

CHARLIE CHRISTIAN

CHRONOLOGICAL BIOGRAPHY (based on Broadbent 2003)

- July 29, 1916:** Charlie Christian (hereafter CC) born in Bonham, TX
Father is a compressor operator in cotton mill; Mother is a hotel maid
- c.1918 (age 2):** Father loses eyesight; Family moves to Oklahoma City, OK;
Father works as a busker on the streets of the city as a guitar player
- 1926 (age 10):** Father dies; CC inherits his father's two guitars
- 1928 (age 12):** CC begins high school; Takes classes with Zelia N. Breaux
Oil discovered in Oklahoma City
- 1930's (teenager):** Oklahoma City is a major stopover for bands traveling east and west
Deep Deuce area of Oklahoma City becomes a popular jazz neighborhood
Older brother Edward becomes an established band leader
Western Swing bands feature electric guitar with single-note solos
- 1932 (age 16):** CC meets and jams with Lester Young
- 1933 (age 17):** T-Bone Walker returns to Oklahoma City and jams with CC
CC takes bass lessons with Chuck Hamilton
- 1934 (age 18):** CC amplifies his acoustic guitar during gigs with brother Edward
- 1935 (age 19):** CC jams with Cootie Williams as Duke Ellington comes through town
CC has a regular gig with Leslie Sheffield and the Rhythmaires
- 1936 (age 20):** CC begins touring the Plains States with various ensembles
- 1937 (age 21):** CC acquires his first electric guitar and amp (Gibson ES150)
- 1938 (age 22):** First recordings of jazz on an electric guitar are made
Charlie Parker sees CC play in Kansas City
- 1939 (age 23):** CC returns to Oklahoma City and fronts his own small group
Benny Goodman begins recording with various electric guitarists
Benny Goodman offers guitar-player Floyd Smith a contract, which is
turned down by Smith's manager
John Hammond, Goodman's manager, offers CC the job
- Aug. 17, 1939:** CC sits in with Benny Goodman's band in LA, CA
(play "Rose Room")

- Aug. 19, 1939:** CC broadcasts for the first time with the Benny Goodman Sextet
(play "Flying Home")
- Sep. 11, 1939:** CC records with Lionel Hampton's group on "Hot Mallets"
–considered the first recording of Bebop on trumpet (Dizzy)
- Nov. 22, 1939:** CC records with the Benny Goodman Orchestra
(play "Honeysuckle Rose")
- Dec. 24, 1939:** CC plays Carnegie Hall with the Goodman Sextet and others
(play "Good Morning Blues" & "Lady Be Good")
- Feb. 7, 1940:** CC records with the Metronome All-Stars in New York
- Feb. 23, 1940:** Goodman band plays a gig in Chicago; CC is diagnosed with TB
- March, 1940:** CC flies to LA to play gigs with Goodman despite doctor's warnings
CC plays many after-hours jams while in LA
(play "Good Enough to Keep")
- July 20, 1940:** CC returns home to Oklahoma City
- Sept. 22, 1940:** CC drives through Kansas City on way to NYC; plays with KC Rockets
- Oct. 28, 1940:** Count Basie and band members record with Goodman, CC, and others
(play "I Never Knew")
- Nov. 7, 1940:** New Goodman group brings out the best in CC
CC enters most productive time with Goodman
(play "Wholly Cats" & "I Found A New Baby")
- Feb. 5, 1941:** Records a session for Blue Note records on acoustic guitar
(play "Jammin' in Four")
- Mar. 4, 1941:** CC records "Solo Flight;" song hits #20 on Billboard Pop Charts
(play "Solo Flight")
- May 1941:** Recordings made of CC playing at Minton's
(play "Swing to Bop")
- June 1941:** CC collapses while on tour with Benny Goodman in the mid-west
CC is rushed back to NYC and admitted to NY Bellevue Hospital
- July 11, 1941:** CC is transferred to the Sea View Hospital on Staten Island
- March 2, 1942:** CC dies of chronic pulmonary tuberculosis at Sea View (age 25)

STYLISTIC CHARACTERISTICS (based on Finkelman 1993 and Downs 2000-2001)

1. Metric displacement by contour
 - highest note in line falls somewhere other than the downbeat
2. Metric superimposition (grouping dissonance)
 - melodic line suggests a meter other than what the ensemble is playing (cross-rhythms)
3. Displaced motivic repetition
 - melodic figure is repeated in different metric positions
 - related to heavy use of formulas
4. Long sequence of eighth notes
 - ambiguity of accents, often occurring on a dominant (V) chord or over a B section
 - "structural articulation" of more complicated harmonic areas
 - eighth-notes are more rhythmically even
5. Irregular phrase length
 - solo lines are organized in groupings that conflict against underlying phrase structure
 - freedom of phrasing, not confined to 2-bar or 4-bar segments
6. Accented chordal extensions
 - particularly 9ths and 13ths
 - often simply through metric placement
 - often phenomenally accented when occurring at the end of the phrase on an off-beat
7. Omission of roots
 - especially on non-tonic chords
8. Harmonic anticipation
 - begins to solo in a harmony before ensemble moves to the chord
 - use of applied diminished chords to upcoming harmony
 - contributes to heightened sense of tension between solo line and ensemble
9. Use of chord tones from prior and upcoming harmony
 - helps to bridge one bar to the next
10. Heavy use of chromaticism, typically:
 - between $\hat{5}$ and $\hat{3}$, passing through $\hat{\#4}$ and $\hat{4}$
 - half-steps between $\hat{6}$ and $\hat{5}$ and between $\hat{9}$ and $\hat{8}$
11. Strong blues influence
 - used primarily during tonic (I) sections
12. Angular melodic lines
 - leaps of a M7th are common

RECORDINGS

1. "Rose Room" † (Oct. 2, 1939) *Benny Goodman Sextet*: Benny Goodman, clarinet; Lionel Hampton, vibes; Fletcher Henderson, piano; Artie Bernstein, bass; Nick Fatool, drums.
2. "Flying Home" † (Oct. 2, 1939) *Benny Goodman Sextet*: Benny Goodman, clarinet; Lionel Hampton, vibes; Fletcher Henderson, piano; Artie Bernstein, bass; Nick Fatool, drums.
3. "Honeysuckle Rose" † (Nov. 22, 1939) *Benny Goodman and His Orchestra*: Benny Goodman, clarinet; Ziggy Elman, Jimmy Maxwell, Johnny Martel, trumpets; Red Ballard, Vernon Brown, Ted Vesely, trombones; Toots Mondello, Buff Estes, alto saxes; Bus Bassey, Jerry Jerome, tenor saxes; Fletcher Henderson, piano; Arnold Covey, rhythm guitar; Artie Bernstein, bass; Nick Fatool, drums.
4. "Good Morning Blues" †† (Dec. 24, 1939) *Kansas City Six*: Buck Clayton, trumpet; Lester Young, tenor sax; Freddie Green, guitar; Walter Page, bass; Jo Jones, drums;
5. "Lady Be Good" †† (Dec. 24, 1939) *Benny Goodman Sextet, Count Basie Band, Meade Lux Lewis, Pete Johnson, Albert Ammons, piano*
6. "Good Enough to Keep" † (June 11, 1940) *BG Sextet*: Benny Goodman, clarinet; Lionel Hampton, vibes; Dudley Brooks, piano; Artie Bernstein, bass; Nick Fatool, drums.
7. "I Never Knew" † (Oct. 28, 1940) *BG Sextet (plus others)*: Buck Clayton, trumpet; BG, clarinet; Lester Young, tenor sax; Count Basie, piano; Freddie Green, guitar; Walter Page, bass; Jo Jones, drums.
8. "Wholly Cats" † (Nov. 7, 1940) *Benny Goodman Sextet*: Cootie Williams, trumpet; Benny Goodman, clarinet; Georgie Auld, tenor sax; Count Basie, piano; Artie Bernstein, bass; Harry Jaeger, drums.
9. "I Found a New Baby" † (Jan. 15, 1941) *Benny Goodman Sextet*: Cootie Williams, trumpet; Benny Goodman, clarinet; Georgie Auld, tenor sax; Count Basie, piano; Artie Bernstein, bass; Jo Jones, drums.
10. "Jammin' in Four" § (Feb. 5, 1941) *Edmond Hall Quartet*: Edmond Hall, clarinet; Meade Lux Lewis, celeste; Israel Crosby, bass.
11. "Solo Flight" † (Mar. 4, 1941) *Benny Goodman and his Orchestra*: BG, clarinet; Alec Fila, Jimmy Maxwell, Cootie Williams, Irving Goodman, trumpets; Lou McGarity, Cutty Cutshall, trombones; Skippy Martin, Gus Bivona, alto saxes; Georgie Auld, Pete Mondello, tenor saxes; Bob Snyder, barry sax; Johnny Guarnieri, piano; Artie Bernstein, bass; Dave Tough, drums; Jimmy Mundy, arranger.
12. "Swing to Bop" §§ (May 1941) *Minton's House Band*: Kenny Clarke, drums; Thelonius Monk, piano; Joe Guy, trumpet; Nick Fenton, bass.

REFERENCES:**Audio:**

- † Charlie Christian, *The Immortal Charlie Christian* (New York: Legacy, 2000)
†† Charlie Christian, *The Genius of the Electric Guitar* (New York: Sony, 2005)
SIBLEY: CD 15,523
§ Charlie Christian, *1939-1941: Radioland* (Studio City, CA: Varese, 2001)
§§ John Hammond et al, *Spirituals to Swing: the Legendary Carnegie Hall Concerts of 1938/9*
(New York: Vanguard, 197?)
SIBLEY: J-5084

History:

- Bill Simon, "Charlie Christian," *The Guitar in Jazz: An Anthology*, ed. James Sallis (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1996)
SIBLEY: ML3507 .G968 1996
James Lincoln Collier, *Benny Goodman & the Swing Era* (New York: Oxford U. Press, 1989)
SIBLEY: ML422 .G653 C699 1989
Leo Valdes, *Solo Flight: The Charlie Christian Web Site* (Accessed Feb. 28, 2007)
< <http://home.elp.rr.com/valdes/> >
Peter Broadbent, *Charlie Christian: Solo Flight—The Story of the Seminal Electric Guitarist*
(Blaydon on Tyne, UK: Ashley Mark Publishing Co., 2003)
SIBLEY: ML156.7 .C555 B863 2003
Thomas Owens, "Charlie Christian," *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed Feb 28, 2007)
<<http://www.grovemusic.com>>

Analysis:

- Clive Downs, "Metric Displacement in the Improvisation of Charlie Christian," *Annual Review of Jazz Studies* vol. 11, ed. E. Berger et al (Oxford, UK: Scarecrow Press, 2000-2001)
Jonathan Finkelman, "Charlie Christian, Bebop, and the Recordings at Minton's," *Annual Review of Jazz Studies* vol. 6, ed. E. Berger et al (Oxford, UK: Scarecrow Press, 1993)
Joseph Weidlich, *The Guitar Chord Shapes of Charlie Christian* (Anaheim Hills, CA: Centerstream Publishing, 2005)

Transcriptions:

- Clive G. Downs, "An Annotated Bibliography of Notated Charlie Christian Solos," *Annual Review of Jazz Studies* vol. 6, ed. E. Berger et al (Oxford, UK: Scarecrow Press, 1993)
G. Hansen, *Charlie Christian: Legend of the Jazz Guitar* (Accessed Feb 28, 2007)
< <http://www3.nbnet.nb.ca/hansen/Charlie/> >
Stan Ayeroff, *Swing to Bop: The Music of Charlie Christian, Pioneer of the Electric Guitar*
(Pacific, MO: Mel Bay, 2005)
Wolf Marshall, *The Best of Charlie Christian: A Step-by-Step Breakdown of the Styles and Techniques of the Father of Modern Jazz Guitar* (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard, 2002)