Music and Magic

Music and Magic:
Charlie Parker, Trickster Lives!

By

Frank A. Salamone

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FOREWORD

CHARLIE PARKER: TRICKSTER LIVES!

Frank Salamone's monograph about Charlie Parker and tricksters in Jazz music provides a new way of seeing both Jazz and the trickster archetype in American culture. I am honored to have been asked to write this foreword, given his prolific research history on this musical genre. The Trickster is a fascinating topic and character transcending Jazz and American culture. It does have notable variations, but something common across societies and cultures persists. When asking what the nature of this archetype is, my first thoughts are whether the trickster is a socially interactional creation implicitly suggesting a potential for being a trickster in many of us. Although interactions are pivotal to its social recognition by others, the trickster has to reach beyond loosely connected situations.

Do certain circumstances therefore correspond with the displayed and patterned "doings" (West and Zimmerman 1987) associated with the trickster character or archetype? What are the potential processes of becoming a trickster? Is there a definable set of characteristics of being a trickster within jazz that differs from other contexts, scenes, or subcultures? These are difficult questions warranting more research and indicative of the depth of this engaging topic; however, good and sound research understands its limitations of scope and purpose. This book provides a very thoughtful, rich, and empirical engagement of Charlie Parker, tricksters and how they pertain not only to jazz, but also to American culture and its historical inequalities and divisions related to African Americans.

I will not pretend to know jazz like Frank Salamone. I know Charlie Parker as a distanced fan of his amazing musical talent, importance to the inception of bebop, and having the posthumous ability to scare a young high school musician with his practice scales for bass clef instruments. That tuba player was me. On reflection, the experience was a possible introduction to a "symbolic boundary" (Lamont and Fournier 1992), distinguishing a different and much higher musical aptitude, education and

subculture. As Salamone thoroughly discusses, the creation and construction of boundaries are an almost essential prerequisite to this contentious character. It is the trickster's *raison d'être* to violate, challenge, and usurp not only symbolic, but also social boundaries. Potentially, little is sacrosanct, and a "biting humor" with a notable reflexivity is almost a requirement for jazz musicians and tricksters.

For the sake of theoretical comparisons we may consider a few other relevant "character types" or social roles within the scope of unequal social class and racial relations. David Riesman spoke of an "autonomous person" in his renowned, yet somewhat forgotten book *The Lonely Crowd*, first published in 1950. The autonomous type questions and does not adjust to the predominant mode of conformity and authority of their respective time period. The autonomous type resists, including to the preferences of their "peer group", due at least partially to their heightened "self-consciousness" (Riesman 2001:255-259). From Salamone's description, the jazz trickster is also similar to an "organic intellectual". Antonio Gramsci describes this role within the ongoing class conflict and bourgeois domination in capitalism. These grassroots intellectuals are organically born from the classes and groups marginalized, alienated and oppressed. These agents help mobilize "counter-hegemonic" forces and collective actions to uproot and destabilize the control and oppressive forms of authority. Much like these tricksters, they can use their charisma, musical talent, and deep understanding of the social circumstances to solidify their impact (Storey 2009:88-91).

Frank Salamone's tour of the jazz trickster makes many fascinating stops. Charlie Parker is ostensibly at the root of this book, but many of the famous and prolific jazz masters that "Bird" was connected to formed a dream-like social network. Louis Armstrong, Dizzy Gillespie and Charles Mingus are a few of the major figures Salamone discusses in terms of having influenced or played with Charlie Parker during his shortened, but potent, life. These musicians in addition to others, like Miles Davis, also challenged the *status quo* of the dominant white class and culture. He retells a few stories where Dizzy Gillespie injects subversive humor to both recognize racial inequalities and the civil rights issues of the time and places. The jazz trickster acts with greater autonomy recklessly transgressing and reconstructing through deconstruction. This also unavoidably teaches observers by raising awareness and social consciousness.

As for the role of a teacher, there are many possible lessons from the jazz tricksters. The trickster challenges the accepted definition of the situation or "frame" (Goffman 1986:10) with the help of humor. The

arbitrariness of traditionally accepted boundaries is illuminated. Much like the cultural jamming of today, the trickster, teaches through challenging political power structures. Ironically, the jazz "jam session" (Cameron 1954) was an important sessional technique and format within the jazz subculture where imagination and musical improvisation is paramount. Salamone recognizes the importance of the imagination for the trickster and his agency. Imaginative improvisation, as noted by Salamone, teaches through representation how jazz musicians responded to the racial oppression of the Jim Crow south.

In his book *Stigma*, Erving Goffman slyly and eloquently demonstrates how many people are seemingly normal, but secretly deviant, using the term "normal deviants" to define this "feature of society" (Goffman 1963:130). The jazz trickster embodies and uncovers these social and cultural contradictions that comprise many of us. We are potentially "hip" and "squares" (Becker 1963:90), but some cultures and subcultures have a long history of producing these cultural characters as responses to bigger societal injustices. By showing this arbitrariness, the jazz tricksters taught their greatest lessons about societal inequalities and social and symbolic boundaries and structures, *vis-à-vis* transgression. Salamone brings to life the relationships and influences between Charlie Parker, other famous jazzmen and the larger cultural characteristics symbolized in the black and African American experiences. This is a very worthwhile and enjoyable addition to the study of tricksters and Jazz music and subculture.

Marcus Aldredge
Assistant Professor of Sociology
Iona College
New Rochelle, NY

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INTRODUCTION

I have been a jazz fan for over 60 years. My Uncle Jake took me to pick up some relatives of his at a club in Rochester called the Golden Grill near Lake Ontario one Sunday. I waited in the outer lobby while he went in. The moment he opened the door I was in heaven. I remember asking him what that music was called. He laughed in the usual way and said, "That's jazz." I was hooked. Oh sure, I had heard jazz since I was born in 1939. It was on the radio daily. It was in the movies frequently. Juke boxes were filled with it. I had, however, never heard "live jazz". When that door opened letting my uncle into the club, I felt as if the gates of heaven had opened and Gabriel was playing the horn. Surely, that music must be the soundtrack of paradise. It was a moment that changed my life.

Later I realized that what I had heard was called Dixieland jazz or New Orleans jazz, maybe even Chicago jazz, trad jazz, moldy fig or even classic jazz, depending on the time, place, or person doing the classifying. As I grew older, I knew that all kinds of jazz were simply jazz, and came from Louis Armstrong, no matter what they were called. Louis never tried to avoid the term, as some jazz greats did. Ellington, for example, who was a bit older than Louis, stated that there was simply good music and the rest. The very good was beyond category. I know what the Duke of Ellington was saying, and I can dig it. However, he knew what he played was jazz whatever else he or someone else called it.

I knew that I wanted to play that music. I never really could. Oh, there were two or three times I actually did. As jazz musicians say, something played my instrument through me on those occasions. One was an impromptu school dance in junior high. The other was at a club as an adult when I started taking lessons again. That was really it. But it was enough to help give me a glimpse of what the transcendent realm of the spiritual is like, to be in the eternal now, and to be totally lost. Two or three brief moments in a long life may not seem like much, but they are enough.

Indeed the high E-flat on my alto sax that brought a crowd to its feet and turned the heads of professional musicians and the eighth and ninth grade kids dancing and roaring their approval in the early 1950s while I played music was something I could never again duplicate. Nevertheless, they were enough for me to understand why Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Fela, Bill Evans, Duke Ellington and many other jazz-based

musicians stated that jazz is spiritual. Parker went farther than anyone else, and declared that jazz was his religion. Indeed, Coltrane also used jazz to get in touch with his own spirituality.

I had to distill my own spirituality from listening to jazz. Not all jazz brought me to the absolute heights. Truly, some jazz was bad. Most was mediocre, like most of life itself. But even the mediocre had its surprises. The level of music of the greats is indeed high. It goes beyond technical competence to a realm that is indeed far, far away. Even when Bird Parker was not at his best, it was better than all but a few. In his declining years Satchmo Armstrong could bring a chill before the night was past. Coltrane, the great Trane, would thrill you even when playing his squeaks and squawks in the mid to late 1960s. Dizzy, suffering from cancer of the jaw, would prove now and then that he was among the giants. Monk with his angular and strange music fought off his inner demons to provide magical moments. And on it went.

I found that most musicians—indeed, all but one—would talk freely about their mystical experience. The Yoruba Trickster himself, Fela Anakulapi Kuti, the man who carried death in his pocket, spoke freely to me in Lagos at his club, The Shrine, about the spirituality of Black Music. As he puffed on his marijuana joint, he waxed eloquent about the spirituality of his music. It was his sacred calling, his destiny. I could multiply the examples but the point is clear, that the music is sacred and spiritual.

It also, like Fela, speaks truth to power, to the squares that control the world and pile up their unfair share of its goods. Louis Armstrong put his career on the line to oppose segregation and call out the President of the United States on his failure to enforce the law equally. He called on Dwight D. (Ike) Eisenhower to go with him to Selma, Alabama, and take the first little black child he saw by the hand and walk into the school house. Dizzy sang about segregation and fought it with humor. He sang, “I’ll never go back to Georgia. No, I’ll never go back to Georgia”, putting that line in the middle of “Swing Low, Sweet Cadillac”, itself a parody of “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot”. That song was based on a Yoruba song. And so it goes.

The music is one that refers to anything and everything in one’s life. Nothing human is foreign to it. The juxtaposition of the incongruous, the sign of the trickster, is the meat of jazz, especially among those who are more than the merely great, as Jeff Goldblum’s character in the movie “Lush Life”, noted. Biting humor is an earmark of jazz. Musicians make themselves the butt of jokes. It gets them past their pain, through their long nights before uncomprehending and rude fans. It gets them past their

bitterness at seeing lesser musicians making more money playing square and simple tunes. They will tell you the joke about the fool who played jazz for the money.

For every Miles Davis or Dave Brubeck, there are many outstanding jazz musicians who barely make their car payments. There are too many who die in poverty. I hung around for many years with great musicians. I have kept in touch with a few. Jimmy Heath still greets me, as does Gary Smulyan. Others nod to me. A number want me to be their agent. Indeed, I did so with one musician, Larry Luger, a fine guitarist. He said I was the only one who kept my promises. I got him gigs and wrote articles about him, as promised. I stopped working for him when I went to Nigeria on a Fulbright.

Almost nothing else in life, except my parents, my wife, my kids and grandkids, and great-grandson, has given me so much joy and pleasure. Every time I play Sonny Rollins, Bud Powell, and, of course, Bird, Satchmo and Diz, I am no longer in this world. I see things more clearly, with greater perspective. Only Mozart gives me as much pure joy and pleasure among composers. I wish there had been some means of recording his improvisations. I think if he were alive, he would be going to a gig tonight, bitching about the crappy out of tune piano he would have to play tonight, but he would do so with a smile and impish gleam in his eye.

CHAPTER ONE

CHARLIE PARKER—
BIRD LIVES!

"Music is your own experience, your own thoughts, your wisdom. If you don't live it, it won't come out of your horn. They teach you there's a boundary line to music. But, man, there's no boundary line to art."

—As quoted in *Bird: The Legend of Charlie Parker* (1977), by Robert George Reisner, p.27

"Louis Armstrong, Charlie Parker."

—Miles Davis summarizing the history of jazz

Introduction

Charles Mingus, the legendary and troubled genius of the bass and composition, issued an album in 1957 entitled "The Clown". Jean Shepherd did the narration for the title song. In it, Mingus's meaning is clarified. The clown of the title is none other than the jazz performer himself. Certainly, Mingus had himself in mind but he also meant to apply it to others, and certainly to Charlie Parker whom Mingus idolized, writing "Reincarnation of a Lovebird" for this album. Shepherd's narration includes a section indicating that only when the clown accidentally falls and injures himself does he achieve great popularity. He cashes in on that popularity, inserting his message behind the tricks, an apt metaphor for the tricksters in jazz. Indeed, it is no accident that the two major tricksters in jazz, Louis Armstrong and Charlie Parker, were trickster, and both not so incidentally were influences on Mingus.

Trickster

In mythology and religion, the trickster deity breaks the rules of the gods or nature, sometimes maliciously but usually, albeit unintentionally, with ultimately positive effects. Often, the bending/breaking of rules takes the form of tricks or thievery. Tricksters can be cunning or foolish or both; they are often funny even when considered sacred or performing important cultural tasks.[1]

Although Trickster is found in many different cultures, the first full anthropological description of a trickster figure was found in Paul Radin's study of Native Americans, *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology* (1987, originally 1955). Subsequently, many other studies of Trickster followed. Lewis Hyde's tour de force, *Trickster Makes the World*, comes closest to what I am trying to convey here. The *Kirkus Review* notes that Hyde "delineates some of their common themes: voracious appetite, ingenious theft, deceit, opportunism, and shamelessness. Through such themes trickster tales dramatize a mythic consciousness of accident and contingency (supplementing fate), moral ambiguity, foolishness, and transgression—in other words, the world as it is, rather than the way it may originally have been intended by the more senior gods". Trickster in art is a mighty force for creativity through change of the status quo.

[1] TV Tropes:
http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/TheTrickster?from=Main.Trickstes.

Additionally, note the common themes of Trickster. Trickster has an incredible appetite, whether it is food, sex, or mind-altering substances. He is a shameless thief, crafty in his deceit but albeit loveable and creative. He is noted for mocking these gods, jumping on accident and opportunity to come up with something new, maybe better than what came before, and maybe not. In sum, Trickster is a boundary crosser. He apparently is unable to resist finding out what is on the other side. Trickster seemingly must subvert boundaries and present the moral ambiguity present in the world. The *Kirkus Review* article of Hyde's work uses Stephen Douglass as a model. Douglass certainly is an apt model for African American tricksters like Parker, who defied many seemingly rigid ethnic, artistic, marital, conventional moral and segregationist boundaries, dying in the New York apartment of the Jazz Baroness, Kathleen Annie Pannonica Rothschild de Koenigswarter (known as "Nica").

Bird

When Charlie Parker died the phrase "Bird Lives!" was found scrawled on walls all over New York City. March 12, 1955 was a sad day for those who loved bebop, modern jazz, or just plain great art. The phrase captured both the sadness and the realization that in some way Charlie Parker, known as Bird, would live on. While there may have been those who refused to believe the fact of his physical death, there were many more who knew his music would continue into the future, breaking boundaries along the way. It is, after all, the obligation of tricksters to shatter boundaries and bring about change, to be beyond category, and to live their own idiosyncratic lives.

African American culture is marked by tricksterism, and black music has had no lack of tricksters. Arguably, Parker and Louis Armstrong have been the greatest of them all. Parker paid his tribute to Armstrong in memorizing many of his solos note for note and then performing them within his own improvisations, although usually at greater speeds. Both, however, shared a knack for transforming other music into new music with a personal stamp on it.

In his article, "The Years with Yard", Dizzy Gillespie (2009:82-84) notes both his trickster-like quality and his ability to transform music into something beyond the ordinary while revealing its essence. He notes that Parker had the ability to play rapidly but also melodiously, because his deep knowledge of harmony allowed him always to find the melody in the harmony. He says that in his opinion Parker may not have been aware of twenty-five per cent of what he played; it just came out of his being and

fell under his fingers. That view may have come from Parker's own saying, "Don't play the saxophone. Let it play you." Parker had also stated that the secret of playing was to learn all you could about your instrument and then forgot all that and just play.

There is something almost mystical and certainly nearly Zen-like in these statements. Parker often took both sides of various issues, sometimes in the same interview, often in different interviews.[2]

Did he have influences from earlier jazz musicians? Is be-bop part of jazz? Did he know that what he was playing was something new? It all depends on which interview you read or listen to. In all his interviews, he was deferential to a fault. It is not hard to know that he was puttin' on old Massa. Now and then he would address something head on, but by then there was so much smoke it was hard to tell. To be sure, one has to go to Dizzy Gillespie's writings and interviews (for example, Gillespie 2009a and b, among others). There, Dizzy lays out the connections of be-bop to earlier jazz and the influences of various players on Bird. In his Blindfold Test with Leonard Feather, Bird reveals his vast knowledge of earlier styles as well as his love for them (Leonard Feather: A Bird's-ear View of Music. Nobody gets the bird from Bird as broadminded Parker takes the blindfold test, in Metronome, 64/8 (Aug.1948), p.14, 21-22).

There is no doubt that Bird inhaled the work of Louis Armstrong. Kevin Young has much to say about both men and their relationship to each other in terms of being tricksters. He says this about Armstrong: "… for innovators like Louis Armstrong, who also saw themselves as showmen, entertainer is no less a mask than cool is for those who came later" (2012:198).

In a broader context, Armstrong's trickster role can be tied to the jazz musical genre that he so transformed. Both were subject to—and responded to—unavoidable social realities, expressing pain and anger in reaction to a debilitating racism. Both also employed secret musical codes, employing protective masks that gave space to individual freedom and collective empowerment. Furthermore, both recognized humor as the license that permitted their liberationist expressions of thinly veiled social commentary. Jazz, like Armstrong, offered a language, the subtleties of which spoke *to* the in-crowd (the "hip") and *about* the outsiders (the "squares"). Invariably, it would privately mock either or both. Iain Ellis (October 2005) refers to one of my writings to summarize this point:

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[2] See Michael Levin and John S. Wilson 2009: 32-36; Leonard Feather http://www.melmartin.com/html_pages/interviews.html.
Paul Desmond 1954: http://www.melmartin.com/html_pages/interviews.html.

> Critic Frank A. Salamone adeptly analyzed the trickster humor at work in Armstrong's popular song, "Laughin' Louie". Firstly, the "squares" are outed in the title itself, which parodies the common misinterpretation of his name in mainstream culture and mocks the one-dimensional stereotype with which he was regarded (and sometimes dismissed). From Armstrong's point-of-view, the title's humor might also allude to his habitual pot-smoking habits, this further underscored by the name of his accompanying band, the Vipers, a slang term for marijuana. The song's music fluctuates throughout, between the "hot" sound "hip" critics encouraged from Armstrong, and the "sweet" sounds he always had such affection for, but for which he was criticized as compromising to mainstream tastes. Here, the trickster celebrates his own creative choices (laughing for himself), and satirically dismisses the imposing judgment of his critics (laughing at them). This is achieved through the humorous method of incongruity, the shock of the juxtaposed styles surprising listeners into recognition and appreciation.

We can safely say that both Armstrong and Parker are exemplars of the trickster in jazz, even if they are so in different ways. However, we need to delve more deeply into what we mean by Trickster and what role he plays in African American culture, particularly jazz.

His (Hyde's) choice of the fiery nineteenth century African American orator Frederick Douglass may at first seem puzzling in this regard. But in light of the real-life gravity of the "boundaries Douglass crossed, and the ingenuity with which he did so", Hyde's example makes sense. Indeed, with his clever interpretive skills and his eye for the meaning-rich detail, Hyde brightly illuminates the ways in which his examples struggled to subvert such seemingly intractable elements as the definition of art or slavery and segregation (K*irkus Reviews*. LXV, November 1, 1997, p. 1623).

Trickster, then, is a boundary-crosser, subverting conventional boundaries. Trickster's very subversion of conventional boundaries opens up new vistas, new ways of seeing and thinking. Once thought and shown, these new ways seem "right", almost obvious, and equivalent to Kuhn's concept of paradigm shift (Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* 1996).

In an interview with Paul Desmond and John McLellan, Parker was asked about his revolutionary change in music. After responding that he did not know that he was doing anything that much different from others, he elaborated on what he fundamentally was doing:

> But I mean, ever since I've ever heard music I've thought it should be very clean, very precise—as clean as possible anyway, you know. And more or

> less to the people, you know something they could understand. Something that was beautiful, you know. There's definitely stories and stories and stories that can be told in the musical idiom, you know. You wouldn't say idiom but it's so hard to describe music other than the basic way to describe it—music is basically melody, harmony, and rhythm. But, I mean people can do much more with music than that. It can be very descriptive in all kinds of ways, you know, all walks of life (Paul Desmond interviews Charlie Parker 1954).

Parker clearly sees his music as crossing boundaries and having clear implications for "all walks of life". He has stories to tell. The technical trappings of music are there to help one tell stories, to comment on life, and to break through restrictions.

Gerry Mulligan notes how he, and by extension his generation of players experienced Bird's music:

> … when Bird played it was like a new country had been heard from. It just was an altogether different atmosphere and it was really striking because he played with such clarity …[3]

For some people that was not a good thing. Many older jazz musicians termed the music "Chinese", by which slur they meant that it was dissonant in sound and that there was no clarity of cohesion in it. While that may have been true of some of the bop musicians, it was not true of Parker. His music was always tonal, logical, steeped in the blues and clear. It was simply telling a different story than most other musicians, even than that of his close collaborators, like Dizzy Gillespie.

The strong negative reaction to his music by many older people and others who preferred more pop oriented music is not surprising. That in no way lessened his impact. His influence was felt even in Dixieland bands, or more accurately in New Orleans and Swing music. Jon Hendricks, the poet laureate of jazz, poked fun at the moldy figs. He wrote in his lyrics to *Everybody's Boppin'*:

> Bop ain't dead, that's a line o' jive,
> Dixieland bands done kept it alive.
> Tell that square to take a dive,
> 'Cause everybody's boppin'. (Columbia: 1989, reissue)

[3] Autobiography:
http://lcweb4.loc.gov/natlib/ihas/service/mulligan/100010952/0001.pdf.

There is a close relationship between the deep structure of both musics. It took the genius of a Charlie Parker to bring it out in the open and show it in a new light. Perhaps that only added to the strong negative reaction Bird faced among many established older musicians. I mean his ability to transform even the great solos of Louis Armstrong into something rediscovered. Armstrong, usually generous toward other musicians, took some time warming up to Dizzy Gillespie, who became a close friend and frequent visitor at Louis's home. Interestingly, Armstrong never did say anything good about Bird that I have found. Rather, he delighted in telling a story about how Charlie Parker had to be dragged on the stage at a festival in France after Sidney Bechet had finished playing. It sounds very close to the story told of how Lester Young had to be pushed onstage after Bird's solo at a *Jazz at the Philharmonic* concert. I do not believe either story.

Thus, like most tricksters, Parker rearranged the world while challenging people's understanding of what they had taken for granted. He recombined material from the past, made it new, and saw others rework his material. He could play with older and younger musicians with ease. He was never easy to pin down, as interviews with him demonstrate very clearly. His personal life was rarely as orderly as his art. Chaotic is the best word to describe it. It was filled with unresolved contradictions. Bird was a man of great appetites, which finally led to his demise. And yet, as the graffiti on the walls of New York buildings proclaimed, Bird Lives.

Conclusion

Everywhere one looks among premodern peoples, there are tricky mythical beings alike enough to entice any human mind to create a category for them once it had met two or three. They are beings of the beginning, working in some complex relationship with the High God; transformers, helping to bring the present human world into being; performers of heroic acts on behalf of men, yet in their original form. Or, in some later form, foolish, obscene, laughable, yet indomitable (Robert D. Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa*, 15).

Do the times make the man, or does the man make the times? Bird came along at a time jazz was sounding tired. The World War helped bring black protest into the open again, after it had died away during the Depression and general hard times, or at least went underground, and a new generation of African Americans began to express themselves, exploiting the contradictions in American life revealed by the war. These two forces came together and provided the soil from which bebop sprang. Charlie Parker grew up in the twin Kansas Cities. That the Twin Cities' music was steeped in blues provided a link between swing and bop and fostered many types of fusion in jazz.

Bird himself was a charismatic person, filled with contradictions. He was erudite, but could act in childish ways. He longed for recognition from "serious" musicians, playing with a string section on recordings and at clubs, most notably Birdland, a club named after him but from which he was ultimately barred. He was innocently surprised when someone asked him if he was paid for the use of his name. Like Trickster, Bird was filled with contradictions. This description of Trickster could be a description of Charlie Parker.

Trickster is the mythic embodiment of ambiguity and ambivalence, doubleness and duplicity, contradiction and paradox (7), and can thus be seen as the archetypal boundary-crosser, although here Hyde notes that "there are also cases in which trickster creates a boundary, or brings to the surface a distinction previously hidden from sight" (7).

Bird indeed crossed numerous boundaries. Bebop may at first sound dissonant, but it really is not when one analyses the chords, especially their higher intervals. It is a new way of looking at music. It is deeply rooted in jazz in spite of early criticism, and even goes back to early New Orleans jazz in ways swing usually did not. It provided a bridge to later forms of jazz, which in my view do not have its verve or depth. Wynton Marsalis has said many times that it is the hardest type of jazz to play. Bird stated many times that he wanted to study with Hindemith, and that Hindemith

had agreed to take him on as a student. While many of his followers derided Louis Armstrong and classical music, not the better of them to be sure, Bird slipped in solos based on *The Firebird* and improvisation on Satchmo's *West End Blues*. According to Dizzy Gillespie (Salamone 1990a) Bird was at home with African music whose rhythms suited his tastes.

Not only was he an embodiment of Trickster in his professional and personal life, he was the personification of Walt Whitman's American (Whitman's *Song of Myself)*. He did indeed contradict himself, and did contain multitudes. The times could not and did not tolerate him. The harassment of New York's finest and their drug busts targeting bop musicians, the virulent racism of the times, the slurs of many, not all, established musicians, the copy-cats singled out in Charlie Mingus's musical tributes to Bird, all helped lead to his death. They also served to make him a martyr and to help perpetuate his music. Charlie Parker, the Trickster, did indeed cross many boundaries, and people are still working out his changes.

Coda

I saw Charlie Parker once. It was at a Jazz at the Philharmonic concert in Rochester, NY, in 1954 or 1955. I was a young teen, in love with jazz and awed by the stories I had read of Bird. I had heard some of his music, but not a lot. Still, it was enough to whet my appetite. I was surprised when Bird came on stage. He did not have his own group but was backed, so my memory tells me, by the Oscar Peterson Trio. Despite its name, there was also a drummer with the trio: with Bird, that made it a quintet.

That was not the main surprise. Bird was disheveled and seemed disoriented. He had a baggy suit on, was overweight, and his horn looked shopworn. However, when he put the horn to his lips, closed his eyes and blew, the surprise was that a "gentleman bum", in George Shearing's words, could make such music (Salamone 1990b). I had taken sax and clarinet lessons, but knew very little music theory at that time. I only knew that I was witnessing a force of nature. Music that down-to-earth but also ethereal could only come from a complicated individual.

Shearing had told me that Bird, looking like a "gentleman bum", was the only musician who approached him in Birdland, asking if Shearing wanted to go outside for a walk. He helped George on with his coat and unobtrusively guided him out the door. Shearing said that Bird frequently made little gestures like that, which contradicted the stories that made him out to be unaware of others and totally self-absorbed (cf, for example,

Miles Davis, 1990). There are, of course, other stories of Bird's kindness, such as his giving Davis a free place to stay, and sponsoring his career when many other musicians wondered why he bothered with the rich kid from East St. Louis.

When all these stories are put together, the contradictions, the wit, charm, intelligence, excesses and appetite with a skill that seems to have come from nowhere and influenced the future of the music as only Louis Armstrong had done, we have a portrait of a consummate trickster. His untimely death adds to the legend, as do stories of bird feathers floating from the heavens on the day he died. I have spoken with some of his very close friends about him—Dizzy Gillespie, who said Bird was the other beat of his heart, and Bob Redcross, for whom Bird wrote a song of the same name and who was a general factotum and who swore that Bird could pick up any wind instrument and play it perfectly the first time. They all note his contradictory nature and his charm. He was indeed the personification of Trickster, and, like Trickster, he self-destructed.

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CHAPTER TWO

THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF JAZZ: TRICKSTER AND HIS ROLE IN JAZZ

> "I think his sense of humor lets him get away with things the rest of us wouldn't have the nerve to try".
>
> —Attributed to Phil Woods and Gene Lees.

> "I am too famous to die."
>
> —Dizzy Gillespie on his deathbed.

> [The trickster] is a forerunner of the saviour… He is both subhuman and superhuman, a bestial and divine being, whose chief and most alarming characteristic is his unconsciousness.
>
> "On the Psychology of the Trickster-Figure," Carl Jung CW 9i, par. 472.

The role of the trickster in African culture is well-known (Frederick-Malanson 2012; Badejo 1988; Ugorji 1991; Gates 1988; Hyde 1998; Jung; Davis 1991). He is a dangerous character, one who changes and transforms reality. Seemingly off-handedly he creates and recreates the world. If he were not filled with humor, it is debatable whether anyone would ever approach him. Certainly, there have been figures in African, and west African, culture that fulfill the role of Trickster. Musicians come quite easily to mind. I will name two, one African and one African American, namely, Fela, the Nigerian rebel musician, and Dizzy Gillespie, one of the creators of be-bop who also used humor to makes dangerous points, points that upset the status quo.

However, the proper place for trickster figures is religion. Indeed, both Fela and Gillespie saw their music as spiritual, as each man told me (Salamone 2008). Shamans and priests in west Africa often partake of trickster characteristics. In mythology and religion, the trickster deity breaks the rules of the gods or nature, sometimes maliciously but usually, albeit unintentionally, with ultimately positive effects. Often, the bending/breaking of rules takes the form of tricks or thievery. Tricksters

can be cunning or foolish or both; they are often funny even when considered sacred or performing important cultural tasks.

Charles Mingus, the legendary and troubled genius of the bass and composition, issued an album in 1957 entitled "The Clown". Jean Shepherd did the narration for the title song. In it, Mingus's meaning is clarified. The title clown is none other than the jazz performer himself. Certainly, Mingus had himself in mind but he also meant to apply it to others, and certainly to Charlie Parker, whom Mingus idolized, writing "Reincarnation of a Lovebird" for this album. Shepherd's narration includes a section indicating that only when the clown accidentally falls and injures himself does he achieve great popularity. He cashes in on that popularity, inserting his message behind the tricks, an apt metaphor for the tricksters in jazz. Indeed, it is no accident that the two major tricksters in jazz, Louis Armstrong and Charlie Parker, were trickster, and both not-so-incidentally were influences on Mingus.

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African American culture is marked by tricksterism, and black music has had no lack of tricksters. Arguably, Parker and Louis Armstrong have been the greatest of them all. Parker paid his tribute to Armstrong in memorizing many of his solos note for note and then performing them within his own improvisations, although usually at greater speeds. Both, however, shared a knack for transforming other music into new music with a personal stamp on it.

The Diz and Tricksters

Trickster myth is found in clearly recognizable form among both aboriginal tribes and modern societies. We encounter it among the ancient Greeks, Chinese, and the Japanese and in the Semitic world as well. Many of the trickster's traits were perpetuated in the figure of the mediæval jester, and survived right up to the present day in the Punch and Judy plays and in the clown. Although repeatedly combined with other myths and frequently drastically reorganized and reinterpreted, its basic plot seems

[4] TV Tropes:
http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/TheTrickster?from=Main.Tricksters.