

= Dodo Marmarosa =

Michael " Dodo " Marmarosa ( December 12 , 1925 ? September 17 , 2002 ) was an American jazz pianist , composer , and arranger .

Originating in Pittsburgh , Pennsylvania , Marmarosa became a professional musician in his mid @-@ teens , and toured with several major big bands , including those led by Tommy Dorsey , Gene Krupa , and Artie Shaw into the mid @-@ 1940s . He moved to Los Angeles in 1945 , where he became increasingly interested and involved in the emerging bebop scene . During his time on the West Coast , he recorded in small groups with leading bebop and swing musicians , including Howard McGhee , Charlie Parker , and Lester Young , as well as leading his own bands .

Marmarosa returned to Pittsburgh due to health reasons in 1948 . He began performing much less frequently , and had a presence only locally for around a decade . Friends and fellow musicians had commented from an early stage that Marmarosa was an unusual character . His mental stability was probably affected by being beaten into a coma when in his teens , by a short @-@ lived marriage followed by permanent separation from his children , and by a traumatic period in the army . He made comeback recordings in the early 1960s , but soon retreated to Pittsburgh , where he played occasionally into the early 1970s . From then until his death three decades later , he lived with family and in veterans ' hospitals .

= = Early life = =

Marmarosa was born in Pittsburgh , Pennsylvania on December 12 , 1925 . He had " Italian working @-@ class parents " ? Joseph and Carmella . He was the middle of three children , between sisters Audrey and Doris , and grew up in the East Liberty neighborhood of Pittsburgh . Marmarosa attended Peabody High School . He received the uncomplimentary nickname " Dodo " as a child because of his large head , short body , and bird @-@ like nose .

Although he had stated an interest in playing the trumpet , Marmarosa 's parents persuaded him to take up the piano , which he began at the age of 9 . He received classical music lessons , but was influenced by the jazz playing of Art Tatum , Teddy Wilson , and others after fellow pianist Erroll Garner , four years Marmarosa 's elder , introduced him to their music . Marmarosa practiced a lot , until his left and right hands were equally strong .

= = Later life and career = =

= = = 1941 ? 50 = = =

Marmarosa began his professional career around 1941 , joining the Johnny " Scat " Davis orchestra at the age of 15 or 16 . He was first mentioned in the national jazz press the following year , appearing in Down Beat magazine for his playing at a jam session . After touring , the Davis orchestra disbanded , so Marmarosa and others then joined Gene Krupa around the end of 1942 . After one 1943 Krupa performance in Philadelphia , Marmarosa was beaten into a coma by sailors who accused him of draft dodging . According to clarinetist Buddy DeFranco , who was also attacked by the men , " Dodo was always a little off but he seemed different after that beating . The head injury didn 't affect his playing , but I think it created psychological problems for him . "

After Krupa 's orchestra broke up in the middle of 1943 , Marmarosa played in Ted Fio Rito 's band for at least a month that summer . He then moved to Charlie Barnet 's big band , where he stayed from October 1943 to March 1944 . Marmarosa 's recording debut was with Barnet in 1943 ; they recorded " The Moose " , a track described by Gunther Schuller as " a veritable masterpiece " on which the 17 @-@ year @-@ old pianist played an original blend of nascent bebop and Count Basie @-@ style minimalism . Marmarosa recorded some trio tracks with Krupa and DeFranco in 1944 . From April to October of that year he was with Tommy Dorsey , including for the orchestra 's appearance in the MGM film Thrill of a Romance . A Dorsey biographer indicated that the pianist

was dismissed because the bandleader did not care for the modernistic facets of his playing . Marmarosa soon joined clarinetist Artie Shaw , with whom he stayed until November 1945 , as part of a big band and Shaw 's small band , the Gramercy Five .

From the early 1940s Marmarosa had searched for and experimented with advanced progressive forms of jazz , and had become increasingly attracted to bebop after meeting and jamming with the leaders of that new movement , Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker . In 1945 Marmarosa moved to Los Angeles . He was pianist in March of the following year for Parker 's first recordings for Dial Records . Two of the tracks recorded , " Ornithology " and " Yardbird Suite " , have been included in the Grammy Hall of Fame .

Marmarosa recorded extensively as a sideman in the period 1945 ? 47 , in both bebop and swing contexts . Leaders of these sessions included Wardell Gray , Lionel Hampton , Mel Tormé , Willie Smith , Lester Young , and , with Marmarosa as house pianist for Atomic Records , Slim Gaillard and Barney Kessel . With a few exceptions , however , Marmarosa only rarely played in public with the leaders whose studio recordings he appeared on during his time on the West Coast . Between the frequent recording sessions , he played " in big bands ( especially Boyd Raeburn and Tommy Pederson ) , at jazz concerts , as a soloist in nightclubs [ ... ] or jamming after hours . " Raeburn 's orchestra was a progressive group that used " modern arrangements seeking to bridge the gap between bop and advanced European music " .

Marmarosa made his first recordings as leader in 1946 , with trio tracks that included Ray Brown on bass and Jackie Mills on drums , and in a quartet with saxophonist Lucky Thompson added . He also recorded his only vocal track , " I 've Got News for You " , in the same year . In 1947 Marmarosa led a trio session for Dial with Harry Babasin on cello and Jackie Mills on drums ; these were the first pizzicato jazz cello recordings . In the same year , he featured in some of Gene Norman 's Just Jazz concerts , and was given Esquire magazine 's New Star ( piano ) award .

According to Mills , his housemate in 1946 ? 47 , " Dodo was the most dedicated of players . He practiced an incredible amount of hours , often all day long . He wouldn 't stop to eat . He would eat at the piano with one hand and keep playing with the other . He had no other interests that I was aware of . He could play forever . " At this time , Marmarosa did not drink or take hard drugs , but his behavior was often eccentric . Mills reported that " Dodo was just a big kid [ ... ] He never really grew up because he never allowed anything but the piano to be important to him . The piano was his life . He heard things in his head that he wasn 't able to play and it frustrated him . Once , he got mad at the old upright piano we had and chopped it up with an axe . "

In the spring of 1948 Marmarosa returned to Pittsburgh because of illness . He toured again with " Scat " Davis ( April ? July 1949 ) and Shaw ( September ? November 1949 ) . He left Shaw 's band for the final time during one concert after they had twice played Shaw 's hit , " Frenesí " , Marmarosa had threatened to leave if Shaw called for it again , and the leader had done so after the audience requested a third playing . Shaw reported that Marmarosa " was gentle and fragile , [ ... and ] never learned to deal with the world of a musician . " The pianist returned to Pittsburgh in 1950 , signed " a term contract " with Savoy Records , and recorded four trio sides for them in July , but the quality did not match his earlier playing .

= = = 1951 ? 59 = = =

For around a decade , Marmarosa was much less active as a musician . Shaw and DeFranco raised the idea of psychiatric treatment , but the former was rebuffed by Marmarosa himself , and the latter by the pianist 's parents : " They were not reconciled to his needing professional help . They were from the old school , they saw it as a stigma . I got into a big argument about it with his father . He really blew up . "

In 1952 , two years after marrying , Marmarosa moved with his wife and their two daughters to California . The marriage was short lived , and he again returned to his parents ' home in Pittsburgh in the fall of that year . His ex @-@ wife remarried and asked him to allow her to change the children 's names in exchange for not having to pay her any more money ; following the advice of his parents , he signed the documents . A friend of his later stated that never seeing his children

again " was the great blight of his life . It tore him apart " . Another friend commented more generally that , " After the marriage broke up , he seemed to lose the spark , the drive he once had " .

A tour of a few months in Charlie Spivak 's band in 1953 preceded Marmarosa being drafted into the army the following year . This exacerbated his problems : several months in a Veteran Administration hospital preceded his discharge , at which point he was in a poor psychological condition . Back in Pittsburgh , where he played locally from March 1956 , Marmarosa continued to be erratic , sometimes disappearing for weeks at a time , and giving his money away : " It was like he was on the road to self @-@ destruction " , commented trumpeter Danny Conn . Amateur recordings from the pianist 's concerts in Pittsburgh in 1958 were released four decades later by Uptown Records .

= = = 1960 ? 2002 = = =

Marmarosa departed for California by car in 1960 , but problems with the vehicle halted him in Chicago . Promoter Joe Segal organized an Argo Records session for him there , but Marmarosa departed suddenly and the recording was delayed until the following year . The resultant trio music from two days in May was released as Dodo 's Back ! in 1962 . Leonard Feather described it as " required listening for anyone with a serious interest in the history of modern jazz piano " , but it failed to gain Marmarosa more than a brief resurgence of interest . He made his final studio recordings in 1962 . One album from these , Jug & Dodo , contained trio and quartet tracks , with saxophonist Gene Ammons ; it was released on Prestige Records more than a decade later . The other , in a quartet with trumpeter Bill Hardman , was released in 1988 . Segal commented that Marmarosa " didn 't talk much , was very mild @-@ mannered . He just drank an awful lot , shot and a beer all day long . It would 've put nine out of ten people under the table , but he was still walking around . " The pianist shuttled between Chicago and Pittsburgh for a time , then settled again in the latter .

Marmarosa continued to perform in Pittsburgh , albeit irregularly . Around 1963 , DeFranco dropped by ; he recalled that the pianist " would play brilliantly for half a tune , then just stop and walk away . He didn 't even know who I was " . Marmarosa 's last performance in public has been dated variously as occurring in 1968 or the early @-@ to @-@ mid 1970s . Diabetes contributed to his permanent retirement . " Even the resurgence of interest in bebop in the 1970s and 80s did not bring him back to national attention " , reported The New York Times .

For the rest of his life , Marmarosa alternated between living with his sister Doris ' family and in a veterans ' hospital , both in the Pittsburgh area . Some of his friends blamed Marmarosa 's family for keeping him in their home because of shame about his mental problems , and suggested that the family blamed musicians and music for his instability . Marmarosa himself did not explain his withdrawal from performing . Irritated by telephone calls from a fan seeking an interview in 1992 , Marmarosa passed on the news that he had died ; this led to premature obituaries being published in two British newspapers . He sometimes played piano in the family 's basement or for other residents at the hospital . His mother died in 1995 , after his father . Marmarosa died of a heart attack on September 17 , 2002 , in a veterans ' hospital in Pittsburgh . He was survived by his two sisters .

= = Playing style and influence = =

Pianist Dick Katz wrote that , " In the opinion of many , Dodo Marmarosa was the most gifted of all the pianists who figured in the bebop saga . Blessed with a beautiful legato touch and a fluid technique , he developed an original style , which [ ... ] blended perfectly with the bop idiom , as well as with earlier styles . He combined advanced chordal and scalar elements with graceful rhythmic phrasing . "

In some of his 1944 playing , Marmarosa was progressively bebop @-@ directed , employing melodies derived from the harmony and varying the rhythmic positioning of accents ; soon after , he added more space to his playing , using shorter sequences of notes than typical in bebop . Jazz critic Marc Myers , in comparing Marmarosa with other pianists of the early bebop period , observed

that he was less aggressive than Bud Powell , and more expressive and complex than Al Haig , and that he " had a punctuating , full @-@ keyboard approach , developing ideas in the middle and widening out to express them . "

Critic and musician Brian Priestley wrote that " What was so distinctive about Dodo 's work was partly his harmonic sense and knowledge of the additional notes [ ... in bebop . ] Many pianists were trying to find ways to voice these satisfactorily in full chording , but none did so as pleasingly or as fluently as Marmarosa . Partly it was also the way he alternated between employing his hands together and in opposition to each other , and allied to this was his unusual time feeling . "

By the time of his 1960s recordings , Marmarosa had a more relaxed playing style . Biographers commented that " his even , classically derived articulation had given way to a more rhythmically pronounced , jazz @-@ oriented playing , and , above all , his musical personality seemed still more determined and coherent . "

Pianist Cecil Taylor commented in 1961 that " The first modern pianist who made any impression on me was Dodo Marmarosa , with Charlie Barnet . " Marmarosa also encouraged DeFranco to take up bebop .

= = Discography = =

Compilations of previously released material , and recordings from or for radio broadcasts , are not listed .

= = = Albums as leader / co @-@ leader = = =

= = = Albums as sideman = = =

= = = Singles as leader / co @-@ leader = = =

= = = Singles as sideman = = =

Tracks recorded but not released as singles are not listed .

Main sources :

= = Filmography = =

Thrill of a Romance ( made 1944 ; released 1945 )