

CHARLIE PARKER ON DIAL VOLUME 3

Early in 1947, after spending over six months at Camarillo State Hospital, Camarillo, California, where he had been committed for acute alcoholism and narcotic addiction, Charlie Parker resumed recording for Dial Records. When Parker was hospitalised his physical condition had deteriorated to a very dangerous level. At Camarillo he underwent involuntary withdrawal from psychedelics and submitted to a strict institutional regime, which included both psycho and occupational therapy, the latter in the form of light labour in the hospital gardens under the California sunshine. As he regained his health, Bird chafed at this routine, which must have seemed unbelievably tedious and "square" for one who had spent the past ten years of his life in night clubs and dance halls and indeed, had sometimes not seen the sun for days on end. Thanks to it, Bird emerged from Camarillo a new man. His face had fleshed out, he had gained twenty pounds, was calm, sanguine, cheerful, relaxed and glowing with vitality. These qualities are evident in his playing on the two sessions made for Dial in February 1947 and the HOME COOKING session which represents Bird's very first recordings after his release from Camarillo.

This is not to say that Bird played better on these dates. His famous LOVER MAN session (issued on Spotlite 101), performed on the eve of his breakdown and commitment, was recorded when he was scarcely able to stand or finger the saxophone, yet projects a strange and moving beauty. By contrast the February 1947 sessions seem flooded with melody. They may be lacking in certain of those virtuoso effects one hears on Koko—it is possible that six months at Camarillo had dulled the fine edge of Parker's ability to execute seemingly impossible leaps and runs. But the pulse of these recordings is very sure, as if Bird stood on solid ground and had time under absolute control. His tone is well centred and now seems fuller than before. As a possible reflection of his months in the pastoral surroundings at Camarillo the lines abound in happy, almost Mozart-ian melodies.

The RELAXIN' AT CAMARILLO session on the enclosed record was Charlie Parker's final recording date in California and took place at the C.P. MacGregor Studios, Western Avenue near Eighth Street, Hollywood on Wednesday, February 26, 1947, just a week after the Garner-Parker collaboration which produced COOL BLUES (issued on Spotlite 102) and a little more than a month following his release from Camarillo. The personnel was made up of sidemen hand-picked by Charlie from the most advanced jazz musicians working on the West Coast in 1947.

Howard McGhee, the foremost trumpet man playing in the modern idiom, had been contractor for combos featuring Parker at the Club Finale the year before and at the unpretentious little club, The Hi-De-Ho, just before his return to New York. McGhee was the trumpet player on the ill-fated LOVERMAN date of July 29, 1946. That session had also taken place in the same studios. Because of its excellent acoustics and the availability of sound engineer Ben Jordan, Parker and A&R man Ross Russell had decided to use the same facilities for the farewell session.

This session was to be Wardell Gray's only opportunity to record with Parker inside a studio. A lamentable fact. As these tracks testify, Wardell was perhaps the most compatible of all the tenor men of the Forties (Dexter Gordon excluded) for the Parkerian alto. Wardell had just arrived in Los Angeles and was taking on the local tenor men led by Teddy Edwards and Dexter Gordon, at such after hours clubs as the Bird-in-the-Basket on Central Avenue.

Dodo Marmarosa was easily the first choice of the local piano men. Dodo had been on the scene since

arriving with Tommy Dorsey. During 1945-47 he had worked with Boyd Raeburn's Big Band and the Slim Gaillard Trio.

The week before Red Callender had been in the MacGregor studios as anchor man in the rhythm section for the COOL BLUES session. He was with the Erroll Garner Trio, then winding up a lengthy engagement at The Haig. The section was completed by Barney Kessel, making one of his first important dates, and Don Lamond, Jo Jones—inspired drummer whose percussion work was a driving force in the Woody Herman Herd.

Ross Russell recalls that Charlie was more than an hour late for the session, not an unusual occurrence. However, of the four originals he had promised to compose, only one materialised. This was RELAXIN' AT CAMARILLO, a sophisticated reading of the 12-bar blues. The tune had been run down roughly at a brief rehearsal a few days before but none had mastered its sinuous line and five cuts were required before Parker approved the E take.

With CAMARILLO in "the can" the seven musicians proceeded to three additional tunes, provided by Howard McGhee, who had the foresight to anticipate Parker's dereliction in the writing department. McGhee coolly produced lead sheets for STUPENDOUS, which originates from a line written by trumpeter Melvyn Broiles who was at the time a pupil studying under McGhee, CARVIN' THE BIRD and CHEERS. As the title suggests, STUPENDOUS is a musical paraphrase of S'WONDERFUL. It was the Dial Policy, whenever possible to ignore Tin Pan Alley and pay out composer royalties to jazz musicians rather than the tunesmiths. CARVIN' THE BIRD is a riff blues featuring spirited chase sections. CHEERS rests on the sub-structure of George Gershwin's hoary old I GOT RHYTHM.

Charlie Parker enthusiasts will be excited to see the inclusion on this record of two previously unissued takes of CHEERS. The B and C masters. The sound quality is not as good as the remaining items from the session but the masters to these items appear to have been lost forever and these two tracks originate from two extant acetate dubbings which have dried out during the passage of time thus creating a certain amount of surface noise. However the farewell date is now virtually complete but for the B take of CAMARILLO which was neither issued nor saved, the master being missing or presumed lost.

The Dial master number system, incidentally, was to assign a decimal series to each recording session. Thus the master numbers for the following session was D1081, D1082 &c. Takes were designated by letters, as D1081-A, D1081-B &c. At Dial sessions involving Charlie Parker, Bird was always the musical director and had final say on matters pertaining to the date and time of recording, selection of sidemen and material, and approval of takes. It was his custom to continue recording until the over-all performance was satisfactory and this usually happened on the final take of each number. However, the reason for rejecting earlier takes more often than not lay in defects of performances by sidemen. As to Parker's own solos, they were often equally interesting, sometimes more so, and certainly, in the case of this highly creative musician, different on rejected takes.

A short while after the RELAXIN' AT CAMARILLO session Charlie, accompanied by Doris Sydnor, whom he later married, left Los Angeles by air for Chicago, where he played an engagement, probably a one-nighter with a local rhythm section, at the Pershing Ballroom. He then continued to New York and shortly opened at the Three Deuces on Fifty Second Street with a quintet which included Miles Davis. This

was the group which subsequently made further sessions for Dial the first of which will shortly be appearing on Volume 4 of this series, Spotlite 104.

The remaining three titles are the now famous HOME COOKING items. These consist of alto solos only on two popular tunes of the day and an original by altoist Hal McKusick. Although the various items have matrix numbers allocated to them they are of little importance as they do not indicate the recording sequence. The three tunes on this record originally appeared on a 12" Dial LP905. The last item HOME COOKIN' III appeared as an untitled track on this LP but only because the type became excessive for the printing area on the label. Despite the fact that trumpeters Howard McGhee, Shorty Rogers and Melvyn Broiles were all present on the date they are not heard on these items as all other solos &c. were edited due to bad balance. Only the alto solos were retained, the balance being good on these as McGhee and others present held the microphone near Bird while he was soloing. Only one microphone was used and the recordings probably were made on a Packard-Bell. They were made at the home of Charles Kopley, a Hollywood musician and three more items were recorded apart from those already mentioned. These were BLUES, YARDBIRD SUITE and LULLABY IN RHYTHM. BLUES presumably lost forever and the last two both issued on Spotlite 107 "Lullaby in Rhythm". COOKING I is the Hal McKusick original called OPUS, an amalgamation of S'WONDERFUL for the first 16 and last 8 bars and HONEYSUCKLE ROSE for the bridge, whilst COOKING II and III are based respectively on CHEROKEE and I GOT RHYTHM. Other titles suggested for various items recorded at Kopley's but never used were:— KOPLEY PLAZA, BLUES ON THE SOFA, TUNIN' UP and RELAXIN' AT CAMARILLO.

PERSONNEL

- : CHARLIE PARKER ALL STARS
Howard McGhee tpt; Charlie Parker alt; Wardell Gray ten; Dodo Marmarosa p; Barney Kessel g; George 'Red' Callender bs; Don Lamond d.
C.P. MacGregor Studios, Hollywood—Wednesday, February 26, 1947.
- + CHARLIE PARKER alt. acc. by
Russ Freeman p; Arnold Fishkind bs; Jimmy Pratt d.
Chuck Kopley's, Hollywood—Saturday, February 1, 1947.

SIDE ONE

- : Relaxin' at Camarillo (3:03) D1071-A
- : Relaxin' at Camarillo (3:02) D1071-C
- : Relaxin' at Camarillo (2:58) D1071-D
- : Relaxin' at Camarillo (2:54) D1071-E
- : Cheers (3:05) D1072-A
- : Cheers (3:00) D1072-B
- : Cheers (3:00) D1072-C

SIDE TWO

- : Cheers (3:00) D1072-D
- : Carvin' the Bird (2:40) D1073-A
- : Carvin' the Bird (2:42) D1073-B
- : Stupendous (2:50) D1074-A
- : Stupendous (2:50) D1074-B
- + Home cooking I (2:19) K-905
- + Home cooking II (2:05) K-904
- + Home cooking III (2:24) K-903

SPOTLITE 103