

Jazz music and drugs

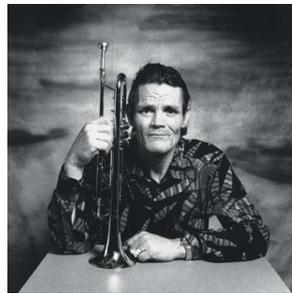
by Andrey Marukhin,

Jazz and Popular Music Performance Faculty

Today I'd like to talk about a sorrowful problem in jazz music, drugs in musicians' lives. The history knows many examples of great jazz performers whose drug-addiction made their lives short. I mean the American [jazz saxophonist](#) and [composer](#) Charlie Parker (1920-1955), a pioneer of the bebop style, famously called Bird who was found dead of overdose when he was 35. I mean Chet Baker (1929-1988), renowned for his blue and romantic trumpet playing, who took drugs and one day jumped out of a hotel window in Amsterdam. I mean Kenny Kirkland (1955-1998), a very expressive jazz pianist who ran contrary to jazz orthodoxy, performing on the electric keyboards. Nobody can tell you exactly why those musicians took drugs. It could be many reasons related to specific features of their profession. It might have been because they had night jobs, because their free-time didn't coincide with that of people who mattered to them and who they wished to communicate with, or because of their wild desire to run away from troubles to practice creatively, thinking that they would improvise better if they took a dose... I think that it is only excuses of their weak will. Having understood this simple idea some drug-addicted musicians, with John Coltrane (1926-1967), Miles Davis (1926-1991), Elvin Jones (1927-2004) among them, stopped to take drugs. Since then they performed and recorded successfully. The pianist and composer Herbie Hancock (1940), the saxophonists and composers Wayne Shorter (1933) and Branford Marsalis (1960) are not so young today but they are still popular for their drive performing and still retain their leading position on the jazz world stage. So I ask you, please remember that drugs are not the only way to make music or solve your problems. But it is the fastest way to defeat.



Charlie Parker



Chet Baker



Kenny Kirkland



Herbie Hancock



Wayne Shorter



Branford Marsalis