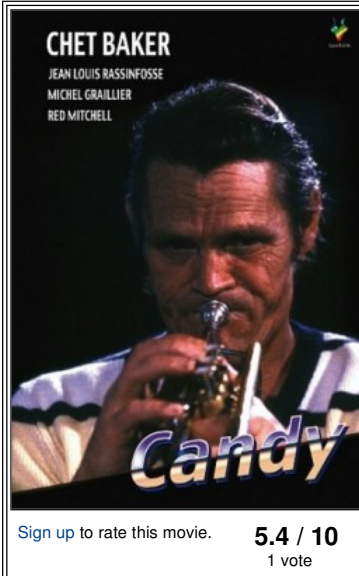




Chet Baker: Candy (1985)



Jazz musicians sometimes have tragic stories. Some have tragic endings. This is the case with Chet Baker, a great trumpeter who meet with a mysterious end in 1988. His story is perfect for the picking for a great Hollywood movie. I hope they do it. Let's get the story of his life before we review this somewhat short 1985 concert.

Wikipedia

Baker was born and raised in a musical household in Yale, Oklahoma; his father was a professional guitar player. Baker began his musical career singing in a church choir. His father introduced him to brass instruments with a trombone, which was replaced with a trumpet when the trombone proved too large.

Baker received some musical education at Glendale Junior High School, but left school at age 16 in 1946 to join the United States Army. He was posted to Berlin where he joined the 298th Army band. Leaving the army in 1948, he studied theory and harmony at El Camino College in Los Angeles. He dropped out in his second year, however, re-enlisting in the army in 1950. Baker became a member of the Sixth Army Band at the Presidio in San Francisco, but was soon spending time in San Francisco jazz clubs such as Bop City and the Black Hawk. Baker once again obtained a discharge from the army to pursue a career as a professional musician.

Baker's earliest notable professional gigs were with saxophonist Vido Musso's band, and also with tenor saxophonist Stan Getz, though he earned much more renown in 1951 when he was chosen by Charlie Parker to play with him for a series of West Coast engagements.[5]

In 1952, Baker joined the Gerry Mulligan Quartet, which was an instant phenomenon. Several things made the Mulligan/Baker group special, the most prominent being the interplay between Mulligan's baritone sax and Baker's trumpet. Rather than playing identical melody lines in unison like bebop giants Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, the two would complement each other's playing with contrapuntal touches, and it often seemed as if they had telepathy in anticipating what the other was going to play next. The Quartet's version of "My Funny Valentine", featuring a memorable Baker solo, was a major hit, and became a song with which Baker was intimately associated.

The Quartet found success quickly, but lasted less than a year because of Mulligan's arrest and imprisonment on drug charges. In 1956, Pacific Jazz released Chet Baker Sings, a record that increased his profile but alienated traditional jazz fans; he would continue to sing throughout his career. Baker formed quartets with Russ Freeman in 1953-54 with bassists Carson Smith, Joe Mondragon, and Jimmy Bond and drummers Shelly Manne, Larry Bunker, and Bob Neel. The quartet was successful in their three live sets in 1954. In that year, Baker won the Downbeat Jazz Poll. Because of his chiseled features, Hollywood studios approached Baker and he made his acting debut in the film Hell's Horizon, released in the fall of 1955. He declined an offer of a studio contract, preferring life on the road as a musician. Over the next few years, Baker fronted his own combos, including a 1955 quintet featuring Francy Boland, where Baker combined playing trumpet and singing. He became an icon of the West Coast "cool school" of jazz, helped by his good looks and singing talent. Baker's 1956 recording, released for the first time in its entirety in 1989 as The Route, with Art Pepper helped further the West Coast jazz sound and became a staple of cool jazz.

Baker was a heroin user from the 1950s for the remainder of his life, and eventually saw his musical career decline as a result. At times, Baker pawned his instruments for money to maintain his drug habit. In the early 1960s, he served more than a year in prison in Italy on drug charges; he was later expelled from both West Germany and the UK for drug-related offenses. Baker was eventually deported from West Germany to the United States after running afoul of the law there a second time. He settled in Milpitas in northern California where he played in San Jose and San Francisco between short jail terms served for prescription fraud.[4]

In 1966, Baker was savagely beaten (allegedly while attempting to buy drugs) after a gig in San Francisco, sustaining severe cuts on the lips and broken front teeth, which ruined his embouchure. He stated in the film Let's Get Lost that an acquaintance attempted to rob him one night but backed off, only to return the next night with a group of several men who chased him. He landed finally in a car where he was surrounded. Instead of rescuing him, the people inside the car pushed him back out onto the street where the chase by his attackers continued, and subsequently, he was beaten to the point that his teeth, never in good condition to begin with, were knocked out, leaving him without the ability to play his horn. He took odd jobs, among them pumping gas. Meanwhile he was fitted for dentures and worked on his embouchure. Three months later he got a gig in New York.

Between 1966 and 1974, Baker mostly played flugelhorn and recorded music that could mostly be classified as West Coast jazz.[4]

After developing a new embouchure resulting from dentures, Baker returned to the straight-ahead jazz that began his career, relocating to New York City and began performing and recording again, notably with guitarist Jim Hall. Later in the seventies, Baker returned to Europe where he was assisted by his friend Diane Vavra, who took care of his personal needs and otherwise helped him during his recording and performance dates.

From 1978 until his death, Baker resided and played almost exclusively in Europe, returning to the USA roughly once per year for a few performance dates. Baker's most prolific era as a recording artist was 1978-88. However, as his extensive output



Review by Bill Wolford
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is strewn across numerous, mostly small European labels, none of these recordings ever reached a wider audience, even though many of them were well-received by critics, who maintain that the period was one of Baker's most mature and rewarding. Of particular importance are Baker's quartet featuring the pianist Phil Markowitz (1978-80) and his trio with guitarist Philip Catherine and bassist Jean-Louis Rassinfosse (1983-85). He also toured with saxophonist Stan Getz during this period.

In 1983, British singer Elvis Costello, a longtime fan of Baker, hired the trumpeter to play a solo on his song "Shipbuilding", from the album *Punch the Clock*. The song was a top 40 hit in the UK, and exposed Baker's music to a new audience. Later, Baker often featured Costello's song "Almost Blue" (inspired by Baker's version of "The Thrill Is Gone") in his live sets, and recorded the song on *Let's Get Lost*, a documentary film about his life.

The video material recorded by Japanese television during Baker's 1987 tour in Japan showed a man whose face looked much older than he was; but his trumpet playing was alert, lively and inspired. Fans and critics alike agree that the live album *Chet Baker in Tokyo*, recorded less than a year before his death and released posthumously, ranks among Baker's very best. "Silent Nights", another critically acclaimed release, and Baker's only recording of Christmas music, was recorded with Christopher Mason in New Orleans in 1986 and released in 1987.

Chet Baker's compositions included "Chetty's Lullaby", "Freeway", "Early Morning Mood", "Two a Day", "So Che Ti Perderò" ("I Know I Will Lose You"), "Il Mio Domani" ("My Tomorrow"), "Motivo Su Raggio Di Luna" ("Tune on a Moon Beam"), "The Route", "Skidadidlin", "New Morning Blues", "Blue Gilles", "Dessert", and "Anticipated Blues".

At about 3 am on May 13, 1988, Baker was found dead on Prins Hendrikkade, near Zeedijk, on the street below his second-story room (Room 210) of Hotel Prins Hendrik in Amsterdam, Netherlands, with serious wounds to his head. Heroin and cocaine were found in his hotel room, and an autopsy also found these drugs in his body. There was no evidence of a struggle, and the death was ruled an accident.

Baker's body was brought home for interment in the Inglewood Park Cemetery in Inglewood, California. A plaque outside the Hotel Prins Hendrik now memorializes him.

/Wikipedia

This concert is held in the Sonet Record Library in Lidingo, Sweden. The performances are live, and no audience is present, reminding me of a public television special. There are a couple short interviews with Baker interspersed throughout the show, and he seems almost shy and reserved at times when speaking. Along with Chet Baker on trumpet, there is Michel Grallier on piano and Jean Louis Rassinfosse on bass. I couldn't help but think about the music in some of the Peanuts cartoons during some of the numbers. It must show my lack of experience in jazz music. Watching the musicians play is fascinating as each one is a master at his instrument. Here is the listing of the songs performed;

1. Candy
2. Love For Sale
3. Tempus Fugue-It
4. Sad Walk
5. Red's Blues
6. Nardis
7. Bye Bye Blackbird
8. My Romance

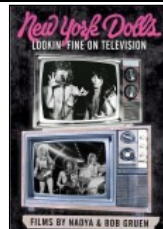
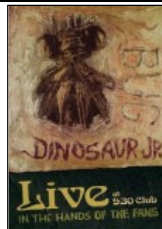
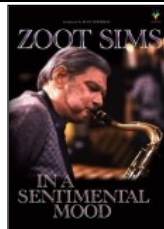
The life of Chet Baker is summarized in the eight page booklet that comes along with this great DVD. So you can see the incredible life, and read about the tragic death of one of the worlds great jazz trumpeters. An essential purchase for fans of Chet's career.

7.10.



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