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| Gillespie, Dizzy (1917-1993) |
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| Dizzy Gillespie was an American jazz trumpeter, composer, and bandleader. Gillespie’s artistic career was spent with New York City as his home base, where he was active first performing in big bands and later leading bands of his own. The trumpeter was one of the progenitors of the modern jazz movement of Bebop in the 1940s, along with his musical colleague Charlie Parker. Gillespie often performed this music in Harlem at the jazz nightclub known as Minton’s Playhouse, often evenings at Minton’s would include after hour jam sessions with pianist Thelonious Monk and alto saxophonist Parker. Considered one of the pioneers of Latin jazz, especially Afro-Cuban jazz, Gillespie traveled extensively performing this music with an international roster of musicians. Compositions that reflect this style of jazz include ‘Tin Tin Deo,’ and ‘Manteca’ (1947). His musical orientation to Afro rhythms was evident as early as 1942, when he composed the jazz standard ‘A Night in Tunisia.’ Gillespie gave modern jazz tenor saxophonist John Coltrane his start in improvisational focused small band work when the trumpeter dissembled his big band in 1949 and formed a sextet.  Dizzy Gillespie was born John Birks Gillespie on October 21, 1917 in Cheraw, South Carolina. Gillespie started playing the piano at age four, and throughout his artistic career turned to that instrument to make sense of and conceptualize advanced chord progressions and harmonies that would come to characterize modern jazz movements like the Bebop he co-founded. Gillespie performed with alto saxophonist Charlie Parker in the Billy Eckstine band starting in 1944, which was considered the first modern big band of Bebop jazz. Gillespie and Parker would experiment with new, advanced bebop improvisations and harmonies after big band performances, most commonly at after hour jam sessions with pianist Thelonious Monk in Harlem at the jazz nightclub Minton’s Playhouse.  Having established bebop in full with Parker in 1946, Gillespie turned his attention to the music of Latin America, namely of Cuba, fusing it with modern music from United States such as jazz, and subsequently creating a new style known as Afro-Cuban jazz. Gillespie was signed to a contract with recording company RCA Victor, where he began recording his Afro-Cuban jazz compositions with a big band, including songs ‘Manteca’ and ‘Tin Tin Deo’ (co-written with his big band’s conga player, Chano Pozo, in 1947). His Orchestra performed and recorded bebop too, such as his composition ‘Anthropology,’ co-written with Parker in the in the course of their small combo work in 1945, and recorded by the Gillespie Orchestra in 1948. Gillespie would become a cultural ambassador of modern jazz as early as 1956, performing bebop and Afro-Cuban jazz and touring the world with the support of the US State Department, diplomatically promoting these and other modern musics of the Americas. He later formed the United Nations Orchestra, and toured the world again with them.  Gillespie performed and recorded with bassist Charles Mingus on a number of occasions, usually in a quintet setting with Charlie Parker on alto saxophone, much of the time performing Gillespie’s compositions. The quartet with Parker and Mingus played notable concerts in the 1950s, and would usually perform Gillespie’s compositions ‘Groovin’ High’ and ‘A Night in Tunisia, ’among others that were bebop focused and written in the 1940s. Gillespie was awarded a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in 1989. He died in Englewood, New Jersey, on January 6, 1993, at age 75. |
| Further reading:  DeVeaux, S. (1997) *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.  Gentry, T. (1991) *Dizzy Gillespie: Performer, Bandleader and Composer*, New York: Chelsea House.  Giddins, G. and S. DeVeaux (2009) *Jazz*, New York and London: W.W. Norton.  Gioia, T. (1997) *The History of Jazz*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.  Horricks, R (1984) *Dizzy Gillespie and the Be-Bop Revolution*, Tunbridge Wells, UK: Spellmount.  Maggin, D.L. (2006) *Dizzy: The Life and Times of John Birks Gillespie*, New York: Harper.  McRae, B. (1988) *Dizzy Gillespie: His Life & Times*, New York: Universe Books.  Shipton, A. (1999) *Groovin’ High: The Life of Dizzy Gillespie*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.  Vail, K. (2003) *Dizzy Gillespie: The Bebop Years, 1937-1952*, Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.  *Memoirs:*  Gillespie, D. and A. Fraser (2009) *To Be, or Not…to Bop*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. (These memoirs of Dizzy Gillespie were first published in 1979, and recount his jazz career experiences with the likes of pianist THELONIOUS MONK and trumpeter MILES DAVIS, the latter who he performed with while a member of the Billy Eckstein Band.) |