



The witty woman joined the Algonquin Round Table in 1919. Today, New Yorkers are celebrating her legacy in Jazz Age style.

By Tracy Walsh

Dorothy Parker's New York

DOROTHY PARKER, the quick-tongued wit who subscribed to undertakers' trade journals while editing *Vanity Fair* and, when informed that Calvin Coolidge had died, not-so-innocently asked, "How can they tell?" was the most acerbic icon of the Jazz Age. During Prohibition, when bartenders asked her what she'd be having, she's snap back, "Not much fun." Critic Alexander Woollcott called her "a blend of Little Nell and Lady Macbeth"—and he was her friend. Parker was the first female drama critic in New York, a top-notch satirist and one of the first contributors to the *New Yorker*. In other words, a Manhattanite par excellence. And the city has not forgotten her.

"Manhattan couldn't have existed without Dorothy Parker, and Dorothy Parker couldn't have existed without Manhattan," says Kevin Fitzpatrick, founder of the



(clockwise from top left) Alan Campbell, St. Clair McKelway, Russell Maloney, James Thurber, Dorothy Parker, Frank Case, Wolcott Gibbs and Fritz Foord

city's **Dorothy Parker Society** (dorothyparker.com). The society, which boasts some 3,000 members, hosts readings, parties, service events and tours year-round. And just as the Algonquin Round Table was a social phenomenon—a meeting of the minds over cocktails, if you will—the DPS has united people from all across the country who love the literature, music and spirit of the roaring '20s.

Fitzpatrick, who has written three books about Parker, leads tours of her Manhattan haunts. The tours start at the Algonquin Hotel, where the Round Table met and where Parker lived for a time. Regulars at "The Gonk" included George S. Kaufman, who discovered the Marx Brothers; Edna Ferber, who wrote *Showboat*; and Alexander Woollcott, the critic who greeted friends with his standard "Hello, repulsive."

Today, the Algonquin offers a marvelous opportunity to capture some of that 1920s magic. The Dorothy Parker Suite features a cache of photos and letters from the mordant wit, and the upstairs hallways are wallpapered with *New Yorker* cartoons. In the lobby/bar, where writers can still grab drinks at the Round Table, cocktail napkins come emblazoned with bon mots from Parker and her contemporary Robert Benchley.

Even better, the hotel's weekly events draw an extraordinarily quirky, well-read, 1920s-minded crowd that's eager to mingle. Take the Algonquin Salon, a no-cover cabaret held in the plush hotel lobby. It could be

a scene straight from 1928: Waiters scurry around delivering trays of martinis to men in suits and women with bobbed hair and jeweled tunics; a pianist tickles the ivories while a singer belts out a torch song.

Although the Algonquin Salon is not formally affiliated with the Dorothy Parker Society, it draws a similar crowd of wits, bon vivants and culture vultures. William Zeffiro, an officer of the DPS, is also a regular performer at the salon; his repertoire includes his original "Happy Birthday, Mrs. Parker" ("Happy birthday, Mrs. Parker/Thank you for the gloom/Your sweet scowl and calm derision/Brighten any room").

Zeffiro, like many participants of the NYC's 1920s revival, grew up in middle America on a steady diet of Dorothy Parker, Marx Brothers, Cole Porter and George Gershwin. (He "flipped" upon hearing "Rhapsody in Blue" at age 10, he recalls.) After a brief stint as a singing waiter in Florida, he moved to the big city in hopes of "becoming the next leading man on Broadway." Instead, he became a vocal coach and started work on a musical comedy about 1920s pop culture, complete with historically accurate references to trends like tent shows and "Radithor," the radium-laced water that was once a popular soft drink.

"You can't walk into The Algonquin without thinking of all those wits at the round table, getting bombed and one-upping each other," Zeffiro says. "You come to places like these, and you feel the spirit of the 1920s in your bones."

Zeffiro has attended no fewer than four Dorothy Parker tours, one of which ended with drinks at the legendary 21 Club, another

A QUIP STUDY

Dorothy Parker was one of the most quotable women of the 20th century. Here are some juicy bites:

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