

# Dizzy Gillespie

Biography

## Biography

*John Birks "Dizzy" Gillespie, one of the greatest Jazz trumpeters of 20th century and one of the prime architects of the bebop movement in jazz, was born in Cheraw, South Carolina and died in Englewood, New Jersey.*

*Nicknamed "Dizzy" because of his zany on-stage antics, Gillespie, a brass virtuoso, set new standards for trumpet players with his innovative, "jolting rhythmic shifts and ceaseless harmonic explorations" on the instrument during the 1940's period, which ushered in a definitive change in American Jazz music from swing to bebop. The last of nine children, Gillespie was born into a family whose father, James, was a bricklayer, pianist and band leader: Dizzy's mother was named Lottie. Dizzy's father kept all the instruments from his band in the family home and so the future trumpet great was around trumpets, saxophones, guitars and his father's large upright piano (his father tore down one of the walls of the house to get the piano in ) most of his young life. James use to make all of his older children practice instruments but none of them cared for music. Dizzy's father died when he was ten and never heard his youngest son play trumpet, although he did get the chance to hear him banging around on the piano, because Dizzy started trying to play this instrument at a very early age.*

*In 1930, Gillespie tried learning how to play the trombone but his arms were too short to play it well. That same year he started playing a friend's trumpet and heard one night over the radio a broadcast of Roy Eldridge playing trumpet in Teddy Hill's Orchestra, that was playing at the Savoy Ballroom in New York City. Young Gillespie, then 13, loved Eldridge's playing and the entire band. From that day on, he dreamed of becoming a jazz musician.*

*In 1933, after graduating from Robert Smalls secondary school, Gillespie received a music scholarship to attend Laurinburg Institute, in North Carolina. He stayed there for two years, studying harmony and theory until his family moved to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1935. In Philadelphia, Gillespie began playing trumpet with local bands, learning all of his idol Eldridge's solos from records and radio broadcasts: it was in Philadelphia that he picked up his nickname of "Dizzy.". In 1937, "Dizzy" moved to New York and replaced Eldridge in Teddy Hill's Orchestra. After a couple of years Gillespie moved on to Cab Calloway's band in 1939.*

*In 1937, Gillespie met his future wife, Lorraine, a chorus dancer at the famed Apollo Theater: they were married in 1940 and remained together until his death. Gillespie worked with many bands during the early 1940's (Chick Webb, Fletcher Henderson, Benny Carter, "Fatha" Hines and Billy Eckstine's seminal band ) before teaming up with Charlie Parker in 1945. Their revolutionary band ushered in the bebop era and was one of the greatest small bands of the 20th century. An arranger and composer, Gillespie wrote some of the greatest jazz tunes of his era: songs such as "Groovin' High", "A Night in Tunisia" and "Manteca" are considered jazz classics today..*

*With his trumpet and its upturned, golden bell, goatee, black horn rim glasses and beret, Gillespie became a symbol of both jazz and a rebellious, independent spirit during the 1940's and 50's. His interest in Cuban and African music helped to introduce those music's to a mainstream American audience. When he died he was famous and beloved everywhere and had influenced entire generations of trumpet players all over the world who loved and emulated his playing and his always positive, upbeat, optimistic attitude.*

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