



# **Bird Lives!: The High Life & Hard Times of Charlie (Yardbird) Parker**

*Ross Russell*

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This work on Charlie Bird Parker offers a picture of not only of the saxophonist-composer as an artist and as a human being, but also of zeitgeist and the musical/social setting that produced him. It shows his complex personality; his great appetites; the extent of his influence; and his work.

## **Bird Lives!: The High Life & Hard Times of Charlie (Yardbird) Parker Details**

Date : Published March 22nd 1996 by Da Capo Press (first published April 1973)

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Author : Ross Russell

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# From Reader Review Bird Lives!: The High Life & Hard Times of Charlie (Yardbird) Parker for online ebook

## Dwight Penny says

Another book from the laundry room shelf, I should have read this a long time ago. I claim to love jazz, but I don't play, and I'm no student of it. I was always very fuzzy on Charlie Parker. His blazing fast style can be jarring to the ears, and I have to admit, I never got it. I usually prefer deep textures, a big sound, and long slow tunes I can follow, remember, and hum in the elevator. Bird is relentless, frenetic, (and sometimes a bit wheezy). The whole period of his music, the 40's and early 50's, has always been an undifferentiated blur to me.

Written in 1973 by a white producer who was one of the first to record Bird as a leader, back in 1946, this book has something of a bad reputation. The author himself makes a case for the raised eyebrow. Is it really appropriate for yet another white bystander to write a bio of a black jazz hero? There is some pretty good research here, based on a lot of interviews with musicians who worked with Bird. A lot of the story is fictionalized, with snatches of dialogue and descriptions of scenes for which there were no cameras. That gives a realistic documentary feel, but suddenly you turn the page on the chapter where Russell talks about his own involvement with Parker, signing back of the napkin contracts, lending him money, getting him out of rehab, getting crossed as Bird breached exclusive agreements, and you realize there can be no objectivity here. The language suddenly changes to the first person, and oscillates between being honest and defensive. There are people who thought Ross Russell was one of the many people in the music industry who didn't do right by him, and Bird was one of them. The last time they met, Charlie Parker threatened to shoot him.

While it may not be the definitive biography, I still think it's a great book. The language is evocative, and at times has a dark, beat edge to it. It makes a convincing case that Charlie Parker was a true cultural hero, and deserves to be a legend. He was a unique and powerful creative force in transforming jazz from swing, which was for dancing and entertainment, to bebop, where in the space of a few years, jazz became a form of personal expression, an Art. Parker was no civil rights activist, but he stood his own terms, and set an example for doing so. Like too many legends, he also set a standard for tragic self-destruction. When he died, his health destroyed by years of heroin and alcohol, the coroner estimated his age at 53. He was 34.

Well, then, on a lighter note, what also made the book valuable for me is that it also served as a listening guide. Thanks to the den of copyright thieves that is YouTube, every cut mentioned is available for instant listening with a few keystrokes. That includes some bootleg recordings that the author himself never heard, except by reputation. It sets the scene of individual recording sessions. It sketches out the dynamic among the players, legends in their own right, like Gillespie, Miles, and Monk. Sidemen and hangers-on whose names I'd only known from liner notes, became became fleshed out characters, with motives and styles of their own. With passionate commentary on choruses and solos, the book helped me dig (should I put quotes around that?) Charlie Parker, and bebop, in a way that escaped me before. I'll never be able to whistle Charlie Parker solos, but in the past couple of weeks, I've been hearing them in my dreams, sharp and clear, utterly inventive, and blazingly fast.

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## **Russ says**

Hard to say what to make of Ross Russell -- he was a label owner as well as Parker's biographer; employer and eulogist. It's hard to believe he'd be impartial when it came to Bird. But keeping that in mind, it's another valuable look into the life of the bebop pioneer.

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## **Alex says**

Bird Lives!: The High Life and Hard Times of Charlie (Yardbird) Parker by Ross Russell (1996)

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## **Erin says**

I just ordered this book at the suggestion of a friend who knows music all too well. It's in his blood! I'm excited to read this book. I ordered so both my husband and I can read it.

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## **Serge Pierro says**

The definitive biography on Charlie Parker. Covers a lot of ground, including his famous appetites for music, women, food and drugs. Musicians and non-musicians will come away with something by reading this book.

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## **Chris says**

I really liked this book. The story of Parker's even if it was sad at times was a great read. As with so many artists I often wonder what they would think of today's music. Also, I wonder where they would be now.

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## **Jeff says**

Although reprinted since, I first read an out-of-print copy found in a college library. Still the definitive bio of tormented genius Charlie Parker, it attempts to delineate and map the shifting, wavering boundaries between torment and genius.

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## **Brendan says**

this book tore me apart. whether you're a charlie parker fanatic or not (tho it helps as it's about charlie parker) ross russell's 79 biography gives us access to the man with a hole in his soul. bird lived and played hard into his early death, his music took off from where armstrong left off, and all those that came after were merely replicating his apocalyptic blues. it's a stunning insight into pre and post ww2 america, into the music

industry, and into the core of an artist who blew too deep. charlie bird was never truly compensated, respected or worshipped for his revolutionary recordings, his heroin addiction, unreliability and psycho sexual behaviours preventing him from the nice cars and adornments dizzy and miles accepted, but everyone knows he was the one. like dylan thomas he was so ahead of his time it took us a while after his death to catch up and see. if you love jazz, art or you are an artist yourself then find time for this one. then listen to parkers mood. bebop!

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### **Starlyn says**

Fun, informative and accessible to the non musician; Although it helps to know a little about the scene once the author starts naming others in the business. A great overview of one of the great talents in jazz. A good look into a man who's views and music were years ahead of his contemporaries.

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### **Phillip says**

i revisited this book that i read when i was a young, budding jazz musician. this time around i had to skim it - i simply could not connect with the idiotic tone, which tries too hard to sound like some beatnik snapping his fingers and digging bird.

what a disappointment!

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### **Morris Nelms says**

All the bios of Parker are worth reading. Giddens wrote the best one. This one has plenty of information. It's a bit of a potboiler sometimes, and it didn't need to be.

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### **Djordje says**

Troubling, very troubling, engaging, painful, great on the music. The author has a knowledge of culture and the history of ideas which helps a lot when placing the whole story into a wider context.  
Part biography, part cultural history, and part novel - it is, for all its faults, an enormously important book.

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### **Larry says**

Is it a biography or a biographical novel? Call it 'the story of Charlie Parker's life', in which the author brings together the people in that life like characters in a novel, inventing dialogue, inner thoughts and outward motivations that he couldn't possibly have been privy to. The author knew Parker personally, and interviewed numerous others who had been close to him. Since another book had already quoted extensively from those sources, it seems that this author chose the 'creative non-fiction' route, producing a warm yet critical look at this great musician's messed-up life. Though sympathetic, the author neither whitewashes nor

condemns Parker's professional struggles or his addictions.

My only criticism is that I'd have liked more analysis of the music itself and the nuances of his musical development. Nevertheless, if you're interested in the life and career of one of the great musical groundbreakers of the 20th Century, you'll enjoy this engaging page-turner of a book.

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### **Dave Finnigan says**

quite technical for the non-musician, but still very good

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### **Cary says**

Bird Lives, what can you say? The biography of Charlie Parker. One of the most influencial black musicians of the 30's and one of the creators of bebop & improv jazz. His influence on jazz music is incalculable. If he was alive today he would have the American Lifetime Achievement award like Heston, Dylan, and other great contributers to American art. This is not a book just for musicians. Charlie Parker led an interesting life full of difficulties. Heroin addiction, racial oppression, and skepticism for his music. But he overcame all these obstacles to become a true American cultural hero. An incredible book that takes you from the back room world of Kansas City jazz to the clubs of Harlem in New York. Where he met other pioneers like Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie, and John Coltraine. WORD! Cary

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