



The
**Blue
Bird
Reunion**

4

Honoring
Barry Harris
And
Charles McPherson

Societe of the Culturally Concerned

Sunday, September 25, 1994

“Our hats are off to two jazz giants”

**BARRY HARRIS
&
CHARLES McPHERSON**

MR. G’S BILLIARD PARLOR

8830 Fenkell at Wyoming • (313) 864-1644



Charles Stokes, Proprietor

The jazz-loving gents at Mr. G’s are
“cued up and ready to shoot”
a salute to two jazz giants—
Barry Harris and Charles McPherson



TOP POOL PLAYERS IN THE COUNTRY!

Left to Right: “Slim,” Harold, “Red Dog,” Ronnie “Diyal,” Chane and Dave

Charles McPherson

It is ironic that Charles McPherson and Charlie Parker, to whom he has been likened for so many years, should have been born in the same State of Missouri. Yet, when the family of Charles McPherson moved from Joplin, Missouri to Detroit in 1948, it set the stage for the development and emergence of another of the world's greatest alto saxophonist.

Settling on Detroit's near West Side, in the shadow of The Bluebird Inn, young Charles received an early music education in the Detroit Public Schools; attending McMichael Junior High and Northwestern High School. A very rich and active jazz scene was the complexion of Detroit in those years sparking the interest and the efforts of many young players. Charles found many peers including, Saxophonist Donald Walden, Drummist Roy Brooks, Bassists Bob Friday and James Jamerson, Pianist Alice McLeod (Coltrane) Altoist, Ira Jackson and Charles' number one collaborator and friend, Trumpeter, Lonnie Hillyer.

There was ample opportunity for a young jazz player to listen to the greats play (particularly at the nearby Bluebird Inn) and for the youngsters to learn to play. Many high school and college dances and cabaret parties would find Charles and his peers on it's bandstand.

Central to Charles' learning experience in music however, was his mentorship by Barry Harris. Under Barry's sensitive guidance, Charles and his good friend, Lonnie Hillyer acquired the most expert knowledge of the elements and styles of the Be Bop Masters; Charlie Parker, Bud Powell, Dizzy Gillespie, et. al., Charles and Lonnie became the most celebrated of Barry's minions as they grew to work with and eventually, record with Barry. Charles' association collaborations with Barry have remained throughout the years.

In the early 60's, the "third mass exodus" of Detroit musicians to New York took place and found Charles prominent among that number. There he was to "make his presence known" quickly and performed with many

of the world renown jazz musicians of the day. The pinnacle of these years was McPherson's work with Master Bassist, Charles Mingus. This association lasted 12 years and gave forth many recordings including the Benchmark, *Monterey Concert Album*. Undoubtedly, the experience of working with Mingus had a significant impact on the musical perspective of Charles.



Throughout the years, Charles' style has been likened by many to that of Charlie Parker. It has been argued that, of all the great Alto Saxophonists such as Jackie McLean, Sonny Stitt, Cannonball and Phil Woods, Charles "captured the essence and indeed, the finite nuances of Charlie Parker." It is unquestionably this perception that led Actor/Filmmaker, Clint Eastwood to call upon McPherson to enhance and augment the score for the film, *Bird*.

McPherson performed and recorded with many artists including Art Farmer, Kenny Drew, Toshiko Aklyoshi and Lionel Hampton, Billy Eckstine and Nat Adderly. He has been the featured artist on several recordings with the Prestige, Mainstream and Xanadu labels. Most recently, his efforts can be found on an album entitled *the Prophet* on the Discovery label.

Charles continues to play and travel as a Bandleader and a significant voice in the music today. His concerts, club dates and festival performances have been extensive and encompassing of nearly every continent in The World.

Despite his assurance in jazz history and the critical acclaim he has received, Charles has remained true to the tradition of "passing it on" as he occasionally teaches a course at San Diego State University. Of course, here "at home in Detroit." We know that much like Charles' mentor, Barry Harris, there is not only great music to be heard when he plays, but "a lesson going on."

We are extremely proud to honor Charles McPherson this evening.

— Kenn Cox