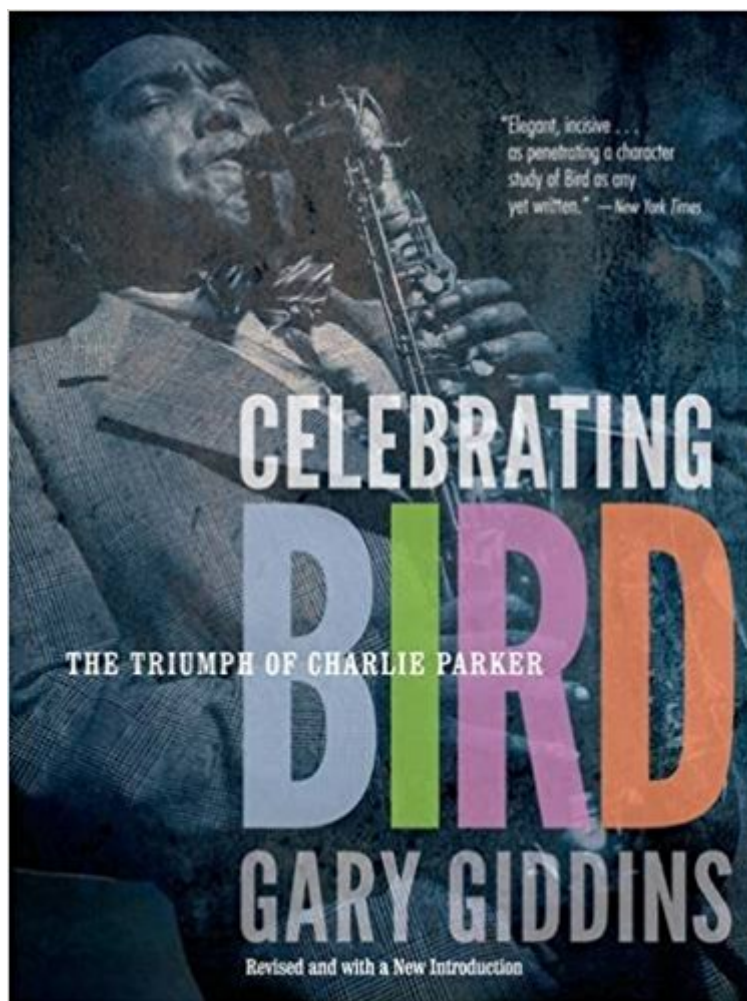




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Celebrating Bird: The Triumph Of Charlie Parker



Synopsis

Within days of Charlie "Bird" Parker's death at the age of thirty-four, a scrawled legend began appearing on walls around New York City: Bird Lives. Gone was one of the most outstanding jazz musicians of any era, the troubled genius who brought modernism to jazz and became a defining cultural force for musicians, writers, and artists of every stripe. Arguably the most significant musician in the country at the time of his death, Parker set the standard many musicians strove to reach—though he never enjoyed the same popular success that greeted many of his imitators. Today, the power of Parker's inventions resonates undiminished; and his influence continues to expand. Celebrating Bird is the groundbreaking and award-winning account of the life and legend of Charlie Parker from renowned biographer and critic Gary Giddins, whom Esquire called "the best jazz writer in America today." Richly illustrated and drawing primarily from original sources, Giddins overturns many of the myths that have grown up around Parker. He cuts a fascinating portrait of the period, from Parker's apprentice days in the 1930s in his hometown of Kansas City to the often difficult years playing clubs in New York and Los Angeles, and reveals how Parker came to embody not only musical innovation and brilliance but the rage and exhilaration of an entire generation. Fully revised and with a new introduction by the author, Celebrating Bird is a classic of jazz writing that the Village Voice heralded as "a celebration of the highest order"—a portrayal of a jazz virtuoso whose gargantuan talent was haunted by his excesses and a view into the ravishing art of one of jazz's most commanding and remarkable figures.

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Customer Reviews

"Giddins writes with something like Bird's bravado. . . . [Parker] can practically be heard ripping through Cherokee and stewing over Koko straight off the pages of this book." *L. A. Weekly* "As penetrating a character study of Bird as any yet written." *New York Times* "Since his death in 1955, myth-makers have sounded the bebop battle cry Bird Lives! but Giddins is the first biographer to make it sound true." *Village Voice* "A major contribution to jazz biography . . . has the verve and adrenaline of its subject matter." *Ishmael Reed* "A tribute . . . to Parker's gift and grief. Giddins gives the man his due." *Los Angeles Times*

Gary Giddins is one of the world's foremost jazz critics. His books include *Visions of Jazz*, *Bing Crosby: A Pocketful of Dreams*, *Satchmo*, *Weather Bird*, *Natural Selection*, *Jazz*, and *Warning Shadows*, and his many recognitions include a National Book Critics Circle Award, the Jazz Journalists Association Lifetime Achievement Award, a Guggenheim, a Grammy, and six ASCAP Deems Taylor Awards for Excellence in Music Criticism. He is executive director of the Leon Levy Center for Biography at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York.

In my jazz book collection, the Gary Giddins titles stand tall for their passion, literacy, conciseness, and accuracy. At 145 pages, half of which space is devoted to some marvelous photographs, GG doesn't waste a word. The focus is on The Music, with biographical details as a skeleton. But it's the love for Bird that comes through, dressed in his engaging writing style that makes you feel you're listening to a knowledgeable friend. His writing voice is closer to Stephen King than Ira Gitler. I've read a lot of Mojave Desert dry material on Bird; so reading this was like finding an oasis. The updated discography is a spot-on buyers guide, the new index makes it a good reference, and the photographs a delight. Thanks to Helmut Schwarzer's review, I bought a used copy of the old hardback edition, with its larger format and glossier paper, in order to better enjoy the photographs. They convey a humanity that words alone cannot.

A satisfying book on Charlie Parker and perhaps the best one for musicians to read. Giddins sought the early interviews that help describe how Bird became great. Two biographies written by the authoritative critic are gravy.

Excellent narrative, awesome understanding of jazz unfolding and Parker's role in that

Comparing it with the first 1987 Beech Tree/Morrow edition (best found on with an ISBN search: 0688059503), a summing up is best done by enumerating the Pros and Cons: Pros: Excellent index (the 1st edition had none!). An evaluating critical CD discography. A fresh intro and an Acknowledgments section that is more than just a list of names. Cons: The format (8" x 6") is less than half the size of the first edition (12" x 9"). This, combined with the fact that the first edition was printed on coated stock, negatively affects the quality of the pictorial content, especially noticeable with the full-page photo reproductions. Claims made here and there that this reissue is 'revised' or 'fully revised', do not really pertain to the text itself which has been left alone, except for a small amount of stylistic/cosmetic tidying and tightening. Pointing out one correction and one omission: the photo caption on p. 106 should read June 1952 (not 1953), when Bird's engagement at the Tiffany Club took place. The bibliography is guilty of one astonishing omission, Lawrence O. Koch's *Yarbird Suite: A Compendium of the Music and Life of Charlie Parker* (1999) - the most important session-by-session evaluation and analysis of his recordings, both commercial and private.

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