

Charlie Parker 3

Anthropology 1945



Key Features of Bebop:

Rapid chord changes, tri-tone substitutions, fast tempos, virtuosic, re-workings of existing tunes, quintets, 4s with drums, unison heads, focus on solos.

Anthropology is a fast Bebop tune written by pioneers **Charlie Parker** (Alto Sax) and **Dizzy Gillespie** (trumpet) in 1945.

Charlie Parker (1920-1955) is one of the most famous icons of Bebop. As a teenager, he practiced up to 15 hours a day. In 1937, Parker played at a jam session at the Reno Club in Kansas City. His attempt to improvise failed when he lost track of the chord changes. This prompted Jo Jones, the drummer for Count Basie's Orchestra, to throw a cymbal at his feet as a signal to leave the stage. However, rather than discouraging Parker, the incident caused him to vow to practice harder, and turned out to be a seminal moment in the young musician's career when he returned as a new man a year later. He learnt to play every Jazz standard in every key.

According to an interview Parker gave in the 1950s, one night in 1939 he was playing "Cherokee" in a jam session with guitarist William "Biddy" Fleet. He experimented playing on the upper extensions of chords. He realised that the 12 semitones of the chromatic scale can lead melodically to any key, breaking some of the confines of simpler jazz soloing. It was to be this **extended harmonic language, chord substitutions** and **rapid tempos** that were to become the **hallmarks of Bebop**. Due to the strike of 1942–1943 by the American Federation of Musicians, much of the early development of Bebop was not recorded.

It was not until 1945, when the recording ban was lifted, that Parker's collaborations with Dizzy Gillespie, Max Roach, Bud Powell and others had a substantial effect on the jazz world.

Parker acquired a morphine addiction whilst being hospitalised as a teenager following a car accident. This developed into a heroin addiction, also rife and available on the New York Jazz scene. This would lead to his early death at 34. The coroner mistakenly estimated his age to be between 50-60! It was Parker's struggles with addiction that made him unreliable and a poor employee throughout his life and curtailed what should have been a prolific output from such a musical genius.

Analysis-Anthropology

Instrumentation/Orchestration:

A classic Jazz quintet used: Charlie Parker (Alto Sax), Dizzy Gillespie (trumpet), Bud Powel (piano), Roy Haynes (drums), Tommy Potter (bass)

Texture:

Monophonic 32 bar head melody played in **unison** on alto Sax and trumpet.

Walking bass line throughout negotiating the chord pattern.

Piano **comping** providing **homophonic** chordal accompaniment to the ensemble. During piano solo, Powel plays **monophonic** lines in his **RH** whilst comping **Homophonic chords** in his left.

Drums played extremely fast, syncopated and disjointed at times.

Harmony and Tonality:

Anthropology is a tune based on the 32 bar AABA chord structure of George Gershwin's *I've got Rhythm*. *Anthropology* is played in the traditional key of **Bb Major**. Bebop players were very familiar with these chord changes and could improvise on them with extreme dexterity.

The A sections are in Bb major with lots of use of jazz **III VI II V** progressions. The B section features A cycle of 5ths: **D7→G7→C7→F7** ready to return to the Home key of Bb Major.

Structure:

Based on a **simple 32 bar AABA structure**. Bebop sought to push harmonic and melodic boundaries, combined with virtuoso tempos, but had little interest in exploring orchestration and structure. Bebop preferred to stick to **simple well established forms** e.g. 32 bar and 12 bar, often simply stating the head in unison. Bebop players were often more interested in the tune as a **vehicle for improvisation**.

4 bar drum intro

32 bar head: Alto Sax and Trumpet perform in **unison**

96 Bar (3 choruses) Sax solo

96 bar (3 choruses) Trumpet solo

64 bar (2chorus) Piano solo

64 bar (2chorus) 4s with the drums

4 bars **Alto**→4 bars **Drums**→4 bars **Trumpet**→4 bars **Drums**

4 bars **Alto**→4 bars **Drums**→4 bars **Trumpet**→4 bars **Drums**

32 bar head: Tune recapped

X2=64 Bars

Melody:

Based on the chords for *I've got Rhythm*, this melody features all the hallmarks of Bebop: Rapid break-neck tempos, plenty of **syncopation**, **chromaticisms** and exploration of the **higher intervals of the chords** e.g. b9ths, #9ths, 11ths, 13ths etc. This is in stark contrast with the original tune for *I've got rhythm* which is simple, repetitive and mostly pentatonic played at a moderate tempo.

The tune/head merely serves as a vehicle for virtuoso soloing. Parker takes 3 chorus showing his sheer brilliance to negotiate these chords with endless ease and imagination. Parker consistently displays his thorough knowledge of the chords and an endless ability to access all the upper intervals of the chords, 9ths, 11th 13ths etc. Parker also regularly approaches target notes e.g. D, from a semitone above Eb, a semitone below C# resolving to D. **Eb→C#→D**

Parker displays his encyclopedic knowledge of Jazz repertoire playing many **musical quotes** from other **existing pieces** and songs during his solo.

Dizzy Gillespie shows equal prowess on the trumpet navigating the chords but makes far greater use of extreme high notes **super Ds and beyond!**

Rhythm and Metre:

Bebop was elitist and sought to weed out lesser players, hence this tune played at 300bp! Only the most proficient would be capable of such a feat. Due to the sheer speed, quavers lose their swing and become straighter. **The metre is 4/4**. The bass performs a **walking crotchet bass line** throughout, **piano comps** the chords whilst there is a more **disjointed approach to the drums** than that heard in other jazz styles. Most of the tempo is maintained on the ride cymbal.

Dynamics:

Much of the subtlety of the dynamics is lost in this recording. Due to the sheer speed, the drums would be at a reasonable volume and the remaining instruments would have to play loud enough to overcome this. The trumpet would have to be performed fortissimo to achieve the very high notes of the solo.



