and chords Bb, (Cm7), (F7), (Bb), Fm7, and Bb7. Asterisks are placed under the first two notes of the first measure, and a bracket spans the first four notes.

Example 78: Unconventional use of chord tones in Parker’s “Ko Ko” solo

In the second half of the line, Parker delays a resolution to B \flat by placing dissonant pitches F \sharp_4 and E \flat_4 on strong beats (m. 145). His B \flat_4 on beat two of m. 145 hints at resolution, but Parker follows the note with pitches clearly belonging to C m7 and F 7 , such that harmonic closure is delayed until m. 146.

Despite the harmonic ambiguity resulting from his use of chromaticism and chord tones, Parker maintains the harmonic coherence of his line through melody. The contour of Parker’s line is complex, changing directions several times per measure. But the peaks of the line form an interior stepwise descent from F to B \flat (F $_5$ -E \flat_5 -D $_5$ -C $_5$ -B \flat_4), followed by a descending B \flat arpeggio (B \flat_4 -F $_4$ -D $_4$ -B \flat_3). This is shown in Example 79, below.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Parker’s interior stepwise line is indicated by note names and a line above the staff, while Parker’s B \flat arpeggio is indicated by asterisks and a bracket below the staff.

Example 79: Interior stepwise line and arpeggio in Parker’s “Ko Ko” solo

Parker fortifies his interior stepwise line dynamically. He accents most of the notes in his descent—all but the C₅ in m. 144, b. 3. Parker also fortifies the line harmonically. His melodic descent from F to B \flat overlaps with an underlying harmonic motion from F⁷ to B \flat (i.e., V⁷ to I).⁴⁹

The harmonic complexity of “Ko Ko” is best seen in another line from Parker’s second chorus (Example 80, below). Like other examples discussed in this section, Parker plays the line over a ii⁷-V⁷-I progression in B \flat . The line contains chord substitution, chromaticism, harmonic delay, and an unconventional use of chord tones.

⁴⁹ At the local level, the chord progression C⁷-C^{m7}-F⁷→B \flat (mm. 41–45) is best interpreted as B \flat : V⁷/ii-ii⁷-V⁷-I. At a more general level, however, the chord progression is interpreted as a broad harmonic motion from V⁷ to I.



Example 80: Aggressive chromaticism in Parker’s “Ko Ko” solo

Considered from the perspective of B \flat major, Parker’s line is aggressively chromatic. In addition, Parker’s line only vaguely suggests—and frequently departs from—the written chord changes.

Parker begins the line on a dissonant G \sharp ₄ (m. 125). Starting on beat four, Parker descends chromatically from C₅ to E \flat ₄, traversing a minor sixth entirely by half-step. After the descent, he plays additional chromatic notes (B \flat ₃, C \sharp ₄), and ends with a chromatic enclosure resolving to the fifth and third of B \flat (mm. 127–128).

Due to the long stretches of chromatic material, Parker’s line defies a simple harmonic interpretation. One interpretation is that Parker is “side slipping”: temporarily performing a half-step away from the original (or expected) chord or key.⁵⁰ Parker substitutes the chord progression F⁷-F \sharp ⁷-F⁷-B \flat for the

⁵⁰ David Morgan: “Side slips generally function as large-scale chromatic neighbors of the following inside [i.e., diatonic, in-the-key] material.” David Morgan, “Superimposition in the Improvisations of Herbie Hancock,” in *Annual*

original chord progression C^{m7} - F^7 - Bb . He also adjusts the lengths of the $F^{\#7}$ and F^7 chords (in mm. 126–127) to five and three beats, respectively. This interpretation is shown in Example 81, below.⁵¹

Example 81: Aggressive chromaticism in Parker’s “Ko Ko” solo (detail)

The line is not only harmonically ambiguous, but innovative, as it exhibits the skillful manipulation of multiple musical elements—chromaticism, harmonic rhythm, key, pitch—all at once. Again, the tempo of “Ko Ko” contributes to its effectiveness; Parker’s line is impressive not only because of its content, but because of the rapid speed at which it is executed.

Review of Jazz Studies 11, 2000–2001, edited by Edward Berger et al. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2002), 79. Another example of side slipping is seen in the theme to Parker’s composition “Red Cross,” discussed in [Chapter XI](#), above.

⁵¹ In Example 81, asterisks denote the tones of Parker’s implied harmonic substitutions (the chord symbols in parentheses).

Timbre

In his summary of Parker's musical style, Owens describes Parker's saxophone tone as "far removed from the sweetness produced by older alto saxophonists," "harsh," and as possessing a "hard brittle edge."⁵² Owens's statements are fitting descriptions of Parker's saxophone sound on "Ko Ko." While the saxophone sound on "Red Cross" was streamlined and full—and Parker's "hard brittle edge" less apparent—the saxophone sound on "Ko Ko" is bright, with a "thinner" core and prominent upper partials, especially on accented notes and in the instrument's upper register.⁵³

It is important to note that, on the day of the "Ko Ko" recording session, Parker had equipment problems that affected his sound. Woideck writes that "Parker's reed squeaked unacceptably and the sax itself was evidently not in good

⁵² Writer and music critic Stanley Crouch agrees: "[H]e didn't have that big creamy alto saxophone sound that you get from Johnny Hodges, Benny Carter, Willie Smith... his sound was hard, it was a brittle sound... [It was] devoid of pity." Owens, "Charlie Parker," 1:15; Stanley Crouch, interview by Ken Burns, July 1, 1997, accessed October 2011, <http://www.pbs.org/jazz/about/pdfs/Crouch.pdf>.

⁵³ "Acoustical analysis of his tone would probably reveal an overtone spectrum rich in upper partials." *Ibid.*, 1:268.

shape.”⁵⁴ The problems were serious enough that producer Teddy Reig halted the session and took Parker to midtown Manhattan to have his instrument repaired.⁵⁵ These equipment problems may have contributed to the “hard brittle edge” of Parker’s sound on “Ko Ko.”⁵⁶ Although less serious than the problems on “Billie’s Bounce” (a piece recorded earlier in the session), Parker can also be heard squeaking on “Ko Ko” at 1:15–1:16.⁵⁷

The harshness of Parker’s tone on “Ko Ko” is made more apparent by the sheer velocity of his melodic lines. As Owens notes, Parker’s “harsh tone... is singularly appropriate for the fast, aggressive melodies he created.”⁵⁸ Miles Davis (who was present at the “Ko Ko” session) expressed a related view to Owens when he later said, remarking on Parker’s penchant for playing many notes, that Parker “shoved them down your throat. Bird was raw.”⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 112.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ The use of hard reeds also may have contributed to the “edge” in Parker’s sound. Priestley notes that saxophonist Buster Smith—who had a “flexible but slightly edgy tone... like Parker”—advised Parker to “cultivate power and projection rather than a conventional rounded tone, by using the toughest reeds he could.” Priestley, *Chasin’ the Bird*, 23.

⁵⁷ The squeak on “Ko Ko” occurs during Parker’s first eight-measure solo break (m. 21, b. 1).

⁵⁸ In his summary of Parker’s mature musical style, Owens adds that Parker’s harsh tone “is well-suited for his aggressive and precise rhythmic style.” Owens, “Charlie Parker,” 1:15 and 1:268.

⁵⁹ Szwed, *So What*, 70.

In Parker's "Ko Ko" solo, this "rawness" comes across in several ways. Some of these ways have already been discussed. For example, Parker plays long lines full of eighth notes; he peppers them with dynamic accents; and he places them on top of or slightly ahead of the beat at high speed. The rawness of the "Ko Ko" solo also comes across in Parker's saxophone sound. In addition to the "hard brittle edge" of his tone, Parker adds energy to his notes with bends, growls, timbral "bursts," and other tonal effects.

There are many examples of Parker doing this. One such example is found in the B section of Parker's first chorus (Example 82, below). Parker ends a line segment on a loud and slightly out-of-control note (m. 74, b. 4).⁶⁰ He begins his next line segment with a dynamic burst that propels his line downward (m. 75, b. 2ff.). In the next two measures, Parker ghosts and squeezes notes, making the line loose rhythmically (m. 76–77). He follows this with several notes that are evenly spaced and cleanly articulated (m. 78ff.).⁶¹ Parker adds a wide, relaxed vibrato to the last note of the line (m. 81, bb. 3–4). The vibrato is unexpected, and contrasts with the aggressive material that precedes it.

⁶⁰ Parker also allows the note to ring out, rather than stopping it with his tongue. For another example of this kind of note, see the $G\flat_4$ at 1:56 (m. 147, b. 4).

⁶¹ Note the similarities between Parker's material in mm. 77–78 and the chromatic ii-V-I figure discussed in the Note Placement and Swing Feel and Harmony sections above.

(0:57) Am⁷ D⁷ loud/uncontrolled ending Gmaj⁷ explodes → ghosted/squeezed notes, loose rhythmically

73

cleanly articulated

Gm⁷ C⁷ Cm⁷ F⁷

77

wide, relaxed vibrato

B^b

81

Example 82: Timbral variation in Parker’s “Ko Ko” solo 1

Parker’s dynamic accents sometimes cause his notes to distort and flare.

One example of this is during Parker’s “Tea for Two” sequence (Example 83).

Parker breaks the sequence with a held E^b₄, adding a slow and “lazy” vibrato halfway through the note (m. 134, bb. 1–3). In the following measure, Parker descends chromatically from C[#]₅ to A₄ (m. 135, bb. 2–4). He colors the last two notes of the descent (B^b₄-A₄). The notes swell in intensity and their timbre briefly changes, resembling a growl.⁶²

⁶² Another example of this kind of timbral coloring is found on Parker’s descent from C₄ to A^b₃ at 1:55 (m. 146, bb. 3–4).



Example 83: Timbral variation in Parker’s “Ko Ko” solo 2

These timbral effects are found throughout Parker’s “Ko Ko” solo, and form an important part of his musical personality. This can be seen in Parker’s melodic lines. Many of Parker’s melodic lines are intricate and complex. Parker offsets this complexity through timbral effects. This results in melodic lines that—despite their complexity—appear natural and fluid. As with other aspects of his improvisational style, Parker’s timbral effects are well-executed and frequently unpredictable. They also support Parker’s other improvisational approaches. Changes in timbre—ghost notes, vibrato, etc.—regularly coincide with changes in dynamics, harmony, and rhythm.

Conclusion

Charlie Parker’s “Ko Ko” is a major musical statement by a mature artist. Recorded at Parker’s first session as a leader in 1945, it was the standout performance of the session, and marked the arrival of a new form of modern music.

Like Parker's earlier performances of "Cherokee" with Jay McShann, "Ko Ko" was essentially a vehicle for Parker. It provided him with abundant solo space over a challenging up-tempo chord progression. Parker's great creativity and skill are evident throughout the solo. As Woideck writes, "This solo, more than any other Parker had yet put on disc, announced Parker's brilliance as an instrumentalist and a musical mind to the world."⁶³

In his "Ko Ko" solo, Parker improvises in predominately stepwise eighth-note lines. Parker varies the accentuation, length, position, and rhythm of these lines. He breaks them up with long notes and rests, embellishes them with eighth-note triplets and sixteenth notes, extends them to six measures or more in length, and positions them so that they cut across formal divisions.

By varying the characteristics of his lines, Parker creates continuous contrast at the phrase level. Parker also varies his lines in ways that reinforce the "Ko Ko" song form. For example, Parker plays on the first beat of every A section, but rests on the first beat of every B section. He also uses prepared material like musical quotations and sequences at the beginning of each B section, where the harmony is less static and more challenging. This material emphasizes

⁶³ Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 115.

the differences in the “Ko Ko” song form, and adds further variety to Parker’s melodic lines.

Parker’s approach to harmony is adventurous and complex. At times, Parker stays close to the written harmonies through the use of arpeggios and lines that emphasize chord tones on strong beats. At other times, Parker departs from the written harmonies through chord alterations, extensions, interpolations, and substitutions; changes to harmonic rhythm; anticipation and delay; and extended chromatic passages. Parker also obscures the written harmonies by avoiding chord tones, and by placing chord tones on rhythmically unaccented beats.

Due to the content and composition of its lines, Parker’s “Ko Ko” solo takes on an aggressive and experimental character. Heavy use of chromaticism blurs the written chord progression. Unconventional phrasing blurs the “Ko Ko” form. Shorter lines have an abrupt stop-and-go quality; longer lines are harmonically adventurous and rhythmically dense.

Other elements contribute to the aggressive and experimental character of Parker’s “Ko Ko” solo. Parker’s saxophone sound is harsh and bright, and is continually modified through timbral manipulation. Parker’s eighth notes arrive early in the beat, and even rush ahead of the rhythm section at several points. These elements—combined with Parker’s dynamic accents, his rhythm section’s

modern accompanying style, and a 300+ beat-per-minute tempo—create an aggressive, and at times almost frenzied swing feel.

Parker’s solo on “Ko Ko” is similar to his solo on “Red Cross.” On both pieces, Parker’s playing is complex, unpredictable, and virtuosic. In addition, many of the musical features discussed in the analysis above—e.g., differing line lengths, multiple approaches to harmony, timbral variation—are found in both solos.

Parker’s solo on “Ko Ko” is also a marked improvement over his solo on “Red Cross.” Like the earlier work, Parker’s solo on “Ko Ko” is fluidly executed and stylistically mature, reflecting multiple musical approaches integrated into a cohesive whole. But because the tempo on “Ko Ko” is so much faster, the solo is considerably more virtuosic. It is also more complex, more spontaneous, and more imaginative, containing nearly 150 measures of consistently and strikingly creative material.⁶⁴

Another characteristic of Parker’s “Ko Ko” solo is its clarity. Despite how unpredictable his solo is, Parker’s musical ideas are clearly expressed. This is partly due to the “diction” of Parker’s melodic lines. Most notes in his lines are

⁶⁴ Parker improvises on “Ko Ko” for a total of 144 measures: two sixty-four-measure choruses, plus two eight-measure solo breaks.

cleanly articulated and evenly spaced. This is also due to Parker's execution. Even when Parker is at his most experimental (as he is, for example, in his more chromatic lines), the outward appearance of these lines is deliberate, never haphazard.

CHAPTER XV

MUSICAL ANALYSIS OF SONNY STITT'S SOLO ON "KO KO" (1963)

Introduction

This chapter is devoted to analysis of Sonny Stitt's 1963 solo on "Ko Ko." The version of "Ko Ko" discussed here is from Stitt's Atlantic Records album *Stitt Plays Bird*. This album was conceived of as a tribute to Charlie Parker, and consists entirely of compositions Parker had written or previously recorded.¹

Stitt Plays Bird is one of Stitt's most critically-acclaimed albums. It has been referred to as "one of [Stitt's] finest hours"² and "the best album Stitt ever made."³ *Stitt Plays Bird* is also one of Stitt's most critically-discussed albums. The album has attracted considerable attention from critics, due in large part to its Charlie Parker theme. Critics have written not only about *Stitt Plays Bird*'s merits

¹ All but one piece on *Stitt Plays Bird* was written by Parker. That piece is "Hootie Blues," which is credited to Parker's former bandleader Jay McShann.

² Stewart, liner notes to *The Complete Roost Sonny Stitt Studio Sessions*, 20.

³ Early, "The Passing of Jazz's Old Guard," 34. Critical reactions to *Stitt Plays Bird* are discussed in greater detail in Chapter VI, Historical Analysis I: Stitt's Career, above.

as an album, but also what the album reveals about Stitt's reputation as a Parker imitator.

Many critics have compared Stitt's saxophone playing on *Stitt Plays Bird* to the saxophone playing on Parker's original recordings. According to Stitt scholar Woodrow Witt, "one can hear Parker's influence" on *Stitt Plays Bird*, even though "Stitt stands out as a soloist with his own unique voice."⁴ Other scholars have compared Stitt's "Ko Ko" to Parker's 1945 version of the piece. For Thomas Owens, Stitt's "recording of 'Ko Ko' ... shows clearly that he had studied his role model's work—a fact that is hardly surprising, in view of the album's premise."⁵ Other critics write that Stitt borrows melodic material directly from Parker;⁶ and they observe differences between the two saxophonists' approaches to phrasing and execution.⁷

⁴ Witt, "Sonny Stitt," 19.

⁵ Owens, *Bebop*, 47.

⁶ Stewart: "To start the bridge on his solo," Stitt uses "the quick rise-and-fall that Bird used to open his solo on 'Ko Ko.'" Morgenstern: "Ko Ko" "is a masterful recreation; Stitt amazingly replicates some of Bird's exact phraseology, and intermittently does his own takes on Ray Noble's melody." (These specific quotes refer to Stitt's solos on earlier versions of "Ko Ko.") Stewart, liner notes to *The Complete Roost Sonny Stitt Studio Sessions*, 12; Morgenstern and Meyer, *Living with Jazz*.

⁷ Witt: "Stitt's phrasing [on "Ko Ko"] is more uniform than Parker's and his melodies are less syncopated." Morgenstern: "the end result is much smoother

Recording

Stitt recorded “Ko Ko” in New York City on January 29, 1963. This date was almost eight years after Parker’s death, and over seventeen years after Parker’s original “Ko Ko” recording. Stitt recorded “Ko Ko” with a jazz quartet. The quartet included Stitt on alto saxophone, John Lewis on piano, Richard Davis on bass, and Connie Kay on drums.⁸

Stitt’s “Ko Ko” instrumentation differs from that of Parker’s original recording. On *Stitt Plays Bird*, Stitt is the only horn player, while Parker’s version of “Ko Ko” includes Gillespie (or possibly Miles Davis) on muted trumpet.⁹ John Lewis’s presence on *Stitt Plays Bird* is noteworthy. Lewis and Parker performed “Ko Ko” at least once while the latter musician was alive—in a concert at Carnegie Hall in 1947.¹⁰ In 1948, Lewis also performed on Parker’s classic

than the original.” Witt, “Sonny Stitt,” 19; Morgenstern and Meyer, *Living with Jazz*.

⁸ Guitarist Jim Hall performed on most pieces at the *Stitt Plays Bird* recording session, but not on “Ko Ko.” Lord, *Jazz Discography Online*.

⁹ This difference in instrumentation is characteristic of Stitt and Parker’s music generally. Except for projects with a second tenor saxophonist, Stitt usually led groups where he was the sole horn player. By contrast, Parker’s groups usually included a trumpet player. The identity of the muted trumpeter on Parker’s “Ko Ko” is discussed in the Recording and Composition section of the previous chapter.

¹⁰ “Charlie Parker Discography.”

recordings of “Constellation” and “Parker’s Mood”—pieces that Stitt then rerecorded on *Stitt Plays Bird*.¹¹

Stitt Plays Bird is somewhat uncharacteristic for a tribute album. There is a looseness to the whole affair: as Owens notes, the album features Stitt “in an almost jam-session format.”¹² This looseness may reflect a lack of preparation on the part of Stitt, who later dismissed the album as “the company’s idea” (i.e., Atlantic Records’ idea).¹³ For this reason, *Stitt Plays Bird* comes across as a conventional Stitt recording—notwithstanding the high caliber of its performances and its Charlie Parker theme.

Stitt Plays Bird is a straight-ahead jazz album. Stitt and his band perform each piece as a simple head arrangement. The pieces begin with a brief rhythm section introduction, followed by opening and closing melodic statements with improvised solos in between. In general, Stitt’s pieces have the same chords, keys, melodies, musical forms, and tempos as Parker’s originals.¹⁴ One noticeable difference between the pieces is their solo length. Solos on *Stitt Plays Bird*—an

¹¹ Lewis also performed other pieces with Parker that would later appear on *Stitt Plays Bird*. For example: Lewis and Parker performed Parker’s “Cool Blues” at Birdland in 1953. Ibid.

¹² Owens, *Bebop*, 48.

¹³ Enstice and Rubin, *Jazz Spoken Here*, 250.

¹⁴ One exception is the piece “Yardbird Suite,” which begins with a minor-key introduction and is performed at a much slower tempo than Parker’s original.

LP record—are noticeably longer than those on Parker’s original 78 rpm recordings.

Composition and Form

As with Parker’s recordings of “Cherokee” and “Ko Ko,” Stitt’s “Ko Ko” is an extended feature for alto saxophone. The piece has a head-solo-head structure with a single multi-chorus saxophone solo in the middle. Stitt makes no notable changes to the “Ko Ko” harmony, key, or melody. Like Parker, Stitt performs the theme without chordal accompaniment (i.e., using saxophone and drums only).

There are slight differences in musical form. Because Stitt’s quartet has no trumpeter, the eight-measure trumpet solo break from Parker’s “Ko Ko” is removed. Stitt’s version lacks a drum solo before the second iteration of the melodic theme. It is also two minutes longer.¹⁵ This is due primarily to the length of Stitt’s main solo, which consists of five 64-measure choruses (versus Parker’s two). Stitt’s “Ko Ko” version is also slightly slower, beginning at approximately

¹⁵ Stitt’s version of “Ko Ko” is 4 minutes and 55 seconds long; Parker’s version of “Ko Ko” is 2 minutes and 54 seconds long.

The rhythmic pattern above differs from Roach’s—which is performed using brushes, and is frequently interrupted by Roach’s spontaneous accents on the snare drum. Like Parker’s solo, the character of Roach’s playing is abstract, unpredictable, and rhythmically loose. By contrast, Kay’s drumming—and the Stitt solo that unfolds underneath it—is clearly presented and rhythmically tight. As a result, the aesthetic effect and rhythmic feel of Stitt’s break is steadier than Parker’s.

Stitt’s two eight-measure solo breaks are similar in content, and should be considered together. The breaks are shown in Example 85 and Example 86 below:

(0:06)

The musical notation consists of two staves. The first staff begins with a 9-measure rest (marked '9'), followed by eighth notes, a quintuplet of eighth notes (marked '5'), and a 'rush' of eighth notes (marked 'rush'). The second staff continues with eighth notes, a triplet of eighth notes (marked '3'), and a triplet of eighth notes (marked '3').

Example 85: Stitt’s first eight-measure break in “Ko Ko”

(4:39)

353

357

Example 86: Stitt's second eight-measure break in "Ko Ko"

Stitt's solo breaks consist predominately of long strings of eighth notes. The eighth notes proceed mostly by continuous stepwise motion, though also by arpeggiated leap.¹⁶ While the lines are long, Stitt breaks up his eighth notes with the occasional rest, long note, quarter note, eighth-note triplet, and ascending quintuplet.

Both of Stitt's solo breaks are in the key of C minor. While the eight-measure sections contain no chordal accompaniment, Stitt's note choices suggest a chord progression that toggles between C^m and G⁷ until the second half of the break. The progression then proceeds to F⁷, and finally resolves to B^b at the reentrance of the "Ko Ko" theme. (A possible chord progression is indicated in Example 87 below.)

¹⁶ This is especially noticeable in Stitt's first solo break (Example 85). See, for instance: mm. 9, 12–15.

(4:39) Cm G Cm G Cm

353

G^{7(b9)} (Cm) Cm⁷ F⁷ → resolves to B^b

357

Example 87: Harmony of Stitt’s second solo break in “Ko Ko”

The chord symbols in the Stitt example above are also found in Parker’s first solo break.¹⁷ In fact, apart from the ascending quintuplet in Stitt’s first break (Example 85: m. 11, b. 1), the musical features already listed—long strings of eighth notes, motion by scalar step or chord arpeggio, the key of C minor, etc.—are also characteristic of Parker’s first solo break.

Stitt and Parker’s solo breaks are also remarkably similar in their melodic vocabulary. For instance, Stitt begins both of his breaks as Parker begins his first break: with a low E_b3 honk followed by an ascending arpeggio. There are other melodic similarities as well. These are shown in Example 88, below:

¹⁷ For a discussion of Parker’s first solo break, see the section First Solo Break in the previous chapter. To compare the example above with the chord progression of Parker’s two solo breaks, see Example 55 and Example 60.

Parker: 1st solo break
(0:19)

Stitt: 1st solo break
(0:06)

Stitt: 2nd solo break
(4:39)

Example 88: Comparison of Parker and Stitt solo breaks on “Ko Ko”

The bracketed segments in Stitt’s two solo breaks contain material that is nearly identical to material performed by Parker seventeen years earlier (with slight differences in rhythm and pitch). Given that Stitt reuses Parker’s material over the same section of the same piece, it is reasonable to conclude that Stitt is deliberately borrowing—or quoting—from Parker. This is an example of what

Morgenstern called Stitt’s “masterly re-creation... [of] Bird’s exact phaseology.”¹⁸

While Stitt’s two solo breaks are harmonically straightforward, he departs from the (likely) chord progression in one place.¹⁹ In the second half of his first break, Stitt introduces the pitch C#₄ (m. 14, b. 3). He places the pitch—which is dissonant in the key of C minor—on a strong beat. Stitt also draws attention to the pitch by having it coincide with a change in melodic contour. Harmonically, C#₄ can be understood as the raised fifth on an interpolated F7 chord (see Example 89). The chromatic note is not structurally significant; it passes quickly and does not reappear. Rather, Stitt uses the note to add color and variety to his line.

The image shows a musical staff in C minor (one flat) with a treble clef. The time signature is 4/4. The notation includes a key signature change from C minor to B-flat major (two flats) at the end. Above the staff, there are three arrows indicating harmonic substitutions: Cm7 (from 0:10 to the end of the first measure), F7 (from the start of the second measure to the end of the third measure), and 'to theme in Bb' (from the start of the fourth measure to the end). The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes. Fingering numbers (1, 3, 5, 7) are written below the notes. Some notes have an 'x' above them, indicating natural harmonics. A sharp sign (#) is placed below the C note in the second measure, indicating the C#4 pitch.

Example 89: Harmonic substitution in Stitt’s first solo break on “Ko Ko”

¹⁸ Morgenstern and Meyer, *Living with Jazz*.

¹⁹ Again: absent chordal accompaniment, Stitt’s intended chord progression is difficult to know for certain.

Phrasing and Rhythm

As with his solo breaks, Stitt's main solo is constructed of strings of eighth notes embellished with changing rhythmic values and broken up by rests. Phrase segments vary from two to eleven measures in length, with four- to six-measure lengths being the most common. The start and endpoints of Stitt's phrase segments also vary. This is seen in Example 90, which shows the first A section of Stitt's first solo chorus.

1st A
(0:19) B \flat beat one ~ two measures Fm 7 beat two B \flat 7
25

E \flat E \flat m 3
29

B \flat ~ seven measures beat four C 7 two measures
33 (beat one)

Cm beat three Dm 7 G 7 Cm 7 F 7
37 6 3

2nd A B \flat ~ five measures
41

Example 90: Approach to phrasing in Stitt's "Ko Ko" solo

The approach to phrase construction shown above is similar to that found in Parker's "Ko Ko" solo. Both solos consist predominately of eighth-note lines of varying lengths, placed on various beats at a blisteringly fast tempo. However, there are also differences in their approaches to phrase construction. For instance, while Parker's "Ko Ko" solo contains long lines (~7 to 8 measures long), Stitt's lines are even longer, on average.

Stitt's approach to phrase construction also appears to be a departure from his earlier mid-1940's work. In "Ready, Set, Jump" and "Oop Bop Sh'Bam," the lengths of Stitt's phrase segments were relatively short, and their placement within the phrase tended to reinforce standard four-measure subdivisions. There was nothing in Stitt's earlier work comparable to the line in the following "Ko Ko" excerpt, which spans twelve measures and contains eleven full measures of notes (Example 91).²⁰

²⁰ Stitt's line is also several measures longer than anything in Parker's "Ko Ko" solo. The longest line in Parker's solo spans eight measures; it is found in his second solo break. See Appendix D, mm. 209–216.

(2:02)

153

157

161

Example 91: Twelve-measure line in Stitt’s “Ko Ko” solo

Despite differences in the length and placement of his phrase segments, Stitt’s approach to phrasing on “Ko Ko” is similar in other ways to his earlier work. This is most obvious at the start of Stitt’s phrase segments. Although Stitt starts phrase segments on various beats, he usually starts them *on the beat*, especially when the segments are close to structurally significant parts of the form (i.e., at the beginnings of choruses and sections). This can be seen in the first A section of Stitt’s first solo chorus (Example 92):

1st A
(0:19)

Example 92: On-the-beat phrasing in Stitt’s “Ko Ko” solo

In the example above, Stitt begins several phrase segments on beats one and three (mm. 25, 33, 37). This preference for strong beats results in a phrase that is rhythmically solid and stable. Stitt’s phrase does not sound unpredictable or off-balance, as Parker’s phrases sometimes do.

Stitt’s practice of beginning phrase segments on the beat becomes more pronounced as his five-chorus solo unfolds.²¹ Stitt begins few phrase segments on

²¹ The practice is especially noticeable in the middle of Stitt’s solo, where each chorus contains only one phrase segment on an off-beat (m. 110 in mm. 89–152, m. 179 in mm. 153–216, and m. 217 in mm. 217–280). In Stitt’s two eight-

off-beats, and he begins no phrase segment on the off-beat of four.²² When Stitt does begin a phrase segment on an off-beat, he usually does so in a way that reinforces the underlying harmony. For example, Stitt often begins with a chromatic approach from below followed by an ascending triplet chord arpeggio. He does this three times in his first solo chorus (Example 93).

Example 93: Off-beat triplet arpeggios in Stitt’s “Ko Ko” solo

Stitt also begins phrase segments—or breaks up longer segments—with syncopated rhythm. In mm. 40–41, Stitt reinforces the arrival of his second A section through syncopation, harmonic anticipation, and a broken chord arpeggio (Example 94).²³

measure solo breaks (mm. 9–16 and 353–360), every phrase segment begins on the beat.

²² One possible exception is the syncopated rhythm at m. 40, b. 4 (the last measure of Example 92, above). This rhythm is discussed below.

²³ For an example of this later in Stitt’s solo, see mm. 104–105.

Example 94: Syncopation and anticipation in Stitt’s “Ko Ko” solo

Stitt’s uses these changes in phrasing and rhythm to add variety to his solo. However, these changes generally serve to clarify and strengthen the “Ko Ko” form and harmony, rather than obscure them.

Blues and Quarter-Note Figures

Another way Stitt adds variety to his solo—while clarifying the “Ko Ko” harmony and form—is through short blues-based and quarter-note-based figures. Stitt plays these kinds of figures approximately two or three times per chorus. He plays them in a responsive way, placing them near the middle or end of a formal section so that they contrast with the long eighth-note lines that precede them.

One example of a short blues-based figure is found in Stitt’s second chorus. After seven consecutive measures of eighth notes, Stitt rests for three beats, then plays a high, accented $A\flat_5$ quarter note (Example 95):

Example 95: Accented high note in Stitt’s “Ko Ko” solo

This quarter note (m. 96, b. 4) contrasts with the preceding eighth-note line in several ways. It contrasts rhythmically and texturally, because it is a single note that follows seven continuous measures of faster notes. It also contrasts in register. The quarter note is higher than every note in mm. 89–95, and its pitch ($A\flat_5$) is the highest note in the $E\flat$ alto saxophone’s natural playing range.²⁴ The quarter note also contrasts with the preceding eighth-note line in tone and execution. Stitt bends up into the quarter note through a combination of a fingered grace note (G_5 - $A\flat_5$) and an embouchure-created pitch bend (a scoop). Stitt

²⁴ Transposed for alto saxophone, concert $A\flat_5$ becomes F_6 , or “high F.”

attacks the note strongly and with a loose tone. Since a bent $A\flat_5$ is also the blue seventh of $B\flat$, the result is a short, bluesy wail.

The contrast, then, is between seven measures of controlled, dense, middle-register eighth notes, and a single loose, high-register blue quarter note. Stitt underscores this contrast by leaving several beats of rests on either side of his quarter note (mm. 95–97).

Another example of Stitt’s idiosyncratic use of quarter notes is found in Stitt’s third chorus. Amid a dense passage of chromatic fast notes—containing an ascending glissando, sixteenth notes, and an eighth-note triplet—Stitt plays two quarter notes on successive downbeats (Example 96).

(2:17) dense, chromatic lines

172 $B\flat^7$ 32nd notes $E\flat$ 16th notes

175 $E\flat m$ 8th-note triplet 16th notes $B\flat$ 5 short, playful quarter notes rests rests

179 C^7 Cm^7 F^7 $B\flat$ chromatic 8th-note line

Example 96: Melodic and rhythmic contrast in Stitt’s “Ko Ko” solo

Again, the contrast here is striking. Stitt breaks up several measures of quick notes (mm. 172–176, 179–182) with two standalone quarter notes (mm. 177–178). He draws attention to these quarter notes by playing them staccato and on successive downbeats. He also establishes harmonic contrast by having the quarter notes clearly outline the chord tones of a tonic $B\flat$ chord (F_4 - D_5). In the context of a fast, chromatic line, Stitt's diatonic quarter notes sound playful—even cute.²⁵

Stitt's playful use of diatonic quarter notes is seen again in Example 97. Following a five-measure ornamented eighth-note line (m. 111–115), Stitt ascends a $B\flat$ major scale in quarter notes (mm. 117–119).

²⁵ Stitt completes the phrase in a similar manner, outlining a $B\flat$ major triad with two quarter notes and a dotted-half note (mm. 182–183: F_4 - $B\flat_3$ - D_4).

(1:29) Ebm five-measure ornamented eighth-note line Bb

113

Bb C7

114

quarter-note line to bridge

Bb major: $\hat{2}$ $\hat{3}$ $\hat{4}$ $\hat{5}$ $\hat{6}$ $\hat{7}$ $\hat{1}$

117 Cm7 1 3 5 F7 7 3 1 Bb 1

Example 97: Diatonic quarter notes in Stitt’s “Ko Ko” solo

In addition to providing contrast with the preceding eighth-note lines, Stitt’s quarter-note figure carries structural significance. By placing certain tones—C₄-E_{b4}-G₄-A₄-B_{b4}—on successive strong beats, Stitt emphasizes both the chord progression C^{m7}-F⁷-B_b and the 7-1 resolution in B_b major.²⁶ Stitt’s figure therefore tonicizes B_b in an unambiguous way. Because it arrives at the end of the A section, Stitt’s quarter-note figure also demarcates the boundaries of the “Ko Ko” form and strengthens the harmonic contrast with the modulating B section that follows (in m. 121ff.).

In his second chorus, Stitt uses longer rhythmic values and blues-based

²⁶ C₄-E_{b4}-G₄ emphasizes C^{m7}, A₄ emphasizes F⁷, and B_{b4} emphasizes B_b. The melodic motion A₄-B_{b4} is a 7-1 resolution in B_b major.

figures to establish contrast across multiple sections (see Example 98, below).

end of **B** section
(1:45) G Gm⁷

shorter note values

131 134

C⁷ Cm⁷ F⁷

last **A** section

137 3 Fm⁷ Bb⁷

longer note values

141 Eb Ebm 5 four beats

145 Bb six beats C⁷ two beats rests

149 Cm⁷ playful staccato quarter notes F⁷ Bb

3 first **A** section

153 Bb Fm⁷ Bb⁷

157 Eb Ebm 3

161 Bb Cm⁷ lay back 3 3

Example 98: Contrast across multiple sections in Stitt's "Ko Ko" solo

In mm. 131–141 (above), Stitt performs a virtuosic eleven-measure eighth-note line. He follows this (in mm. 143–144) with a short rising figure that ascends to another bluesy $A\flat_5$.²⁷ Stitt then plays three measures of longer notes (mm. 145–148)²⁸ before ending his second chorus with playful staccato quarter notes (mm. 149–151). At the start of his third chorus, Stitt returns to linear playing, performing another virtuosic twelve-measure eighth and sixteenth-note line (mm. 153–164).²⁹

The examples examined above demonstrate an effective use of contrast at both a local and sectional level. Stitt repeatedly sandwiches blues-based figures and longer rhythmic values between material that is harmonically and rhythmically dense. Stitt strengthens the contrast between these two kinds of material through changes in accentuation, register, and timbre. Stitt’s use of

²⁷ Stitt unintentionally breaks the note (m. 143, b.3), and it drops down one octave to $A\flat_4$. This can be heard at 1:55 on the “Ko Ko” recording. Because of the note breaking, the bluesy pitch bend is difficult to hear. However, careful listening to the second half of the note reveals a slight increase in pitch consistent with an intentional change in embouchure.

²⁸ Note that both Stitt’s D_5 (m. 145, b. 2) and $E\sharp_4$ (m. 147, b. 3) are the thirds of their respective chords ($B\flat$ and C^7).

²⁹ For a similar multiple-section example, see the beginning of Stitt’s fourth chorus, where he follows twelve measures of mostly eighth notes (mm. 217–228) with ascending figures (m. 229–231) and playful staccato quarter notes (m. 233–234).

contrast in “Ko Ko” does not make his solo more difficult to follow. Rather it does the opposite, by accentuating the “Ko Ko” chord progression and form.

Harmony

Stitt’s approach to harmony on “Ko Ko” is similar to that found in his earlier work. His phrases are filled with chord tones that track the “Ko Ko” chord changes closely. Stitt also frequently organizes his notes so that they target chord tones on consecutive beats.

An example of this is shown in excerpt below (Example 99):

The image shows two staves of musical notation in 4/4 time, starting at measure 27. The key signature has two flats (Bb and Eb).
 Staff 1 (measures 27-30):
 - Measure 27: Chord Fm7. Notes: G4 (3), A4 (1), Bb4 (7), C5 (3).
 - Measure 28: Chord Bb7. Notes: C5 (3), D5 (1), Eb5 (7), F6 (1).
 - Measure 29: Chord Eb. Notes: F5 (1), G5 (7), Ab5 (1), Bb5 (3), C6 (5), D6 (7), Eb6 (7), F6 (1).
 - Measure 30: Chord Eb. Notes: F6 (1), G6 (3), Ab6 (5), Bb6 (7), C7 (5), D7 (7), Eb7 (7), F7 (1).
 Annotations: "connected by step (Bb dominant bebop scale)" spans measures 27-28. "connected by arpeggio" spans measures 29-30. "accented upper neighbor" points to the Eb5 note in measure 29.
 Staff 2 (measures 31-34):
 - Measure 31: Chord Ebm. Notes: G4 (3), Ab4 (5), Bb4 (9), C5 (1).
 - Measure 32: Chord Ebm. Notes: G4 (3), Ab4 (5), Bb4 (9), C5 (1).
 - Measure 33: Chord Ebm. Notes: G4 (3), Ab4 (5), Bb4 (9), C5 (1).
 - Measure 34: Chord Bb. Notes: C5 (3), D5 (1), Eb5 (5).
 Annotations: "accented incomplete upper neighbor" points to the Bb4 note in measure 31.

Example 99: Approach to harmony in Stitt’s “Ko Ko” solo 1

One notable aspect of this excerpt is the number of chord tones it contains (between three and four per measure, on average). Stitt connects these chord tones by step and by leap. In mm. 27–28, Stitt descends a Bb dominant bebop scale,

forcing chord tones on the beat while traversing a major ninth ($B\flat_4-A\flat_3$) by step.

Stitt also connects chord tones by arpeggiated leap (mm. 29–30, 33).

Sometimes Stitt places non-chord tones on the beat, displacing the expected chord tone by one eighth note (m. 29, b. 1; m. 31, bb. 3–4). In one of these instances, the displacing note (F_5) functions both as a chord extension (the ninth of $E\flat^m$), and as an (incomplete) accented upper neighbor ornamenting the $E\flat_5$ that follows.

Stitt uses a similar approach to harmony on his B sections (Example 100). As with the previous excerpt, Stitt connects his chord tones using arpeggios (m. 60) and a descending dominant bebop scale (mm. 57–58). He also traverses a major eleventh entirely by step ($C\sharp_5-G\sharp_3$, mm. 61–63).³⁰

³⁰ The practice of highlighting chord tones through arpeggios and long scalar descents is found throughout Stitt's five-chorus solo. For an even longer descent, see mm. 317–319, where Stitt descends an octave and a diminished fifth ($D_5-G\sharp_3$) using only the E dominant bebop scale.

B

(0:45) C#m7 F#7 Bmaj7 connected by arpeggio

57 connected by step (F# dominant bebop scale)

61 connected by step

Example 100: Approach to harmony in Stitt’s “Ko Ko” solo 2

This excerpt also contains numerous chord tones. In several places, Stitt displaces the root of a chord onto an off-beat or a weak beat (m. 57, bb. 1–2; m. 59, b. 1; m. 60, b. 3; m. 63, b. 1). He also makes prominent use of ninths. For example, in both of the excerpt’s four-measure segments (mm. 57–60, 61–64), Stitt begins on the ninth of the chord, then descends by step to a lower chord tone on the following beat.³¹

³¹ D#5 is the ninth of C#m7 (m. 57, b. 1); Stitt descends by step to C#5 (the chord root) on beat two. C#5 is the ninth of Bm7 (m. 61, b. 4); Stitt descends by step to B4 (the fifth of E7) on beat one of m. 62.

B
 (0:45) C \sharp m⁷ F \sharp 7 Bmaj⁷

57 (C \sharp m⁷)

61 Bm⁷ E⁷ A (E⁷)

Example 101: Harmonic displacement in Stitt’s “Ko Ko” solo

The “Ko Ko” B section begins with ii-V-I chord progressions in B major and A major. In the bracketed sections of Example 101, above, Stitt is shown highlighting the chord tones of ii^{m7} over V⁷, and the chord tones of V⁷ over I. That is, Stitt performs material that suggests C \sharp m⁷ over the chords F \sharp 7 and Bmaj⁷ (mm. 58–59), and material that suggests E⁷ over an A chord (mm. 63–64). The resulting lines are still diatonic—since C \sharp m⁷ belongs to B major, and E⁷ belongs to A major. Because Stitt’s chord tones do not always align with the written chord changes, a sense of harmonic arrival is delayed. This is especially true in mm. 63–64, where Stitt delays resolution to the A chord until the last note (A₄) on third beat of m. 64.

The examples above are evidence of Stitt’s flexibility within a strongly diatonic framework. Harmonic flexibility over ii-V-I chord progressions was also

seen in Stitt's earlier work,³² as was the use of accented non-chord tones and chord enclosures. Here, however, these practices appear in a more developed form. They are executed at a faster tempo and with greater fluency.

Harmony and Form

Earlier sections showed how Stitt used certain kinds of phrases and figures to emphasize the "Ko Ko" harmony and form. This section will show how Stitt positions certain notes to extend this practice over an entire chorus.

The clearest example of this is found in Stitt's fourth solo chorus. In this chorus, Stitt ends his first two A sections on the third of B \flat major with a half note D (mm. 232, 247). In the last A section, however, Stitt ends on a tonic B \flat (mm. 277–280) and prolongs the note over four measures (Example 102).

³² See the Chromaticism section of the "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" solo analysis (Chapter X).

(3:02) first A section
Cm G7 Cm7 F7 half note on strong beat
229 Bb major: $\hat{3}$

(3:15) second A section
Cm7 F7 Bb
245 Bb major: $\hat{3}$ half note on strong beat

(3:40) third A section
Cm7 starts on strong beat F7 Bb
277 Bb major: $\hat{1}$ tied over four measures

Example 102: A section endings in Stitt's "Ko Ko" solo

By finishing the first two A sections on the third of B \flat major, Stitt signals a temporary point of arrival. By finishing the third A section on a multi-measure B \flat tonic, Stitt marks the final A section as distinct from the two that preceded it, and highlights the end of the chorus.

Stitt finishes each of his five choruses on a B \flat tonic, with one exception.³³ (The end of every chorus is shown in Example 103, below.) Four of Stitt's choruses end on B \flat_4 (mm. 86, 214, 278, 342). In three of those choruses, the B \flat_4

³³ The exception is at the end of Stitt's second chorus (mm. 150–151), which he ends on F $_4$, the fifth of B \flat .

is preceded by F₄ (i.e., 5-1).³⁴ This includes the fifth and final chorus, meaning that Stitt ends his solo with a clear V-I cadence in the tonic key (mm. 342–344).³⁵

chorus 1
86 F⁷ B^b
B^b major: $\hat{5}$ $\hat{1}$

chorus 2
150 F⁷ B^b
B^b major: $\hat{1}$ $\hat{5}$

chorus 3
214 F⁷ B^b
B^b major: $\hat{5}$ $\hat{1}$

chorus 4
278 F⁷ B^b
B^b major: $\hat{1}$

chorus 5
342 F⁷ B^b
B^b major: $\hat{5}$ $\hat{1}$

Example 103: End of choruses in Stitt’s “Ko Ko” solo

The four-measure B^b-tonic figure shown in Example 102 above (mm. 277–280) is remarkably similar to a figure from Parker’s “Ko Ko” solo. The two figures are shown in parallel in the Example 104, below:

³⁴ That is, Stitt ends his choruses on the notes F₄-B₄, a 5-1 melodic motion to the tonic of B^b major.

³⁵ Despite the harmonic clarity of this figure, Stitt’s B^b tonic arrives on the off-beat of four, instead of on the beat (i.e., Stitt anticipates the final B^b chord by half a beat). If Stitt’s B₄ arrived on a downbeat, the sense of cadential closure would be even stronger.

The image shows two musical staves. The top staff is for Parker, starting at measure 93. It shows a treble clef with a key signature of two flats. The first measure is Cm7. On beat three, there is a quarter note F4, which is held for two measures. The next measure is F7, and the following measure is Bb. An arrow labeled 'to next chorus' points to the right. Below the staff, a dashed line indicates the Bb major scale starting on the first measure.

The bottom staff is for Stitt, starting at measure 277. It also has a treble clef and two flats key signature. The first measure is Cm7. On beat three, there is a quarter note Bb4, which is held for two measures. The next measure is F7, and the following measure is Bb. An arrow labeled 'to next chorus' points to the right. Below the staff, a dashed line indicates the Bb major scale starting on the first measure.

Example 104: Similar figures in Parker and Stitt's "Ko Ko" solos

The similarities between Parker and Stitt's two figures are many. Both figures begin on beat three, four measures before the end of their respective choruses. They both contain a note that is held for several measures and bent from below. The figures also serve the same functions: they create contrast, accentuate the end of their respective choruses, and provide a brief respite from virtuosic eighth-note playing.

The main difference between the two figures is their pitch. In his early figure, Parker plays the dominant note (F₄), building anticipation for the following chorus. In his later figure, Stitt plays the tonic note (B_b₄), resulting in a sense of harmonic closure.

Chromaticism

As with his earlier solo on “Oop Bop Sh’Bam,” Stitt’s solo on “Ko Ko” contains frequent use of chromaticism. Throughout the solo, Stitt peppers his phrases with chromatic neighbor tones and passing tones. This is seen in Example 105, below:

(4:15) Am⁷ D⁷ G
321 chromatic incomplete upper neighbor

Gm⁷ C⁷ Cm⁷ F⁷
325 chromatic lower neighbors chromatic passing tones

Example 105: Chromaticism in Stitt’s “Ko Ko” solo

Four of the five chromatic tones indicated above occur on the beat.³⁶ As with the accented neighbor tones discussed earlier, Stitt’s chromatic notes often displace his chord tones by an eighth note, pushing them off the beat. Since these chromatic notes resolve immediately to chord tones, however, they do not obscure

³⁶ The four on-the-beat chromatic tones are the E^b₅ in m. 323, b. 1; C[#]₄ in m. 325, b. 4; F[#]₄ in m. 326, b. 4; and F[#]₄ in m. 327, b. 2.

the written “Ko Ko” harmony. Rather, they color the written chord changes by embellishing their chord tones.

Stitt’s approach to chromaticism is less radical than Parker’s. Stitt’s dissonant chromatic tones resolve quickly to consonant chord tones. Stitt’s solo also does not contain extended chromatic passages and harmonically ambiguous lines, as Parker’s “Ko Ko” solo does.

Stitt’s comparatively conservative approach to harmony is seen even in heavily chromatic passages like the one below (Example 106):

Example 106: Chromatic passage in Stitt’s “Ko Ko” solo

Aside from the three-note D major triad played over the B \flat ⁷ chord in m. 332,³⁷ the chromaticism in this passage consists of standalone chromatic pitches. Stitt integrates these pitches seamlessly into his lines, stringing short, consecutive chromatic segments together into mini-sequences (indicated with brackets in the excerpt above).³⁸

Stitt appears to have borrowed these short chromatic segments from Parker. The segments are intervallically equivalent to material found in Parker's "Ko Ko" solo. Although Stitt and Parker use these segments over different chords and at different pitch levels, the similarities between them are undeniable (Example 107):

³⁷ The D major triad resolves to the E \flat chord tone B \flat ₄ on the downbeat of m. 333. This is a brief (two-beat long) example of "side slipping."

³⁸ The mini-sequences are: A1-A2 (mm. 325–326), B1-B2 (mm. 326–327) and B3-B4 (mm. 331–332).

The image shows two musical staves. The top staff is for Parker, starting at measure 33 with a Bb chord. It features a chromatic line with chords C1 and C7, ending at measure 44 with an A2 chord. The bottom staff is for Stitt, starting at measure 325 with a Gm7 chord. It features a chromatic line with chords C7, Cm7, F7, Bb, Fm7, B3, and B4. Both solos include triplet arpeggio figures.

Example 107: Chromatic segments in Parker and Stitt’s “Ko Ko” solos

In spite of these similarities, Stitt’s approaches to chromaticism and harmony are far cleaner than Parker’s. Like Parker, Stitt uses chromaticism to add color and variety to his lines. Unlike Parker, however, Stitt is harmonically conservative. He departs from the written chords and key only briefly, favoring chord tones and harmonically-precise phrases.³⁹

³⁹ For example, there is nothing in Stitt’s solo as harmonically aggressive or as radical as mm. 125–128 and 209–216 in Parker’s “Ko Ko” solo (Appendix D). For a discussion of those measures, see the Second Solo Break and Harmony sections of Chapter XIV. Stitt does, however, quote from mm. 209–213 of Parker’s solo (see below).

Vocabulary

The preceding sections contain several examples of Stitt’s melodic material. They also contain three examples of Stitt adopting melodic material from Parker’s 1945 “Ko Ko” solo.⁴⁰ In this latter set of examples, Stitt both incorporates Parker’s melodic material note-for-note, and modifies it for his own purposes (making small changes to pitches and rhythms).

This section will present additional examples of Stitt adopting melodic material from Parker’s 1945 “Ko Ko” solo. These examples will demonstrate that the presence of Parker’s vocabulary is not an aberration or coincidence, but rather an important feature of Stitt’s solo.

Example 108 contains a figure from Parker’s “Ko Ko” solo (mm. 109–110). In Stitt’s first chorus, he performs this figure verbatim (mm. 37–38). Like Parker, Stitt begins the figure on the same beat and over the same chords.

The image shows a musical score for Example 108, comparing Parker's and Stitt's solos. The score is written on a single staff in C minor (one flat). Parker's solo (1:25) starts at measure 109 and consists of three measures: Cm7, Dm7, and G7. Stitt's solo (0:29) starts at measure 37 and consists of three measures: Cm, Dm7, and G7. The melodic lines for both are identical, starting on a quarter rest in the first measure of each phrase, followed by a quarter note G, a quarter note F, a quarter note E, a quarter note D, a quarter note C, a quarter note Bb, and a quarter note A.

Example 108: Vocabulary in Parker and Stitt’s “Ko Ko” solos 1

⁴⁰ See Example 88, Example 104, and Example 107 above.

Example 109 (mm. 33–34) contains the opening two measures of Parker’s main solo. At the beginning of his second chorus (mm. 89–90), Stitt performs this figure verbatim. He repeats the figure at the start of an A section in his fourth chorus (mm. 265–266).⁴¹

Example 109: Vocabulary in Parker and Stitt’s “Ko Ko” solos 2

Example 110 contains the opening two measures of Parker’s aggressively chromatic eight-measure solo break (mm. 209–210). At the start of his fourth chorus, Stitt performs a figure that is very similar (mm. 217–219). The figure is the most harmonically adventurous material in Stitt’s five-chorus solo. This

⁴¹ Stitt uses the figure a third time in mm. 329–330, beginning of beat three (see Example 107, above).

means that Stitt is at his most harmonically adventurous when he uses material derived from Parker.⁴²

Parker second solo break
(2:42)

209

Stitt 4
(2:53)

217

Example 110: Vocabulary in Parker and Stitt's "Ko Ko" solos 3

Stitt also assembles lines out of Parker's melodic material. Example 111 shows over three measures of a line from Stitt's fourth chorus (mm. 239–242). To construct this line, Stitt relies on material from different parts of Parker's solo (mm. 87–88, 212–213).⁴³

⁴² It also means that Parker's vocabulary is more harmonically adventurous than Stitt's own.

⁴³ For other examples like the Stitt line shown here, see mm. 111–114, 223–227, 304–306.

Parker from chorus 1 (1:08) A1 from second solo break (2:44) B1 C1

Stitt from chorus 4 (3:10) A1 B1 Bb C1

87 212 239

Example 111: Vocabulary in Parker and Stitt's "Ko Ko" solos 4

Stitt borrows even Parker's most memorable material. In the first B section of his 1945 "Ko Ko" solo, Parker performs an eighth-note triplet and alternate fingering sequence, the beginning of which is shown in Example 112 below (mm. 65–66). Parker "used this [opening sequence] regularly in the 1940s."⁴⁴ Stitt uses the first half of the sequence in two B sections of his own solo (mm. 121–122, 249–250).

⁴⁴ Woideck, *Charlie Parker*, 86.

Parker (0:50) C#m7 65 3 off-beat of two F#7 repeats major 2nd lower

Stitt (1:37) C#m7 121 3 3 F#7 (3:18) C#m7 249 3 3 F#7 beat three

Example 112: Eighth-note triplet figure in Parker and Stitt's "Ko Ko" solos

Stitt does not perform the sequence verbatim. In fact, Stitt does not perform it as a sequence at all: while Parker repeats the opening triplet figure a major second lower, Stitt does not. Stitt also smooths out the rhythm by removing Parker's syncopation. While Parker emphasizes the off-beat of two (m. 66), Stitt cuts the figure off on beat one (m. 122). In the second case, Stitt uses Parker's notes—D#₅, F#₅, C#₅—but plays a rhythm (m. 250) that emphasizes strong beats (beats one and three) instead of the off-beat of two.

Stitt's preference for strong beats is seen later in the phrase. Following his first eighth-note triplet figure (mm. 121–122), Stitt performs three additional phrase segments, all of which end on downbeats (mm. 124, 126, 129). These segments are shown in Example 113, below:

The image shows three staves of musical notation in treble clef with a key signature of two flats (Bb major). The first staff starts at measure 121 and includes annotations for 'downbeat' at the beginning and end of a two-measure phrase, and another 'downbeat' at the end of a three-measure phrase. Chords C#m7, F#7, and Bmaj7 are indicated. The second staff starts at measure 125 and includes annotations for 'downbeat' and 'weak beat' at the beginning of a phrase, and another 'downbeat' at the end of a three-measure phrase. Chords Bm7, E7, and A are indicated. The third staff starts at measure 129 and includes annotations for 'downbeat' and 'weak beat' at the beginning of a phrase, and another 'downbeat' at the end of a phrase. Chords Am7 and D7 are indicated, with a note that D7 '(breaks pattern)'. Measure groupings are shown with arrows and labels: 'two measures' and 'three measures'.

Example 113: Downbeat pattern in Stitt’s “Ko Ko” solo

Stitt tends to use shorter lines and prepared material over the first half of the B section, where the harmonies are more challenging and remote (ii-V-I in concert B major and A major). He then transitions to longer lines and more impromptu material for the second half, where the harmonies are less challenging and more closely-related to Bb major. This approach to “Ko Ko”’s B section was also seen in Parker’s solo.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ There are exceptions to this approach. In general, Stitt uses longer lines in the first half of the “Ko Ko” B section than Parker does. See, for example, Stitt’s first and fifth choruses (mm. 57–64 and 317–320).

Sequences and Quotes

The discussion of chromaticism above provided examples of Stitt using short mini-sequences of three to four notes each. Another example of this is found at the beginning of the B section of Stitt's fifth chorus (Example 114):

(4:08) C#m7 9 3 1 F#7 13 7 5 5 Bmaj7 9 3 1
313 stepwise descent to root stepwise descent to fifth stepwise descent to root

Example 114: Short sequence in Stitt's "Ko Ko" solo

Stitt performs a disjunct three-note figure (D#₅-E₄-C#₅) in m. 313. He repeats the figure with shorter note values in m. 314. He then repeats the original figure a major second lower (C#₅-D#₄-B₄) in m. 315. The figure is interesting harmonically: it consists of less stable chord extensions (9 and 13, beat one) falling to more stable lower chord tones (1 and 5, beat three).

A longer sequence is found in the B section of Stitt's third chorus. In mm. 185–188 of his solo, Stitt performs a version of Parker's "Tea for Two" sequence. Like the eighth-note triplet sequence discussed above, the "Tea for Two" sequence is one of the most memorable passages in Parker's 1945 "Ko Ko" solo. The two versions are shown in parallel below (Example 115).

Parker (1:41) **B**
C#m7 F#7 Bmaj7
129
sequence continues weak beat

133
Bm7 E7
weak beat line continues →

Stitt (2:28) **B**
C#m7 F#7 Bmaj7
185
strong beat strong beat sequence continues

189
Bm7
strong beat line continues →

Example 115: “Tea for Two” sequences in Parker and Stitt’s “Ko Ko” solos

While the sequences are nearly identical in pitch, their phrasing differs in interesting ways. Parker breaks the sequence on a weak beat (m. 132, m. 2) and restarts it on a weak beat (m. 133, m. 2). By contrast, Stitt breaks the sequence on a strong beat (m. 186, b. 3) and restarts it on a strong beat (m. 187, b. 1). As a result, Stitt’s sequence sounds steadier than Parker’s, even despite the rhythmic displacement inherent in the sequence itself.

After the “Tea for Two” sequence, Stitt then launches into a sequence of his own. The sequence consists of three ascending segments that end on E₅ (mm. 193–194), and three ascending segments that end on D₅ (mm. 196–197). The

rhythms of these segments differ, but their length does not. Each segment is a beat-and-a-half long, creating a three-against-four rhythm (Example 116).

Example 116: Rhythmic sequence in Stitt’s “Ko Ko” solo

Stitt’s sequence is also interesting on a melodic level. Because it is comprised of ascending arpeggio-like segments, the sequence contains both a lower voice and a higher voice. Over the course of nine measures, Stitt guides these voices downward by step. This is shown in Example 117, below. (Solid lines indicate connections within a phrase segment; dotted lines indicate connections across phrase segments.)

Example 117: Rhythmic sequence in Stitt’s “Ko Ko” solo 2

In addition to the “Tea for Two” sequence, Stitt quotes the melody to Ray Noble’s “Cherokee” several times in his solo. By doing this, Stitt is being playful, hinting at the harmonic and historical connection between the two pieces.⁴⁶ (See Example 118, below.)

⁴⁶ Parker’s “Ko Ko” is based on Ray Noble’s “Cherokee.” The two compositions also share a common chord progression and musical form for solos.

“Cherokee” melody

B \flat Fm 7 B \flat 7

chorus 3, 2nd A section
(2:15) B \flat Fm 7 B \flat 7

169

chorus 1, 1st A section
(0:19) B \flat

25

Example 118: “Cherokee” quote in Stitt’s “Ko Ko” solo 1

At the beginning of the second A section of his third chorus, Stitt plays a version of the opening four measures of the “Cherokee” melody (second system, mm. 169–172). He also begins his solo by hinting at the “Cherokee” melody, slyly holding a D $_4$ —the first note of the melody—for three beats (third system, m. 25).

In the last A section of his fourth chorus, Stitt alludes to a different part of the “Cherokee” melody (Example 119):

“Cherokee” melody

B \flat C 7

chorus 4, 3rd A section
(3:37) B \flat C 7

273

Example 119: “Cherokee” quote in Stitt’s “Ko Ko” solo 2

Accentuation

In his 1946 “Oop Bop Sh’Bam” solo, Stitt often accented the first note in groups of four eighth or sixteenth notes. This made Stitt’s solo pulse on strong beats, reinforcing the metrical rhythm and written chord changes.⁴⁷ Stitt’s approach to accentuation differed from that of Dizzy Gillespie, whose solo demonstrated a more dynamic, unpredictable, and “boppish” approach to accentuation.

In his 1963 “Ko Ko” solo, Stitt continues to accent notes in groups of four. However, Stitt’s longer lines also contain accents on weak beats and off-beats. The result is a solo that emphasizes strong beats, but is less rhythmically uniform than his earlier work.

This is shown in Example 120, taken from Stitt’s first chorus:

⁴⁷ Emphasizing strong beats reinforces the written chords because the chords change on strong beats.

The image displays a musical score for a solo, divided into four staves. The first staff starts at measure 43 with a treble clef and a key signature of two flats. It features chords Fm7, Bb7, and Eb. The second staff begins at measure 47 with chords Ebm and Bb. The third staff starts at measure 50 with a C7 chord. The fourth staff begins at measure 53 with chords Cm7, F7, and Bb. A 'lay back' annotation is placed over the first measure of the fourth staff. Accents (v) are placed under various notes throughout the score, indicating the performer's emphasis.

Example 120: Stitt’s approach to accentuation of his “Ko Ko” solo

Analysis of the excerpt above reveals certain patterns. While notes on strong beats are most likely to be accented, notes on weak beats and off-beats are accented when they start or end a phrase segment (m. 43, b. 2; m. 49, b. 2; m. 55, b. 4). Notes on weak beats and off-beats are also accented when they are the highest notes of their phrase segment (m. 44, b. 4; m. 51, b. 2; m. 53, b. 4, n. 4).

Parker’s “Ko Ko” solo also suggests a preference for accents on strong beats, particularly in longer lines. However, this preference is even more pronounced in Stitt’s solo. Parker’s accents have a wider dynamic range than Stitt’s accents, on average. This difference becomes noticeable when comparing Parker’s accented notes with his non-accented notes and ghost notes.

Ironically, Stitt’s off-beat and weak-beat accents are most prominent in melodic material that is borrowed from Parker. Two examples of this are Stitt’s version of the “Tea for Two” sequence discussed above, as well as the figure below (Example 121):

The image shows two musical staves. The top staff is labeled 'Parker (1:52)' and starts at measure 142. It features a C7 chord, a triplet of notes, and an accent on an off-beat note. The bottom staff is labeled 'Stitt (0:54)' and starts at measure 68. It features a G chord, a triplet of notes, and accents on strong beats. A box labeled 'strong beat' points to the first beat, and another box labeled 'strong beats' points to the next two beats.

Example 121: Comparison of accentuation in Parker and Stitt’s “Ko Ko” solos

As the bracketed segments show, Parker and Stitt accent the chromatic figure the same way. There are interesting differences, however, in the rest of the excerpt. Parker accents an off-beat note (m. 144, b. 2), while Stitt accents several notes on strong beats (mm. 68, b. 1; m. 70, bb. 1, 3).

Note Placement and Swing Feel

In “Ko Ko,” Stitt plays consistently on top of the beat. This can be verified by comparing Stitt’s phrases against the rhythm section at virtually any point in

the recording. The contrast in note placement is especially striking between Stitt and bassist Richard Davis, who places his quarter notes slightly later in the beat.

Stitt is not merely on top of the beat; he pushes ahead of it. This results in the tempo increasing to 320 beats per minute by the end of Stitt’s solo (an increase of 30 BPM)—and even then, Stitt remains on top of the beat. At certain points, Stitt pushes so far ahead that it sounds like he is leaving the rhythm section behind. One example of this is near the end of the piece, at the return of the “Ko Ko” theme. Stitt rushes the theme. As a result, he gets out of sync with drummer Connie Kay for over three measures (Example 122, mm. 348–351):

(Stitt)
(4:34)

rush

347

(Kay)

351

back in sync

(Kay)

The image shows two systems of musical notation. The first system is for Stitt's solo, starting at measure 347. It features a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a 4/4 time signature. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes. An annotation 'rush' with a long arrow above the staff indicates that the tempo increases during this section. The second system is for the drum part, starting at measure 351. It features a bass clef and a 4/4 time signature. The drum part is represented by a series of 'x' marks on a single line, indicating the placement of the snare drum. An annotation 'back in sync' with a downward arrow points to the start of the drum part in measure 351, indicating that the drum part returns to its original tempo after Stitt's solo.

Example 122: Stitt and Kay, return of the “Ko Ko” theme

Despite his forward note placement, Stitt also places certain figures behind the beat for effect. He often does this at the end of a long eighth-note line. As with his use of staccato quarter-note figures, playing behind the beat allows Stitt to add color and variety to otherwise rhythmically predictable phrases.

Example 123 shows three separate instances of Stitt playing behind the beat. In the first instance, Stitt lays back on some quarter notes (mm. 54–55). In the second instance, Stitt lays back on the final notes (mm. 163–164) of a long, rhythmically dense line. In the third instance, Stitt lays back on a short, bluesy syncopated figure (mm. 200–201). In each of these instances, Stitt lays back at or near the end of a melodic line, as well as near the end of an A section.

quarter notes
(0:41) C⁷ Cm⁷ F⁷ B^b lay back

end of long line
(2:09) B^b C⁷ lay back

bluesy figure
(2:38) C⁷ Cm⁷ F⁷ B^b lay back

Example 123: Behind-the-beat playing in Stitt’s “Ko Ko” solo

Because his notes are mostly ahead of the beat, Stitt's swing feel is characterized by persistent forward motion. Forward motion also characterizes the swing feel in Parker's "Ko Ko" solo. But here again, there are slight differences between the two saxophonists' approaches. Stitt plays earlier in the beat; he is also more consistently on top of the beat than Parker is. Unlike Parker, Stitt does not vary his note spacing by squeezing groups of eighth notes closer together. Combined with Stitt's preference for accenting notes on strong beats, this results in a more even and regular eighth-note swing feel.

Timbre

With the possible exception of his virtuosic technique, Stitt's saxophone sound on "Ko Ko" is the clearest indication of a developing musical style. Compared with his sound in the mid-1940s, Stitt's "Ko Ko" sound is fuller and more expressive. It is somewhat darker in timbre, with a more prominent mid-range and occasional thinness in the upper register. It also has a more flexible pitch characteristic of a larger mouthpiece tip opening and looser embouchure.

Stitt's "Ko Ko" solo contains frequent use of timbral inflections, including bluesy inflections (bent notes, wails) and a slower, wider vibrato on longer notes. Stitt's saxophone sound also has a playful character, which Stitt highlights

through changes to articulation and rhythm, combined with exaggerated diatonic figures.⁴⁸

The above characteristics are evidence of a more developed and personal saxophone sound. They are also evidence of a departure from Stitt's earlier, more Parker-like sound. In "Oop Bop Sh'Bam," Stitt's sound was dry, edgy, and tightly controlled, with few prominent timbral inflections and sparse use of vibrato. As with Parker's sound, Stitt's sound typified a modern conception of saxophone tone: not sweet or husky, but clear, focused, and centered in pitch.

While Stitt's "Ko Ko" sound is clean and focused, it is also fuller, less tightly controlled, bluesier, looser in pitch, and more expressive. It is not brittle or hard-edged, like Parker's "Ko Ko" sound, nor is it as raw or aggressive in character. It is also somewhat bendy; the attacks and releases of notes often differ slightly in pitch. The fullness, bendiness, and bluesiness of Stitt's 1963 "Ko Ko" sound represent a departure from his mid-1940's timbral aesthetic.

⁴⁸ Examples of this include Stitt's playful staccato quarter-note chord tones at mm. 149–150 and 177–178.

Conclusion

Stitt's 1963 "Ko Ko" solo is an impressive performance by a virtuoso saxophonist. Recorded over the chords to Parker's 1945 bebop masterpiece, Stitt's solo is both a tribute to his slightly older contemporary, and a compelling attestation of Stitt's own mature musical style.

Despite the similarities to his mid-1940's work, Stitt's "Ko Ko" solo represents a clear improvement in musical execution and style. Compared with "Oop Bop Sh'Bam," Stitt's "Ko Ko" solo is more polished, confident, and fluid. It is also more flexible (i.e., less tightly controlled), owing to Stitt's varied phrasing, increased use of bluesy material, and a richer, more expressive saxophone sound. Like his earlier work, Stitt's "Ko Ko" solo is conceptually and structurally clear. But even where there is continuity with his earlier work—in Stitt's approaches to accentuation, form, harmony, note placement, and rhythm—there is increased variation and evidence of a developing approach.

Stitt's "Ko Ko" solo is musically similar to Parker's classic "Ko Ko" solo in several ways. Both solos are comprised mainly of multi-measure eighth-note lines performed slightly ahead of the beat at very fast tempos. The eighth-note lines highlight the "Ko Ko" harmony through chord-tone-heavy arpeggios and scalar material. The lines are also frequently embellished through chromaticism,

harmonic displacement, and changing rhythmic values. In their solos, Parker and Stitt outline the “Ko Ko” form through adjustments in phrasing and rhythm at the ends of A sections, and with prepared material and sequences during B sections. Despite important timbral differences, both saxophonists play with a bright, clear, and focused saxophone sound.⁴⁹

Stitt’s solo also contains multiple examples of Parker’s vocabulary—melodic material borrowed note-for-note (or adapted with minor changes) from Parker’s 1945 solo. This vocabulary includes many memorable figures and sequences, like the beginning of Parker’s eight-measure solo break, the opening of Parker’s main solo, and the “Tea for Two” sequence. The frequency and variety of Parker material in Stitt’s solo indicate that Stitt had internalized Parker’s musical language.

Despite these similarities, Stitt’s “Ko Ko” solo diverges from Parker’s in subtle but significant ways. Stitt’s harmonic approach is conservative, while Parker’s approach is progressive. Stitt’s saxophone sound is flexible and full, while Parker’s sound is aggressive and edgy. Stitt’s rhythmic approach and swing feel are steady, while Parker’s rhythmic approach and swing feel fluctuate. In

⁴⁹ That is, they have modern saxophone sounds (unlike the husky, spread, and sweeter sounds of their predecessors).

improvisational presentation and composition, Stitt's solo is more consistent, ordered, and conventional. By contrast, Parker's solo is unpredictable, spontaneous, and avant-garde.

Stitt's "Ko Ko" solo demonstrates a strong awareness of song structure. Even in the aspects of Stitt's playing that vary—e.g., accentuation, phrase lengths, rhythmic values, timbre—Stitt uses this variation to emphasize the "Ko Ko" form and harmony. The presence of short bluesy figures and staccato quarter-note arpeggios at the end of A sections are two examples of this. Parker's "Ko Ko" solo also demonstrates an awareness of song structure. For example, Parker frequently uses musical quotations and sequences at the beginnings of sections. He also changes harmony and phrasing in ways that accentuate formal divisions.

Despite this similarity, Stitt and Parker's "Ko Ko" solos have a significant structural difference. In Stitt's solo, the foreground is more consistent. Stitt uses his notes to reinforce and work out the underlying song structure in clear and logical ways. In Parker's solo, the foreground is mercurial. Parker uses his notes in ways that sometimes cut against the underlying song structure (especially harmonically). Parker's solo has an unpredictable surface that conceals a coherent approach to form and harmony, while Stitt's solo is coherent all the way down.

CHAPTER XVI

CONCLUSIONS

Summary of Problem

Sonny Stitt was a major jazz figure whose music is best known for its apparent resemblance to the music of Charlie Parker. Stitt was an early adopter of the New York bebop style and a bandmate to many of its pioneers. He was also one of the most recorded saxophonists in jazz history. He was respected by his contemporaries, admired by younger musicians, and feared on the bandstand by many. But Stitt had a mixed reputation among his critics. Some critics praised Stitt as a talented bebop practitioner with his own musical style, while others dismissed him as a mere Parker imitator. Virtually all of Stitt's critics compared him to Parker.

Stitt expressed admiration for Parker but denied copying his musical style. In recorded interviews, Stitt praised Parker and acknowledged him as a musical influence. However, he took exception to his reputation as a Parker imitator and

argued that he was only trying to be himself.¹ Some critics and musicians expressed a similar view; they argued that Stitt was misunderstood by his critics and called attention to the unique aspects of his musical style.

The preceding study was undertaken to determine if Stitt's critics were correct to describe Stitt as a Parker imitator. Examining this question involved carrying out a detailed analysis of Stitt's career; analysis of published statements from critics, musicians, and Stitt himself; and a comparative analysis of Stitt and Parker solos recorded between 1944 and 1963.

The following sections contain summaries of the analysis findings, some conclusions based on these findings, and their implications for further research.

Stitt's Career

Analysis of Stitt's career reveals numerous facts that are relevant to Stitt's critical reputation as a Parker imitator.

In interviews throughout his career, Stitt listed Parker as a musical influence. Stitt stated a preference for Parker's early (i.e., mid-1940's) playing.

¹ "I may have a few of Bird's clichés, but I can only be myself." Bittan, "Don't Call Me Bird," 19.

This was the playing that introduced Parker to Stitt—first on recordings, and then in person in Washington, D.C., Kansas City, and New York.

Stitt had musical influences that overlapped with Parker's. Stitt was influenced by saxophonists Benny Carter, Johnny Hodges, Jimmy Dorsey, Lester Young, Coleman Hawkins, Ben Webster, and Don Byas. Parker was also connected to each of these saxophonists. Parker studied their music (Carter, Hodges, Dorsey), quoted them in his early recordings (Young, Hawkins, Webster) and was sharing stages with them by the mid-1940s (Webster, Byas). Stitt “used to go and listen” to pianist Art Tatum,² who was one of Parker's early New York influences. Stitt and Parker were both greatly influenced by tenor saxophonist Lester Young, although critics suggest that they were drawn to different aspects of Young's style.

Stitt encountered Parker's music early in his professional career. The literature suggests Stitt heard Parker's recordings with McShann in 1943, when Stitt was only nineteen years old. According to saxophonist “Big Nick” Nicholas, Stitt also listened to a homemade recording of Parker on tenor saxophone around this time. Stitt heard Parker perform live in 1943 in Washington, D.C. He also met

² Stitt, interview by Les Tomkins.

Parker face-to-face in Kansas City, where the two saxophonists briefly played music together at a local club.

Stitt's early encounters with Parker's music left an impression on him. Stitt enthusiastically shared Parker's recordings with other musicians. He "started playing like Bird" after hearing Parker on tenor.³ He described Parker's 1943 Washington, D.C. performance as "just electrifying."⁴ Stitt told the story about meeting Parker in Kansas City throughout his career, and frequently used the anecdote to shower Parker with praise: "[H]e was a great man. I loved him"⁵; "He was the greatest man I ever knew."⁶

By 1945, Stitt was living in New York, the city where Parker was based. At this time, Parker had already begun his innovative small group experiments with Dizzy Gillespie, and his influence among young musicians was growing. Stitt began working with Parker's former bandmates in New York. In April 1945, Stitt joined the Billy Eckstine Orchestra, filling an alto saxophone chair occupied

³ Crouch, liner notes to *Big and Warm*.

⁴ Tomkins, "Sonny Stitt Says There's NO Successor to Bird," 16.

⁵ Gitler, *Swing to Bop*, 74.

⁶ Reisner, *Bird*, 216.

by Parker the previous year. In 1946, Stitt replaced Parker in Gillespie's orchestra and sextet.

Stitt's work with Gillespie was compared to Parker by critics at the time. Stitt was described as a "super Charlie Parker."⁷ He played "amazingly like Charlie Parker [but with] better execution,"⁸ and was "the first young alto star to simulate Bird's style effectively."⁹ Gillespie later said Stitt was "the closest to [Parker] that I have heard,"¹⁰ and described the experience of performing with Stitt like "Charlie Parker playing next to me until I opened my eyes."¹¹

Stitt's similarity to Parker during this period was attested to by other musicians. Trombonist J. J. Johnson, who worked with Stitt in the late 1940s, said that Stitt was "rightfully" accused "of being a Bird clone," because he tried "to sound as close to Charlie Parker as he could."¹² Drummer Kenny Clarke described Stitt as "the essence of Bird," although Stitt was "quite individual in his

⁷ Vail, *Dizzy Gillespie*, 39.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁹ Feather, *Inside Jazz*, 98.

¹⁰ "Sonny gets down into all the little things of Charlie Parker's playing. The others just play his music; Sonny plays his life." Gillespie and Lees, "The Years with Yard," 162.

¹¹ Myers, "Interview: Junior Mance."

¹² J.J. Johnson, interview by Lida and David Baker.

style.”¹³ Pianist Junior Mance noted that Stitt carried a picture of Parker in his saxophone case.¹⁴ Mance said elsewhere: “Stitt worshiped Charlie Parker—I know that for a fact.”¹⁵

Stitt continued to encounter Parker after his first few years in New York. Occasionally, Parker offered work to Stitt. Sometimes the two saxophonists performed at the same concert or opposite each other at a club. Shortly before his untimely death in 1955, Parker told Stitt “in front of people” that he would leave Stitt “the keys to the kingdom.”¹⁶ The statement was a morbid remark made by a dying man, but it took on prophetic significance after Parker’s death. By 1960, critics were writing as though Parker had earnestly appointed Stitt to be his bebop saxophone successor.

In the decades following Parker’s death, Stitt participated in numerous live memorials and tributes. He joined a touring Parker tribute band. Stitt performed on several occasions at the annual Charlie Parker Memorial Concert in Chicago. Stitt also participated in George Wein’s “The Musical Life of Charlie Parker,” a

¹³ Stewart, liner notes to *The Complete Roost Sonny Stitt Studio Sessions*, 1.

¹⁴ Myers, “Interview: Junior Mance.”

¹⁵ Cohen, “Sonny Stitt,” 36.

¹⁶ Tomkins, “Sonny Stitt Says There’s NO Successor to Bird,” 16.

touring show that had Stitt recreating Parker's small group music with Gillespie on stage.

Stitt participated in recorded tributes to Parker as well. Stitt wrote and recorded pieces like "Blues for Bird" and "Blues for Yard." He recorded an album called *I Remember Bird*, featuring Leonard Feather's composition of the same name. Throughout his career, Stitt performed and recorded repertoire associated with Parker (including Parker's own compositions). Stitt also recorded the tribute album *Stitt Plays Bird*, which consisted almost entirely of Parker compositions. *Stitt Plays Bird* would further bind Stitt's reputation to Parker; in the opinion of many critics, "it was the best album Stitt ever made."¹⁷

Analysis of Stitt's career, then, reveals a series of connections to Parker and his music over a forty-year period. Stitt encountered Parker's music near the beginning of his professional career. He was inspired by Parker and soon moved to New York City, where he had greater exposure to Parker's music. Before long, Stitt was performing saxophone in Parker's old bands and was being compared to Parker in print. New York critics observed as early as 1946 that Stitt sounded like Parker. Musicians who knew and performed with Stitt in the 1940s later described

¹⁷ Early, "The Passing of Jazz's Old Guard," 34.

Stitt as an enthusiastic Parker disciple who captured the essence of his musical style.

The connections to Parker continued throughout the rest of Stitt's career. Shortly before he died, Parker told Stitt he would leave him the keys to the kingdom. This statement spread and strengthened the perception that Stitt was Parker's musical successor. Stitt denied he was another Parker,¹⁸ but his career choices often suggested otherwise. In the decades following Parker's death, Stitt performed Parker's repertoire in multiple projects and venues. Although Parker was dead, Stitt could often be found on stage or in the studio, keeping his music alive.

Stitt's Critics

Analysis of published statements by Stitt's critics reveals even clearer connections to Parker. The findings of this analysis are as follows:

First, comparisons of Stitt to Parker are ubiquitous in the critical literature. Critics began to compare Stitt to Parker in 1946, as Stitt's visibility was increasing in the New York jazz scene. The comparisons continued throughout

¹⁸ "I'm no new Bird, man... Nobody's Bird! Bird died!" Bittan, "Don't Call Me Bird," 20.

Stitt's career and have persisted to this day. Comparisons to Parker appear in multiple media: academic journals, album liner notes, dissertations, jazz books, newspapers, radio interviews, and trade periodicals. It is no overstatement to say that comparisons to Parker are among the most conspicuous and enduring characteristics of the critical Stitt literature.

Second, despite the ubiquity of comparisons to Parker, critics differ in their evaluation of Stitt and his music. Some critics dismiss Stitt as a mere Parker imitator. Other critics see Stitt as a Parker-influenced saxophonist whose considerable skills brought him close to greatness. Still other critics describe Stitt as a tragic figure whose career trajectory and reputed similarity to Parker hindered the reception of his work by the jazz press.

For example, British critic Steve Race "accused Sonny Stitt of copying Charlie Parker as hard as he could, and of having 'given up all pretense of individuality.'"¹⁹ In recounting an incredible Stitt performance he had personally witnessed, Nat Hentoff described Stitt as a "technically fluent" "steady swinger" who nevertheless lacked "Bird's careening imagination [and] ability to hurl an

¹⁹ Stitt, interview by Les Tomkins.

audience into new dimensions of feeling time and musical space.”²⁰ Writer Gerald Early believed that Stitt was “haunted by the ghost of Bird,” despite being an “incredibly gifted saxophonist who really did have a sound that was distinct from Parker’s.”²¹

Third, critics claim that Stitt had particular musical features in common with Parker. There is a broad consensus about what these features are. The three most commonly cited features are musical language (melodic material/vocabulary), tone (saxophone sound), and technique. Other frequently cited features include timbral inflection and attack. Critics also point to more abstract similarities, arguing that Stitt captured the aesthetic, conceptual, and emotional dimensions of Parker’s musical style.

Fourth, many critics argue that Stitt had his *own* musical style. Despite Stitt’s similarity to Parker—which (again) even Stitt’s most sympathetic critics acknowledge—Stitt’s style differed from Parker’s in significant ways. As with Stitt’s similarity to Parker, critics have explained Stitt’s *dissimilarity* to Parker in

²⁰ And yet: “This night Sonny Stitt was moving efficiently through a set when the rhythm section stopped—and Sonny executed a long break, lightning flashes of searing, ineluctably connected, thrusting notes that seemed to have a palpable force. The effect on the room was as if those sounds had cast a spell. All conversation stopped. Hands about to light a cigarette or reaching for a drink froze.” Hentoff, *Jazz Is*, “Lady Day.”

²¹ Early, “The Passing of Jazz’s Old Guard,” 34.

terms of particular musical features, and there is a broad consensus about what these features are. According to these critics, Stitt's approach to harmony was more conventional than Parker's; and his approaches to phrasing and solo construction were more symmetrical. Other differences include saxophone tone, note attack, bluesiness, and rhythm. Critics also describe differences between Stitt and Parker in more abstract terms. They claim, for instance, that Stitt was a less inventive but steadier soloist than Parker. While Parker was mercurial and raw, Stitt was consistent, logical, predictable, and smooth.

Fifth, some critics dispute—or try to qualify—Stitt's reputation as a Parker imitator. Again, these critics recognize Stitt's stylistic similarity to Parker. However, they argue that by continually bringing up Parker, their fellow reviewers misjudge Stitt and underestimate his musical ability. As early as 1960, critics had begun to “lament” a jazz press that seemed unable to mention Stitt “without invoking Parker's name.”²² To be sure, Stitt used “secondhand” melodic material he borrowed from Parker.²³ But despite these similarities, Stitt was “a

²² James, “Stitt, Parker, and the Question of Influence,” 9.

²³ Ibid.

soloist of the first rank,” a man with his own ideas who “borrowed material” only when it “was in perfect accord with what he had to say.”²⁴

Other critics qualify Stitt’s critical reputation in other ways. For example, Gerald Early suggests that dismissing Stitt as a Parker imitator ignores important distinctions between the two saxophonists’ career paths and artistic goals. While Parker was a radical revolutionary who appealed to “white and black hipsters and intellectuals,” Stitt was essentially a road musician whose main audience was “ordinary, working-class folk.”²⁵ By the 1960s, Stitt was “no longer a modernist,”²⁶ but rather a tireless performer who helped to “unlock the complexities of the ‘new music.’”²⁷ Stitt “demystified Bird’s music” and “made it accessible” to younger musicians and the listening public.²⁸ Parker was a bebop prophet, while Stitt was a bebop practitioner.

Musical Analysis

The relationship between Stitt and Parker was explored further through musical analysis. Analysis of Stitt and Parker solos recorded between 1944 and

²⁴ Ibid., 10.

²⁵ Early, “The Passing of Jazz’s Old Guard,” 35.

²⁶ McRae, *Jazz Cataclysm*, 22.

²⁷ Harrison, Thacker, and Nicholson, *Essential Jazz Records*, 65.

²⁸ Early, “The Passing of Jazz’s Old Guard,” 35.

1963 revealed a number of musical features. The solo features overlap, suggesting similarities between the two saxophonists' improvisational styles. However, the solo features also diverge, suggesting differences between their improvisational styles.

First, the overlapping and diverging solo features discovered through musical analysis largely correspond with the musical features cited by Stitt's critics. That is, on the narrow question of *what* features Stitt and Parker had (and did not have) in common, the musical analysis corroborates the critical consensus. For example, analysis of Stitt and Parker's solos revealed similarities in musical vocabulary, tone, and technique. Analysis of Stitt and Parker's solos revealed dissimilarities in phrasing, rhythm, and solo construction. Stitt's solos also were found to be more logical, predictable, and symmetrical than Parker's solos, as critics claimed.

Second, analysis of Stitt and Parker's solos revealed overlapping and diverging musical features beyond those commonly cited by critics. For example, musical analysis found similarities in general harmonic approach, melodic contour, repertoire, phrase lengths, rhythmic values, and use of contrast. Musical analysis also revealed dissimilarities between Stitt and Parker's solos, even in the characteristics commonly cited by critics as similar. For example, Stitt's use of

bent notes and high register wails in “Ko Ko” (1963) represents a departure from Parker’s approach to timbre, notwithstanding the underlying similarity in saxophone tone. Stitt’s habit of starting and stopping on strong beats extends to material he borrows from Parker. As a result, Stitt and Parker phrase segments sometimes contain the same notes, in the same order, but the placement and rhythmic effect of these notes differ.

Third, the similarities between Stitt and Parker’s analyzed solos become more pronounced over time. This is seen by comparing how similar each of Stitt’s three solos are to Parker’s mid-1940’s work. Despite its modern qualities (clear saxophone tone, linear-based improvisation, predominance of chord tones on strong beats), Stitt’s 1944 “Ready, Set, Jump” solo is not especially similar to Parker’s work of the same period.²⁹ However, Stitt’s 1946 “Oop Bop Sh’Bam” solo is similar to Parker’s work, particularly in terms of musical vocabulary, tone, and technique. In terms of musical vocabulary, Stitt’s 1963 “Ko Ko” solo and Parker’s 1945 “Ko Ko” solo are noticeably similar. Stitt’s solo not only contains similar harmonic, melodic and rhythmic features (e.g., accented non-chord tones,

²⁹ Stitt’s “Ready, Set, Jump” solo is modern compared with the swing-style solos of his bandmates in the Tiny Bradshaw Orchestra, but not compared with the “Red Cross” solo Parker recorded that same year.

arpeggios, chromatic embellishment, fast flurries of notes, long eighth-note lines, B section sequences), it incorporates entire phrase segments from Parker's solo note-for-note.

Fourth, the dissimilarities between Stitt and Parker's analyzed solos also become more pronounced over time. Between 1944 and 1963, Stitt matured as an improviser and saxophonist. As Stitt matured, the more distinctive aspects of his musical style became more prominent. For example, Stitt's "symmetrical" approaches to phrasing and form are more obvious on "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" than on the earlier "Ready, Set, Jump." While Stitt's 1963 "Ko Ko" solo contains a great deal of Parker's vocabulary, Stitt positions, executes, and adorns this vocabulary in his own way. Where Parker is aggressive, spontaneous, and unpredictable, Stitt is clear, consistent, and logical. The result is a divergence in style that cuts against the two solos' note-to-note similarities.

Additional Conclusions

Now that analyses of Stitt's career, critics, and solos have been considered separately, it is time to consider them collectively. Considering the analysis findings together leads to additional conclusions about Stitt and his reputation as a Parker imitator:

First, given the details of Stitt's early career, the testimony of musicians who knew him, and Stitt's own statements in interviews, it is highly probable that Stitt studied Parker's musical style between 1943 and 1946. This four-year period is marked by increasing exposure to Parker—through recordings, live performances and face-to-face meetings—and the first signs of stylistic influence.

Musicians who knew Stitt early in his professional career (i.e., before 1945) spoke of Stitt's great enthusiasm for Parker's music—an enthusiasm Stitt himself expressed in numerous published interviews. Musicians also noted that Stitt moved away from the Benny Carter-influenced saxophone style he had in high school toward a more Parker-influenced style. "Big Nick" Nicholas attributed Stitt's change in saxophone style to an encounter with an early Parker recording. Nicholas is an important eyewitness: he spent time with young Stitt in Saginaw, and worked with him during the period in question.

When Stitt moved to New York, his exposure to Parker increased again. Stitt was then living in the same city as Parker. Soon he began working in the same bands and with the same musicians that Parker had. Stitt's later statements support the conclusion that he was influenced by Parker during this period. Stitt repeatedly cited Parker as a musical influence but stated a preference for his early

music.³⁰ Stitt also tended to list Parker among his earlier influences (i.e., alongside swing saxophonists Carter and Hodges), and credited Parker with giving him his musical “foundations.”³¹

Second, the observations of critics and the analysis of Stitt’s mid-1940’s solos show that Stitt’s musical style became more like Parker’s musical style during this same period. When Stitt moved to New York City, he was a young saxophonist who was enthusiastic about Parker and his music. By 1946, critics were comparing Stitt to Parker in print. Furthermore, analysis of Stitt’s “Ready, Set, Jump” and “Oop Bop Sh’Bam” solos largely substantiate the critics’ comparisons. The April 1946 claim that Stitt “sounds... amazingly like Charlie Parker and has better execution” is not merely one critic’s opinion. It is supported by analysis of Stitt’s May 1946 “Oop Bop Sh’Bam” solo.

In other words, Stitt’s musical style became more like Parker’s musical style as his exposure to Parker’s music increased. This is evidence that Parker was a direct and (to critics) identifiable influence on Stitt’s early musical style.

³⁰ “He sounded even better when he was younger.” Tomkins, “Sonny Stitt Says There’s NO Successor to Bird,” 16.

³¹ “The alto players I knew were Bird, Johnny Hodges, Willie Smith, and Benny Carter, and that’s where I got my foundations.” Nolan, “Sonny Stitt,” 27.

Third, the literature indicates that Stitt's adoption of certain elements of Parker's style was to some degree intentional. While conscious imitation is of course difficult to prove, statements from Stitt suggest he was aware that he had borrowed from Parker. In a 1959 interview, Stitt denied he was Parker's "successor," but said: "if a fellow has a style on the order of the artist he idolizes, and he can use his own ideas—then he can build something out of it."³² Elsewhere, Stitt admits to using Parker's musical vocabulary but simultaneously asserts independence from him. In 1959: "I have a few of Bird's clichés, but I can only be myself."³³ In 1980: Stitt "added Parker's 'little licks and things' to his own repertoire, he said, but still maintained his own identity. 'You can't be somebody else, first of all.'"³⁴

Some degree of conscious imitation seems especially likely given Stitt's reverence for Parker. Musicians like Mance noted that Stitt "worshiped Parker"

³² Morgenstern writes that this quote "comes as close as anything I've ever read or heard from Stitt on this question to an admission that he did 'idolize' Parker and had not independently arrived at a similar place." Tomkins, "Sonny Stitt Says There's NO Successor to Bird," 16; Morgenstern and Meyer, *Living with Jazz*.

³³ Bittan, "Don't Call Me Bird," 19.

³⁴ Heron, "Stitt's Sax Makes the 'Willow Weep'."

and “would speak up whenever anybody would say anything bad about him.”³⁵ In a 1979 interview, Stitt said: “He was the greatest saxophone player that ever lived—he was the governor and I am the lieutenant governor... It doesn’t bother me a bit that people associate me with Charlie Parker—I’m proud to be associated with a genius like him.”³⁶

Fourth, although Stitt (probably consciously) adopted aspects of Parker’s musical style, the frequent dismissal of Stitt as a Parker imitator is problematic, and can be challenged on three grounds:

One, Stitt emphatically denied that he was a Parker imitator in published statements spanning over two decades. Stitt was not only consistent in his denials; he was consistent in how he phrased his denials. Stitt praised Parker—sometimes acknowledging him as an “idol” or “influence”—but reiterated that he was his own man. For example, in the same interview where Stitt suggests that Parker is an “artist he idolizes,” Stitt says: “No one is a successor to Bird because he was out there by himself. All you can do is try to make a place for yourself... He was

³⁵ Cohen, “Sonny Stitt,” 36.

³⁶ Frederick I. Douglass, “Stitt Recalls Charlie Parker—in More Ways than One,” *Baltimore Sun*, August 31, 1979, B2.

an extraordinary man... He was a genius.”³⁷ In interviews, Stitt frequently referred to his other favorite musicians (e.g., Carter, Hawkins, Hodges, Young, etc.), as if to suggest to his interviewers that his influences were not limited to Charlie Parker alone.³⁸

It is possible to argue that Stitt was a liar. After all, elsewhere Stitt understates the extent of Parker’s influence³⁹ and claims that he developed his musical style on his own.⁴⁰ Given how adamant and consistent Stitt’s denials are, however, one should remain open to the possibility that Stitt did not see himself as a Parker imitator. Stitt said repeatedly, in one form or another: “Everyone should want to be themselves. I’m always going to be myself.”⁴¹ If he was telling the

³⁷ Tomkins, “Sonny Stitt Says There’s NO Successor to Bird,” 16.

³⁸ For example: “[Parker] was one of my biggest idols on the saxophone, but I also dug people like Don Byas, Coleman Hawkins, Johnny Hodges, Buddy Johnson and Chuck Berry during the period in which I was putting together my thing on the horn... I’ve learned from Parker just like I’ve learned from everybody I’ve ever worked with.” Douglass, “Stitt Recalls Charlie Parker.”

³⁹ Stitt understates the extent of Parker’s influence by limiting it to “a few of Bird’s clichés” and “little licks and things.” Bittan, “Don’t Call Me Bird,” 19; Heron, “Stitt’s Sax Makes the ‘Willow Weep’.”

⁴⁰ In the same interview where Stitt called Parker “the greatest saxophone player that ever lived,” he said: “I never tried to copy his style of playing—my music just came out that way.” (Douglass, “Stitt Recalls Charlie Parker.”) Stitt’s Kansas City story may also be an attempt to suggest that he and Parker came to their styles independently.

⁴¹ Sonny Stitt, interview by Les Tomkins.

truth, then Stitt was not a mere copyist, but rather a Parker-influenced saxophonist who worked through that influence in his own way.

Two, the standard dismissal of Stitt as a Parker imitator has been credibly challenged by other critics. These critics tend to regard the standard view as deficient, and offer more charitable—and to this writer, more convincing—evaluations of Stitt’s music and place in jazz history. The fact that a critical pushback against Stitt’s reputation as a Parker imitator even exists may suggest that the standard view is incomplete.

The main alternate evaluations of Stitt and his music are as follows: For critics like Gerald Early, Stitt was “an incredibly gifted saxophonist”⁴² whose major contribution was his role as “the popular disseminator of the virtuosic technique of the language of bop.”⁴³ For critics like Martin Williams, Stitt’s adoption of Parker’s style can be read more charitably as “aesthetic kinship.”⁴⁴ Williams in 1963: Stitt was “not playing an imitation, and his work is far from

⁴² Early, “The Passing of Jazz’s Old Guard,” 34.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴⁴ Williams, *Jazz in Its Time*, 112.

pastiche or popularization. He simply finds his own voice in Parker's musical language."⁴⁵ For critics like Michael James, Parker's material is:

completely fused with [Stitt's] original melodic thoughts, no more separable from them than flesh is from the bone... The material gleaned from Parker is not used to prop up some despicable piece of jerry-building but implements the basic structure of an edifice well designed in itself.⁴⁶

The most common alternate view is that the strength of Stitt's saxophone playing and the differences between Stitt and Parker's styles belie a pat dismissal of Stitt as a Parker imitator. Writers like Jim Burns acknowledge that "one can't help but compare Stitt's work to Parker's."⁴⁷ Even though Stitt was "overshadowed by [Parker's] genius," his work remains impressive on its own terms, and it is "difficult to write it off as second-hand Bird."⁴⁸

Three, the musical analysis findings cut against Stitt's reputation as a Parker imitator. It is true that Stitt and Parker's solos contain many stylistic similarities. It is also true that these similarities are evidence of stylistic influence and some degree of imitation. But Stitt's "Ready, Set, Jump," "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" and "Ko Ko" solos are not works of "imitation," at least not in the conventional sense of "copying" or "simulation." Even in Stitt's "Oop Bop Sh'Bam" solo—the

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ James, "Stitt, Parker, and the Question of Influence," 9.

⁴⁷ Burns, "Early Stitt," 6.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

solo most reminiscent of Parker—Stitt’s musical ideas and personality assert themselves, resulting in a “clear,” “orderly” and “symmetrical” solo that Parker would not have played. In his “Ko Ko” solo (1963), Stitt’s musical personality is more obvious still. Although Stitt borrows entire phrase segments from Parker’s solo (1945), he also reconfigures them, resulting in an impressive and tight musical performance that bears little structural resemblance to Parker’s own.

In short, the standard dismissal of Stitt as a Parker imitator misunderstands who Stitt was and what he tried to do. The standard dismissal has been challenged by dissenting credits, who offer credible alternate evaluations of Stitt’s music and place in jazz history. Finally, the standard dismissal is not the best explanation of the music Stitt made.

One may argue in opposition that Stitt’s critical reputation as a Parker imitator is tenable, given a certain reading of the Stitt literature. After all, the historical and musical evidence *does* suggest that Stitt studied and replicated certain aspects of Parker’s style between 1943 and 1946. Moreover, Stitt’s continued use of Parker’s musical vocabulary and involvement in Parker-related projects are rightly seen as evidence of Stitt’s long-term association with Parker.

However, seeing Stitt *primarily* as a Charlie Parker imitator ignores many details of Stitt’s career and is a poor explanation of Stitt’s music. One could argue

more plausibly for derivation, in the sense that Stitt's alto saxophone playing appears to *come out* of Parker's style. Seeing Stitt as a Parker-derived alto saxophonist is consistent with Stitt's early enthusiasm for Parker, with his career-long connection to Parker's music, with his life as an itinerant bebop practitioner, and with the various similarities and dissimilarities between Stitt and Parker's musical styles. Such a view would imply that Stitt was not a copyist or a clone, as many claim, but rather a saxophonist with his own style.

To speak of Stitt as a Parker-derived saxophonist would also imply that his style was "derivative." The jazz literature does sometimes refer to Stitt's style that way, and of course there are negative connotations to that word. But calling Stitt's musical style "derivative of Parker" is different from calling it an "imitation of Parker." First, calling Stitt's style "derivative of Parker" is consistent with the historical and musical evidence examined in this study, while calling it an "imitation of Parker" is not. Second, the word *derivative* is an accurate descriptor of Stitt's musical style, especially when coupled with an exposition of Stitt's achievements and contributions. As Thomas Owens notes,

If Stitt's saxophone styles in large part are *derivative* of Parker and others, does that mean we should dismiss him as a second-rate jazz artist? Was he merely a "remote rival" to Parker, as Ross Russell describes him? No, for he contributed much of value. During the 1940s and early 1950s he helped establish the norms of the bebop vocabulary; Stitt and other perpetuators

underscored the supreme importance of Parker's style. Further, Stitt matured into a first-rate improviser.⁴⁹

Implications for Further Study

This study has focused narrowly on Stitt's alto saxophone playing, Stitt's relationship to Charlie Parker, and Stitt's critical reputation as a Parker imitator.

This study did not address other criticisms of Stitt in the jazz literature: his alcoholism, his over-recording, his capitulation to the record producers who determined the format of his work, and the casualness with which he treated many aspects of his career. These criticisms are relevant to Stitt's reputation as a Parker imitator, and they merit future study.⁵⁰

The present study contains extended analysis of a limited number of musical works. This kind of musical analysis is like analysis of a high-resolution snapshot; it is a deep examination of a particular musician's style on a particular type of repertoire at a particular point in time. One obvious limitation of this

⁴⁹ Owens, *Bebop*, 48, emphasis added.

⁵⁰ An example of this is the tribute album *Stitt Plays Bird*. While this album cemented his reputation as a Parker imitator, Stitt was seemingly not involved its planning. The album was "the company's idea." Enstice and Rubin, *Jazz Spoken Here*, 250.

approach is that the data points are few. Additional analysis of Stitt and Parker's musical works is needed.

While the present dissertation is focused on Stitt's alto saxophone playing, and earlier Stitt dissertations were focused on Stitt's tenor saxophone playing, no academic work has examined Stitt's alto and tenor saxophone playing side-by-side. A comparative analysis of Stitt's alto and tenor saxophone recordings would be a fruitful area of research. Such an analysis could also be used to challenge or corroborate the conclusions of this study. Critics claim that Stitt took up the tenor saxophone to escape his reputation as a Parker imitator, and argue that Stitt's musical style differed depending on which instrument he played.⁵¹

Most of the academic Stitt literature focuses on his jazz work (i.e., music performed in a bebop or hard bop vein). However, Stitt also performed and recorded music in R&B and soul jazz styles. Stitt's projects with Gene Ammons,

⁵¹ For example, Barry McRae writes: "Constant reference was made to the influence that Parker exerted on his style, and the switch to tenor in 1949 was in some ways a justifiable rebellion. The change was completely successful, and almost from the start it was noticeable that [Stitt] approached the larger horn in a different way." McRae, *Jazz Cataclysm*, 21.

his organ groups, and his work on the Selmer Varitone are three examples of this type of music. Stitt is often portrayed—even in the present study—as a Parker-influenced bebopper. Analysis of Stitt’s R&B and soul jazz music may lead to alternate portrayals of Stitt that take additional aspects of his music and career into account.⁵²

⁵² The Gerald Early and Gerald Majer articles analyzed in Chapter VII of this study contain discussions of this side of Stitt’s playing. Early expands on his thinking in an interview with Ethan Iverson: “My piece was an elegy, and the only way I could remember him was how I was introduced to Stitt in Philadelphia where I grew up. My uncles would go out to see jazz performances, and that bluesy style was the kind of jazz they went out to see. They didn’t consider Sonny Stitt as this kind of bopper or something like that, they saw him in tenor sax battles with Gene Ammons with the screaming organ in the background.” Early, “The Passing of Jazz’s Old Guard,” 34–36; Majer, *Velvet Lounge*, 15–34; Early, interview by Ethan Iverson.

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APPENDIX A

SONNY STITT'S SOLO ON "READY, SET, JUMP" (1944)

♩=ca. 188
(1:18)

Ab7 D7 *(brass)* Ab7/D Db

Bb7 Ebm6 Cm7b5 F7

Bbm F7 Bbm6

Bbm F7b9 Bbm

APPENDIX B

SONNY STITT'S SOLO ON "OOP BOP SH'BAM" (1946)

♩=ca. 158
(1:19)

Chords: Fm7, Bb7, Ebmaj7, Gm7, C7, Cm7, F7, Bb, G7, Cm7, F7, Bb7, Eb, Bb, F7, Bb

APPENDIX C

CHARLIE PARKER'S SOLO ON "RED CROSS" (1944)

♩=ca. 210

(0:41)

B \flat Gm⁷ Cm⁷ F⁷ B \flat Gm⁷ Cm⁷ F⁷

B \flat ⁷ Eb⁷ Ab⁷ B \flat Gm⁷ Cm⁷ F⁷

B \flat Gm⁷ Cm⁷ F⁷ B \flat Gm⁷ Cm⁷ F⁷

B \flat ⁷ Eb⁷ B \flat F⁷ B \flat

D⁷ G⁷

C⁷ F⁷

continued

(1:09)

25

B \flat Gm⁷ Cm⁷ F⁷ B \flat Gm Cm⁷ F⁷

29

B \flat ⁷ E \flat ⁷ A \flat ⁷ B \flat 3 Gm⁷ Cm⁷ F⁷

33

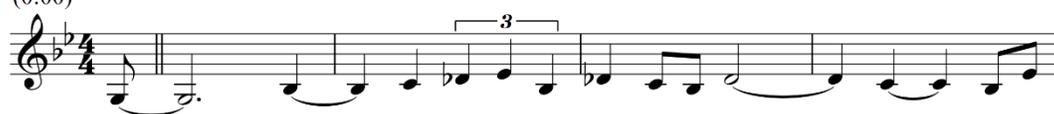
B \flat

APPENDIX D

CHARLIE PARKER'S SOLO ON "KO KO" (1945)

♩=ca. 310

(0:00)



continued

(0:22)

continued

(0:50) $C\sharp m7$ $F\sharp7$ $Bmaj7$

65 $Bm7$ $E7$ $A\sharp maj7$

69 $Am7$ $D7$ $G\sharp maj7$

73 $Gm7$ $C7$ $Cm7$ $F7$

77 Bb $Fm7$ $Bb7$

81 $Eb\sharp maj7$ $Ab7$

85 Bb $C7$

89 $Cm7$ $F7$ Bb

93 **2** Bb $Fm7$ $Bb7$

97

continued

(1:19) Ebmaj7 Ab7

101

Bb C7

105

Cm7 G7 Cm7 F7

109

Bb Fm7 Bb7

113

Ebmaj7 Ab7

117

Bb C7

121

Cm7 F7 Bb

125

C#m7 F#7 Bmaj7

129

Bm7 E7 Amaj7

133

continued

(1:48) Am⁷ D⁷ Gmaj⁷

137

Gm⁷ C⁷ Cm⁷ F⁷

141

B^b Fm⁷ B^b⁷

145

E^bmaj⁷ A^b⁷

149

B^b C⁷

153

Cm⁷ F⁷ B^b

157

31

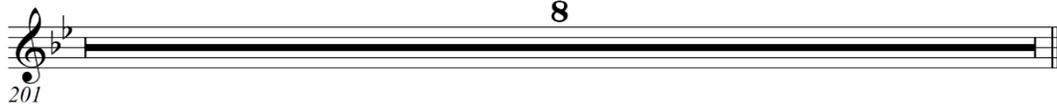
160

193

197

continued

(2:36)



APPENDIX E

SONNY STITT'S SOLO ON "KO KO" (1963)

♩=ca. 290

(0:00)

(sax and drums)

Theme

5

9

13

17

21

rush

continued

(0:19) **1**

25 $B\flat$ $Fm7$ $B\flat7$

29 $E\flat$ $E\flat m$ 3

33 $B\flat$ $C7$

37 Cm $Dm7$ $G7$ $Cm7$ 6 3 $F7$ 3

41 $B\flat$ $Fm7$ $B\flat7$

45 $E\flat$ $E\flat m$

49 $B\flat$ $C7$

53 $Cm7$ $F7$ $B\flat$ 3 3 3

57 $C\sharp m7$ $F\sharp7$ $Bmaj7$ lay back 3

continued

(0:48) Bm7 E7 A

61

Am7 D7 G

65

Gm7 C7 Bbm7 F7

69

Bb Fm7 Bb7

73

Eb lay back Ebm 7

77

Bb C7

81

Cm7 F7 Bb

85

2 Bb Fm7 Bb7

89

Eb Ebm

93

continued

(1:17) Bb C7
97

Cm G7 Cm7 6 F7
101

Bb Fm7 Bb7
105

Eb lay back 3 Ebm
109

Bb C7
113

Cm7 F7 Bb lay back
117

(1:46) Gm7 C7 Cm7 F7

133

Bb Fm7 Bb7

137

Eb Ebm 5

141

Bb C7

145

Cm7 F7 Bb

149

3 Bb Fm7 Bb7

153

Eb Ebm 3

157

Bb C7 lay back 3 3 3

161

Cm G7 Cm7 F7 3

165

continued

(2:15)

169

173

177

181

185

189

193

197

201

Chords: Bb, Fm7, Bb7, Eb, Ebm, C7, Cm7, F7, Bb, C#m7, F#7, Bmaj7, Bm7, E7, A, Am7, D7, G, Gm7, C7, Cm7, F7 lay back, Bb, Fm7, Bb7

continued

(2:43) Eb Ebm 3

205

Bb C7

209

Cm7 3 F7 Bb

213

4 Bb Fm7 Bb7

217

Eb Ebm

221

Bb C7 3

225

Cm G7 Cm7 F7 9

229

Bb Fm7 Bb7

233

Eb Ebm

237

continued

(3:12) B \flat

241

245

249

253

257

261

265

269

273

lay back

continued

(3:40) Cm⁷ F⁷ B^b

277

5 B^b Fm⁷ B^b⁷

281

E^b Ebm

285

B^b lay back C⁷

289

Cm Dm⁷ G⁷ Cm⁷ F⁷ lay back (side D)

293 (side D)

B^b Fm⁷ B^b⁷

297

E^b Ebm

301

B^b C⁷

305

Cm⁷ F⁷ B^b

309

continued

(4:08)

313

317

321

325

329

333

337

341

Theme (sax and drums)

345

continued

(4:36)

349

353

357

361

365