

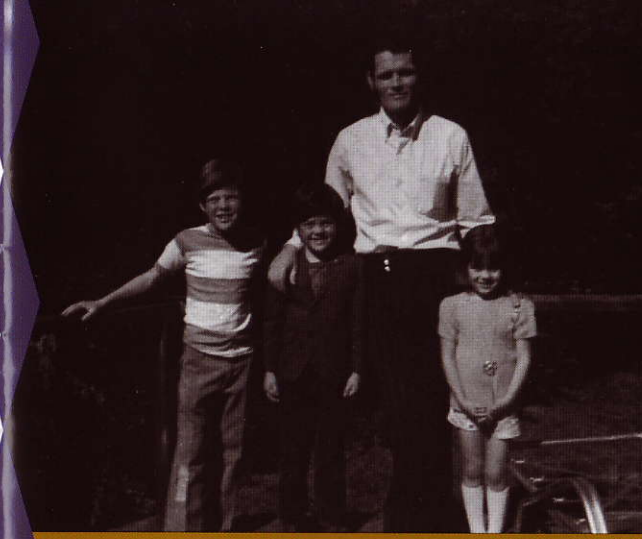
CHET BAKER

Belgium 1964

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- 2 Isn't It Romantic
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Norway 1979

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Chet with his children—
Paul, Dean
and Melissa

When I watch my father create music and I think about the life he had, the beauty of his artistic offerings always amazes me.

Born in Oklahoma and enduring a major portion of the Depression as a child, there is always a poignant measure of melancholy in his voice reflective of the experience. But then comes the "West Coast Cool"—the rich, warm, inspired sound of his horn and it creates the whole spectrum of artistic expression that is the heart of the classic Chet Baker sound.

Watching this footage from these European concerts reminded me of how my father used to speak so well of the European jazz culture. You see, traditional jazz in America fell off a bit in the 1960s, but in Europe it was embraced continually. I know this enlivened my father and inspired him to offer his best at each show.

I hope you enjoy this DVD.

Best wishes,

Paul Baker
Chet Baker Enterprises
Tulsa, Oklahoma
March 22, 2006

foreword



Beauty comes in many forms. In music, it can be the result of a perfectly constructed melodic line, a harmonic voicing that sends shivers down your spine, a groove that somehow captures the joy of being alive, or a timbre so sensuously rich that it makes your body quiver from head to toe. In the case of Chet Baker, a jazzman capable of spinning out some of the most achingly beautiful music human beings have ever known, beauty was a result of finding the poignancy in sorrow, in deploying pitch inflection, melodic arc and a vibratoless timbre to conjure up something of rarefied value in a life of addiction and endless disappointment. There are many virtuosic technicians in the history of jazz. Few of them could capture the pathos of the human condition in the way that Baker did.

Born just before Christmas 1929 to a cloying mother and a father whose own failed dreams of being a musician drove him to misery, Baker's childhood knew few happy moments. While his father for a short period played banjo and guitar in country and western swing bands, his true love was jazz, his favorite player being trombonist Jack Teagarden. One day in 1943 on his way home from work he spotted a trombone in a pawnshop and, inspired by his own dreams, decided to buy it for his thirteen year old son. Unfortunately, Baker, short for his age, found the slide unmanageable and within a few days the trombone had been traded in for the much smaller trumpet. Shortly after acquiring the trumpet, Baker lost a tooth while playing on the street with

some friends. While his mother procured for him a removable tooth, he seldom wore it and instead kept his mouth closed most of the time, developing a half smile that became a visual trademark for the rest of his life (on this DVD you can see the gap in his mouth where the tooth is missing when he sings Sammy Cahn's and Jules Styne's "Time After Time"). The missing tooth served to limit Baker's range on the instrument. While he was criticized much of his life for his consequent inability to play flashy high register arabesques, as was the norm for many young testosterone-loaded trumpeters, Baker took this limitation and made it into an asset, developing a facility for melodic invention in the middle range perhaps only equaled by Miles Davis.

Somewhat of a rogue genius, Baker found playing by ear so easy that he never bothered to learn to read music or develop a working knowledge of music theory. Throughout his life, whether in high school music class, in Armed Services bands or playing professionally, Baker would stare blankly at any sheet music put before him, hear the piece played once and then join in during the second run through, more often than not playing his part perfectly by ear. As a professional, the combination of his genius and his arrogance also meant that he had little use for practice.

Baker's earliest influence on the trumpet was big band star Harry James, who rode high in the pop charts of the day with a big, bright, brassy melodic sound. When an underaged Baker enlisted in the Armed Forces in November 1946, his infatuation with James dissipated. Stationed in Berlin during his first tour of duty, he was exposed to the new radical sounds of bebop through V-Discs played on Armed Forces Radio Service. It was an eye and ear opening experience. Fascinated by the pyrotechnics and harmonic adventurousness of trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie, Baker spent hours trying to understand this new music.

"Everything changed for me," he told reporter Les Tompkins in 1979. "I found myself getting further and further away from the 'sweet' Harry James style of playing, and trying to phrase things in, I guess—for a lack of a better word—a 'hipper' way."

Upon his release in 1949, he moved with his parents to Hermosa Beach just outside Los Angeles. There he began to participate in jam sessions and, through the G.I. bill, enrolled in music classes at El Camino Junior College. Not very interested in learning music theory or in developing a facility reading music, Baker earned a solid F in school. His education, such as it was, came instead from hanging out at Jimmy Rowles' house, learning dozens of songs by ear from the veteran pianist.

While bebop had fascinated Baker, it was a series of recordings in New York City in 1949 by a nine-piece ensemble led by Miles Davis featuring arrangements by Gerry Mulligan, John Lewis and Gil Evans, ultimately known as *Birth of the Cool*, that proved to be formative for the budding musician. "I didn't really get locked into what I wanted to do until I found Miles Davis," he told Leonard Malone in a television interview in January 1988.

Taken with Davis' lyricism and aloofness (some would say emotional distance), Baker began to develop a laid-back, less-is-more approach to playing the trumpet. Alto saxophonist Paul Desmond, who at the time was a featured soloist with Dave Brubeck, would also have an inordinate influence on Baker. Over the rest of Baker's career, although he was fully capable and on occasion would play in a fiery hard bop style, he developed the ultimate cool approach. Characterized by a clear, vibratoless tone and the emotional reserve of Davis and Desmond, Baker's recordings in the 1950s came to epitomize the white sound of West Coast jazz.

In early 1950, in order to avoid jail time for possession of marijuana, Baker re-enlisted in the army. Discharged in early 1952, he was chosen by bebop giant Charlie Parker to play in Parker's band for a three week string of dates in California. A choice gig that virtually any musician would have killed for, it gave Baker instant cachet in the jazz world.

Following his stint with Parker, Baker joined *Birth of the Cool* alumnus, baritone saxophonist Gerry Mulligan in the latter's famous piano-less quartet. Although over time their friendship soured, when they first started playing together Mulligan and Baker seemed to have a near telepathic relationship, the two budding stars effortlessly weaving contrapuntal lines in and around each other's solo statements. Their earliest recordings, such as their version of "My Funny Valentine" cut for Fantasy Records in 1952, are defining moments in the development of the West Coast sound.

By the time he recorded with Mulligan, Baker had developed a style that was in some ways contradictory. While laid back in the extreme, evincing a sense of hipness that suggested he was too cool to care to be engaged, his choice of notes, their placement in time and his micro manipulation of pitch, where he often would slightly flatten notes, was



Chet gives a lesson to a group of Belgian airmen.



strangely seductive.

"I wanted to play on the dark side," Baker told Malone in 1988, "a little bit under the center of tonality. Not really flat, but just on the underneath side."

When Mulligan was busted for possession of heroin in April 1963, and sentenced to six months in prison, Baker struck out on his own, recording a series of era-defining 45s and LPs for Dick Bock's Pacific Jazz (later World Pacific) label. By the summer of 1953, Bock had taken eight of the Baker singles, including Lorenz Hart and Richard Rodgers' "Isn't it Romantic" heard here in a 1964 performance, and put them together on a ten-inch LP entitled *The Chet Baker Quartet*.

Critical acclaim was instantaneous, *Down Beat* giving the album five stars with the reviewer remarking: "Our suspicions that the 23-year-old trumpet man from Yale, Okla., was a major star are confirmed by this LP, which is a gasser from start to finish. The lad had the style, the sound, the command of the horn . . . To the names of Dizzy, Miles, Joe Newman, Shorty Rogers and Clark Terry must

ously and made a number of forays into recording studios, he continued to run afoul of the law, serving time in Italian drug rehabilitation clinics in December 1959 and March 1960 before being sentenced to one year and seven months in the town jail in Lucca in April 1961.

Released early again for good behavior, Baker signed a contract with RCA Italiano and in early 1962 recorded four sides as a vocalist with an orchestra conducted by spaghetti western composer Ennio Morricone. In June he was arrested in Germany and deported. A month later he was busted in Switzerland and in February 1963 he was found guilty of narcotics violations in England, whereupon he was deported to France. While much of Europe was like Italy and adored the sound of cool jazz, hard bop reigned supreme in France. Baker responded by dumping a lot of the pretty ballads and vocals from his repertoire, replacing them with covers of Miles Davis' "So What," "Bye Bye Blackbird" (both heard here in the 1964 performance in Brussels) and "Milestones." Sonny Rollins' "Airegin" ("Nigeria" backwards) had been in his repertoire since 1962.

In the summer of 1963, Baker pawned his trumpet for dope money. When a French musician came to his aid by loaning him a flugelhorn, Baker found himself enamored with the mellower sound of the slightly larger instrument and ended up playing it for years. It is the wider belled flugelhorn that Baker is playing in the thirty-plus-minute program from Belgian television included on this DVD.

The quartet he chose to play with—Belgian alto saxophonist and flautist Jacques Pelzer, the French pianist Rene Urtreger and the Italian battery of Luigi Trussardi on bass and Franco Manzecchi on drums—was superb. Pelzer was a part-time musician and full-time drug store owner who became one of Baker's closest friends, playing with him in countless shows as early as 1962 and continuing through at least the late 1970s. The classically trained Urtreger had toured with Miles Davis in 1956 and 1957 and played on Davis' French recording *Ascenseur pour L'Echafaud*. He played with Baker as early as June 1963. Over the course of his career, Urtreger also accompanied such visiting jazz luminaries as Don Byas, Buck Clayton, Dizzy Gillespie, Stan Getz and Lee Konitz. Trussardi and Manzecchi were also first call accompanists for many visiting American musicians, collectively and singly gigging and/or recording with Eric Dolphy, Donald Byrd, Dexter Gordon, Hank Mobley, Teddy Wilson and France's own Stéphane Grappelli.

While the set is short, the five songs the Chet Baker Quintet performed that night in Brussels cover a lot of ground. On the opener, "Bye Bye Blackbird," Baker's tone is both strong and airy at the same time. Notice the way he draws emotion out of his mostly mid-register



Jacques Pelzer
and Chet Baker
on European
television.

lines by inflecting pitches slightly flat. Also note the contrapuntal long notes played by Baker under Pelzer's solo and the counterpoint woven by Pelzer at the end while Baker restates the head.

By the second piece, "Isn't It Romantic," Baker is playing from his standard sitting position. After a rip-snorting take on Rollins' "Airegin," he delivers an emotionally arresting vocal on "Time After Time." The brief set concludes with a five-minute version of the classic Miles Davis modal composition "So What." During the opening statement of the head, Baker plays a series of held notes not present on the Davis recording from *Kind Of Blue*. Interestingly, during his solo, he cracks a few notes a la Davis. During solos by other members of the band, rather than leave the bandstand or move off to the side as most jazz musicians do, Baker stays seated center stage head down, flugelhorn cradled in his arms listening intently, giving his sidemen the respect he felt all jazz players were due.

Baker returned to the States in the spring of 1964, but being a known junkie, found himself unable to get a cabaret card to work in Manhattan. Finding work elsewhere also often proved to be difficult, and for a while he supported himself as a break and enter artist, specializing in second floor heists. Every year brought new arrests,

and Baker hit rock bottom when he was jumped and badly beaten in San Francisco in the summer of 1966. Several of his teeth were either knocked out or needed to be extracted due to the beating he took, and Baker was unable to play again until late 1967.

Fitted with dentures, he spent the late 1960s and early 1970s slowly getting his chops back. Taking whatever live and studio work he was able to muster, at one point Baker was reduced to recording a series of albums in emulation of Herb Alpert's success with the Tijuana Brass under the *nom de disque* the Mariachi Brass. Blaming many of his problems on the American attitude towards drug addiction, over time his hatred of America became nearly pathological. Baker spent more and more time, and certainly did his best work, in Europe from the mid-70s until his death in Amsterdam in the spring of 1988.

The second performance featured on this DVD is a half-hour set recorded in Norway in September 1979. At this point Baker was living in Europe and gigging constantly. Curiously, while he did not play with local musicians in each different city, he does not appear to have used a single steady band. Looking at both legitimate and bootleg recordings throughout 1979, Baker can be heard with different bands in January, June, September, October, November and December. Accompanying him on the Norway show featured on this DVD were Michel Graillier on piano, Wolfgang Lackerschmid on vibraphone and Jean Louis Rassinfosse on bass. All three musicians would play with Baker on and off until his death in 1988. German vibraphonist Lackerschmid recorded a duet album with Baker in January 1979 entitled *Ballads for Two*. Included on the LP were Oscar Hammerstein and Sigmund Rosenberg's "Softly, As In A Morning Sunrise" and Lackerschmid's own "Five Years Ago," both featured in this performance.

Baker is in great shape playing with a strong bright tone while demonstrating, if possible, an even greater sense of vulnerability, world weariness and introspection than he did in the earlier 1964 program. For Lackerschmid's tone poem "Five Years Ago," Baker puts on his glasses (presumably to read sheet music, although the way the performance is shot, he is the only musician without a visible music stand). Betraying a classical influence, "Five Years Ago" is carefully crafted with Baker and Lackerschmid playing a note-against-note head, followed by Baker working out on a series of circular lines underneath Lackerschmid's solo. Baker's introduction of this piece is the only time he speaks during either performance.

The highlight of the set and perhaps of this whole DVD is the drummer-less quartet's near-fifteen-minute version of Cole Porter's "Love For Sale." Baker had recorded the tune in 1977 in a funk version



with Michael Brecker, John Scofield, and Tony Williams on the LP *You Can't Go Home Again*. Here Baker unleashes all the stops, demonstrating a tremendous sense of time and mastery of breath while Rassinfosse plays a tension-inducing call and response bass *ostinato*. In many respects, this performance represents a rocking aesthetic that is diametrically opposed to Baker's usual cool. It burns from beginning to end and like all great performances leaves you wanting more.

Taken together, these two shows, filmed fifteen years apart present Baker playing in very different contexts. Given his loss of teeth following his 1966 beating and his crippling drug addiction that dominated the majority of his waking hours in that fifteen year interval, it is remarkable how consistent his overall aesthetic is. This is chamber jazz at its most delicate, relying on a refined sense of dynamics, melodic invention, counterpoint and, most importantly, emotional vulnerability. As a whole, it contains all the reasons why, despite his personal problems, Chet Baker remains one of the finest soloists and vocalists in the history of jazz.

—Rob Bowman
(June 2006)

Although jazz is well represented in terms of documentaries such as PBS' *American Masters* series and Ken Burns' *Jazz*, few examples of vintage concerts by the pioneers of jazz in their prime period are officially available on DVD. In an effort to remedy this situation, we created the JAZZ ICONS™ series.

Since the '30s, Europe has had a love affair with jazz. Often when these American artists would visit they were treated like foreign dignitaries. During the '50s and '60s most of the European TV stations were government-controlled and did not depend on ad revenues. They could therefore allow these artists the luxury of performing concerts of an hour or more, expressing their music on a deeper level. In America, however, (especially in the '50s and early '60s), the best TV exposure these jazz artists could hope for (with the exception of National Education TV and PBS) would be a few numbers on a network variety show between ads for cigarettes or laundry detergent. We as Americans owe the various TV stations of Europe our thanks for filming and preserving our musical heritage.

From the beginning, our goal was to make each JAZZ ICONS™ DVD a truly special experience. Every featured artist needed to be a household name that had in some important way helped shape the history of jazz. It was also important to find the earliest concert footage available, featuring the artists as close to their prime as possible. Further, all of the artists and side-musicians had to be fairly paid. To accomplish this, we dealt directly with the artists (or their estates), and for the side-musicians we arranged payment through the American Federation of Musicians. Finally, as with all of our releases, (including our GRAMMY®-nominated *American Folk Blues Festival 1962 – 1966* DVD series) we have provided informative liner notes, previously unseen photos and memorabilia in each DVD's booklet to enhance the listening and viewing experience.

Many people contributed to this project. We'd especially like to thank TDK for their support, Rick Eisenstein for making sure everything was properly cleared, art director Tom Gulotta for designing a look that we feel truly honors these great artists and their work and Don Sickler for his endless knowledge and boundless enthusiasm which helped shape every aspect of this series. Although we're proud to list him as associate producer and consultant, in many ways he is the soul of this series.

Jazz is recognized as an American treasure, appreciated the world over, and we hope these DVDs add to the appreciation of this unique and influential art form.

David Peck & Phillip Galloway
Reelin' In The Years® Productions
(June 2006)

Other titles in the JAZZ ICONS™ series:

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THELONIOUS MONK • LIVE IN '66
BUDDY RICH • LIVE IN '78
COUNT BASIE • LIVE IN '62
ART BLAKEY & THE JAZZ MESSENGERS • LIVE IN '58



producers' notes

Producers- David Peck & Phillip Galloway for Reelin' In The Years® Productions
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Art Direction and Design- Tom Gulotta
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Personnel

Chet Baker – Flugelhorn, Vocal
Jacques Pelzer – Alto Sax, Flute
Rene Urtreger – Piano
Luigi Trussardi – Bass
Franco Manzecchi - Drums

Jazz Kongsberg Festival licensed exclusively by Reelin' In The Years® Productions on behalf of NRK
Filmed in Norway on September 3, 1979

Personnel

Chet Baker – Trumpet
Wolfgang Lackerschmid –
Vibraphone
Michel Graillier – Piano
Jean Louis Rassinfosse – Bass

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