



PEARSON NEW INTERNATIONAL EDITION

Jazz Styles

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Eleventh Edition



**Pearson Education Limited**

Edinburgh Gate  
Harlow  
Essex CM20 2JE  
England and Associated Companies throughout the world

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ISBN 10: 1-292-04259-1  
ISBN 13: 978-1-292-04259-6

**British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Printed in the United States of America

# BOP: THE EARLY 1940s TO THE EARLY 1950s



During the 1940s, a number of adventuresome musicians showed the effects of studying the advanced swing era styles of saxophonists Coleman Hawkins and Lester Young, pianists Art Tatum and Nat Cole, trumpeter Roy Eldridge, guitarist Charlie Christian, and the Count Basie rhythm section. “Early jazz” and other pre-1940 styles are today referred to as the “classic period.” The new styles that emerged after 1940 were classified as modern jazz. These first “modern” musicians were also saxophonist Charlie Parker, pianist Thelonious Monk, and trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie. Their music was called bebop, or just “bop.” By the middle 1940s, bop had inspired a legion of other creative musicians including trumpeter Miles Davis and pianist Bud Powell. By the late 1940s, Parker and Gillespie had also influenced the music in several big bands, including Woody Herman’s. This chapter will discuss the solo and combo styles of these musicians and the big bands of Herman and Gillespie.

Modern jazz did not burst upon the jazz scene suddenly. It developed gradually through the work of swing era musicians. Parker and Gillespie themselves began their careers by creating swing-style improvisations. Then they expanded on swing styles and gradually incorporated new techniques; their work eventually became a different style, but its swing era roots remained evident. Rather than being a reaction *against* swing styles, modern jazz developed smoothly *from* swing styles.

Charlie Mingus, Roy Haynes, Thelonious Monk, Charlie Parker  
(Bob Parent/Hulton Archive/Getty Images)



Bebop was considerably less popular than swing, and it failed to attract dancers. However, it did contribute impressive soloists who continued to gain disciples for the rest of the century. The first bop soloists contributed a new vocabulary of musical phrases and distinctive methods of matching improvisation to chord progressions. This became the most substantial system of jazz for the next 40 years. Even today, musicians frequently evaluate new players according to their ability to play bop. Mastery of this style was considered the foundation for competence as a jazz improviser.

Bop improvisations were composed mostly of eighth-note and sixteenth-note figures that seemed jumpy, full of twists and turns. The contours of the melodic lines were jagged; there were often abrupt changes of direction and large intervals between the notes. The rhythms in those lines were quick and unpredictable, with more syncopation than any music previously common in Europe or America. (Listen to the melody line of Gillespie and Parker's "Shaw Nuff," *JCCD1* Track 26.)

Bop players took a cue from Lester Young and often began phrases in the middle of eight-bar sections, continuing them through the turnarounds, past the traditional barriers of the eighth bar (twelfth bar in the blues). Bop performers more often overcame the tendency of premodern improvisers to stop phrases at or before *turnarounds*. They planned ahead further and mastered the improvisation of extended lines that reflected a tune's underlying chord progression less and less.

## BOP HARMONY

By contrast with the earliest jazz musicians, bop musicians did more than embellish a song. As a starting point for their improvisations, they retained only the chord progressions that had accompanied a song.<sup>1</sup> Then they often enriched a progression by adding

### BOP CONTRASTED WITH SWING


Bop differed from swing in a number of performance aspects:

1. Preferred instrumentation for bop was the small combo instead of big band.
2. Less emphasis was placed on arrangements in bop.
3. Average tempo was faster in bop.
4. Clarinet was rare in bop.
5. Display of instrumental virtuosity was a higher priority for bop players.
6. Rhythm guitar was rare.

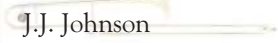
Bop differed from swing in a number of stylistic respects:

1. Bop improvisation was more complex because it contained
  - a. more themes per solo,
  - b. less similarity among themes,
  - c. more excursions outside the tune's original key, and
  - d. a greater scope of rhythmic development.
2. Melodies were more complex in bop.
3. Harmonies were more complex in bop.
4. Bop tunes and chord progressions projected a more unresolved quality.
5. Accompaniment rhythms were more varied in bop.
6. Comping was more prevalent than stride style and simple, on-the-beat chording.
7. Drummers played their timekeeping rhythms primarily on suspended cymbal, rather than snare drum, high-hat, or bass drum.
8. Surprise was more highly valued in bop.
9. Bop was a more agitated style than swing was.

**TABLE 1** A Few of the Many Bop Style Musicians**TRUMPET**

Dizzy Gillespie   
 Fats Navarro  
 Howard McGhee  
 Miles Davis  
 Kenny Dorham  
 Red Rodney  
 Benny Harris  
 Sonny Berman  
 Freddie Webster  
 Conte Candoli  
 Clark Terry  
 Idrees Sulieman  
 Benny Baileyz

**TROMBONE**

J.J. Johnson   
 Kai Winding  
 Bennie Green  
 Frank Rosolino


**BASS**

Oscar Pettiford   
 Ray Brown  
 Tommy Potter  
 Curly Russell  
 Nelson Boyd  
 Al McKibbin  
 Gene Ramey  
 Red Callender  
 Teddy Kotick  
 Chubby Jackson  
 Eddie Safranski


**SAXOPHONE**

Charlie Parker   
 Dexter Gordon  
 Lucky Thompson  
 Stan Getz  
 Wardell Gray  
 Allen Eager  
 Herbie Steward  
 Brew Moore  
 Gene Ammons  
 Sonny Stitt  
 Flip Phillips  
 James Moody  
 Charlie Ventura  
 Zoot Sims  
 Al Cohn  
 Ernie Henry  
 Leo Parker  
 Sonny Criss  
 Serge Chaloff  
 Don Lanphere  
 Charlie Rouse  
 Sonny Rollins  
 Phil Urso  
 Boots Mussulli

**VIBRAPHONE**

Milt Jackson   
 Teddy Charles  
 Terry Gibbs


**DRUMS**

Kenny Clarke   
 Max Roach  
 Joe Harris  
 Tiny Kahn  
 Don Lamond  
 Roy Haynes  
 Osie Johnson  
 Denzil Best

**PIANO**

Bud Powell   
 Thelonious Monk  
 Al Haig  
 Dodo Marmarosa  
 Joe Albany  
 Walter Bishop, Jr.  
 Duke Jordan  
 George Shearing  
 Oscar Peterson  
 Billy Taylor  
 Hank Jones  
 Argonne Thornton  
 (Sadik Hakim)  
 Hampton Hawes  
 John Lewis  
 Tadd Dameron  
 Ahmad Jamal

**GUITAR**

Arv Garrison   
 Tal Farlow  
 Bill DeArango  
 Jimmy Raney  
 Johnny Collins  
 Barry Galbraith  
 Chuck Wayne  
 Barney Kessel  
 Billy Bauer  
 Johnny Smith

**COMPOSER-  
ARRANGER**

  
 Gil Fuller  
 George Russell  
 Neal Hefti  
 Dizzy Gillespie  
 Charlie Parker  
 Thelonious Monk  
 Tadd Dameron  
 John Lewis  
 Shorty Rogers  
 Ralph Burns  
 Gil Evans  
 Gerry Mulligan

new chords. When jazz musicians add chords or change chords in a given progression, they call it *substitution* or reharmonization because new chords are substituted in place of the old ones. Art Tatum had previously added and replaced chords underneath existing melodies. In fact, his reharmonization of “Tea for Two” is well known among jazz musicians. Coleman Hawkins had loved to improvise on complicated chord progressions and invent solo lines whose construction implied that chords had been added. His recording of “Body and Soul” demonstrates this. In these ways, Tatum and Hawkins had set the stage for the wide use of these techniques in bop style. Some bop lines implied chords that

Charlie Parker (alto sax) and Miles Davis (trumpet), two of the most influential men in modern jazz. Parker devised the bop approach, and Davis went on to develop cool, modal, and jazz-rock approaches. Pictured here in 1947 when Parker was 27 and Davis was 21.

(Photo by William P. Gottlieb, courtesy William P. Gottlieb collection, Library of Congress Prints & Photographs Division)



were not originally in a tune's accompaniment; these lines were sometimes played against a tune's original harmonies to achieve purposely clashing effects. In other cases, the pianist and bassist instantaneously changed chords and chord progressions to fit the new harmonic directions implied by an improvised line.

Bop players also altered existing chords. They often based their lines more on the alterations than on the fundamental tones. So, by comparison with their predecessors, bop musicians not only used more chords, they used richer chords and created lines that drew from the enrichments. The most common alteration was the *flatted fifth* (also known as the lowered fifth or raised eleventh). It soon became identified as much with modern jazz as the lowered third and lowered seventh were identified with premodern jazz. Today all three intervals are basic to the character of jazz. Dizzy Gillespie's 1945 arrangement of "Shaw Nuff" (JCCD1 Track 26) ends on a flatted fifth.

Because bop musicians liked to improvise on difficult chord progressions, they sometimes wrote original progressions themselves. But a more common practice was to improvise on popular song progressions that were challenging. "All the Things You Are" served this purpose. "Cherokee" also became a favorite because the progressions in its bridge are unusual.<sup>2</sup>

Listen to this example on [mymusiclab.com](http://mymusiclab.com)

## CHARLIE PARKER

The musician who contributed most to the development of bop was alto saxophonist **Charlie Parker** (1920–1955), nicknamed "Bird." Jazz musicians and historians feel that he is the most important saxophonist in jazz history. Many musicologists consider Parker one of the most brilliant musical figures in the twentieth century. Going beyond the advances made by Lester Young, Coleman Hawkins, and Art Tatum, he built an entire system that was conveyed in his improvisations and compositions. The system embodied:

1. new ways of selecting notes to be compatible with the accompaniment chords;
2. new ways of accenting notes so that the phrases have a highly syncopated character;
3. methods for adding chords to existing chord progressions and implying additional chords by the selection of notes for the improvised lines.

Parker astonished other musicians with his tremendous fertility of melodic imagination, unprecedented mastery of the saxophone, and the dizzying pace with which he was able to improvise.<sup>3</sup> Parker's solos were densely packed with ideas. During his improvisations, his mind seemed to be bubbling over with little melodies and paraphrases of melodies. It was as though he had so much energy and enthusiasm that he could barely contain himself. This led to interspersing his solos with double-time and quadruple-time figures. Even in ballad renditions, he tended to ornament slow lines with double-time figures. (For a demonstration of double-timing, listen to *Demo CD* Track 35. For Parker himself double-timing, listen to the introduction to "Just Friends" on *JCCDI* Track 30.) In other words, he played fast, and he played a lot of notes. It is no coincidence that soon after Parker's mid-1940s recordings appeared, there was an increase in the average tempo, an increase in double-timing, and an increase in the average amount of melodic ideas in the improvisations of other modern jazz musicians. Though this trend had already begun during the swing era, it was also partly a function of the new example set by Parker.

Parker's timbre departed from standard swing era models. In place of the lush, sweet tone preferred by Johnny Hodges and Benny Carter, Parker used the dry, biting tone preferred by Kansas City saxophonist Buster Smith, an early model for Parker. Though Parker's tone had considerable fullness, it possessed a lighter color than the tone of Hodges. In place of the pronounced vibrato of Hodges and Carter, Parker used the slower, narrower vibrato preferred by Smith, and Parker was less prone to dwell on a few choice notes than Hodges. By comparison with Hodges, Parker sounded more hurried. As opposed to an easygoing romantic, Parker sounded like a modern composer improvising at lightning speed.<sup>4</sup>

## PARKER'S SOURCES

Parker's improvisations were inspired by many sources. An adequate analysis of his techniques is beyond the nontechnical scope of this book, but we should note that Parker's improvisatory techniques echo the methods that are routinely employed by classical composers.<sup>5</sup> Though we will not be able to recognize examples of the techniques if we do not know them, we might notice other sources for his improvisations because they draw upon familiar material. Parker interspersed his lines with phrases from highly varied sources. He drew from materials as far-flung as the solos of Louis Armstrong and Lester Young and the melodies of blues singers and early jazz hornmen. He selected phrases from pop tunes and traditional melodies, themes from opera and classical music.<sup>6</sup>

## PARKER'S TUNES

Parker wrote a sizable body of tunes, and their character set the flavor for bop as much as his improvisations did. Though not melody-like in the pop tune sense, they were catchy lines in a jazz vein. Most were accompanied by chord progressions borrowed from popular songs. Many used accompaniments of the twelve-bar blues chord progression. Their phrases were memorized and analyzed by hundreds of jazz soloists. His "Now's the Time," "Billie's Bounce," and "Confirmation" were played at jam sessions for decades after he introduced them. This was the musical language of bop.

## PARKER'S IMPACT

Parker's impact on jazz was immense. Bop trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie cites Parker as a primary influence on his own style, and bop pianist Bud Powell modeled some of his lines on those of Parker. Methods of improvisation devised by Parker were adopted by numerous saxophonists during the 1940s and 1950s (see Table 2).

 **Watch** the video of "Hot House" by Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie [mymusiclab.com](http://mymusiclab.com)