

Reviews

'Bird' chronicles success, decline of trend-setting jazz saxophonist

"Bird"
Starring Forest Whitaker and Diane Venora
Directed by Clint Eastwood
Rated R
*** 1/2
By Shane Hall

REVIEWER

Probably no musician in the field of jazz has been more influential than alto saxophonist Charlie Parker, nicknamed "Yardbird" because of his fondness for chicken. During the 1940s and 50s, Parker was an acknowledged leader in the jazz movement known as bebop, a style that emphasized improvisation.

In 1945, Parker recorded "Ko Ko," a landmark recording that assured Parker of musical immortality.

Charlie Parker was a genius, but he also was a man beset by personal troubles. He was an alcoholic and a junkie. During the later years of his life, club owners became reluctant to book him as a performer, fearing that he would show up in no shape to play or not show up at all.

In 1955, Parker died of pneumonia at the age of 34. Doctors estimated his age to be 50 or 60.

Clint Eastwood, a life-long jazz fan and ardent admirer of Parker, brings the story of this legendary artist to the screen in "Bird."

Produced and directed by Eastwood, "Bird" stars Forest Whitaker as Parker and Diane Venora as Parker's wife, Chan Richardson.

"Bird" is a complex film that includes several flashbacks within flashbacks before returning to the present. The flashbacks return us to

major events in Parker's younger days, including a humiliating incident when he was 16 and forgot the chord changes to "I Got the Rhythm" during a performance.

To get the young musician off of the stage, the drummer threw a cymbal to the floor. Unless you are paying close attention to what is happening, it is easy to lose track of events and when they are happening. The film jumps frequently from the 1930s to the '50s, to the '40s and back to the '50s and so on.

The portrayal of Parker by Eastwood and screenwriter Joel Oliansky is one that shows us the artist's troubled side. In many scenes, Whitaker is seen staggering down a dark New York street, drunk or high. We see a vivid dramatization of Parker's 1954 suicide attempt in which he swallowed iodine.

It is believed that Parker's attempted suicide was the result of depression about his daughter's death. That view seems to be the film's contention as well.

Jack Green's cinematography, with its frequent use of night scenes and dimly-lit interiors, visually heightens the film's downbeat nature.

In addition to Parker's personal demons, we also see the way many audiences rejected his music and later, the man himself. A segment of the film portrays a trip to the West Coast by Parker and Dizzy Gillespie in which the California audiences rejected bebop's innovative, but unconventional style.

Later in the movie, as Parker's personal problems worsen, no club will book him. Even Birdland, the club named for him, declines to give



A portrait of Charlie "Bird" Parker.

Photo courtesy of Warner Bros.

him a gig.

The film is mostly accurate in its dramatization of Parker's life, but it does contain some fictional elements, particularly the character of Buster (Keith David), who is portrayed as a long-time rival. Buster later finds fame playing rock 'n' roll while Parker is down on his luck and unable to find work.

In real life, Parker had a mentor named Buster, Dallas musician Buster Smith. Perhaps it is Smith that the character of Buster is based on, but it seems unlikely. Smith was a friend to Parker; hardly the nemesis Buster in the movie is. Still, the choice of the name "Buster" for a rival character is curious.

The major problem with "Bird" is

that in showing us Parker's personal turmoils and devastating addictions, the portrait of the musical genius is mostly obscured.

Although he is not a musician, Forest Whitaker is convincing as "Yardbird" and bears a striking resemblance to Parker. During performance scenes, Whitaker mimed playing the saxophone. Diane Venora is memorable as well for her role as Chan Richardson.

"Bird," despite its shortcomings, is Clint Eastwood's finest film as a director. The movie has its artsy touches, but mostly avoids heavy-handed direction. "Bird" is the finest jazz film since 1986's "Round Midnight," and is highly recommended.

Anecdotes provide great leisure reading

By S. Hoehstetter

REVIEWER

Are you tired of reading cereal boxes and watching MTV during study breaks? Most college students barely have time to read all of the required books for their classes, much less anything just for pleasure.

But columnist Lewis Grizzard has come to the rescue with his book, "When My Love Returns From the Ladies Room, Will I Be Too Old to Care?"

Grizzard's book is perfect for anyone who wants to take a break from textbooks and term papers. The book is a collection of one- and two-page commentaries, so you can read a few, but it is hard to resist reading most of the book in one sitting.

Grizzard is a syndicated newspaper columnist from Georgia who writes about everyday events and people in humorous and touching ways. Some of his stories are so funny that you will laugh out loud and all of them are thought-provoking.

The variety in his writing makes each story a pleasant surprise and entices you to read just one more story, one more chapter, until you are suddenly at the end of the book.

The anecdotes' topics range from college athletics to women shoppers. Grizzard takes the typical good 'ol southern boy stance in many of his commentaries.

One of the longest chapters in the book is about women and how long they take when they shop or go to the ladies room.

Grizzard says he thinks ladies' rooms have male strippers and dress shops in them, which is why women take so long in getting out. I want to know the name of the wench who broke the female code of honor and told him this well-kept secret.

He gives his reasons for opposing the high school no-pass, no-play and college entrance exam restrictions on athletes. He also proposes a national apology to Howard Cosell and a crazy idea for a new sport for people who cannot afford million-dollar polo ponies: pig polo.

Grizzard thinks soccer is the most boring sport in the world, and he emphasizes that point in several stories. "At least in bowling, you can always laugh at those silly bowling shirts and shoes the bowlers wear," he writes. "The

only thing uglier than a bowling shoe is Gloria Vanderbilt."

An article that college students might appreciate reading is called "Too Old to Drink?" Grizzard considers that maybe there should be a maximum legal age to drink alcohol instead of the minimum age of 21.

"Older people have a lot more reason to drink than younger people," he writes. "I drink more now than I did when I was 20. That's because when I was 20, I hadn't been through three divorces and the Nixon presidency."

When he suggests that making it illegal to drink after a certain age is unfair Grizzard says, "We did that to young people, didn't we? We picked what sounded like a good number, twenty-one, and we said: Don't care if you're married, a parent, a soldier, whatever. Be 21 or be gone."

"You know what practically every kid says at least a million times? 'It's not fair,' that's what they say. And, sometimes they're right."

The man is a die-hard Southerner with a capital S and he lets the reader know this by devoting an entire chapter to comparing Yankees to southerners.

Grizzard says Americans are experiencing various degrees of culture shock as they move around the country in search of their fortunes. But he also thinks some benefit arises from that phenomenon: "If we all spoke the same, dressed the same, acted the same, thought the same, then this country would not be the unique place that it is, would not have the benefit of our spice and variety, and everybody would be in the Rotary Club...What we all need to realize is the more diverse we are, the stronger we are," he writes.

Grizzard loves to point out our differences and find the humor in life. One of his stories is almost entirely composed of telegenic jokes. Other topics, ranging from ordinary to serious, that Grizzard writes about are guys with earrings, girls with neckties, Colonel Qaddafi, condoms, his childhood, airplanes and computers. The list seems endless.

"When My Love Returns From the Ladies Room, Will I Be Too Old to Care?" is great for anyone on a college monetary and time budget. Its humorous, easy-going style provides welcome respite from tests and studying.

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Around Town

Live Music

Brazos Landing
Brazos Landing is at Northgate. Everyone is admitted. Beer, wine and mixed drinks are served. For more information, call 846-3497.

Thursday — **Poi Dog Pondering**. World folk. \$5 cover.

Friday — **Shake Russell**. Rock. \$5 cover.

Saturday — **Freddy Steady's Wild Country**. Country. \$4 cover.

Cow Hop Annex
Next to the restaurant at Northgate. Those 18 and older admitted. Alcohol served to legal drinkers. Call 846-1588 for more information.

Thursday — **XYZ**. Heavy metal. \$1 cover.

Friday — **Backtracks**. Rock. Cover.

Saturday — **Backtracks**. Rock. Cover.

Wednesday — **Singalong with Sneaky Pete**. \$1 cover.

Emiliano's
In Bryan at 502 W. 25th St. Beer, wine and set-ups served. Call 775-9539 for more information.

Friday — **Nick Villareal**. Spanish. Cover \$5-\$7.

Sunday — **Fandango USA**. Contemporary/Spanish. Cover \$5-\$7.

Frank's Bar and Grill
In College Station at 503 E. University Drive. All ages are admitted. Beer, wine and liquor are served to legal drinkers. Call 846-5388 for more information.

Saturday — **Local Jazz**. Jazz. \$2 cover.

Hall of Fame
In Bryan on FM 2818 north of Villa Maria. Those 18 to 20 admitted on selected dates. Alcohol served to legal drinkers. Call 822-2222 for more information.

Thursday — **Lonesome Dove**. \$2 cover.

Friday — **Lonesome Dove**. \$4 cover.

Saturday — **Texas Fever**. \$4 cover.

Kay's Cabaret
At Post Oak Mall. Those 18 and over are admitted. Beer, wine and liquor served to legal drinkers. For more information, call 696-9191.

Thursday — **Hank Townsend**. Easy listening. No cover.

Friday — **The Band with No Sleep**. Rock. \$2 cover.

Saturday — **The Scroocs**. Grateful Dead. \$2 cover.

Cinema Three
Located at 315 College Ave. in the Skaggs Shopping Center. Call 693-2796 for more information.

The Fly II. Rated R. Showtimes are 7:15 p.m. and 9:15 p.m.

Who's Harry Crumb? Rated PG-13. Showtime is 7:20 p.m. Ends Friday.

Tap. Rated PG-13. Showtime is 9:10 p.m. Ends Friday.

True Believer. Rated R. Showtimes are 7 p.m. and 9:05 p.m.

Working Girl. Rated R. Showtimes are 7 p.m. and 9:05 p.m. Opens Friday.

Post Oak Three
Located in the Post Oak Mall. Call 693-2796 for more information.

Her Alibi. Rated PG. Showtimes are 7:10 p.m. and 9:25 p.m.

Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure. Rated PG. Showtimes are 7:20 p.m. and 9:20 p.m.

The 'Bubs. Rated PG. Showtimes are 7 p.m. and 9:15 p.m.

Schulman Six
In Bryan at 2002 E. 29th Street. Call 775-2643 for more information.

The Accidental Tourist. Rated PG. Showtimes are 7:20 p.m. and 9:50 p.m.

Physical Evidence. Rated R. Showtimes are 7:15 p.m. and 9:45 p.m. Ends Friday.

Twins. Rated PG. Showtimes are 7:15 and 9:50.

Scrooged. Rated PG-13. Showtimes are 7:05 p.m. and 9:35 p.m.

Big. Rated PG. Showtimes are 7:10 p.m. and 9:40 p.m.

Dirty Rotten Scoundrels. Rated PG-13. Showtimes are 7 p.m. and 9:25 p.m.

Bird. Rated R. Showtime 8 p.m. Ends Friday.

Night of the Demons. Rated R. Showtimes are 7:20 and 9:30.

Plaza Three
In College Station at 226 Southwest Parkway. Call 693-2457 for more information.

Rain Man. Rated R. Showtimes are 7 p.m. and 9:35 p.m.

Beaches. Rated PG-13. Showtimes are 7:10 p.m. and 9:40 p.m.

Three Fugitives. Rated PG. Showtimes are 7:20 p.m. and 9:45 p.m.

Manor East Three
In Bryan in the Manor East Mall. Call 823-8300 for more information.

Mississippi Burning. Rated R. Showtimes are 7:05 p.m. and 9:40 p.m.

Cousins. Rated R. Showtimes are 7:15 p.m. and 9:30 p.m.

Dangerous Liaisons. Rated R. Showtimes are 7:20 p.m. and 9:45 p.m.

Animate

(Continued from page 13)

cartoons, although some have become exactly that. But because Japan's censorship laws are more lax than the United States', they aren't always suitable for a young audience, says Daralyn Wallace, program adviser for Cepheid Variable, A&M's science-fiction/fantasy club.

Some films are simply inappropriate for children, she said. "There have been times when I just walked out on a film because it was too risqué," she said.

U.S. and Other Animators

The United States has produced some outstanding animation recently — Japan does not own the industry. The film *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* by Roger Williams and the television series *Mighty Mouse* by Ralph Bakshi are examples of U.S. animators' skills.

For the last 23 years, Williams has labored to produce a film called *The Thief and the Cobbler*, an animated feature film based on the story *The Arabian Nights*. So far, he has produced only 15 minutes of film, and he estimates that it will cost at least \$10 million to finish.

Hundreds of other animators in the United States and other countries produce work seen rarely, if ever, by the general public. Artists like Nedeljko Dragic and Borivoj Dvornikovic of Yugoslavia create political animations and comments on social condition, Halas writes.

Draw

(Continued from page 14)

"I had four characters in the film that worked toward a parody of some of the things that were happening in Japanese animation at that time," Collier said.

"There really wasn't a storyline. The film was an experiment for me to learn how to make the characters move on film."

Collier worked with a meager budget and a pile of typing paper he used for his drawings.

His studio was a floor in his brother's house and his assistant was a friend with an 8mm camera.

After the artwork was finished, Collier arranged the drawings on the floor and began shooting pictures.

The film then was projected onto a screen and videotaped.

"I was working at a rate of about 12 drawings per second of film," he said. "When you put it on film, it takes about one or two frames for each picture, and the film usually runs 24 to 32 frames per second. This is what makes the picture move."

"Animation is not difficult to do with whatever equipment is available," Collier says.

"It (film) doesn't look as good as what could be made in a professional studio, but it was well worth the practice."

Making the film cost Collier about \$50.

Since his first feature film, Collier says he hasn't had time to create

other, but he does intend to make a longer film in the future.

"I'm in the process of being torn between aerospace (engineering) and trying to become an animator," he says.

"The only drawback is that it (animation) doesn't pay much money because professional studios can't afford to pay animators well. Conventional animation is very expensive as it is."

Meanwhile, the drawings will continue to pile up until he decides the time is right for another try at animation.

"I know it may sound like a really horrible hobby," Collier said, "but I sit around drawing all day."



Graphic by Tim Collier

Ratt to headline triple-bill concert, inject performance with spontaneity

By Keith Spera

REVIEWER

The rock group Ratt will headline a three-band concert at Sam Houston Coliseum in downtown Houston Sunday night. The show will contain a twist that is rarely found in today's technically complex and completely scripted concerts — spontaneity.

Ratt is doing something unusual on this tour — they are performing a different set of songs at each concert, says Matt Schulte, PACE Concert's director of publicity.

Not having a set playlist is unusual because many major bands play the same songs, in the same order, night after night, which can leave performances sounding stale and mechanical.

While Ratt will perform songs from most of their new album, as well as many of their past hits, they will change the order the songs are played in, and vary their selection of older songs.

"This keeps the performances fresh," Schulte said.

"They'll be playing, and feel the time is right to play a song, so they will. This helps keep Ratt on top of the game."

Ratt will be able to choose songs from a list that includes past hits

such as "Round and Round," "Lay It Down," "You're In Love," and "Dance."

Their Houston concert is part of a tour to promote their fifth and latest album, *Reach for the Sky*.

The album, on Atlantic Records, has gone gold (sold more than 500,000 copies) and has yielded the single "Way Cool Jr."

Appearing on the bill with Ratt are the bands Britny Fox and Kix.

Britny Fox has released one album, self-titled, but it already has been certified gold.

Britny Fox has produced two hit singles, "Long Way to Love" and "Girlschool."

Opening the show is Kix, a "new" band that actually has been around for 10 years, playing clubs across the

country. They have released four albums on Atlantic Records.

Their most recent release, *Blow My Fuse*, has yielded two songs whose videos have been highly requested on MTV — "Cold Blood" and "Blow My Fuse."

Schulte said that Kix recently sold out a show they played at Houston's Backstage music club, and are "quite an exciting band."

Tickets for the concert are available and cost \$17.50.

The show will begin at 7:30, half-hour before concerts usually start, so all three bands can perform without the show ending later than usual.

Schulte pointed out that "this allows Agents to get back home before it gets too late."

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