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The Connection Between Jazz and Drug Abuse: A Comparative Look at the Effects of Widespread Narcotics Abuse on Jazz Music in the 40's, 50's, and 60's

The Connection between Jazz and Drug Abuse: A Comparative Look at the Effects of Widespread Narcotics Abuse on Jazz Music in the 40's, 50's, and 60's.

An Annotated Bibliography

By: Aaron Olson

November, 2019

From the 1940s to the 1960s drug abuse in the jazz community was almost at epidemic proportions. While there were social and economic conditions that influenced this problem, the use of narcotics was widely accepted in the jazz community. Many of the jazz musicians that were addicted rationalized the use of heroin, cocaine, and morphine as a way of coping with life and said that the drugs enhanced their creativity and musicianship. The notoriety and performances of famous and infamous jazz greats such as Charlie Parker, Miles Davis and Chet Baker only served to reinforce the misconceptions surrounding drug abuse. There were also many highly successful jazz musicians such as Dizzy Gillespie, Clifford Brown, and Cab Calloway that avoided the use of narcotics. Although all of these musicians had a great impact on the direction that jazz would take for decades, we have to wonder, how did the ravages of narcotic abuse effect their creativity and performance? This bibliography is a short list of resources that can help the reader examine and compare information to help answer this question.

Baker, Chet. "Let's Get Lost", Little Bear Films and Nan Bush, 1988. Video.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6PGeOZqvISk>, accessed October 8, 2019.

Written and directed by Bruce Weber this black and white film / documentary about the troubled life and career of jazz great Chet baker is both informative and sad. From the beginning

the film bounces back and forth from scenes and pictures of present day (1987) Chet Baker, all the way back to his early years when he was discovered by record producer Dick Bock and performed with other jazz greats like Charlie Parker, Gerry Mulligan, and Russ Freeman. The portrayal of a carefree, but extremely talented young musician mixed with the addiction ravaged shell of a man that looks twice his age is quite stunning. Along with Baker's talent he had "Hollywood" good looks that opened many doors for him and garnered much attention from adoring women. As the film progresses the viewer sees a picture develop of a person who is quite self-absorbed and indifferent towards others, especially his family. I found it quite surprising to learn that he had very little to do with his children and seemed to barely know what they were doing with their lives. The scenes of three of his children commenting on a distant father they barely knew was both touching and depressing. The interviews with his wives showed women that all loved him, but did not trust him and seemed to be glad he was gone as well. Baker's indifference to the ravages of his addiction to heroin are painfully portrayed by the casual manner he tells stories of his problems with drugs and the law. All the music is performed by Chet Baker and show that although he still had talent and skill in his later years his abilities had diminished considerably. Tragically Chet Baker never saw the film. He died when he fell out of the second story window of his Amsterdam hotel on May 13, 1988. Bruce Weber's production is a poignant story of success and tragedy that every young jazz musician should see.

Baker, Chet. "Rebel Without A Pause." *Spin*, February 1, 1990: 42-45, 48-50, 89.

This article is a first-hand account from jazz trumpeter Chet Davis. His personal account of a significant portion of his life shows the highs and lows of a gifted musician and performer that succumbed to the ravages of heroin addiction. Baker's "matter of fact" account of his

successes along with his failures as well as numerous run-ins with the law, portray a man that does not seem to recognize the effects of addiction. As Baker's reliability and performance decline, his income also declines, forcing him to concentrate on feeding his habit. Although Baker appears to be oblivious, the reader can clearly see the negative effects of his addiction.

Canales, Amanda, "U.S. Jazz in the 1950s." Master's Thesis, University of Texas Pan American, 2013, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.

Amanda Canales' thesis is a well written history of jazz in the 1950's. She accurately portrays the history of the various jazz styles of the time. From Bebop to Cool West Coast to Hard Bop, Canales thoroughly informs the reader regarding all aspects of the creators and performers of 1950's jazz through biographical information. The author also categorizes and defines what she sees as the three types of mentalities surrounding the jazz culture of the fifties. Non-conformists, conformists, and purists. The author defines non-conformists as rebellious people rejecting society's norms. They made music and did things because it is what they wanted to do rather than what their audience expected them to do. Many times this rebellion lead to addiction and self-destruction. Charles Mingus, Charlie Parker, Chet Baker, and Miles Davis' behavior fit into this category. Conformists tended to create music and behaved in a manner that endeared them more to society as a whole. They gave the audience what they thought they wanted. The popularity of Louis Armstrong who lived a long and productive life is a prime example of a conformist. Purists were primarily listeners and fans of jazz that felt as consumers they had better ideas of what jazz should be. Canales also includes many of the non-conformist jazz musicians in this category as well. She says these musicians did not accept new forms of jazz very well and saw performers like Louis Armstrong and Dizzy Gillespie as sell outs.

Through this context Amanda Canales presents an interesting history of the cause and effect that created the ever changing shape of jazz music. Although Canales does not delve into the effects of drug abuse on jazz music itself, her presentation forms a good basis for understanding the elements surrounding jazz in the 1950's.

Deutsch, Elliot. "Chet Baker: The Importance of His Late Recording Career through Transcriptions of 'There Will Never Be Another You'." Master's Thesis, California State University at Long Beach, 2008, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.

Masters student Elliot Deutsch gives the reader a brief history on the life of Chet Baker along with an in depth analysis of four of Baker's many performances of the jazz standard "There Will Never be Another You." Although the history on Baker is much the same, aspiring trumpeter becomes a popular and accomplished jazz musician whose talent is overwhelmed by drug addiction. It is the the writer's analysis and opinion regarding the performance of this one particular jazz piece, two from the 1950's and 2 from the 1970's that is most useful. Deutsch believes and demonstrates that Chet Baker's improvised performances in the 1970's "rival, if not outshine" his earlier performances. The author does qualify this by pointing out that over time Baker's sound became weaker and more airy. This look at the performance of a single jazz piece by Chet Baker, is evidence that while the years of addiction brought a decline in ability, his maturity in improvisational skill increased over time.

Gioia, Ted. *The Jazz Standards: A Guide to the Repertoire*. New York: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2012. ProQuest Ebook Central,

**<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/du/detail.action?docID=991959>, Accessed
October 12, 2018.**

Acclaimed jazz historian Ted Gioia provides the professional and aspiring jazz musician as well as the listener an in depth evaluation and list of preferred performances of over 250 jazz compositions. Created from the realization that an overwhelming knowledge of these many classics is vital to the aspiring performer because of the extemporaneous nature of jazz and the need to understand and be able to perform whatever piece a band leader or teacher may require at a moment's notice. Because this guide includes many of the great jazz composers and performers who were and were not drug addicts, it is a vital resource in the examination of these musicians' performance and creativity

Komara, Edward. Review of *Big Bands Live: Benny Goodman/Legends Live: Dizzy Gillespie Quintet/Lost Tapes: Chet Baker. Early Chet: Chet Baker in Germany 1955-1959/Lost Tapes: Modern Jazz Quartet. Germany 1956-1958*. ARSC Journal 45, no. 2 (2014): 272-79. https://search-proquest-com.du.idm.oclc.org/docview/1760211416?accountid=14608&rfr_id=info%3Axri%2Fsid%3Aprimo.

This review of four important CD's by music critic, author and Crane Music Librarian Edward Komara is a good example of the live performances recorded in the late 1950's by Swing band leader Benny Goodman, Bebop band leader and trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie, West Coast Cool trumpeter Chet Baker, and jazz chamber group The Modern Jazz Quartet. Recorded during tours of Germany these performances of jazz classics are in Komara's opinion and analysis, some of the best live works by all four groups. The author provides a glimpse of the talent and

capabilities of the performers some of which were drug addicts and some were not. This information is a valuable tool in determining the effect of drug abuse on the musician's performance and creativity. Certainly carefully listening to these recordings by the reader is required to determine the validity and agreement with Edward Komara's point of view. If true this information would provide some validation of the so-called positive effects of heroin use by jazz musicians.

Spunt, Barry. *Heroin and Music in New York City*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. 19-64.

Chapter two of Barry Spunt's book focuses on drug use in the jazz community from the late 1930's to present time. Spunt cites all the usual rationalizations from, necessary stimulation, a sense of belonging, societal pressure, enhanced performance and creativity, along with the more honest reason, that of needing an escape or to cope with the pressures of the life of a jazz musician. The author effectively uses the actual narratives of 19 jazz musicians based in New York City that were "self-acknowledged heroin users" to portray the devastation that addiction had on their lives. This history tells the story of jazz greats like Charlie Parker, Billie Holiday, Fats Navarro, and others that did not survive addiction as well as many others that were able to eventually "get clean" and live long productive lives. Spunt also includes for comparison and contrast, the words of no-users such as Dizzy Gillespie, Cab Calloway and Clifford Brown. Throughout the chapter these narratives portray the musician-addict as accomplished professional performers whose dependability, musicianship, and creativity decline as they progressed through the stages of addiction. Almost every one of them stated that although heroin use in particular may have helped them cope and relax, it did not enhance their performance or

creativity. In fact many stopped creating new music during their addiction and spent more time seeking a fix than practicing or performing. For the musicians that were able to overcome their addiction, a return to creative composing was seen, which supported their commitment to stay clean. Barry Spunt's writing brings to light the importance of understanding the terrible effects of heroin addiction and the negative impact it had on jazz music.

The Real Book. 5th ed. S.l.: S.n., 1994.

This compilation of over four hundred lead sheets for many jazz standards is a great source for comparing the actual composition to the performing styles of the great jazz musicians of the 40's, 50's, and 60's. The performance of jazz does not follow a formal structure and is primarily an improvised and free playing form of music. "The Real Book" provides a basis for examining the performances of jazz musicians that were and were not abusers of narcotics. It is from this analysis that a better picture can be developed regarding the long term effects of drug abuse on the creation and performance of this uniquely American form of music.

Tolson, Gerald H., and Michael J Cuyjet. "Jazz and Substance Abuse: Road to Creative Genius or Pathway to Premature Death." *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* 30, no. 6 (2007): 530-38.

In this article two professors from the University of Louisville evaluate the available information that links creativity and drug abuse in jazz musicians. Through historical evidence, clinical opinion, and commentary from the musicians themselves, the authors describe the environmental and social elements that encouraged wide spread narcotics abuse by jazz

musicians from the 1940's thru the 1960's. While acknowledging the creative contributions of abusers like Charlie Parker, Billie Holiday, and Miles Davis, Tolson and Cuyjet question whether this creative genius was truly inspired by drug use. The article points out that there were also great contributions made by non-abusers like Dizzy Gillespie and Clifford Brown. Ultimately the authors arrive at the conclusion that although more study needs to be done, the work of these great jazz musicians was indeed inspired, but came with a heavy personal and professional price.

Winick, Charles. "How High the Moon - Jazz and Drugs" *The Antioch Review* 21, no. 1 (1961): 53-68.

Through his hands on experiences as the director of the Musician's Clinic in New York City, psychologist Charles Winick's article gives the reader an informative examination of the problem of drug abuse among jazz musicians and a qualified opinion regarding the effects on performance and creativity. Winick believes that musician addicts have a lot in common with other addicts in that they all seem to have the same personality traits. The author states that addicts, "are persons who have found the demands of reality so difficult thatdrugs like heroin provide a method of postponing decisions or urgencies." Winick does however acknowledge that there are "social and personal factors" that are distinctive to the lives of jazz musicians that become drug abusers. The environment that they lived and worked in exposed them to heavy drinking and narcotics were readily available. The pressure to use drugs and not be a "square" was always there. The rigors of life as a jazz musician was physically and mentally demanding so it was inviting to either relax or get a lift through drug use. Winick also says that the experimental nature of jazz and jazz musicians led to experimentation in other aspects of

their lives such as drug use. The talent and popularity of well-known musician addicts like Charlie Parker, Billie Holiday, Miles Davis and others led to the imitation of bad habits by many less talented and aspiring young musicians. Many thought that being “high” improved their performance and creativity. Charles Winick admits that the use of drugs may enhance a musician’s self-expression, “but do not provide them with ideas or technique.” Winick further states that, “The best available evidence suggests that opiates do not improve musicianship in any way.”

—. "The Use of Drugs by Jazz Musicians." *Social Problems* 7, no. 3 (1959): 240-53.

In this additional article by Charles Winick, he presents a more clinical analysis of the “*Use of Drugs by Jazz Musicians*.” Through statistics at the time of his work at the Musicians Clinic, the author estimates that there were approximately 5,000 jazz musicians in New York City and tragically 700 to 800 were regular heroin users. Winick attempts to interview enough jazz musicians to create an accurate picture of the numbers, types, and tendencies of addicts in the jazz community. Between 1954 and 1955 the author interviewed 409 musicians regarding drug use. The average age of those interviewed was 33. Sixty-nine percent were white and thirty-one percent were black. The average length of performing as a professional musician was 13 years. Winick was able to interview at least 66 of the 89 most popular jazz bands in the New York area. These interviews revealed that fifty-three percent had used heroin, twenty-four percent were occasional users, and sixteen percent were regular users. The author also discovered that Cocaine use was very small because of the high cost at the time. Winick’s study found that many would experiment with different drugs or combinations of drugs to get maximum satisfaction. Most of the musicians said they rarely used drugs while performing, but did so

before and after. Interestingly a large majority of the musicians said that the behavior of the heroin addict was the greatest concern, because of the frantic nature and agitation created by not having the drug. Winick's interviews showed that although most musicians had a tolerant view of heroin use, they did not believe that heroin enhanced performance. They did however note that addicts had great difficulty performing at all without the influence of heroin. Because of the unreliability of the people interviewed Winick cautions the reader to understand the possible inaccuracies of his information. Charles Winick also includes a bibliography of valuable sources for further research.

Woideck, Carl. "Parker, Charlie." Grove Music Online. 10 Jul. 2012,

<https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.01.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-1002224954>. Accessed October 19, 2019.

This article is an eight page biography on the life, music, and influence of legendary alto saxophonist Charlie Parker. There is also an additional 3 pages of bibliographies and other sources regarding Charlie Parker and drug use during his life. Carl Woideck reveals a life line of Parker from his early years learning and struggling to play the saxophone he was given, to his rise and fall from the pinnacle of jazz performance. Through early failures Parker learns that long hours of practice were his path to performing jazz at level that would get him on stage with older and more experienced musicians. Unfortunately as Charlie Parker began his rise to the very top of the jazz world, at age 16 he had already become a heroin user. His performances were none the less, legendary and many aspiring jazz musicians emulated Parkers style along with his drug

habit. Woideck points out that although Parker was a virtuoso on the alto saxophone, he did tend to play the same music for extended periods of time. Also, even though Parker was generating many recordings and performing with other jazz greats like Dizzy Gillespie and Miles Davis, his addiction to heroin affected his dependability and sometimes was unable to perform. As Parker's career declined he was frequently entangled with law enforcement and spent several stints in jail and mental institutions. At the time of his death Charlie Parker was only 34 years old, leaving many to ponder what his contribution to jazz would have been if he lived a much longer life.