

# Chet Baker

## BIOGRAPHY

Baker was one of the most controversial figures in jazz. Self-taught, a musician who could only read a bit and did not know traditional harmony, his performances as a trumpet player, flugelhorn player and singer were often mesmerizing.

With a small range of about 2 1/2 octaves on his horn, but he contended, "I can say everything I have to say." Baker always had problems with his teeth, which affected his embouchure, and in later years he wore dentures. Because of his various addictions, he often failed to show up for concerts or recording sessions. Most American listeners had forgotten him by the 1980s. But Chet continued to record in Europe, and on many nights, a performance by Chet Baker was a rich, unique experience.

Chet Baker was born on December 23, 1929. His father was an amateur guitarist who played western swing music on local radio. The family moved to Glendale, California when Chet was ten, and at the age of eleven, his father bought a trumpet for him from a local pawnshop. Chet taught himself by listening to the radio and records and playing along, relying on his ear. At about this time he was hit on the mouth with a rock at school, losing his upper left front tooth. This limited his range and volume, and forced him to alter his embouchure. Hating school, and wanting to get away from his family, he joined the army at the age of sixteen, where he was assigned to an army band in Berlin. During his stint in the service, Chet heard Dizzy Gillespie over Armed Forces Radio, which changed his life.

When he got back home in California, Chet enrolled at El Camino College in Los Angeles to take theory and harmony classes, but soon decided not to attend jam sessions. But he re-enlisted to play in the Sixth Army Band in San Francisco. When he was re-assigned to another band at a fort in the middle of the Arizona desert, he went AWOL; a month later he reported back to San Francisco and was given a general discharge.

When he got back to LA, he played in more jam sessions, and landed a gig with Charlie Parker at the Tiffany Club in May of 1952. Upon returning to New York, Charlie Parker told trumpet players, "There's a little white cat on the coast who's gonna eat you up."

Saxophonist/arranger Gerry Mulligan had established residence in Los Angeles, and was arranging for bands and playing at jam sessions. At a Monday evening jam session at a club called the Haig, Mulligan met Baker, liked his playing, and invited him to join a new band he was forming. One week at the Haig, the featured performer, vibist Red Norvo, asked that the piano be put in storage to give Chet more room on the stand. Mulligan's group rehearsed without the piano, liked the results, and the group remained piano-less. Recordings on the new Pacific Jazz label followed, and the Mulligan group's popularity skyrocketed, becoming the resident band play- ing at a small, eighty-five seat club for six months. The Haig was packed every night, with many celebrities in attendance to hear the 'new thing' in jazz. The telepathy between Mulligan and Baker was uncanny; this quartet is regarded as one of the great legendary small groups in the history of jazz.

However, it was not to last. Baker was arrested for smoking marijuana in December of 1952, the first of many arrests. Mulligan was also arrested for drug possession in June, 1953, and was sentenced to a California prison for three months. Baker hired pianist Russ Freeman as replacement. Recordings with the new line-up established Baker as a poll-winning leader. Mulligan and Baker would later re-unite for occasional recording or concert.

Baker made his first vocal recordings in October of 1953. Critical reaction was mixed, but he usually sang at least one number per set at that time on. His playing, singing and movie star looks made him one of the most well known personalities in show business. He appeared in the movie *Hell's Horizon* in 1955, and word in Hollywood was that he was being groomed as the next James Dean. But a plane tour that same year was surrounded by tragedy: the death of pianist Dick Twardzik.

When he returned to the states in 1956, he formed a new group with saxophonist Phil Urso. In 1959, he moved to New York and made several recordings for the Riverside label. But he was arrested again for possession of drugs; he was in jail for four months, and his New York driver's license was taken from him. He decided to move to Italy with his wife and son. In 1960 he was again arrested for drug possession and sentenced to seven years in jail. He only served sixteen months, and was soon playing and recording again. In 1964, he returned to the U.S.; he was now playing flugelhorn because of his continuing problems with his teeth. Work was scarce in New York, so he moved back to Los Angeles with his family, which now included two more children.

In the fall of 1966, while playing a gig in San Francisco, Baker was brutally beaten. He continued to play until, in 1968, he decided to pull out his remaining teeth and wore a denture for the rest of his life. Forced to re-learn how to play the trumpet, he disappeared for several years to get himself together.

When he started playing again, he found more opportunities for his talent in Europe, and it would be his home base until his death. He had no fixed address and traveled from gig to gig, recording prolifically. Unreliable, often in poor physical shape, Baker missed as many concerts as he played. And yet he was respected in Europe and commanded high prices for concerts and recordings.

In 1970, a fashion photographer named Bruce Weber shot interview and concert footage of Baker, interspersed with interviews of his friends and family. *Let's Get Lost* was first shown in 1988 in Venice; it was later nominated for an Academy Award for Best Documentary.

Chet's life was busier than ever when he checked into a motel room one evening in Holland. Apparently he had taken both heroin and alcohol, and tried to open a window in the room, falling into the street below. He died in the early morning of May 13, 1988.

# AU PRIVAVE

By CHARLIE PARKER

### Medium Blues

The musical score for "Au Privave" is written in G major, 4/4 time, and is marked "Medium Blues". It consists of ten staves of music. The first staff begins with a *mf* dynamic marking. Chord markings above the staves include G7, C7, E7, Am7, D7, and G7. The notation includes eighth and sixteenth notes, rests, and slurs. The final staff includes a tempo marking of 120.