



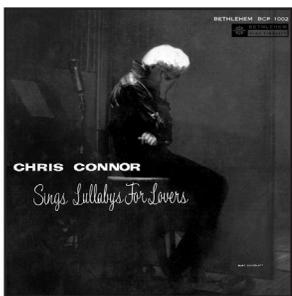
**Oh No! Not Jazz!!**  
**Ed Palermo Big Band (Cuneiform)**  
 by Donald Elfman

Frank Zappa was a master parodist with an extraordinary command of and, ultimately, affection for a wide range of musical styles. Ed Palermo has dedicated himself to the spirit of Zappa through arranging his music for a big band but has also created a substantial body of original work beautifully steeped in big band jazz.

The first of the two discs on *Oh No! Not Jazz!!* is simply called *Zappa*. "Lumpy Gravy" (from the 1968 album of the same name) starts out at a frantic pace as the sound fades up into full-throttle and a funky, muted trumpet solo by Ronnie Buttacavoli over a groove where all the sections spin their well-oiled gears. Suddenly, there's an even wilder section with the band playing hot ensemble riffs—again, all the sections are featured—leading to a powerful tenor solo by Bill Straub. He and then the band take the tune out to a ferocious climax. It's a perfect combination of Zappa and Palermo's big band smarts. All of the tunes here have the same mix of discipline and abandon. "America Drinks and Goes Home" is something else entirely. As the closer of the Mothers of Invention's 1967 *Absolutely Free* album, it was a sendup of the mildly sleazy band-with-vocalist groups populating nightclubs in mid 20th century America. Palermo's singer, Mike James, is an imitation Sinatra and the performance of Zappa's sardonic lyrics is affecting even as it descends into cheap Vegas Sinatra-isms.

The second disc, *Palermo*, opens with a tune by David Leone, a Basie-ish big band swinger, complete with a smooth sax section, rich trombones and a sinuous alto solo by the leader. Then the sections coalesce, paving the way for a hot violin solo by Katie Jacoby. The opening theme returns to glide us back to an infectious pulse and the close of the tune; it then returns, in a slightly different setting, to open "Prelude to an Insult", which maintains a cheerful mood, belying the title. There's a wide range of moods throughout the Palermo set, with an almost manic array of colors and textures. The inspiration of Zappa thrives in tunes like "Why is the Doctor Barking?" but it's the leader's skill in a jazz feel and the brilliance of the big band that shine here. Think Zappa, the rants of Buddy Rich and late-period Beatles' playfulness.

For more information, visit [cuneiformrecords.com](http://cuneiformrecords.com). This group is at Iridium Aug. 29th-30th. See Calendar.



**Sings Lullabys For Lovers**  
**Chris Connor (Bethlehem-Verse Music Group)**  
 by Andrew Vélez

Chris Connor, who died five years ago this month at the age of 81, grew up in Kansas City with a violin-playing father and began her own musical life as a clarinetist. But when she sang "Amor" to great acclaim

at her 1945 school graduation, she decided to pursue a singing career. She was in the small band of then-19-year-old ace trombonist Bob Brookmeyer and eventually put her time in with big bands, including Claude Thornhill, and then, at the suggestion of singer June Christy, began a stint with Stan Kenton's orchestra. It was with Kenton that she first recorded what became her signature song, "All About Ronnie". After deciding to go solo, it was during an appearance in Birdland that a Bethlehem Records scout heard and signed her on the spot. A pair of releases came out in 1954, one of which, *Sings Lullaby For Lovers*, remains as fresh and swinging today as when first released. Along with *Sings Lullabys of Birdland*, it revealed Connor as the Cool vocalist par excellence and turned her into a best-selling solo artist at 26. The Ertegun Brothers at Atlantic Records, no fools, quickly signed her up and produced a series of now-classic albums.

The opener here is an unadorned and eloquently emotive rendition of Billy Strayhorn's urban blues masterpiece "Lush Life". Accompanied by Joe Cinderella's sensitive guitar lines, Connor's torchy sound is as affecting emotionally as it is understated. She and Cinderella also make for a perfect pair on Mercer-Arlen's gem "Clear Out of This World". Connor's breathy and intimate crooning of "You're cleaaaaar out of this worrrrrld, when I'mmmmm looking at you" gets kicked up a few notches by Ronny Oldrich's clarinet. He also has another beautiful solo on "Stella by Starlight" and is joined for some breezy swinging by Don Burns on accordion. With her flawless timing throughout, sans histrionics, Connor seems to sail over each lyric and note even as she expresses a wealth of feeling.

For more information, visit [bethlehemrecords.com](http://bethlehemrecords.com)



**Flash Forward**  
**Michael Carvin (Motéma Music)**  
 by Ken Micallef

Though one of the major jazz drummers since the early '70s, Michael Carvin has always been oddly low-profile. A player of great power, finesse and creativity, Carvin joined Freddie Hubbard in 1973 and went on to work with Dizzy Gillespie, Jackie McLean, McCoy Tyner, Pharoah Sanders and Hampton Hawes, among many others. Carvin has eight albums as a leader and over 200 credits as a sideman.

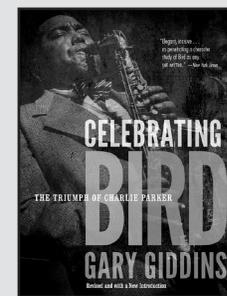
Carvin's albums consistently run the gamut from nearly free, powerfully open arrangements to swinging interpretations of the Great American Songbook, the drummer often accompanied by his young students. *Flash Forward* combines Coltrane-inspired improvisations with sweetly performed ballads and swingers, all infused with solid solos, particularly by the leader. Tenor saxophonist Keith Loftis has a burly sound that steers the pointedly 'spiritual' arrangements perfectly, but is balanced by pianist Yayoi Ikawa's more delicate, exploratory approach. Bassist Jansen Cinco is the session's even keel.

*Flash Forward's* more interesting moments lie in its corners, such as the closing vamp of "You Stepped Out Of A Dream", where Ikawa weaves intricate waves while Carvin churns below, his flipping brushes creating an air of endless possibility. You can hear the band about to tip over into something new before the track abruptly ends. As noted, Loftis tends towards Coltrane-inspired flights, such as in opener "So What",

the group bringing out their Elvin Jones-McCoy Tyner influences to accompany Loftis' heavy enunciations, but Ikawa turns left for her solo, trading block chords for delicate punctuations, circular melodies for bluesy flurries tending toward the avant garde. The group barrels through "In Walked Bud", climaxing in a terrific Carvin solo, full of tricky metric modulations, delicate snare work popping full set accents, returning the group to the melody. "Autumn Leaves" closes the album, a showcase for Carvin's stinging brushwork and his group's excellent cohesion and rapport.

For more information, visit [motema.com](http://motema.com). This project is at Dizzy's Club Aug. 25th. See Calendar.

## IN PRINT



**Celebrating Bird: The Triumph of Charlie Parker**  
**Gary Giddins (University of Minnesota Press)**  
 by Sean O'Connell

*Celebrating Bird* seems like it was probably one of the easier books Gary Giddins has churned out. At 145 pages, it is a brisk read, especially considering that terrific photos—telegrams to candid family snaps to mid-flight poses of the subject—dot numerous pages. But this book is not so much concerned with the gritty details of hard living as with depicting what it calls the "triumph of Charlie Parker".

Giddins points out in the acknowledgements that the book was the result of a multimedia collaboration that included a film and a bigger photo spread. It was originally published in 1987 but now exists with a shiny new cover, a few revisions and a new introduction. He states that it was interviews with Parker's first wife Rebecca that captivated him and he sheds a nice amount of light on the early days of the Parker myth. He digs into the birth of Parker's development as a saxophonist as well as the countless weaknesses that took him down at the age of 34.

Giddins paints a vivid cultural portrait of the era, illuminating Parker's role beyond simply jazz history but the limited word count leaves the author no choice but to breeze through numerous incidents with almost a shrug. He sums up Parker's final months with a single, lengthy sentence that includes failed gigs, a suicide attempt, two hospitalizations, alcohol abuse and the crumbling of his last marriage—incidents all worthy of deep analysis. More often than not the book has a look-it-up feel, which is fine if the reader is not already familiar with the story. Of course this book was rereleased concurrent with Stanley Crouch's long-gestating first half of a Parker biography that barely climbs out of the subject's teen years despite being twice the length. (Crouch is graciously credited for dumping out a bag of his research for Giddins nearly 30 years ago).

The last quarter of Giddins' book goes heavy on the discography and features an index nearly a tenth the length of the actual text but if the rerelease of this book leads to introducing anyone to the jazz legend, it will have succeeded efficiently.

For more information, visit [upress.umn.edu](http://upress.umn.edu). A Parker tribute is at Birdland Aug. 26th-30th and the Charlie Parker Jazz Fest takes place Aug. 23rd at Marcus Garvey Park and 24th at Tompkins Square Park. See Calendar.