

***Now's the Time, Charlie Parker***  
***Now's the Time, Eddie Jefferson***

**Time for a Change in Jazz - Intermediate level,  
grades 3-6**

**Objectives:**

1. The student will identify characteristics of bebop style jazz.
2. The student will learn the story of Charlie Parker through the lyrics of jazz singer Eddie Jefferson.
3. The student will compare and contrast the saxophone solos of Charlie Parker and James Moody.

**Optional Objectives:**

1. The student will investigate and learn more about the life of Charlie Parker through the web sites listed below.
2. The student will compare improvised solos of other musicians with solos played by Charlie Parker.

**Time:** One or two class periods.

**Materials Required for Objectives:**

Computer access to recordings on the Internet and speakers for playback to class. "Comparing Two Musicians" worksheets. Optional: Comparing Improvised Solos worksheet.

**Procedure:**

**Activity 1 - Introduce Charlie Parker.** "So far we have learned about several great jazz musicians and we know about styles of jazz such as New Orleans, stride piano, swing, Afro-Cuban, and even a *cappella* jazz. Few musicians changed jazz as much as Charlie Parker. Alto saxophonist Charlie Parker (who was nicknamed 'Bird') was as fast and creative as Fats Waller but was also an innovator and an inventor. He developed a new style of jazz called bebop with such musicians as Dizzy Gillespie and Thelonious Monk. He used notes that sounded funny to the ears of the musicians before him but those unusual-sounding notes soon

became the notes everyone wanted to play. People were amazed by Bird, and many musicians copied him. Musicians from all over the world wanted to play with him and hoped that they could learn the secrets of his brilliant saxophone playing. Some even copied his not so brilliant bad habits such as substance abuse, which killed Bird at the young age of thirty-four. Listen to this slower recording of Bird's and listen for the 'funny notes' he liked to play. When you think you hear one of the 'funny notes,' hold up your thumb in front of your chest." Teachers: play the recording several times and after each playing, ask students to describe what one of the "funny notes" sounded like. They should pick up on the last note of the first time through the melody and other notes that he wavered on or scooped up into. Pause the recording after these so the students can isolate and hear them better.

**Activity 2** - Now listen to Eddie Jefferson's version of *Now's the Time* and listen to his lyrics for the story of Charlie Parker and his music. Eddie Jefferson was a jazz singer who loved to create lyrics that went with famous solos improvised by jazz instrumentalists. Singing lyrics to improvised instrumental solos is called vocalese. Jefferson has taken a Charlie Parker improvised solo on *Now's the Time* and is singing the same notes with both lyrics and scat syllables. Ask students to listen for the story of Charlie Parker and be ready to share what they understand after the recording finishes. Go to this web site to hear a short interview with Eddie Jefferson on why he created vocalese including *Now's the Time*.

<http://www.gallery41.com/JazzArtists/EddieJefferson.htm>

**Activity 3** - Eddie Jefferson loved to sing with jazz saxophonist James Moody. In fact, one of his first vocalese recordings was on one of James Moody's saxophone solos that Jefferson recorded called *Moody's Mood for Love*. Use the "Comparing Two Musicians" worksheet and ask students to listen to and compare the saxophone solos on the two versions of *Now's the Time*. Students might hear that James Moody's saxophone sounds different: it is a tenor saxophone and Parker played alto saxophone. They might also hear James Moody playing fast like Parker. Students will probably decide that Moody sounds a lot like Charlie Parker. Probe the students to

describe how they sound the same and remind them that just about all jazz musicians who lived during Charlie Parker's time tried to play like him. James Moody was one of the best but James Moody didn't copy the bad habits of Parker.

### **Optional Activities:**

**Activity 1** - Explore the two Charlie Parker web sites below for additional information on him. You might complement this with a reading of Robert Burleigh's book *Lookin' for Bird in the Big City* (New York: Harcourt, 2001). The book tells the story of Miles Davis going to New York City as a young man and looking for Bird everywhere because he wanted badly to play with him. Ask students to share their thoughts on why Charlie Parker was so admired by other musicians.

**Activity 2** - Listen to recordings online at the websites listed below and compare improvised solos of musicians playing on the Charlie Parker recordings with Charlie Parker's own solos. Students should also notice that the solos have many of the same qualities that Charlie Parker's solos had. This is because musicians wanted to play like Parker but they also contributed to the new bebop style in their own ways. Ask students if they hear anything different in the improvised solos of other musicians playing with Parker. Use the worksheet "Comparing Two Improvisations."

**Extension:** Show the only known video clip of Charlie Parker, which is included in the video *Reed Royalty*.

### **Indicators of Success:**

Students will be able to explain the impact of Charlie Parker on other musicians and be able to describe the bebop jazz style using words like "fast," "funny notes," and "lots of ideas." Students will recognize that during Charlie Parker's time, many musicians worked very hard to emulate him in their own playing.

### **Learn more about Charlie Parker:**

[http://www.pbs.org/jazz/biography/artist\\_id\\_parker\\_charlie.htm](http://www.pbs.org/jazz/biography/artist_id_parker_charlie.htm)

<http://www.charlie-bird-parker.com/>

**Learn more about Eddie Jefferson:**

<http://www.ralf.org/~colomon/vocalese/jefferson.html>

<http://www.gallery41.com/JazzArtists/EddieJefferson.htm>

[http://www.aaregistry.com/african\\_american\\_history/1057/Eddie\\_Jefferson\\_sang\\_early\\_vocalese](http://www.aaregistry.com/african_american_history/1057/Eddie_Jefferson_sang_early_vocalese)

**Video Resource:**

*Reed Royalty*. VHS video, 60 mins. Pleasantville, NY: VAI, 1992.