World is celebrating Bird at 100

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“You can tell the history of jazz in four words: Louis Armstrong, Charlie Parker.”

Thus spoke Miles Davis, the terrifically talented trumpeter, who knew jazz inside and out. Not surprisingly therefore millions of this planet’s inhabitants will celebrate the Centennial of the Arrival of the Angel of the Alto Saxophone, Charlie Parker, on Saturday, Aug. 29, 2020.

If you can’t travel to the birthplace — Kansas City, Mo., — of this avant-garde jazz genius - you can still virtually (and otherwise) raise the scales with him on your very own ‘Bird Suite’ chase.

Across the pond, although the Guinness Cork Jazz Festival 2020 has been canceled, Diageo recently announced that they are fully committed to sponsoring the festival in October 2021.

Meanwhile “3G and Chris Engel” will play “Bird,” recreating Ronan Guilfoyle’s Lingua Franca BIRD that debuted in 2000. Join the Stream from Arthur’s by visiting www.jazzireland.ie, and purchasing a ticket link (valid for 24 hours) to the live Birthday performance at 8:00pm, Saturday night.

The arc of Parker’s life is an out-of-his-control cyclone, within which he explores unique and advanced approaches to harmonic ideas, punctuated by bebop fast tempos, electric passing chords and other virtuoso technique into the jazz idiom.

During a professional career as musician and composer that spanned the late-1930s through the mid-1950s, Parker’s prodigious output appeared on the Savoy, Dial, Verve and Mercury labels, to name but a few, breaching some time-honored formulaic jazz soloing strictures.

Although his star turn as improviser extraordinaire surely earned him time-honored status as the Bull of Bebop, curiously there were eight leaders — inclusive of Jay McShann, Dizzy Gillespie and Sarah Vaughan — on recording sessions on which he appeared — before Parker himself took the helm as the music was made.

That slow upward incline belies the razzmataz of his seemingly meteoric stardom — more popular and renowned in 1950 than Bing Crosby — that the facts reveal.

Charlie Parker paid his dues to and for himself. In the Fall of 1936 while traveling to a gig in the Missouri Ozarks, during which time a car accident resulted in three injured ribs and a fractured spine, the then-16-year-old was treated with pain killers and opioids (including heroin), which precipitated a lifetime-long addiction.

Ultimately after a spectacular full-time performance in the spring of 1936 the soon to emerge semblance of the icon he became flowered after close to four years of intense daily self-induced practice sessions.

No matter how you decide to acknowledge this monumental moment in the history of jazz — whether partaking in the 92Y — Charlie Parker ‘Now’s The Time’ extravaganza of activities (92y.org/charlieparker), tuning in to 89.9FM (WKCR.org) for the marathon “Charlie Parker Centennial Festival” (all day from tomorrow through all day Thursday, Sept. 3), or enjoying the entire month-long Birdman homage on 88.3FM (WBGO.org), one thing’s for sure: Charlie Parker transitioned 65 years ago with music he still had not yet composed but was playing nonetheless in his head.

Come Aug. 29, 2020, wherever you may be, open a window and your heart. A bird will appear.

Listen carefully for what you’ll hear is a song that got away.

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