"If I Want Something, It Just Seems to Happen": Miles Davis and the Evolution of Modern Jazz in Post World War II Society.

Jamison A. Johnson

Western Oregon University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.wou.edu/his

Part of the Social History Commons, and the United States History Commons

Recommended Citation


This Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of History at Digital Commons@WOU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Student Theses, Papers and Projects (History) by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@WOU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@wou.edu, kundas@mail.wou.edu, bakersc@mail.wou.edu.
"If I Want Something, It just Seems to Happen": Miles Davis and the Evolution of Modern Jazz in Post World War II Society.

Jamison A. Johnson
Senior Seminar, History 499

John Rector
Western Oregon University
June 3, 1999
Introduction

The Miles Davis phenomenon has always left critics, fans, and scholars motivated to explain what he is all about. Some say he is about music and jazz. Others claim that he is a reflection of Afro-America and his life reflects a social context. Actually, Davis existed on many different levels: an influential person in African American culture, an innovative artist and unique personality, a mentor, and a representative for his race. Davis was born in 1926 in a time of transition in American History. His family reared him during the prosperous twenties, the years of the Great Depression, and the period of World War II. This time period helps explain Davis, his character, and contributions. Davis shaped music, his audience, his friends, his race and the world throughout his life. Jazz fans and jazz historians agree that Davis was one of the most influential jazz musicians. His collaborative efforts with the best jazz musicians allowed him to be at the forefront of modern jazz from 1946-1991. However, among the choices of the tremendous bop musicians such as Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, and Thelonius Monk and later artists such as John Coltrane, Herbie Hancock, and Chick Corea, few jazz historians or jazz fans would cite Davis as being the leading example of modern jazz. Davis, however, deserves the recognition of being the most innovative and influential leader in this modern jazz era. His power to influence others, and his talent, can only be fully grasped by examining his background and personality, the social and historical context of his career, and his life as an African American.
Miles Davis: His Background, Social Context, and Place in History

The time period in which Davis grew up had an impact on his perceptions and attitudes that became an integral part of his personality. He was born in a time of crisis and social discontent. His background in the swing era of World War II had familiarized him with the progressions and sound of big bands. St. Louis was at the heart of the area that fostered early jazz in the American South.

On May 26, 1926 an event took place that changed America forever: Miles Dewey Davis III was born in Alton, Illinois. His father, Miles Dewey Davis II, was a dentist and oral surgeon as well as a prosperous landowner. His father and mother were not the typical black family. Most black families were not this wealthy and supportive of their children's talents. How many black families of that era owned a 300-acre estate with horses to ride, a cook, and a maid? How many black children received an allowance when they went away to school, if they were fortunate enough to pursue a higher education at all? Davis was most certainly born with a "silver spoon" in his mouth. His father was fortunate as well. Miles Davis II and his siblings avoided high school but received a college education. Miles II received three degrees from three separate colleges. His wife whom he married, Cleota Henry Davis, was a glamorous and stylish woman, who was talented and could play the violin and the piano. Cleota supported the NAACP and even had a relative who was their organization's secretary. Davis' father was a strong man with a different political outlook than his wife. He preferred Marcus Garvey's approach better.

Miles II was a pillar of the community that expected discipline from his family. Unfortunately, he also had a bad temper. All this seemed to have a big effect on his son Miles III. His father did not spank him when he caused trouble. Instead, the elder Miles expressed his anger verbally or, even more effectively, non-verbally through facial expressions or other forms of body language. Davis' mother, Miles III recalls, would
"whip the sh-t out of me at the drop of a hat. She was into whipping me so much that one time, when she couldn't do it because she was sick or something, she told my father to do it." Davis recalls that his father never had the heart to beat him, and instead took Miles III into a separate room and had him scream to convince his mother the father had done his job. Davis' family, because his parents had different outlooks and stances politically, fought constantly. His father's gambling and absence from the house created tension with his mother as well. Davis admits that he blamed his mother for most of the marital problems. This most likely had an impact on Davis' perception of women.

Davis began his musical journey as a trumpet player with Elwood Buchanan as his instructor at the Crispus Attucks School in East St. Louis in 1937. He continued his training at Lincoln Jr. High School, and on his thirteenth birthday, Davis received his own trumpet. By the time Davis graduated from Lincoln High School in 1943, he had performed in the school's concert and marching band and received first place awards as a member of the band groups that competed in the Illinois State High School Music Association Contests. Elwood Buchanan also encouraged the young Davis to try out for Eddie Randall's Blue Devils. While in this group, Tim Bradshaw offered Davis a job in his band to go on tour. Davis, with great disappointment, turned Bradshaw down because his mother would not let him play out of town until he had finished school.

The next year, Davis visited the Riviera Club on Delmar at Taylor Avenue. This was where he met Charlie "Bird" Parker, and Dizzy Gillespie. This club frequently featured other big names in the music business, like Duke Ellington, Count Basie, and Billy Eckstine. Parker and Gillespie asked Davis to sit in for a sick trumpet player. Davis became intrigued, and soon after this encounter, went to New York, under the pretext of studying music at the Julliard School of Music; He wanted to search for the great Parker and Gillespie.

In New York, however, Davis encountered a culture in transition. World War II was essentially over in 1945, and the Cold War was just beginning. By the 1950s,
televisions were in many Americans homes, so information and images were spreading faster. Many successful families were moving to the suburbs and buying various appliances being marketed to this new generation in America. Unfortunately, African Americans were left out of this prosperity, due to a persistence of racial oppression. Most African Americans lived beneath the poverty level, and they were unhappy with their status in America as a marginalized race. They couldn't access all the goods, services, and jobs that Anglo-Americans could, due to Jim Crow laws, poverty, and racial prejudice. The Supreme Court case Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka of 1954 was one example of this growing sense of unrest in this African American community. Progress was slow. Martin Luther King, Jr. and other African Americans emerged to lead the Civil Rights movement by the mid-1950s, and this attitude of activism was apparent in the black culture of New York, when Davis began his musical journey with Parker and Gillespie.

When Davis found Parker and Gillespie, they mentored him as a young player in the style of "bop." As a participant in this bop culture, Davis was also exposed to the drug scene. A few years later, after growing tired of the bop style championed by Parker and Gillespie, Davis created a nonet, a group of nine musicians, who worked together from 1948-1950 to create his first solo project, Birth of the Cool.

In 1949, when he went to Paris, Davis discovered what it was like to be treated as an equal human being. There he met Julliette Greco, a singer, and fell in love. In those moments, he recalled later, he had a greater passion for romance than he did for music. When he returned to America, he became depressed as he experienced the overwhelming American reality of racism, and the dissatisfaction with his relationship with Irene Birth, steered him towards heroin. He continued his struggle with heroin until 1954 when he grew tired of the degrading life of an addict. That year Davis made a big come back personally and musically with albums such as Walkin' and Bag's Groove. He also introduced to the jazz world his famous sound created with a stem-less Harmon mute: a
metallic and haunting sound vibrating a smoother and darker feel.\textsuperscript{23} The Harmon mute helped him to create a sound that represented his feelings of anger and sadness through his trumpet. This was especially helpful in expressing his frustration with discrimination and segregation.\textsuperscript{24}

The reality for Davis and other African Americans was that racial segregation had persisted since the origins of America, and one of the few opportunities that seemed to exist for African Americans that the white establishment accepted was entertainment.\textsuperscript{25} This can be seen through movies, television shows, radio shows, and records: Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, and others were undoubtedly a part of the entertainment industry well before the time of Davis. The music world provided African Americans with a voice that could freely express their roots without negative consequence.\textsuperscript{26} Events in the 1960s created the climate for change. The Vietnam War weakened America and captivated its people to protest social inadequacies. The protesting intensified from all races and genders and gave way to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and 1968.

These changes experienced in the 1950s-70s can be seen in music, especially jazz. The development from bop to fusion highlights the new progressive attitude. The aggressive and apparently angry style of bop can be paralleled with the anger of African Americans. The voice Davis presents in bop suggests the oppressed emotions within the black culture of America.\textsuperscript{27} The African and Latin influences in jazz were the product of an effort by musicians to integrate their roots into their music. This was especially true in the case of Gillespie. Davis' \textit{Sketches of Spain} also seems to accomplish this end. Although he was never a part of the Spanish culture, Davis seemed to capture the essence of this style of music as if he had been reared within it.\textsuperscript{28} The free jazz phenomenon explored total freedom. One could exist without the restrictions of key signature\textsuperscript{29} and a fixed time, rhythm, or tempo: this meant total musical freedom.\textsuperscript{30} Free jazz of Ornette Coleman and John Coltrane, as well as Miles Davis' 1960s groups, gave some African Americans a taste of freedom that society couldn't provide.
Davis was not Martin Luther King, Jr., but at times he expressed the frustrations and perspectives of his people. His opinions were not shared by all, such as his vulgar statements about white people and religion. Davis made one crucial statement during an interview with Alex Haley in 1962. He talked about how he had friends of all colors, but the people he did not like were the "prejudiced white people." According to Davis, the white audience expected the black entertainer to be bowing, smiling, and acting like clowns. In answer to a common white racist question, "Would you want your sister to marry a Negro?" he responded, "The Negro is always to blame if some white woman wants him. But it's alright that ever since slavery, white men been having Negro women." He told Haley that white people really don't know what "Negroes feel like." The lack of African Americans in the media and television, he said, upset them because black actors were not given equal opportunity to those jobs. Another point he made was "there was no upset about them restaurants not serving Negroes, until it was an African they turned away. You think every Negro in the country don't see what it says? It says that we been here 400 years, but it wasn't no mess until they put out an African that flew over here on a jet." The interview, being its first, represented a new era for Playboy. It was also significant because Davis' candid and controversial statements about racial discrimination and oppression represented the frustrations of African Americans. The editor's preface to this interview explains the situation in the context of the time period: racial integration was a new concept not well received by those who favored segregation. The preface also explained the significance of this article: the popular media usually avoided publishing the anger and frustration of black people until Playboy dared to break that mold. The article was so controversial that for several years thereafter, Playboy dared not identify its interviewer. Some of the points he made were eye opening for naive white Americans. He gave a situation to illustrate the double standard of racism, "If a white man robs a bank, it's just a man [that] robbed a bank. But if a Negro or Puerto Rican does it, it's them awful Negroes or Puerto Ricans." Davis also noted how Jim
Crow laws angered blacks. He added that he would not play anywhere that supported that kind of activity or mindset.37

There are other interviews where Davis spoke his mind on racial matters. During one of Davis' conversations, Davis observed that talk shows did not know how to treat black people and their body language38 because of their lack of exposure to this culture. He told one interviewer, "Dick Cavett and Johnny Carson don't know what to say to anybody black unless there's some black bitch on the show and she's all over them."39 He also made a similar statement, "It's so awkward for them [talk show/late night hosts] because they [only] know all the white facial expressions."40 Davis' outspoken nature, his contributions, and his place in history reflected his unique identity as an African American and a musician in a troubled world.

Davis was also troubled in his personal life. He married Francis Taylor41, Betty Mabry,42 and Cicely Tyson43 and had several girlfriends and flings during his life span. He had children, Cheryl Davis, Erin Davis, Gregory, and Miles IV, with his various wives and girlfriends. Davis, later in his career, suffered from sickle cell anemia and had to battle diabetes, pneumonia, strokes, and hip joint troubles. He also fought pain resulting from an automobile accident where he fractured both of his legs in 1972.44 He died at St. John's Hospital and Health Center in Santa Monica, California, in 1991, at age 65, from pneumonia, stroke, and respiratory failure.45

The Miles Davis' Personality: A Look into the Person of Miles Davis

Davis' background is the context for understanding the nature of his personality. Others perceived Davis, on the surface, as a flamboyant and mysterious artist with trendy clothes, fast luxurious cars, and an exotic living environment. They also recognized his curt and offensive attitude in his speech. His pre-fusion image of turning his back on his audiences, not acknowledging applause, and focusing only on his music remains vivid in
the minds of those who experienced Davis first hand. Dizzy Gillespie, however, assessed Davis as a tough talker whose music revealed his true self to be a shy, gentle, and loving persona. The sound of his voice became another notable characteristic. In 1956, Davis had an operation that removed a non-cancerous growth from his larynx, and the doctor told him to not yell or raise his voice. Unfortunately for Davis, he became torridly enraged over a proposed record deal that he damaged his voice permanently.

This event motivated Davis to avoid interaction with his audience. His voice problems seemed to re-inforce his shy and mysterious behavior. Davis argued he spoke with his music instead: "Look, man, all I am is a trumpet player. I can only do one thing-play my horn...I ain't no entertainer, and ain't trying to be one. I am one thing, a musician. Most of what's said about me is lies in the first place. Everything I do, I got a reason."

Davis' opinions about music stemmed from his highly discerning ear. For example, his Down Beat interviews and "blindfold tests" reveal his opinions when it comes to music. The "blind fold tests" are simply Down Beat interviews with an interviewer, which would play music for a featured musician and ask for his/her reaction. In his interviews, Davis does not hold back his opinions even for his friends. The consequences of Davis' criticism can be seen in the November 30, 1955 Down Beat, "Open letter to Miles Davis," where Charles Mingus responds to Davis' interview in the November 2, 1955 edition entitled, "Miles: A trumpeter in the midst of a big comeback makes a very frank appraisal of today's jazz scene." Davis stated that he "didn't like Max Roach-Clifford Brown's current group...they can go on stage by themselves." About Charlie Mingus and Teo Macero's writing for small groups, Davis says, "some of them are like tired modern pictures. Some of them are depressing. And Mingus can write better than that. 'The Mingus Fingers' he did for Linonel Hampton is one of the best big band records I ever heard, but he won't write like...that number anymore...he's using the wrong instrumentations...I heard one of Teo's works at Newport, but I don't remember it. And if I didn't remember it, I didn't like it." Mingus was obviously offended by Davis'
attacks on his friends and colleagues. Although Davis criticized people musically, he still respected musicians who were his friends. Miles Davis' autobiography is filled with positive comments about all the people he worked with. Davis reflected, "When you work with great musicians, they are always a part of you-people like Max Roach, Sonny Rollins, John Coltrane, Bird, Diz, Jack DeJonette, Philly Joe. The ones that are dead I miss a lot, especially as I grow older: Monk, Mingus, Freddie Webster, and Fat Girl [Fats Navarro]."

Davis was also preoccupied with fitness. Davis felt a black man had to be able to defend himself at any time in America. He also found fitness helped condition his lungs, which strengthened him as a musician. With this endurance gained from exercise, he could hold a particular posture, maintain what he considered a proper playing equilibrium, and have enough air to express himself better musically.

As a source of inspiration, Davis sought out influences in the arts. Davis was not only an influential jazz musician, but also an artist. His paintings were well known in the art world and sought after by galleries and art patrons, more from Davis' reputation for quality work than his fame as a musician. Davis began his visual art in 1982 when a stroke partially paralyzed his right hand and his doctor suggested that he draw to regain the strength in his motor skills. Much like his ideas about music, Davis had ideas for sketches in his head for years. His roots, boyhood, and imagination came out in these drawings. Soon the drawings became paintings, and Davis painted like he played his trumpet. As we come to be aware of Davis' talent, Davis' image conforms to more than just a musician or a painter, but a creative force. Nerlino has said Davis also liked to watch dance productions. In fact, his first wife, Frances Taylor, was a dancer in the Katherine Dunham company. His wife Cicely Tyson was an actor, and his wife Betty Mabry, along with his Parisian lover, Julliette Greco, were singers. These women undeniably had influenced Davis with their perspectives and preferences in the arts.
Many people admire Davis for his contributions to art and music, but some criticize him also. This is often the case with big celebrities in the "spot light." One of the most criticized aspects of Davis was his mistreatment of women. Eric Nisenson was both his biographer and a close friend of his for a few years. He explains that "women found [Davis] fascinating, charismatic, witty, and intelligent" as well as "unpredictable." He says that Davis grew frustrated with women because he could not understand them. To the women, he was a sweet and gentle man until he was somehow angered or frustrated. Davis would later admit that he would "get mad and hit them [women]." Davis first started this behavior when he recalled fighting with his wife, Frances: "that was the first time I had hit her-though it wouldn't be the last. Every time I hit her, I felt bad because a lot of it really was not her fault but had to do with me being tempermental and jealous. I mean, I never thought I was jealous until I met Frances." He recalled a similar incident with Cicely Tyson,

One time we argued about one friend in particular, and I just slapped the sh-t out of her. She called the cops and went down into the basement and was hiding there. When the police came, they asked me where she was. I said, 'she's around here someplace. Look down in the basement.' The cop looked in the basement and came back and said, 'Miles, nobody's down there but a woman, and she won't talk to me. She won't say nothing.' So I said, 'That's her, and she's doing the greatest acting job ever.' Then the cop said he understood-she didn't look like she was hurt or nothing. I said, 'Well, she ain't hurt bad; I just slapped her once.'

His boxing training at this point did not help matters much. When he was frustrated and/or under the influence of drugs like cocaine, he slapped women and verbally rebuked them, but at other times, his assaults became more serious. Eric Nisenson recalled an incident that resulted from Davis' cocaine-filled retirement years, "He [Davis] had broken Daisy's jaw, he [Davis] explained, and she was hospitalized...It was obvious that Miles felt bad about this incident." Although he seemed to feel remorse for his actions, the problems were never solved until much later in his life. From the evidence that can be seen in his background, with his parents fighting and his mother beating him, his family gave him a somewhat turbulent family model. The strength and boldness of his mother
and the power and wit of his father can both be arguably seen in Davis. Psychologists have cited Locke in terms of a person being a product of his/her environment. This is evident in both Davis the creative force and Davis the person.

Davis' early and later career held big struggles. At first, boredom and depression led to drugs like cocaine and heroin. Then, much later, he started to wear down physically. Despite his gains in health from constant exercising, Davis still suffered greatly from the effects of sickle-cell anemia. His heavy tobacco, drinking, and cocaine use progressed further in the early 1970s because of increasing pain. He, with the help of people such people as Cicely Tyson, overcame the obstacles and was able to return to music scene and give his fans more music.

*Miles Davis: His Innovations in Jazz*

The changes in the social world that were evident in New York in 1945 were also a dynamic setting for Davis' musical innovations. At the close of World War II, many industries were affected by the economic recession. One such industry that flourished during the war was the "swing" or "big band" industry. Its impact on the social life of the early 1940s is well engraved in the hard evidence of records, posters, photographs, newspapers, and other such mediums. In other words, swing became an important part of mainstream popular culture during the war. People needed a way to release anxiety, dance, and remind themselves of home and swing music provided that opportunity. The big bands were large and employed many musicians and other people who helped move their show from city to city. At the close of World War II, swing was no longer needed or desired in America, perhaps because people wanted to leave the war behind in their past.

Swing was a style of jazz music that followed a certain rhythm formula that a person could dance or sing to. It had a melody that people could hum after the show that
made it ubiquitous. Some great black musicians became tired of the swing and New Orleans styles they had developed decades earlier. It ceased to be something new, fresh, and black and it became something redundant, copied, and anglicized. Some musicians stepped forward and presented a new option: "bebop" or "bop." This new trend spread through New York, Chicago and on down the Mississippi River to cities such as St. Louis and New Orleans. The fathers of this new revolution of modern jazz, Charlie "Bird" Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, began a counter-revolution which would come to form the "modern jazz era." Davis began his journey in changing the jazz history forever by taking part in the "bop" movement. By learning what he could from Parker and Gillespie, as well as other musicians, he became schooled in this new style and was given the opportunity to grow in his own direction. After four years of playing with Parker and other musicians, he had the knowledge and training to not only lead his own band, but also to write and play with it as well. His experience with Parker in this band helped him to develop as a unique musician and form a new direction for jazz to grow. His expansion into new jazz styles makes Davis the most influential jazz musician of the latter half of the twentieth century.

Already a successful bop player in 1948, Davis forged a new direction atypical of bop or swing. His 1950 Birth of the Cool with Capital Records is a virtual tour guide to modern jazz. Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker were the fathers of modern jazz who force fed bebop to a swing-dominated world. Ironically, their agitated style of flurry, leaps, and endless streams of largely unmelodic music soon became as redundant to Davis, as swing had to them a decade earlier. Davis was more melodic, tone-based, and innovative concerning tonality and technical development, and he favored a smoother improvisational style. He chose to work with players who represented his vision. These musicians included white saxophonists such as Gerry Mulligan and Lee Konitz who, in turn, were influenced by saxophonist Lester Young of the Count Basie big band. Young's style reflected Davis' mentality, which focused on simple ideas, melodies, and a smooth
tone, unequalled during the swing era. Not surprisingly, Davis chose sax players who were influenced by Lester Young rather than the audacious playing style of Parker's disciples.77

The style of the Davis' nonet made its way through the jazz scene from many whom had contact with them. They began to start a large movement, especially on the West Coast, that created a new direction for jazz and jazz trumpeters.78 By forming the group and rehearsing with them, Davis not only laid down a template for other musicians to follow, but he became the leading figure to look to for new jazz trends. Before the release of the Birth of the Cool, people were already starting to play the new "cool" jazz music, which some musicians apparently leaked through the complex intertwining network of contacts in the jazz world. In addition, prior to the release of the "cool" album, Duke Ellington, the leader in swing and composition of big band music, sent one of his messengers to draft Davis into his orchestra. Although flattered and honored, Davis knew that the big band idiom would hamper his ability to be creative and innovative, and thus he declined the offer.79 Davis was more interested in doing something unique. This is why he originally came to New York from St. Louis, to play in Parker's band. Moreover, Davis, motivated to have his own voice in jazz, had further reason to make Birth of the Cool: to explore an avenue distinct from Parker, Gillespie, and Ellington. Musicians who wanted to tread new ground often chose to follow the direction Davis' trumpet was pointing. The revolution, however, was far from over.

In 1952, Horace Silver, a piano player, combined bop, gospel, rhythm-and-blues (R&B),80 and blues influences, forming a style which would later be known as "hard bop."81 Hard bop featured more melodic improvisation than bop, more drum activity, a darker, rougher, and heavier tone, and a start-and-stop feeling that caught listeners off guard. Hard bop's driving swing rhythm and increased piano voicings and rhythms also opened up new musical possibilities.82 Two years after its birth, Horace Silver and Art Blakey played this style together in different venues. In 1954, this style was forced
further into the jazz scene by trumpeter Clifford Brown (1930-1956) with Max Roach on drums and sideman Sonny Rollins. Davis had worked with Rollins and Roach since his bop days and periodically recorded with them. Silver, by contrast, collaborated with Davis much later beginning, in 1954. Davis then had experimented with hard bop by choosing to collaborate with Silver, Coltrane, and other hard bop performers. Clifford Brown, a bop musician of the Gillespie and Fats Navarro tradition, had died, thereby leaving a one-year gap and the question of who would carry the torch he sparked.

In 1955, Davis overcame his heroin addiction and picked up the slack left by Clifford Brown's death: He created the legendary Miles Davis Quintet. The Quintet featured talents like John Coltrane (one of hard bop's leading saxophonists and father figure), and a drummer named Philly Joe Jones, who played hard bop rhythm. Davis added an interesting, softer contrast to Coltrane's hard-driving intensity in his hard bop-like recordings Workin' (1955), Steamin' (1956), Relaxin' (1956), and Cookin' (1956). For Davis and other modern jazz musicians, hard bop was also a logical progression from cool and be-bop, because the blues, R&B, gospel, and rock-and-roll styles were beginning to seep into the mainstream at this time. Hard bop, therefore, was jazz music's answer for increased emotional intensity. Davis, in other words, already having become a legend, was again the carrier of new musical blood in the form of hard bop.

In 1959, only four years after the hard bop revolution, Davis began to progress from hard bop to what was later called "modal jazz." Modal jazz, like all the other subcategories of jazz, can be sometimes be hard to distinguish from the hard bop of previous years, because "modal jazz" derived from hard bop and the music scene of that time. Modal jazz, a mellower "cool" jazz, and hard bop, evolved from the traditional style of Charlie Parker. Musicians of this caliber are never satisfied when continually performing the same style of music; therefore, their musical craft is always in flux and ever evolving. These subcategories of modern jazz serve only as markers for clarification to those who want to understand the complex evolution of this music.
Modal jazz is very similar to hard bop except for the fact that it explores modes originally used by medieval Catholic monks in Europe several hundred years earlier during the medieval period, as well as exotic scales from India and the Middle East. The use of modes ranged from ionian, dorian, phrigian, mixolidian, aeolean, lydian, and locrian as well as exotic scales like the Spanish or Hungarian. They added new flavors and opened the door to greater musical possibilities. Kind of Blue gave musicians a template in which to deal with modes. This album had hard bop influences of Coltrane (tenor sax), Cannonball Adderly (alto sax), and Jimmy Cobb (drums). Critics and jazz fans alike consider this a big landmark album in jazz due to its impact. What was remarkable about the Kind of Blue session was that it was recorded with no rehearsing. Tapes were left to record, un-interrupted, what was played on the first take and the results were simply edited to create smooth transitions between tracks. This recording feat is remarkable, in terms of the caliber of musicianship, especially when compared with the music of other genres. This modal jazz, like previous modern jazz styles, pushed Davis further into the realm of legend.

Due to its loose nature, modal jazz eliminated more boundaries and created opportunities to expand the outer limits of Western based music: It evolved quickly into avant-garde or "free jazz." Free jazz was very atonal. In other words, it was not necessarily based around one particular key, note, or structure. It was, as the name implied, totally free. This musical anarchy represented the dissatisfaction with the framework of society and expressed a need for freedom from social constraints during the late 1950s and to the early 1960s. Since jazz and other musical genres always had some base or structure, this "free" music was not well embraced by the public as a whole. The man held responsible for this movement was saxophonist Ornette Coleman. In 1960, Coleman released Free Jazz. It was quite a shock to the jazz musicians who were used to playing within a set structure. It was also shocking to the listener, especially those who did not listen to jazz. It sometimes sounded like the musician just picked up his/her
instrument the day before he played it, a musician doing some warm up exercises, or a musician just playing around. Free jazz largely relied on raw emotions, grooves, sounds, and rhythms. Often times it was just a big jam session that could go anywhere. Typically, the first player starts off with something and the other musicians respond in some way to the idea presented. This open style can have as little structure as one needed for expression; moreover, different musicians could interpret it in different ways.

Davis' response to free jazz was important by this time, because the jazz world was accustomed to following Davis' driving force in terms of stylistic directions. In 1963, he put together a band that had the most open and elastic approach to loose and free music, but still maintained structure. The group consisted of keyboardist Herbie Hancock, saxophonist Wayne Shorter, bassist Ron Carter, and drummer Tony Williams. The rhythm section operated more as a single unit creating new possibilities for jazz that paralleled what Coleman was doing with his groups and those of his extreme "free jazz" followers. Davis' group created loose tempos, elastic meters, dramatic dynamics, ranging from unbearably loud to complete silence, and used various piano rhythms and chord patterns. The release of My Funny Valentine in 1964 illustrated this approach and became another important landmark of this group. In 1967, one of modal jazz and hard bop's leading advocates, John Coltrane, died due to his overwhelming drug addiction. This tragedy shifted the full attention of the jazz audience even more to Davis. His release of Sorcerer (1967) further demonstrated the group's innovation and incredible dynamics and freedom.

Davis, by responding to Ornette Coleman's complete lack of structure with examples of looser structures, not only provided a model for musicians desiring some structure, but saved jazz from losing its audience because people wanted music, like rock, that would satisfy their cravings as listeners. Most people wanted to connect with more simple and melodic folk-oriented music.

With Davis covering the modern jazz spectrum from one extreme to the other, there could be only one direction to go: incorporating mainstream rock with modern jazz,
forming "jazz-fusion." "Jazz-fusion" or "fusion" was just as it sounded; a molding of jazz with rock. Davis really thought jazz was in a rut, so it was his duty to revitalize the old blood and tradition of jazz with the new excitement and energy of rock music. In addition, Davis wanted to reach the young people listening to this genre. In 1968, he stated that he listened to Jimi Hendrix, James Brown, and Sly Stone to name just a few of his inspirations for "fusion."

The musicians with whom Davis recorded fusion tracks were from a bigger pool of fresh and innovative musicians than in previous years. For example, he worked with Bill Evans, Branford Marsalis, John Scofield, John McLaughlin, Joe Zawinul, and Keith Jarett, to name a few. He chose different combinations of people to reach a desired affect or end result during a recording session. As always, Davis did not like a lot of rehearsal because he wanted to insure the freshness of the recordings. It took a highly developed musician to keep up with the shifting and elusive modifications, minute-by-minute, with little or no rehearsal. Guitarist John McLaughlin, for example, described this in his comment published in *Guitar World* about the recording of the landmark jazz-fusion recording, *Bitches Brew*:

> [McLaughlin was amazed at] how quickly Miles was moving away from the classic conceptions of the quintet and acoustic jazz. He knew where he wanted it to go—without knowing how to get there. So he was following his instincts minute by minute. You felt like you were caught in a hurricane, watching him: He was looking for a good groove, wide open with great dynamics. He'd give you these very obscure instructions, like a Zen Master. I think he was basically trying to get us away from playing clichés, and he could pull stuff out of musicians they weren't even aware they had inside.

Davis embarked on technological explorations that reflected his stylistic changes. He experimented with electronic instruments and effects, like echo and the famous Hendrix wah-wah sound on albums like the 1970 *Bitches Brew*, which gave jazz a psychedelic rock sound. This opened up new possibilities in expression with dynamics, emotions, intensity, and sound quality. Another source of the dynamics on this recording were the intense interpersonal relationships Davis formed in the studio.
Ted Macero seemed to almost intentionally spite Davis during *Bitches Brew*. These two strong-minded individuals argued about the firing of Ted Macero's secretary.\(^\text{110}\) Davis insisted that Macero comply with his wishes of firing the secretary. Macero, stubbornly, resisted and went so far as to tell Davis, 'take you [Davis] and your f---ing trumpet and your f---ing trumpet, and your f---ing musicians, and get outa here!'\(^\text{111}\) Davis, fortunately did not walk out of the studio, but went to the recording booth and began recording one of his most emotionally intense recordings ever. The album is over ninety-three minutes long, is very abstract, chromatic, and often has a powerful rock beat. The overly generous amount of individual solo time was abandoned, but the main focus became Davis interacting with his orchestra.\(^\text{112}\)

Fusion was the last great innovation Davis would have for years, due to the factors of age and illness. He did leave one possible direction for jazz-fusion to go before he died in 1991, and that was the idea of combining jazz with the dance rhythms of hip hop and the lyrical accents of rap music on his last recording *Doo-Bop*. Today, this tradition can be seen in the current music scene in the 1990s with rap artists "The Fugees" album *The Score*, which features on one track a trumpet lick that has a Davis feel.

With the fashioning of bop, cool jazz, hard bop, modal jazz, and the presentation of a more structured alternative to "free" music, and jazz-rock fusion, Davis became a leader, legend, creator, and chief innovator in modern jazz, molding what we perceive today as contemporary jazz. Davis once said, "If I want something, it just seems to happen."\(^\text{113}\) It happened because he was the most influential jazz musician by the overwhelming evidence found in his innovative recordings, his performances, and his affect on his fellow jazz musicians,\(^\text{114}\) and his impact on his diverse audience that ranged from poor to rich and black to white.
Miles Davis: Reviews and Critique

Perhaps even more interesting than Davis' stylistic innovations were the reactions of his critics and audience. These reactions were evident in the reviews of his work. Davis' early career, up to Bitches Brew, had most critics and his audience praising him for his excellence and innovations. Down Beat, a prestigious jazz periodical, was generally consistent with what most critics were saying at the time Davis' music debuted. When the early Davis albums were released, the critics, for the most part, were pleased with the results. Davis' Collector's Items (1956) received a four-and-half-star rating (on a scale of five-stars) from Down Beat. Other albums he released the same year, such as Blue Moods (five-stars), All-Star Quintet/Sextet (four-stars), Musings of Miles (five-stars), and Miles Davis: The New Miles Davis Quintet (four-stars) were just as well received by Down Beat. Cookin' with the Miles Davis Quintet, 'Round About Midnight, and Miles Ahead, all released in 1957, received a five-star Down Beat rating that year. The release of Milestones and Relaxin' (both 1958) were received by Down Beat with four-star ratings. The modal jazz of 1959, represented by Kind of Blue, was well received in a concert review and received a five-star rating in the October 1, 1959 Down Beat. Davis' Workin' received five stars on Down Beat, March 17, 1960. Overall, the early Davis was exceptionally well received. His albums from 1960 up to Bitches Brew also earned similar ratings.

Bitches Brew was awarded five-stars by Down Beat and became the most successful jazz record of all time. Many hard core fans, however, felt let down. His image was concrete and sacrosanct for those fans. They and many admiring critics were not open to a drastic change in Davis' music. They resented him for using sound effects and the latest technology. They wanted to hold on to the classical and sophisticated Davis image. The informal and blurred reality of a psychedelic sound tainted that image. This group of fans idealized the old school of jazz. They froze modern jazz in time like
many had done to swing for several years. They wanted jazz to remain as it was, and their ideal was becoming more standard and classical in nature.\textsuperscript{118}

Davis, however, did not want to retire from music yet, and he continued his search for a change and new directions for jazz. Although he was considered part of the jazz genre, he began to consider himself as more of a trumpet player and a musician for whom labels and categories would not fit. He observed in a 1962 \textit{Playboy} interview, "That's what I hate about critics-how that always are comparing artists...always writing that one's better than another one...And if some critics just don't happen to like a man's style, they will knock the artist. That bugs the hell out of musicians. It's made some damn near mad enough to want to hang up their horns."\textsuperscript{119} This attitude is prevalent today with bands that create a sound that combines two or more musical styles. In the world of musical reality, all distinctions can and will be blurred by daring individuals who use music as a tool for expression of ideas. Davis was a pioneer who not only influenced jazz, but other musical genres and musicians. His ideas can be applied to any type of music and that is why he has such a big fan base.

Another source of criticism focused on Davis' background. He came from a well-to-do family. The opportunities he had been given through the wealth of his father was, obviously, uncommon for African Americans at that time. This may have made critics like Crouch think that Davis was not as valid as an artist because they must have thought that he, in order to have validity as a social commentator of African American life, had to live as a pauper in the ghetto.\textsuperscript{120} Crouch obviously feels that Davis' "street corner" opinions were out of place. It is true that Davis did not go from "rags to riches," but that does not detract from his art or music. A parallel of Crouch's clear attitude about the African American culture can be seen in the image of the modern rap persona, which set black musicians in a ghetto context, but Davis never claimed to be from the ghetto. He did have the perspective of what it is like to be broke and live in despair because he was a heroin addict who became so desperate that he robbed his friends for drugs. Davis
recalled an incident in 1950 when Clark Terry let him stay in his apartment as he was going through heroin withdrawals, "I...took everything I could get my hands on to carry." Racial prejudice, segregation, and experiencing police harassment and brutality have limited Davis. Therefore, he had the right, just as all Americans have the right, to speak his mind on such issues.

Stanley Crouch and other critics brought this up in their articles describing Davis, but they also include other criticisms as well. For example, Crouch said that he is "the most remarkable licker of moneyed boots in the music business, willing now to pimp himself as he once pimped women [for his heroin addiction in the early 50s]." Crouch's criticisms of Davis' fusion and beyond albums are also his focus. For example, Crouch said, "In a Silent Way, in 1969, long, maudlin, boasting, Davis' sound mostly lost among electronic instruments, was no more than droning wallpaper music."

Crouch also accuses Davis of "selling out." This is a frequent accusation against African Americans in the entertainment business. Davis' fusion period is indeed controversial. He did, in fact, use elements of the mainstream pop audience including Motown and the music of Jimi Hendrix. Why did he do this? Was it to get more money and album sales as critics like Stanley Crouch claim? Davis has stated otherwise. He claims that he wanted to reach as many people as he could through his music. Columbia provided the marketing opportunity to do what he loved, and he was paid well for it. He never believed in categories for music. He never wanted to be limited. The goal for him was freedom of expression, both musically and as an American. He used his success to his advantage and pushed his views. For example, he always spoke out against racism: "all Negroes want is to be free...in this country just like anyone else." His success was for himself as well, and he had a reason or idea behind everything. His central idea behind You're Under Arrest (1985) was a protest against police harassment and prejudice. He also explained that his use of other peoples' songs was so Warner Brothers could not control the publishing rights to his songs.
It is also notable that Crouch uses evidence of Davis' past to criticize his fusion music. This is the same Davis of the past who made all those great albums; the ones that Crouch praised. Events that happened before and during his most critically acclaimed period that cast a negative light on the character of Davis should be understood within the context of that past. Personal examples that reflect Davis' character in his later years would have seemed a more relevant choice because they reflect the changes in his music and approach.

Davis' "selling out," in other words, is only an opinion that Crouch and other critics built around weak arguments about his music. It is obvious that Crouch was biased before he had listened to Davis' new music. He praised the Davis of old and condemned the newer Davis. His strong and biased language was evident when he commented on his "amplification" where he stated that Davis' "sound [is] so decadent that it can no longer disguise the shriveling of its maker's soul." This clearly was not an objective voice to adequately judge his music. People who form an image of a musician or entertainer during a certain stage or development in his/her career often feel that image will always be characteristic of that entertainer.

Stanley Crouch's assertion that Davis contradicts himself is somewhat true. His outspoken view on racism helped his race, but his quotes about white people at times produced the opposite effect. Sometimes his comments had violent overtones within them, as mentioned before, while others had him praising white musicians. It is to his credit that he had white friends and hired white people in his various bands. Davis helped to provide an environment where music was the focus and the race of the musicians was not an issue. Davis' environment of racial equality reflected his attitude of how society should be.
The Jazz Community: The Perspective of Miles Davis, his Collaborators, and his Sidemen

While the perspective of critics and jazz fans is necessary for understanding the dimensions of Davis, understanding the jazz community is also essential. Davis, ever since he started playing gigs in St. Louis, was part of a network of musicians who worked together to further themselves and their art. There was an attitude of cooperation and collaboration where jazz musicians would share their ideas and mentor young players by giving them an opportunity to grow. Davis was given many breaks early in his career, and he was generous with his knowledge as well. Davis took under his wing legendary artists such as Tony Williams, John Coltrane, Herbie Hancock, Chick Corea, John Scofield, Sonny Rollins, Cannonball Adderley, Wayne Shorter, and John McLaughlin. Those people, in turn, influenced the musicians who later emerged to carry the jazz torch. Davis learned how to be a bandleader and was schooled in jazz during his tenure with Parker. When Parker became too intoxicated to lead the band, Davis would step in and take care of things. Davis had a natural talent for putting the right people together to work on a musical idea. His approach in his early career had been to be on stage when he needed to be and leave when he did not have to be there. The latter part of his career took on a whole different style that had his group worked together as a unit, and they created a living composition that sometimes was written moment-by-moment. In other words, he would suggest some ideas and let those ideas compose themselves by playing them out with his group in their entirety. In a sense, Davis was giving his musicians the room and freedom to develop individual voices to stretch out as far as they could go. As Coltrane said for Down Beat in 1960, "Miles' music gave me plenty of freedom." Chick Corea had this to say about Davis' group: "He was a spawning ground-a meeting place for great musicians. He also inspired the best within you. Spiritually, he helped me put my own stamp on myself. It was freedom of expression. Miles' approach just
brought out my desire for musical freedom. He did it. He lived it." Davis observed of his groups, "I have always felt that what the group does together is what makes music happen." He also challenged his young players and got them to play things they did not know. Spontaneity and improvisation make great musicians greater by these spontaneous circumstances. In addition, musicians with a "give-and-take [relationship]" formed more than just a bond based on monetary and professional gain.

It was typical for jazz musicians to play six nights a week in either nightclubs or concerts, and club operators and owners often hassled musicians; they treated them like "drunkards" and did what they could to make more money. Most jazz musicians liked clubs because of their personal nature, the unity they inspired in audiences and musicians, and their creative potential, due to the ambiance. Their jazz audiences were mixed races and ages, but the bulk of them were younger black males. These demographics also added a spirit of unity. Jazz provided a sense of freedom or utopia wherein both the listener and the musician could be free to be themselves and explore their full potential. This environment was important for a culture that segregated people for their color. African Americans, who were sometimes treated lower than animals and desperately needed an escape from racist constraints, felt like human beings playing jazz.

**Conclusion**

Davis was more than just a famous musician or African American who lived during the latter part of the 20th Century. He was a great man in history who influenced, and still does, both music and people of all races and ages. Davis made his mark in society by his larger-than-life character and his mystique that challenged people and society to grow. He was more than just a trendsetter. Davis was a creative force that gave all he had to his audience and musicians. As an innovator of original jazz styles, paintings, or personal image, Davis led his generation several times throughout his career.
Although a great man, his attraction to drugs weighed heavy in the way of personal flaws such as mistreatment of women, unfulfilled his duties to his family, and vulgarity. Davis, by creating a microenvironment of freedom and equality, however, served as an outlet for many musicians and listeners to flourish.

1 Although he died in 1991, his recordings and music continue to influence musicians and people.
2 Statements in this paper that are not cited are statements given as a result of my background in music, jazz, and history. As a listener, student, and player of jazz, I will formulate my own interpretations and perceptions of post-war jazz and its figures. I also have a deeper understanding of my subject due to my background as a trumpet player familiar with jazz. As a listener of all styles of music, I bring a perspective that is unique in comparison to those of generations past.
3 These are the bands that played swing were called. Swing was sometimes referred to as big band music.
4 Miles Davis II didn't get a high school education. He, according to Davis III, went directly into college.
6 Ibid., 14.
7 Miles III was unclear whether he was an Uncle or a Cousin of his mother's in his autobiography.
8 He did not like the NAACP.
9 Ibid., 22-23.
10 Ibid., 24.
11 Ibid., 255.
12 Ibid., 26.
13 Ibid., 27.
14 Buchanan was a crucial part of Miles Davis' musical development by helping him to develop his perception of what a good tone for trumpet was, a sound without vibrato, and pushed him to get involved further with music.
17 Carner, 245
18 Ibid., 245-6.
20 Drugs were common in a musician's world and the temptation always lingered.
21 The woman he had his first serious relationship with and his first child. For a more in depth understanding, see also Miles Davis' *Miles: The Autobiography* with Quincy Troupe.
22 Davis with Troupe, 26-7. See also, 96: This elaborates more on Gene Ammons introducing Miles to heroin and his cocaine habit. Miles Davis, ever since his joining of the Eckstine Band after his stay in Los Angeles, was involved with Cocaine as well. Miles Davis seemed to have a personality that predisposed him to drink, smoke, and when times got bad or he had pain, would abuse cocaine and heroin. Heroin was a habit that had plagued Davis mostly in the 1950s, though.
23 Carner, 246-7.
24 Davis wanted to be as expressive in his music as possible. A Davis listener can feel the mood created by his music. For emotional intensity, the sound of a Harmon mute is a valuable resource for musicians, especially those who are frustrated and need to vent their feelings.
25 Jobs and other opportunities were denied to African Americans since their arrival in colonial America. As a result, many African Americans were poor and had no opportunity to express or represent themselves.
26 The roots and ideas of African Americans expressed through music didn't confront racist whites in a way that was easily visible to them.
Note: This is an unwritten and understood fact that most African Americans are aware of.

24. Davis, 245.

29. Key signature or key is the tonal base or what the music is organized by. For example, the key of C major is organized around the pitches or notes of C, D, E, F, G, A, and B. The "C" note is the foundational root of the key and chord of this key are made by stacking the notes in 3rds. For example, The notes C, E, G make up the chord the key is based on.

30. This is the pace of the music.

31. An article in Jet, May 25, 1985, mentions that Davis claimed if he had one hour left to live, he'd spend it choking a white person. Also, in his autobiography, mentions white people as "f--king up everything" (362).

32. Davis, 411.

33. Haley, 7. Note: The particular incident he was referring to is unclear in this article.

34. This was included with the republished article edited by G. Barry Golson in The Playboy Interview.


37. Haley, 11.

38. They felt awkward around them.


40. Albertson, 193.


42. September, 1968.


45. Ibid., 4.

46. Miles Davis later in his career started to break this image by introducing numbers and musicians as well as acknowledging applause due to his new outlook on music and life as a seasoned musician.


48. Ibid., 202


50. Morgenstern, 18.

51. Note: This is one of the leading and most respected jazz journal at this time.

52. These "blind fold tests" had the interviewer play something to the jazz musician. That musician would then would be asked to respond to what he/she had listened to. There was no mentioning of the name or album of the artist previous to the interview.


56. Don DeMichel, "Miles Davis: And in This Corner, the Sidewalk Kid," Frank Alkyer, ed., Down Beat 60 Years of Jazz (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard Corp., 1995), 143-45.


58. Joanne Nerlino took charge over the work of Miles Davis the last two years of his life. She had traveled with him on the world tours in June 1990. Her relationship was two fold: she was both a friend and a dealer for his art.

59. Ibid., 51-2

60. his third marriage.
his second marriage.


64 Davis, 402.

65 Ibid., 228.


67 The name he had given the woman to protect her identity.


69 Davis, 402.


71 Carner, 245-53.

72 Tyson helped Davis starting during his retirement period as well as into his come back period in the 1980s.

73 Davis, 349.

74 Carner, 244-5.


76 Mark C. Gridley, Jazz Styles: History and Analysis (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1997), 179-80.


79 Davis, 120-21.

80 Note: R&B is considered a separate style from blues although they both can use the same chord progressions.

81 John Fordham, Jazz (New York: Dorling Kindrsley, 1993), 34.

This source includes a wealth of brief historical ground information organized chronologically; therefore, the same pages will be cited in further references for different information.

82 Gridley, 197-8.

83 A sideman is not the featured artist, but a supporting artist as a part of a band.

84 Fordham, 34-5.

85 Niesenson, 55, 65.

86 Chambers, 182.

87 Gridley, 224.

88 Fordham, 34-8.

89 This is an unwritten fact understood by innovative musicians.

90 These scales are not referred to as modes to avoid confusion.

91 Miles, like a true musician and innovator, fed his creativity with music that reflected these exotic sounds and tonal colors.

92 Gridley, 227.

93 This is very uncommon for musicians of any genre or time. Rock, pop, country, classical, and even many jazz musicians commonly rehearsed before recording or performing.


95 Fordham, 122.

96 Ibid., 43, 114.

97 They wanted to create music that compliment each other, not show off their talent.
As people have looked to Miles Davis for inspiration, so did people look to Coltrane for increasingly free and exotic hard bop and free jazz innovations. For those who wanted more of innovation, the only source they had only to look to was Miles Davis.

Ibid., 398

Our folk music, or music of the people, was becoming "pop," "top-40," or rock music. During World War II, it was swing. Jazz moved away from a folk music and progressed more into an art form until Miles Davis began his fusion projects.

Davis, 289.

Ibid., see text attached to photograph 90.

Davis, 323.

- Miles Davis didn't appear to like Macero's secretary.

Ibid., 312.


Davis, 323.

Whether it was through the style, sounds, and rhythms of music or Davis' personality, he impacted countless numbers of musicians. He not only influenced his fellow collaborators and sidemen, but also other musicians of his era and the future. For more in depth information, Mark C. Gridley, *Jazz Styles: History and Analysis*


Davis, 394.

Haley, 10.

This can be seen in Crouch's statements in his articles.

Davis, 136-7.


This time span started primarily with *Bitches Brew* and continued on till *Doo-Bop*.

Ibid.


Haley, 6.

Davis, 361-2.

Note: wanted to control what, when, and how his material was published.

Crouch, 30.

This began with his hiring of his nonet for *Birth of the Cool*


Carner, 245.

Davis, 366.

Vail, 221.


Palmer, 45.

Davis, 369.
Bob Beldon and John Ephland, "Miles... 'What Was That Note?' For The Record, Former Friends and Collaborators Celebrate the Legend Who Played It One Note at a time," *Down Beat*, December 1995, 19.


Ibid., 112


Ibid., 266-7.

Bibliography


Davis, Miles. Kind of Blue. Columbia Jazz compact disk.


Note: excerpts are from his autobiography written with Quincey Troupe.


Note: originally published in Down Beat, December 11, 1969.


Note: This was originally published as "The Playboy Panel: Jazz-Today and Tomorrow," in *Playboy*, February, 1964.
2, 1955

Note: originally published in *Down Beat*, November

Note: Originally Published as "In Search of Folk Roots," *Antaeus* in Autumn 1993.


"Miles Davis (interview)." *Musician*, July 1995.


"Miles Davis Excludes Two of His Children from His Will." *Jet*, November 11, 1991.


Note: Originally Published in *Down Beat*, October 1991.

Note: originally published in *Down Beat*, November 30, 1955


