Rhythm and Articulation Analysis of Charlie Parker’s Improvisation

Data is based on an analysis of the following Charlie Parker solos:

- Anthropology
- Blues for Alice
- Confirmation
- Dewey Square
- Donna Lee
- Moose the Mooche
- Now’s the Time
- Ornithology
- Scrapple from the Apple
- Yardbird Suite

Percentages are given for some concepts for the following reasons:
- To know how often Parker tends to use a certain device.
- To know how important specific musical elements are when emulating his style.
- To know which tendencies to practice first; to prioritize the incorporation of performance traits.

**Eighth-note Articulation**

Foundational 1/8th-note articulation style: Tongue upbeat, slur to downbeat.

*Anthropology, m. 34-39*

*Confirmation, m. 66-69*

*Dewey Square, m. 36-39*

*Donna Lee, m. 64-67*
Exception, rare occurrence: Tongued sequential 1/8ths.

**Yardbird Suite, m. 36-40**

Phrase Endings

Four principle categories or types:
1. Short Up Beat (bebop)
2. Long Up Beat (do-dah)
3. Short down Beat (bop)
4. Long Down Beat (dah)

Bebop (short upbeat): 24%. Tonguing the last two notes is most common.

**Dewey Square, m. 36-39** (descending, penultimate note tongued, common)

**Confirmation, m. 72-73** (ascending, infrequent)

**Donna Lee, m. 82-84** (penultimate note approached by slur, less common)

Do-dah or do-wah (long upbeat): 30%

- There is a fairly equal dispersal of up and down with “do-dah” being four times more common.
- All “do-wah” examples in the sample transcriptions are descending, most by step.
-Often with terminal vibrato.
-Air release.

*Anthropology, m. 6-7 (ascending)*

*Confirmation, m. 80-84 (ascending)*

*Dewey Square, m. 56-59 (descending)*

*Moose the Mooche, m. 49-50 (do-wah, descending slur)*

*Anthropology, m. 34-39 (do-wah, descending step)*
Bop (short down beat, tongue-stop): 10%

*Scrapple from the Apple*, m. 35-36

Dah (long down beat): 7%  Often 1/4 or 1/2-note tongued, air release, with terminal vibrato.
- Often with terminal vibrato.
- Air release.

*Anthropology*, m. 44-48

Other (slur, fall, gliss, bend, scoop, air 1/4, air 1/8): 29%

*Dewey Square*, m. 27-29 (slur)

*Scrapple from the Apple*, m. 37-40 (fall)

*Dewey Square*, m. 30-32 (gliss)
Anthropology, m. 61-65 (bend)

Anthropology, m. 57-58 (scoop)

Scrapple from the Apple, m. 41-42 (air 1/4)

Blues for Alice, m. 33-36 (air 1/8)

Phrase Beginnings

Upbeat 1/8th-note (all types): 37%
-37% does not suggest that all other beginnings are down beats.
-Other types not counted in this percentage include sustained syncopated entrance, flam, gliss, and ghosted notes.

Upbeat 1/8th-note followed by 1/8ths: 21%
Anthropology, m. 2-4

Upbeat 1/8th-note followed by triplet: 13%
-Slur from 1/8th-note through triplet
-Tongue top note
-Occasionally slur into top note (rare)
Donna Lee, m. 61-67 (ascending)

Anthropology, 17-20 (descending)

Upbeat 1/8th-note followed by turn: 3%

Blues for Alice, m. 41-44

Downbeat 1/8th-note (all types): 14%

Downbeat 1/8th-note followed by 1/8ths: 12%

Scrapple from the Apple, m. 51-58

Downbeat 1/8th-note followed by two 1/16ths: 2%

Confirmation, m. 69-71
Anthropology, m. 14-16

Flam: 11%
-Descending diatonic most common: 5%.
-Alternatives include chromatic and ascending.

Confirmation, m. 49-52

Moose the Mooche, m. 51-55

Held Syncopation: 9%

Now's the Time, m. 84-89
Scrapple from the Apple, m. 47-49

Gliss: 8%

Confirmation, m. 36-37

Downbeat 1/4-note: 4%

Ornithology, m. 31-33

Triplet: 3%

Anthropology, m. 1-2

Grace note: 4%, applied to above variations

14% accounted for by less common choices such as a turn or ghosted note and by rounding off above percentages.

Contour Notes

-Standard/foundational articulation: Tongued up beats slurred to down beats.
-Melodic contour notes are usually higher in pitch than their surrounding notes.
-Contour notes can be on up beats or down beats.
-When tonguing a downbeat pitch the note that precedes the tongued note is approached by slur, ghosted, or half-tongued (tongue on corner of reed covering surface under the tip, lightly and allowing the continuation of tone, somewhat muffled).
- Occasionally (but rarely) the note that precedes a down beat accent is legato tongued.

Example of the principle of melodic contour:

**Confirmation, m. 45-49**

![Musical notation for Confirmation, m. 45-49]

**Dewey Square, m. 43-50**

![Musical notation for Dewey Square, m. 43-50]
Blues for Alice, m. 28-32 (tongued down beat preceded by tongued note)

Quarter Note Articulation

Short:

Moose the Mooche, m. 49-50

Anthropology, m. 33-34

Long:

Moose the Mooche, m. 57-58

Anthropology, m. 41-43
Eighth-Quarter-Eighth

1/4 long:
-Fairly even distribution of long 1/4 and short 1/4.
-Applied when ascending to 1/4 by skip, descending on 1/8th (sometimes ghosted), and ascending to resolve.

Confirmation, m. 85-91

1/4 short:
-Sometimes notated as two 1/8ths, 1/8 rest, followed by an 1/8th.
-Common when contour other than (and sometimes including) the above.
-Creates a totally different melodic concept than long 1/4 version.

Anthropology, m. 61-65

Confirmation, m. 32-35

Yardbird Suite, m. 60-64
**Triplets**

Ascending (not including phrase beginnings), even: 15%

*Donna Lee*, m. 82-84

![Musical notation](image1)

Descending (not phrase beginnings), even: 3%

*Dewey Square*, m. 43-50

![Musical notation](image2)

Horizontal: 16%

1/4 + two 1/6ths: 9%  Often written as a triplet.

*Anthropology*, m. 14-16 (m. 14 could have been written as a triplet. Measure 15 triplet is more even.)

![Musical notation](image3)

*Confirmation*, m. 45-49

![Musical notation](image4)
Even: 5%

*Confirmation*, m. 57-59

Dotted 1/8th - 1/16th - 1/8th: 3% Written as a triplet or 1/8th + two 1/6ths.
*Blues for Alice*, m. 24-25

Quarter note: uncommon, pulls momentum back

*Blues for Alice*, m. 33-36

**Triplet Pairs**

Ascending or ascending and descending: 3%

*Confirmation*, m. 60-65 (ascending)
Anthropology, m. 21-25 (ascending/descending)

Ascending/Horizontal (even):

Dewey Square, m. 51-55

Ascending even + 1/8th and two 1/16ths:

Blues for Alice, m. 16-19

Anthropology, m. 57-60

Now’s the Time, m. 71
Descending/Horizontal:

*Moose the Mooche, m. 67-69*

![Musical notation](image)

**Turns**

- All turns contain a horizontal 1/16th-note triplet followed by an 1/8th (regardless of notation, they are the same).
- The above rhythm (filling one beat) is slurred.
- The interval and direction moving from the triplet is usually down by step but can be a skip or step in either direction.
- Resolution to the following beat is also usually by step but can be a skip or step in either direction, contrary (opposite direction) or continuous (same direction).
- Turns are slurred but the onset and exit articulations can be either tongued or slurred.
- 49% proceed down by step out of the triplet and down by step to the next beat (m. 87 and 88).

**Turn notation:**

- The most accurate notation for a jazz turn is a 1/16th-note triplet followed by an 1/8th.
- When considering the 1/8th-note triplet subdivision of the swing feel in jazz, other rhythms are less successful.
- Listening to a jazz turn slowed down one reveals the last turn 1/8th usually lining up with the last triplet subdivision 1/8th.

![Musical notation](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Triple</th>
<th>1/8th-note with triplet subdivision (swing)</th>
<th>1/8th and three</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Musical notation" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Musical notation" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Three 1/16ths and 1/8 (correct), places 1/8th on last triplet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Confirmation, m. 85-91

Double Time

-Only selected contour notes are tongued.
-Other notes slurred.
-Subdivision becomes straight.

Anthropology, m. 44-45

Blues for Alice, m. 26-27

Confirmation, m. 42-44

Double Tonguing

Blues for Alice, m. 20-24
Now's the Time, m. 44-46

Ghosted Notes

-Implied but not sounded or barely audible.
-Generally below their surrounding notes.

Ornithology, m. 47-49

Glissandos

-None are bent, all fingered with distinct sounding notes.
-Most are ascending (double those descending).

Now's the Time, m. 49-51

Grace Notes

Now's the Time, m. 53-56
Growls

Blues for Alice, m. 39-41

Half-Tongue

-Tongue held to corner of reed while blowing, dampens tone.
- Often on upbeat 1/8th-note that precedes a downbeat accent (but not exclusively).
- Creates a smooth line because the tongue is on the reed for one note and off for the next thus eliminating possible excessive motion, which can sometimes cause lines to be choppy.
- A half-tongued note is softer allowing a downbeat tonguing to avoid the harshness and possible separation of two tongued notes in a row.

Donna Lee, m. 92-95

Repeated Notes

- Not common.
- Usually at the beginning of phrases when used.

Now's the Time, m. 28-32

Dewey Square, m. 33-35 (end of phrase, uncommon; once in 10 solos)
Moose the Mooche, m. 64-67

Yardbird Suite, m. 65-68

Rests = Rhythm

- Rests within a phrase represent rhythms
- Blow through the notes with melodic connection
- Rests do not represent the separation of melodic elements

Anthropology, 1-2

Confirmation, m. 38-41

Scoops

- Deliberate, not an accidental by product of poor control
- Style suggest less frequent use than many young students evidence

Blues for Alice, m. 45-47
Syncopations

Ornithology, m. 40-46

Vibrato (Terminal)

-A wide, brief vibrato at the end of a note’s duration.
-Almost always present on notes of sufficient length at the ends of phrases.
-Air release.

Donna Lee, m. 31-33
Basic Articulation

Swing Subdivision

The downbeat comprises the first two thirds of a triplet while the upbeat carries the last third of a triplet.

\[ \text{Air/Connect} \]

The *Fundamental Articulation*

Play a major scale all slurred, with a straight subdivision, applying constant air, with full tone on all notes. Connection is key. Upbeats and downbeats should have equal volume.

Add the swing subdivision but maintain all other aspects.

Jazz is a legato style. Lightly, legato, articulate the upbeat note. This is achieved differently as per instrument. Brass, except trombone, and woodwinds use a light contact. Trombones place a slightly heavier articulation on the upbeat notes. Rhythm instruments can play all slurred or with a slight accent on upbeat notes.

Brass (except trombone) and Woodwinds:

\[ \text{Air/Connect} \]

Trombone:

\[ \text{Air/Connect} \]
This foundational articulation underlies jazz phrasing. Charlie Parker only used this style purely about 25% of the time but it influenced how he played other articulations and. It is interesting to experiment with other foundational articulation patterns. Essentially, there are four choices:

1. The foundational style as described.
2. Its exact opposite: tongue (or slightly accent) downbeats and slur to the upbeat.
3. Tongue (or slightly separate) all notes.
4. All slurred.

Certainly, jazz musicians use all of these articulations. However, only the first will create a style familiar to us as jazz. Within this context there is a great amount of variation amongst players.

**Phrase Endings**

There are four fundamental phrase endings amidst many possibilities. They are:

1. Short upbeat
2. Short downbeat
3. Long upbeat
4. Long downbeat

Both the short upbeat and the short downbeat carry the “be-bop” element. The beginning and the end of the last note must be tongued or stopped somewhat abruptly depending on one’s instrument. The resultant sound is reminiscent of “be-bop.”

The “be-bop” ending can be approached in several ways, sometimes dictated by tempo.
Short downbeat:

The long or sustained upbeat has a “du-dah” or “du-wah” sound. It is seldom longer than a dotted quarter in length and might end with a terminal vibrato.

Long upbeat:

The long or sustained downbeat is seldom longer than a half note and usually ends with a terminal vibrato.

Long downbeat:

The Basie-ism

The Count Basie style is often thought of as the epitome of hard swinging jazz. Often, the downbeat of the wind players is slightly behind that of his rhythm section. The upbeats can fall anywhere between the triplet to the dotted eighth sixteenth.

One of the most significant aspects of his style involves the ends of phrases. His band often held the second to last note extra long, closer to a dotted eighth, laying the last upbeat note almost on the next beat.
Practicing

The fundamental articulation will garner much repetition if applied to scale study. Phrase endings are best applied to patterns that require them. Taking such a pattern through 12 keys is excellent practice.

Notation

The following page contains jazz articulation symbols as codified by the International Association for Jazz Education (unfortunately now defunct).

An accompanying CD is available to hear the sound represented by the symbols.
Jazz Articulation Symbols

STACCATO: separated and light
MARCATO: separated but fat
TENUTO: long, legato, connected
ACCENT: long and louder than surrounding notes

TRILL: rapid movement from written note to a diatonic note a step above
SHAKE: same as a trill except the interval is usually a minor 3rd, the speed depends on context
TURN: a horizontal 1/16th-note triplet plus an 1/8th resolving to next beat
FLIP: same as a turn except executed with the lip (brass technique)

DU: muffled tone, bell covered with hand or plunger mute (brass)
WAH: open, usually follows DU (brass)
FALL: a gliss, pitch descends without distinguishable scale, length varies according to context, no definite final
DOIT: gliss, pitch ascends without distinguishable scale, duration depends on context, no definite final

FALL: same as previous definition, this notation suggests distinguishable scale, diatonic or chromatic
SCOOP: short gliss up, no distinguishable starting point or scale
BEND: start on pitch, bend down and return, symbol also used to represent a scoop
LIFT: approach note by scale, diatonic or chromatic, starting about a 3rd below

PLOP: approach note by scale, diatonic or chromatic, beginning about a 3rd above
SMEAR: connect notes without distinguishable scale (brass)
GLISS: note connection by means of scale, diatonic or chromatic, ascending or descending
GHOST: smothered or implied note, no distinguishable tone

ARTICULATING SILENCE: off on 1 (or other appropriate beat), indicated by a tie or -1 (2, 3, or 4 etc.), full tone to abrupt cut-off
Syllables

Medium Swing

Fast (Bebop)

Up-beat End

Down-beat End

Triplet

Quarter Note

The following syllable choices are suggested in *Vocal Improvisation* by Michele Weir.

Eighth Notes

Quarter Notes

Long Notes

Triplets

1

2

3

4
Rhythm Blocks

Most rhythms used in jazz can be analyzed according to eight fundamental rhythms with three modifications: rests, ties, and triplets. A measure in 4/4 time is notated in two halves. The Rhythm Block system of rhythmic identification works with a half measure.

1-note rhythm

2-note rhythms

3-note rhythms

4-note rhythm

Modifications

Example 1: Charlie Parker *Confirmation*

Example 2: Sonny Rollins *Oleo*
Double Time

Double time Rhythm Blocks work with the beat as opposed to the half measure.

1-note

2-note

3-note

4-note

Modifications

Rest (can sub for any note)  
Tie (can connect any two notes)  
Turn (replaces two 16th notes)  
16th note triplet (replaces two 16th notes)  
eighth note triplet (replaces two 8th notes)

Example: Charlie Parker *K.C. Blues*
Considerations

The first section below demonstrates how the Rhythm Blocks might be articulated. There is a CD available for aural example.

The Considerations explore possible variations, adaptations, and “considerations” for the implementation of Rhythm Blocks into improvisation.

Fundamentals

1-note rhythm

2-note rhythm

3-note rhythm

4-note rhythm

Consideration 1

Combine Rhythm Blocks by Rest: The first measure remains intact if followed by a rest. The second rhythm contains a rest substitute.
Consideration 2

Combine Rhythm Blocks by Slur: Use a slur to connect eighth notes.

Consideration 3

Contour Notes: Slur to the note that precedes a melodic contour note (accented or tongued note). Often the note that precedes a tongued (accented) down beat will be half-tongued; rhythm instruments might ghost the note.

Keep these points in mind:

1. Jazz is a legato style.
2. Accents amidst a legato standard create interest.
3. High melodic contour notes, notes higher than those surrounding them, often receive accent regardless of downbeat or upbeat placement.
4. Ghosted notes (usually lower than notes around them), used with discretion, can create interest (parenthesis = ghosted notes).
5. Slur (half-tongue) the note that precedes a downbeat tongued note (Parker).

Example: Charlie Parker Yardbird Suite, mm. 9-14

Consideration 4

Rhythmic Displacement: Start rhythms on a beat other than one.
Consideration 5

Pick-up Note: Add an eighth note before a rhythm.

Consideration 6

Substitutions: Rests, triplets, and ties.

terminal vibrato