



LET'S GET LOST

Autumn
Season
2008

Directed by Bruce Webber *Let's Get Lost* was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Documentary, in 1989.

Small group jazz in the 1940's was revolutionised by the so called be-bop style of Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Christian, Thelonious Monk and others playing fast 'intuitive' improvisations based on harmonic structures rather than the melodies of the predominantly swing style it challenged. This was music for listeners rather than dancers and for many fans it took jazz into an artistic cul-de-sac. This is the origin of the split between the 'traditional Dixieland' style, revived as a reaction to be-bop, and 'modern' styles of jazz. An early evolution of the modern style was a tempering of the aggressive tempos and abstraction of be-bop, inspired by the 'light' Lester Young, which became known as 'cool jazz'.

In 1949-50 a collaborative project by Miles Davis, Gil Evans, Gerry Mulligan and John Lewis, that later became known as the *Birth of the Cool* sessions when re-released in 1957, is the exemplar for the more formal and arranged style of playing. This had a big influence a generation of young white players attracted by the relaxed and softer tones; purer sounding with less vibrato; for some an intellectualized 'art music' form of jazz. Cool jazz became strongly associated with the west coast jazz scene where Chet Baker first rose to prominence in the classic piano-less Gerry Mulligan Quartet. Baker had played with Charlie Parker in 1951, but the 1952 sessions with Mulligan were special for the interplay between the baritone sax and the trumpet, famously on *My Funny Valentine*. The quartet lasted less than a year before Mulligan was imprisoned on drugs charges and Baker went on to lead his own groups, both playing trumpet and singing.

Review

Let's Get Lost is a documentary about the turbulent life and career of jazz trumpeter Chet Baker named after a song performed by Baker, and recorded on the album *Chet Baker Sings and Plays*. The film is essentially a two-hour love letter to its subject (Weber spent about a million dollars of his own money on it). A group of Baker fans, ranging from ex-associates to ex-wives and children, were assembled to paint a portrait of the man.

Weber's film traces the man's career from the 1950s, when he was in his prime to the 1980s, when he had become a skid row junkie unable to get a decent gig. By juxtaposing these two decades, Weber presents a sharp contrast between the younger, handsome Baker, the statuesque idol who resembled a dreamy mix of James Dean and Jack Kerouac, to what he became, "a seamy looking drugstore cowboy cum derelict."

Let's Get Lost begins near the end of Baker's life, on the beaches of Santa Monica and ends at the glitz and glamour of the Cannes Film Festival. Weber uses these moments in the present as bookends to the historic footage contained in the bulk of the film. Although much of Baker's past is captured only in still photos, Weber and his director of photography, Jeff Preiss, use creative camera techniques to energize these static pictures in a way that almost brings them lovingly to life.

Weber first met Baker in the winter of 1986 and convinced him to do a photo shoot and what was originally only going to be a three-minute film. Interviewing Baker was a challenge as Weber remembers, "Sometimes we'd have to stop for some reason or another and then, because Chet was a junkie and couldn't do things twice, we'd have to start all over again. But we grew to really like him".