

Compare the work of two contrasting jazz musicians by referring to specific pieces of music. You should refer to melody, rhythm, harmony/tonality and use of instruments/voices as appropriate.

In this essay, I am going to discuss the similarities and differences between Louis Armstrong and Charlie Parker. Louis Armstrong often used the 12 bar blues as a harmonic framework for his writing. This consists of the structure I | I | I | IV | IV | I | V | V | I | I and may have a few variants on this but largely remains the same throughout the piece. For example, Louis Armstrong's 'West End Blues' uses the 12 bar blues throughout with the exception of the piano solo which alters many of these chords as no other instruments are playing at the time. However, Parker uses a different approach to harmonic structure with the 32 bar chord sequence, often with the structure AABA within each 32 bar section with A representing one set of chords and B representing another. For example, his piece 'Koko' consists of an introduction followed by 2 32 bar sections consisting of the AABA pattern, followed by a drum solo in 2 A sections and then finishes with a coda. While there can be seen some evidence of substitution chords in Armstrong's music, the most adventurous chord is perhaps an Ebmaj9 chord in 'Jeepers Creepers'. Compared to Armstrong, Parker often alters this chord sequence with the use of chromatically altered, extended and substitution chords used frequently, for example the use of an E half diminished A7 (b9) chord in the A section of Blues for Alice. While there is the use of blues scales in Louis Armstrong's music, such as the C minor blues scale in the introduction of 'West End Blues' and flattened thirds and 6ths, Parker often uses bebop scales in his solos and fast, semiquaver passages. Both Parker and Armstrong tend to use a major tonality often in the keys of Eb or Bb, such as 'Koko' using Bb major during the A section and 'West End Blues' which is in the key of Eb. This is mainly due to the instruments used as trumpets and tenor saxophones are in Bb and alto saxophones are in Eb.

In terms of melody, Parker tends to use fast, scalic passages that are often conjunct in nature and use chromaticism that defines the music as being in a bebop style. His melodies are often arc shaped such as those found in 'Blues for Alice' and the introduction in 'Koko' that consists of the saxophone and trumpet playing in octave parallels in a rising and falling motif. Armstrong also uses arc shaped melodies in his writing and often uses conjunct melody writing, such as in 'Jeepers Creepers' the opening sung melody of 'Jeepers Creepers, where d'you get those peepers?' is scalic and stepwise. A difference, however, is that Parker's arc shaped melodies often only last over a bar or so whereas Armstrong's arc shaped melodies tend to be over the 12 bar section. However a contrast to Parker's melodies is that the tempo is more relaxed, e.g. 'Koko' has a tempo of 300 bpm whereas Armstrong's 'West End Blues' is at a calmer tempo. Additionally, the rhythms used by Charlie Parker mainly consist of semiquaver and quaver passages and include syncopation and triplets, such as the opening of 'Blues for Alice'. Syncopation and triplets are also used in Armstrong's music, such as in the introductory trumpet motif where a rising arpeggiated triplet motif can be found. In Armstrong's 'West End Blues', the comping piano chords underneath the melody keep the pace steady. Whereas, the piano part in Parker's 'Koko' often accents the weak beats which is also complimented with the saxophone solo accenting these weak beats as well. However, Louis Armstrong is much more beat orientated, putting more weight on on-beat notes compared to Parker's use of weight on off-beat.

Armstrong is known for using his 'hot five', which is a band of seven musicians including trumpet, trombone, clarinet, banjo, piano, bass and some sort of percussion, such as the milk bottle in 'West End Blues'. This is of a similar size of band to Parker who used a similar number of 4-5 members including a saxophone, piano, bass and drum kit. In Parker's music, the saxophone is often soloing on top of the rhythm section however, in Armstrong's music, the front line instruments play the melody, often the trumpet with the tune and the other frontline instruments playing held chords underneath, on top of the banjo and piano. Parker's music is often only the saxophone soloing, with limited use of other instruments soloing, with the exception of a drum solo at the end of the 2 32 bar sections in

Koko. In comparison to this, Armstrong has a line up of solos allowing each member of the band to take a melodic line, for example in 'West End Blues' a solo from a trumpet is heard, followed by a trombone solo, a clarinet and scat singing (by Armstrong) solo, a piano solo and then a second trumpet solo. Within the trombone solo, glissandi can be heard by the trombone and use of stride piano and tremolo within the piano solo. The writing is also idiomatic for instruments, staying within their range, such as the highest note only being a C on the trumpet on passing during the second trumpet solo in 'West End Blues'. Since Parker's music is for saxophone, these features are not often found in his music but ghost notes can be heard. Parker's music is also idiomatic for saxophone with the use of fast scalar passages, which are made easier to play with the key structure on a saxophone compared to a trumpet in Armstrong's music.