

Because the subjects of *Let's Get Lost* and *A Great Day in Harlem* speak for themselves, the filmmakers' greatest contributions to the projects are technical ones. These elements nonetheless enhance the films' dramatic efficacy. In the first documentary, photographs of trumpeter Chet Baker are almost as prominent as the live shots of him. The sweep of the camera across carefully arranged images vivifies the young Baker, while the loving, lingering shots of these collections render their subject a permanent icon of "star quality" and "charisma." Close-ups of the older Baker serve a similar purpose, though the visage they magnify and dignify is more wrinkled. From beams through a window to a gleaming trumpet and winking flashes behind bumper cars, the light around Baker symbolically—if superficially—elevates him as if he were indeed a "Greek god." The shadows that slice across the interviewees' faces, meanwhile, create a chiaroscuro effect. For Baker, these visual contrasts evoke his dichotomous character, which harbors a shrewd emotional manipulator beneath the casual facade.

One light/dark polarity that receives scant attention in this film is race. The most notable allusion to it comes when Baker and Ruth discuss the trumpeter's knockdown by several "black cats." When Ruth points out the tale's semi-artificiality, the race of those thugs seems an awfully convenient device. Yet that part may have been true, and no explicit prejudices radiate from Baker. He may even share a stereotypical trait with African Americans, namely the "ease" and "naturalness" of his musicianship. In Baker's case, that coolness simply augments his fame.

*A Great Day in Harlem* exalts its subjects with stillness, too. Like in *Lost*, much of its nostalgia comes from pictures, specifically *Esquire's* historic 1958 photo of dozens of jazz artists along with filmed moments and candids from some of the musicians themselves. *Harlem* also uses technical effects, including panning in-focus bubbles and red marks that highlight the figures in question. These kinetic elements both preserve the images and enliven the spirits of their subjects. Dissolves that overlap the pictures with the live persons are especially effective in linking past to present (1994).

As the interviewees reminisce about luminaries as diverse as Gene Krupa and Charles Mingus, it becomes clear that one distinction among them—race—is not an issue. This photo session, as well as *Harlem*'s interviews decades later, let jazz artists celebrate their achievements beyond the sociopolitical concerns that often dogged that field. Made during the safety of the post-civil rights era, both documentaries render the past as glossy as the photographs themselves. They are backwards dreams that, despite their sweetness, carry a twinge of sadness for the good things that could have been and the passing of the good things that were.