From Birth to Death of Cool

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INTRODUCTION

"Miles Davis was a bad dude. He was one of the baddest men in jazz... baddest jazzman ever." - Alvin Jones.

Who is Alvin Jones? Alvin Jones is the man I just met outside of the Bernhard Center on Western Michigan University’s campus in Kalamzoo, MI. I have been laboring over my honors thesis for months now; I am approaching its completion and was at a loss for a way to start the piece. As Alvin Jones stumbled up to me panhandling for a cigarette I could not help but notice his physical similarity to Miles. He looked to be approaching 65, white whiskers sparsely covering his face and making appearances throughout his eyebrows. He was slender, taller than average, and had exaggerated facial features; large luminous eyes, long eyelashes and high cheekbones. Also, he reeked of alcohol. He asked for alms, and I complied upon the condition that he stay and talk for a moment. I asked him his name and where he was from and what he thought about Miles Davis; his answer gave my paper an introductory line and story. I told Alvin I was working on a paper devoted to Miles. He asked me for money. I felt it was time to go our separate ways, but as he shuffled towards downtown I called after him, "When was Miles at his baddest?" To which Alvin replied, "70 baby, you're too young, that's when he started. What we call... kickin' it." I was surprised for two reasons: I agreed with him wholeheartedly and he the elderly
man had just called me baby.

My name is Brandon Theriault and I am about to graduate from Western Michigan University with a degree in psychology and minor in human resource management, and this is my honor thesis. I know I am not supposed to introduce myself, but very rarely do I get the chance to write a paper that I am actually passionate about. I want to introduce myself because I am proud of what I am doing. What am I doing? I have spent four years devoting my life to the psychology and business programs, so why am I writing about a jazz musician? The answer escapes me; that is, until I put on any one of my favorite Miles albums, and then I hear it. I chose this thesis because it completely captivates me and I knew absolutely nothing about it. I have never been schooled in music theory, I have never taken a class relating in any way to jazz (and now, for funding reasons, may never be able to), and didn't know one thing about Miles's life. No, that isn't true, I did know his life, but it was theoretical knowledge based on what transference existed in his music and what others said about him. If I based my thoughts and feelings on Miles Davis based on what others, more specifically critics, said about him, I may have stopped listening after *Kind of Blue*.

I first heard the music of Miles when I would visit my uncle in his suburban neighborhood outside Detroit. He celebrates Miles's entire discography, a value I do not share, but we do
agree on when Miles was truly "kickin' it": 1965-1974.¹ The "adolescence and early manhood of cool" always grabbed me with its transitioning attitude and sea of creative performers assembled by Davis. His whole career is teeming with innovative ideas and outstanding sidemen, but my obsequious writ will favor the years he "kicked it". The thick to come is a slightly-below-the-surface biography of Miles; I have included what I think is important and omitted details that do not pertain to the goal I had in mind at the outset: to throw caution to the wind and celebrate the controversial years (1965-1974) of Miles Davis’s music. I have chosen pivotal albums to dig into, in which I will keep a more informal writing style that can convey my thoughts more clearly. My lack of ability to describe the music with a technical vocabulary will hopefully be overshadowed by the emotion extracted from key tracks. The lavender inserts are meant to encapsulate my personal perspective on his music; each will serve as a snapshot to convey what zeitgeist the album was created in and released to. The resulting understanding will assuredly enrich the listening experience and perhaps convert those that feel Miles Davis lost his cool in the 1960s. Furthermore, unlike my uncle, my affinity for his 1980s resurgence was victim to Miles's fleeting dignity. In other words, they command none of my attention and will therefore

¹ See the bolded date? I have bolded all of them so when you read through there’ll be a time-line staring at you for easy flip-through later on when reflecting on the fine points.
command little of my paper. Ok, Teo start rolling...
May 26, 1926, in Alton, Illinois, Cleota Henry Davis, born in 1880 Arkansas, and Miles Dewey Davis II, born 1902, welcomed their son, Miles Dewey Davis III, into the world. Commas aside, this birth would prove to change music several times over. Middle child between Dorothy, born in 1924, and Vernon, born 1929, Miles was the second child of the couple. He was the third male in the Davis line to have the surname Miles and middle name Dewey, the name given to each eldest son since the abolition of slavery. Miles II was a graduate of Northwestern College, which was very uncommon for a black man in 1920s America. The dental surgeon owned 200 acres in East St. Louis; horses, pedigree dogs, lakes and woods covered the property. Miles II’s status as a dental surgeon earned a real name for the family, or at least expanded the reputation his father built. Miles I was born to a free nation in 1869 and became the most renowned bookkeeper for whites in all of Arkansas. Miles I refused to let Miles II pursue any sort of career in music since the black musicians of his time only played in brothels, bars, or anywhere whites might pay them to play.2 Cleota was incredibly beautiful, and Miles’s (Miles III is not going to be necessary, there is one true Miles Davis) good looks, eccentric style, and artistic abilities were often

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attributed to her; his brains were more likely a paternal gift.

Miles II moved his family into an all white neighborhood, a rebellious yell common to all Davis men, much to the chagrin of the community. Cleota put forth much effort to lose her society-deemed "negroid" habits; her abandonment of heritage always struck a sour chord with Miles. Miles II was very aware of his social position as a black in the 1920s St. Louis; however, unlike his wife, he deeply valued his heritage. He taught Miles all he knew about their lineage and the struggles they endured. He also taught Miles the value of a buck, encouraging him to get a paper route when he was ten years old. The route quickly expanded due to customer satisfaction. Cleota was responsible for a large part of musical knowledge passed on to a young Miles. She was an accomplished violinist and piano player, although Miles was unaware of his mother’s piano skills until the mid-1950s. Miles said, "But [my mother] sat down one day and played some funky blues. Turned out my grandmother used to teach organ." 3Dorothy played piano as well, and Miles would often secretly spy on her during lessons. Although Miles was entranced by his sister’s playing, his mother always pushed Miles towards the violin. Cleota gave him his first taste in jazz by gifting to him two albums, one by Art Tatum the other Duke Ellington. Miles and his siblings would experience the Arkansas music scene

when they visited their grandparents. His family, namely Cleota’s brothers, introduced him to the blues, gospel, and work songs prevalent in the area. This music would influence him later in life, as well as provide the initial hook to get Miles attracted to the life of a musician. On his tenth birthday a friend of Miles II, Dr. Eubank, gave Miles his very first trumpet and he began lessons immediately. Although Cleota disapproved, for she was adamant in wanting Miles to pursue violin, Miles II felt trumpet represented a bond between his son and his heritage. This bond may have been why he ignored Cleota’s pleas and bought Miles a new trumpet for his 13th birthday. The trumpet was essential to jazz, while the violin was present in almost all “white-music”; the contrasting instruments had the potential to craft two very different versions of Miles. He was drawn to the trumpet; his attraction may have been indicative of his rebellion towards his all white neighborhood. Even at a young age Miles was stubborn and cynical. “I went to church... when I was about six I asked my mother why the church kept calling me a sinner when I hadn’t done anything wrong. When I didn’t get a good answer, I stopped going...” 4

Elwood Buchanan was Miles Davis’s first formal trumpet teacher. A locally well known trumpeter who taught many in the surrounding area, Buchanan taught him the technical aspects of

trumpeting as well as giving Miles insight into the folklore of jazz. When Miles began to play trumpet in school he was already standing out. He would almost always win in the who-can-hold-a-note-the-longest competitions his teacher would host. Buchanan told Miles not to play with vibrato, something which would become evident throughout Miles’s whole career. In Miles’s words, “The best [jazz musicians] were the black guys who played straight sounds.” In competitions Miles would never come in first place; although he was a superior musician, prejudiced judges held him back. The adversity he was forced to face would make him try that much harder. Clark Terry, a famous trumpeter, was introduced to Miles by Elwood. When Terry told Miles he liked his sound he enthralled him, and Miles soon started to try to imitate Terry in his playing. As time passed the two got very close and Terry started taking Miles to see concerts outside of his comfort zone. Since the underground jazz scene in St. Louis existed under the radar of those raised as privileged as Miles, this introduction provided him with great musical insights. Terry’s much lower socioeconomic status had him a regular in many of the underground clubs he would take Miles to, but it also meant he could not afford lessons from those superior enough to teach him. Since Miles was fortunate enough

to receive lessons he found himself able to trade his affluent knowledge of the trumpet for the wisdom of the older established, but still lower-class, jazz musicians.

What Clark Terry was to Miles Davis, Levi Maddison was to Clark Terry. Levi was taught by a man who played in the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra named Gustav. Climbing up the ranks of players in his hometown, Miles sought training from Gustav. One of the largest and most overlooked (by less informed fans) influences Gustav had on Miles was recommending to him the Heim mouthpiece his lips would be kissing the rest of his life. The Heim mouthpiece was a signature of St. Louis jazz. In 1942 Miles was under the tutelage of Gustav and Buchanan; it follows then that he was learning technique and theory as well as becoming deeply engrossed in the thick of jazz. Something also must be said here in regard to the influence Duke Brooks held on Miles. Duke’s tragic death cut short their time together, but in his death it would appear he passed on his natural ability to his protégé. With the advancement of American involvement in World War II, as many were to go off to war, a need came for trumpeters in the club scene. Miles, just a cheeky 16, was too young to enlist so he became more prominent in the jazz clubs he frequented. It was also around this time he became romantically involved with Irene Birth, by whom he would later father three children. Finally, at the Rhumboogie Room in St. Louis a saxophonist named
Sonny Stitt insisted Miles join his band on tour; his insistence stemming from his belief Miles was a little Charlie Parker. The pool of musicians was evaporating, and although Miles was very young, he had started to stand out as a bandleader. His impressive intellect was put to use in providing organization and direction to his bandmates. Miles once said: "I taught my sister mathematics. See, if I had a book, I could look at it and remember the whole page... I can remember anything, telephone numbers, addresses... That’s the reason I took care of bank payrolls: I could remember tabs and all that shit."6

Miles was growing tired of his birthplace and ready to move on. Where? He was ready for New York City, anxious to see if he could "make it," however he wasn’t allowed to leave until he graduated from high school. New York City soon came to him; it found him at the Club Riviera in St. Louis where Billy Eckstine was scheduled to play. Miles was first to arrive; he sat wide-eyed with his trumpet in hand, anticipation vibrating his entirety. Dizzy Gillespie was first to talk to Miles and asked him to sit in. Eckstine was unimpressed by the following session Miles played with Dizzy and Charlie Parker, but good nature stopped him from revealing this to Miles. The scent was waft and now Miles was going to follow it all the way to New York.

"Every form, even though it becomes traditional and finally becomes academic, originally came from someone’s spirit who created the form," said Gil Evans to the journal *International Musician* in 1972. It was the mid 1940s and Miles was about to be trained in spirit and academia. Cleota wanted Miles to go to Fisk University, yet Miles did not want to. Miles didn’t. He got his father’s permission to enter New York City’s Julliard School of Music. Miles’s new double-life was to begin in September of 1944. By day he was a student of one of the most prestigious music schools in the world, and by night he was a purveyor of New York City’s many jazz clubs. “I spent my first week in New York, and my first month’s allowance, looking for Charlie Parker,” said Miles Davis later in an interview in *Down Beat*. He arrived in a New York City in the middle of perhaps the most turbulent decade in the history of American music, when jazz itself was undergoing a radical transformation. Jazz, at the time, was a compilation of African and European music styles. The black musicians created a sound that was often stolen and slowed-down by whites. The black involvement in World War II was crucial, and its successes helped to give foundation to a stronger civil rights movement. Their involvement also opened up a lot of soldiers to black music: Bebop was on the scene.

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Many viewed bebop as foreign “un-music.” Louis Armstrong once referred to the genre as a “modern malice,” while many of his contemporaries saw the improvised melodies as a new hip sound. The World War II inspired bluesy sound filled many clubs in New York City while bebop split the population of the metropolis into the “hip” and the “unhip”. Miles eventually found Charlie Parker, also known interchangeably as “Bird,” at a club in Harlem. Soon, the respected, but still struggling, Parker moved in with Davis and the flat mates would learn from one another. Miles would take note of everything he heard while in the company of Charlie Parker and he would lay out his notes and practice as much as he could each day. Most of Miles’s time at Juilliard was spent on practicing things he had heard with Bird. Thelonious Monk would transcribe music for Miles to practice concurrently with Dizzy Gillespie’s encouragement toward his learning of melodic shapes on the piano. Miles did not smoke or drink. He was under the influence of some of the most prolific jazz artists in the world; his only addiction was to sound. Residing in the company he did, with the best of the best, Miles began to earn the respect of his peers. He grew bored with Juilliard, “All that shit, I already learned in St. Louis.”

In 1945 Miles met the legend Freddie Webster. He liked how Freddie

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did not play too many notes, and all the notes he did play were absolutely key. Miles loved Freddie’s sound and he would often try to mimic it, usually with great success.

May 4, 1945 was Miles’s first recording session. He was too nervous to solo, so he played background to his bandmates. “Now’s the Time” and “Billie’s Bounce” were the title tracks. Even when trying to blend, trying to conform, Miles Davis stuck out. His trumpet was yearning to be heard, his reserve would falter and his holy tone would sound. The Armageddon was nigh, the first trumpet was blown by Miles Davis, jazz was in for a change. Miles left Juilliard in the autumn of 1945 and went home to give his father an explanation. Being a reasonable and loving man, Miles II stood by his son’s decision and continued to support him emotionally and financially. November 26, 1945, Miles was to participate in what Savoy Record Company would call “the greatest session in modern jazz history.”¹⁰ Curly Russell, Max Roach, Sadie Hakim, Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, and little Miles Davis put to wax the first recording of bebop. In the midst of the exposure Miles was about to achieve he took Irene Birth, and two of his children, back to St. Louis. Benny Carter was in town and asked Miles to go west with him. As the Bird and Dizzy had just gone out to California, Miles took Benny’s offer.

He recorded with Charlie Parker soon thereafter in what was another completely unrehearsed jam session. In the spring of 1946, sitting in as third trumpeter for an unreleased album, Miles met Charles Mingus. He formed a musical bond with Mingus. When Miles headed home east and reunited with Buddy Eckstine, there was some controversy over his departure. Parker was in the hospital and Miles left him, putting a severe damper on his relationship with Charles Mingus as Mingus could not believe he would leave Parker behind. This may be related to the new habits straight-edge Miles Davis was picking up. Around this time he began experimenting with cocaine and heroin, two things the Bird was very familiar with. Since Charlie Parker held a certain amount of influence over Miles, it was no surprise Miles began to repeat some of his mentor's mistakes. His lapse of judgment would lead to a very difficult first half of the 1950s. He also became a borderline alcoholic and the time spent away from his family gave him the independence and freedom needed to cause complete collapse.

In 1946, while the Bird was at his height of innovation and success, Miles was by his side. Charlie would play diverse styles, switching time switching sound. While the rhythm section was playing a bluesy 2/4, Parker would play as if they were in 1/3. Max Roach would sometimes yell at the rhythm section not to follow Bird; his playing out of time would eventually yield
a more enriching cyclical rhythm. Charlie's experimentations and exploratory jam sessions pushed Miles to his limits and beyond, and he would carry the stylish process of creation close to the heart his whole career. Parker never talked about music outside of the session, and barely gave instructions inside. Miles would have to instruct the band on chord progression, as he was playing assistant director (not to be confused with assistant to the director). Even though Miles was one of the youngest players at the jam sessions, his instructions were always met with great respect. During his pseudoleadership of the band Miles was equally committed to learning from those he directed. When he asked Dizzy Gillespie, "Why is it that you can play so much higher?" Dizzy said "Because you can't hear up there. You hear in the middle register." Miles knew this to be true because he would, at times, be completely lost on what chords Dizzy was playing in. When he asked Dizzy what the chords were it turned out he was just playing an octave above. Even if he was a college drop-out Miles was always a student of all around him.

Charlie Parker had pushed music farther than anyone else in his time. He had a presence that elicited attention and esteem from his audience. When in his element, and off dope, no one could match Charlie. He was not an entertainer of the white man, he was a musician of the people. He always kept in touch with
his rich black roots. His demons played with his addictive nature; who knows what may have been created by a more disciplined Charlie Parker. An artist who stood out on and off the stage, the Bird soared above the other musicians of his time. With 1948 came the split of the Charlie Parker Quintet. Charlie’s addictions were resurfacing, causing him to be unpredictable. He was in high demand as a soloist and would often leave his band behind for a quick buck. Miles once said, “Bird makes you feel one foot high.” Leaving the Bird’s nest was a turning point in Miles’s career. They were going their separate ways, but Parker’s presence can be heard in Miles.

Miles returned to New York when bebop was still flying under the radar, nevertheless he grew tired of its range. The influences of Dizzy and Charlie were slowly fading away in their absence. Miles’s sound was to become more personal and revealing, lighter with excitement and deeper with emotion. The twelve songs he would record for Capitol Records over the next two years would become the recipe for the album The Birth of the Cool. New York City in the late 1940s was home to the reunion of Miles Davis and Gil Evans. Gil understood Miles and his understanding made him a close friend and trustworthy composer. Miles was ready to change suit, he felt his style was dull and was in need of an extreme makeover: jazz edition. He was on the lookout for new musicians to play with, to name a few Gerry Mulligan, Lee
Konitz, Joe Schulman. He even wrote to pianist John Lewis in Paris requesting him to compose a few songs and cross the pond. 1948 was ending and Miles was the band director at New York’s Royal Roost.

[BREAK: BIRTH OF THE COOL]\\(^{11}\)

From 1947 onwards, Miles’s music tended to be a critique of bebop, which he felt was unsinkable by non-musicians, and lacked certain essential emotional depth.\(^{12}\) He received disgruntled reviews from black musicians for featuring white musicians in his band. Miles often said he did not hire musicians based on color, but only the music they held within them. Important musicians of the time were starting to see Miles Davis as the incredible front man he was; Tadd Dameron, band leader Elliot Lawerence, and Eddie Condon issued great reviews on Miles’s behalf.

The Paris Fair of 1949 was headlined by Charlie Parker and Sidney Bechet. Miles and Tadd Dameron played at a venue opposite Charlie in a pick-up group featuring drummer Kenny Clarke and tenor saxophonist James Moody. Miles was treated like royalty in Paris, where the fans were a different breed than American audiences. In Europe the people would give the unconditional love and attention that is reminiscent of a domestic dog. Any

\(^{11}\) Go to the lavender page immediately following this one and then come back when you’ve finished reading the break. You’ll see a few more, please page hop accordingly.

\(^{12}\) Ian Carr, Miles Davis: The Definitive Biography (New York: Avalon, 1998) 56.
Aside from *Cool Boppin’*, all preceding Miles studio sessions were not under Miles’s formal leadership; they were, in fact, primarily under Charlie Parker. While the Bird’s albums were constantly comprised of incredible sounds and styles, Miles never stood out in the way he does here. I found myself wondering, “Where is Miles?” And when he would show up I was never left with the chilling goosebumps *Birth of the Cool* gives me. Even with a nonet you can always hear Miles’s horn as if it were the only instrument playing; the rest of the band just white noise in the background. Do not get me wrong, the group is fantastic, but this is the start of Miles becoming *the Miles Davis*: The best trumpet player in the world, the man who would redefine music time and again, the progressive monolith who defined *cool*, the most prolific jazz musician of all time.

I would not like to have seen the conception of cool. Nor the nine men, all of them the fathers, stuffed together in a small sweaty session delivering it. The *Birth of the Cool* took place on three dates between 1949 and 1950; a comprehensive drawing is included to show the dates, those involved, and composers/arrangers. (I made an excel spreadsheet to illustrate what I have there in the illustration, but it just did not convey the album in the same way my notes did.) The Miles Davis...
Band, as they were billed, first appeared as a nonet at the Royal Roost in the late summer of 1948. Back then, if you were approaching the Royal Roost you would see, just below the Miles Davis Band, "arrangements by Gerry Mulligan, Gil Evans, and John Lewis." At the time no one was doing this. You would only see Duke Ellginton's name, no Strayhorn hung below. Why did Miles do this? Perhaps, he did it to proclaim that his scores were part of the mystique and draw of his music.¹ Miles was signed to record 12 tracks for Capitol Records, the tracks that would all be released together on the LP Birth of the Cool in 1957. They were to be released on 78s (8 of them were released as pairings) giving all of them a time of about 3 minutes; the restriction in time was a hindrance but also contributed to a widely diverse album. The release obtained wide-spread critical acclaim, whilst also receiving sanctimonious reviews from the public.

Birth of the Cool needs to be included in my album breaks not because it is my favorite album, nor because it features any of my favorite tracks, but because it represents the end and the start of a new era. Birth gives insight into where jazz stood at the end of the 1940s and itself "birthed" the school of "West Coast Jazz" (babies havin' babies). The Mulligan and Carisi

arranged “Rocker” and “Israel” respectively, stood out as the real ear-catchers on the album. In addition, “Boplicity,” composed by Cleo Evans (actually Miles’s pseudonym, he used a take on his mother’s name) and arranged by Evans, was a real crowd favorite. In a 1953 interview with Down Beat Miles said it was his own favorite because of Gil’s arrangement of the track. The Birth of the Cool is so important because it is the true unleashing of Miles into the wild. The word cool is synonymous with Miles’s career, although you’ll see I mark cool’s decline and eventual death starting somewhere in 1974 rather than the end of his career.

Darn that dream
I dream each night
You say you love me and hold me tight
But when I awake and you’re out of sight
Oh, darn that dream

Darn your lips and darn your eyes
They lift me high above the moonlit sky
Then I tumble out of paradise
Oh, darn that dream

Darn that one track mind of mine
It can’t understand that you don’t care
Just to change the mood I’m in
Id welcome a nice old nightmare

Darn that dream
And bless it too
Without that dream I never have you
But it haunts me and it wont come true

Oh, darn that dream
new material issued was praised and admired, yet Miles felt it was too easy. The American audience was more like the judgmental housecat, whose attention and admiration you had to earn and keep. He was plagued by reporters, hunted by fans, and he enjoyed every minute of it. Miles had achieved the status of an international celebrity and was completely unaware what this meant until he arrived in Paris. He met Pablo Picasso and Jean-Paul Sartre, as well as singer Juiliette Greco with whom he would have a long-lasting love affair. The excitement of Paris can be seen in Miles's recordings completed there. "Crazy Rhythm" and "All the things you are" were wildly powerful and aggressive.

He came back to America and lusted after the sensational lifestyle that was bestowed upon him in Paris. He also fell deep into addiction: "I got hooked after I came back from the Paris Jazz Festival. I got bored and was around cats that were hung. So I wound up with a habit that took me four years to break."¹³ Whether it was the excitement of Paris or the enabling New York City, the sister cities turned the straight-edge Miles Davis into an amoral addict. He even has admitted to pimping during these times, selling out the women that cared for him. "When I was using dope, I would take bitches money," said Miles of his early 1950s.¹⁴ He neglected his family, Irene and the two

children, leaving them in the care of Betty Carter. On tour he was arrested on suspicion of being a heroin addict. The news shocked many and made it increasingly strenuous to find work, for no club owner or record producer wanted to hire the inglorious user. Leonard Feather wrote an article in the 1952 edition of *Melody Maker* remarking on the stagnation of Miles’s work since 1950 and drew attention to the success of his onetime imitators. He did manage to record a few of his own compositions, “Compulsion” and “Serpent’s Tooth”, as well as Thelonious Monk’s ballad “Round Midnight” in January of 1953. The session is infamous for its many errors and breaks in cohesion, a reflection of Miles’s personality at the time. He hit rock bottom when staying with old friend Clark Terry. One day when Terry returned home expecting to find Miles ready to go out, he found his house looted. No doubt it was Miles’s desperate attempt to collect drug money. Miles tried to elicit the guiding hand of psychoanalysis to kick his addiction. The white-man’s exhausting ineffective approach to psychology didn’t have the results he hoped for; Miles decided to quit cold turkey. “I made up my mind; I was getting off the dope. I was sick and tired of it... I laid down and stared at the ceiling for twelve days. I was kicking it the hard way, it was like having a bad case of the flu, only worse. I lay in cold sweat. My nose and eyes Ran. I threw up everything I tried to eat. My pores opened up and I smelled like
chicken soup. Then it was over."¹⁵ It takes a hell of a man to quit heroin without help, but Davis was a hell of a man. He focused on heroes like Sugar Ray Robinson and Jack Johnson to give him the strength to quit. Miles traveled to the limits both physically and psychologically during his four years of addiction.¹⁶ Like a bone mended, he was now stronger than ever.

In 1954 Miles Davis had kicked addiction, he began to exercise fanatically and be very careful about what he ate. He had always been a really big fan of boxing and was getting to the gym to exercise. "There is really some connection between the boxing and his way of playing. He’d start throwing and... block, fake, jab and anything else really. Jazz is about the speed, the inns for different schools."¹⁷ From this point to 1960 Miles went on a recording rampage, yielding a period of unrivaled creativity and unmatched talent that would make Miles Davis a name for the history books (as well as honors theses). Bebop was way out of the picture and a new band inspired Miles to create something new. Pianist Horace Silver, bassist Percy Heath, and drummers Art Blakey and Kenny Clarke fueled Miles’s imagination and played into his antics. Horace Silver remembers a particularly tough session in which everyone was a little off.

¹⁵ Ebony Jan. 1961
Before tempers flared out of control Miles told the producer to turn off all the lights in the studio. Miles took off his shoes and lead the band in to play, the environmental shift invigorated the band and they recorded four tracks, including the title track, for the album *Blue Haze*.

March 12, 1955 marked the death of Charlie Parker. He was 34 years old. Red Rodney said of his death, "...he died at the right time. I don’t think he had anything more to say." His early death was the result of debilitating self-destruction; history often shows musical genius and fame come with a grave price. Like Kurt Cobain, Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, etc. (biographically and musically) the Bird lived life too close to the edge to last too long.

Miles, back in the good graces of the public, was voted favorite trumpeter in a 1955 poll conducted by *Down Beat*. He spent the summer of 1955 recording with various quartets, quintets, and sextets, some to mediocrity and some to great success. The year has him featured in many super-groups, particularly one short-lived quintet comprised of jazz legends including: Charles Mingus, trombonist Britt Woodman, Drummer Elvin James, and vibraphone playing Teddy Charles. "Nature Boy" and "Easy Livin" made Blue Moods a memorable album with the deeper bass they achieved and Wilson’s incredible arrangement. It was early in 1956 that Miles underwent an operation on his
larynx, failed to obey his doctor's instructions to speak low, and permanently destroyed his voice box. The result was the crunchy, smokey, late-night-radio-host voice so many have imitated when quoting Miles.

Leonard Feather had developed a test of jazz knowledge as a regular article in *Down Beat*. The test consisted of a blindfolded participant listening to tracks of popular jazz artists, and some more obscure ones, and then the participant would try to identify the artists and rate them. In September of 1957 it was Miles's turn to try his luck; he correctly identified 8 tracks out of 9. He even identified many of the band members for each song. He gave both Louis Armstrong and Bobby Hackett the highest rating of 5 stars. When Leonard played Duke Ellington's "Stormy Weather" Miles said, "I think all the musicians should get together one certain day and get down on their knees and thank Duke... and Charlie Parker and Diz,,,," He must have said this in realization that 5 stars was not enough for the master track of Duke.18

Around his September quiz Miles was on his way to creating the Miles Davis Quintet. On drums was Philly Joe Jones, a player that possessed the fire Miles wanted, a force of nature with unparalleled energy. From Detroit came Paul Chambers on the bass. On piano Miles looked for someone who could balance rhythm and

delicacy, and for this position he chose Red Garland. Perhaps
the most important addition was Miles’s draft of a man the same
age as Miles himself, saxophonist John Coltrane. He had no
significant recordings under his belt, but he came highly
recommended to Miles by his band; it was Davis’s trust in his
band that lead to one of the most stupendous partnerships in
jazz history. At first people complained about some of Miles’s
choices, stating he needed to get rid of Jones and Coltrane.
Miles knew what he wanted and he stuck to his guns. The New Miles
Davis Quintet (or MD5 in honor of the Detroit rock group) was
to release 5 albums over the next year and a half. *Cookin’,
Workin’, Steamin’* and *Relaxin’* all receive immense critical
acclaim. The group would often use the first track recording
on each song; Miles was widely known as a one-take performer.
He felt the first take was always home to the best solos, as
they would arrive and depart with spontaneity and would not be
filled with the angst typically seen in retakes. In most of these
albums you can hear the slight influence of Chicago’s Ahmad
Jamal. Miles loved his music; he would make the trip to the windy
city just to see him. All the way to the early 1970s he would
take guests to get a look at the jazz artist. All of the “in’”
recordings were released by Prestige records, whose signing of
the MD5 saved their company from an uneventful year. The MD5
were so in tune with each other it seemed destiny that they met
under the microphone. The three main soloists differed greatly in style, still their play met. It met, quite frequently, on the great beyond. Emotion would run rampant in a variety of forms. Sitting down and listening one can imagine the great friendships at play through the voices of their instruments. As if one were watching a movie, deep in their imagination, of a coming of age story including juvenile friendships leading into manhood; great measure can be taken in following these musicians mature into a state of transcendental glory.

Miles’s burgeoning world-wide fame was based on his skills as a soloist and not on his divinity in band leading and building. One week after the MD5’s last recording session with Prestige Miles was off to Paris, the birthplace of his addiction. This time a conditioned disciplined artist was welcomed with open arms into the Parisian scene with great reverence and anticipation. At a musician hangout, Club St. Germain, Miles reluctantly gave several interviews. He told English writer Alun Morgan “He had to get home as soon as possible ‘I got four guys depending on me back there... the best rhythm section in the world. Philly Joe Jones is great and you know that Coltrane is the best since [Charlie Parker].’”19 Coltrane, deep into his (what seems to be a musician’s rite of passage) addictions, left the Miles

Davis Quintet in 1956. It is speculated by some that Miles gave Coltrane an ultimatum thinking he would quit the drugs; if so, Trane’s choice was evident. Sonny Rollins filled in for some time, but in the spring of 1957 the quintet disbanded altogether. Miles also announced he was packing up his horn, he was earning 700 dollars a night and saw it time for quits! He was tired from the intensity of the preceding 18 months. He wanted time for rejuvenation both physically and musically. He couldn’t separate himself completely, he was still writing music, sort of. Miles would communicate any thoughts he had to Gil Evans, who almost needed no instruction from him; a telepathic link existed between the two. When Evans would put the ideas to paper Miles would be astounded to see his exact thought in a tangible form. The orchestral album Miles Ahead was cut in 1957, completely created through Davis/Evans collaborations. The bond the two held gave the composer/soloist working relationship a natural overhaul. As Miles helped in the shaping of Gil’s works his solos, trumpet or flugelhorn, would come to him as if Evans were sitting on his shoulder giving him a nod of approval or shrug of dissatisfaction. Dizzy Gillespie was so enthralled by the album he wore out his copy two weeks after Miles gave it to him; as he was completely taken, he met Miles to get another copy immediately. Columbia was so excited about its release it issued a 45 rpm single featuring “The Maids of Cadiz” and “Blues for
Pablo.” Now Miles was 31 years old, cookin’ with cornstarch, relaxin’ when he wanted, workin’ hard in the gym and steamin’ for the ladies; he had it all.

In 1957 Miles Davis won every prestigious jazz award he could have dreamed of one day getting: The *Metronome* and *Playboy* polls, *Muziek Express* (Holland), *Jazz Echo* (Germany), *Jazz Hot* (France), *Melody Maker* (England), as well as the “L’Oscar du Disque de L’Academie du Jazz” in France (their Grammy equivalent) for *Miles Ahead*. The *first month of 1958* edition of *Time Magazine* had a feature on Miles that included his rise to fame and a full page picture. He was unsure of what to do next. When an offer was made for him to return to Paris he took it. Louis Maille was in the process of completing his film *L’Ascenseur pour L’Echafaud* and, being a huge fan, asked Miles to record the background music, which Miles did in two sessions after seeing the movie only once.

Returning yet again from Paris, Miles was on the hunt for musicians to play in his new sextet. John Coltrane had kicked his habit and had been studying with Thelonius Monk in the same manner Miles had in his early life; everyday learning a little more and getting his skills up to snuff. Cannonball Adderly had been playing with Miles and he kept on doing so, bringing his alto sax into the mix. Chambers, Garland, and Jones also rejoined Miles for the sextet’s incredible line-up. Cannonball was once
recorded reminiscing about times he spent with the sextet. He said Coltrane would teach his chords while Miles was concurrently teaching him the true nature of music. Cannonball went on saying “...when it was necessary at times to change the style somewhat, Miles did it so subtly that no one knew it.”

Miles held Cannonball and Coltrane in such high regard that in 1958 he honored both by acting as a sideman on their solo albums, *Something Else* and *Legrand Jazz* respectively. Miles’s recording sessions were becoming few and far between. While working on his new album he knew he was a hot commodity. He also knew scarcity breeds wealth. And as he was recording sporadically he had time to play many concerts. He was earning over one thousand dollars a night, and he was very strict in handling his money. His eccentricities in dress and demeanor were becoming things of legend; Miles was becoming an cultural icon.

The 1958 album *Milestones* is yet another turning point in his career (he should be dizzy by now). He creates duels between Adderly and Coltrane, he leaves his mute behind, and he produces extraordinary unhindered solos. In the title track Miles lets his trumpet sing for the first time in awhile. It was a sign of real confidence in the self-actualized musician, although confidence never seemed an issue. Miles wasn’t one to doubt his own musical ability, and would surround himself with others that

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replicated and reciprocated this feeling. Frequently Miles would disappear in the middle of a performance to let the band learn to rely on their own strengths to carry the tunes. He kept himself in a stylized “manliness” to evoke the same in those around him; those who would last, became good friends. *Porgy and Bess*, a recording of George Gershwin’s opera, was the perfect follow-up to *Milestones*. Gershwin’s opera’s deep orchestral sounds lead by the voice of the triumphant trumpet (or flugelhorn) of Miles made this one of his most complex albums. He looked back on it later as the hardest album he had recorded.

[BREAK: KIND OF BLUE]

While musician Joaquin Rodrigo was recording his album *Concierto de Aranjuez* he was surely unaware that he would be responsible for Miles’s new experiment with music. He, after visiting the album over and over and over again, had to ring Gil Evans with some new flamenco driver songs. It took 15 trips to the studio to produce the masterpiece *Sketches of Spain*. The endorsement of Teo Macero and liberties given to him by Columbia combined to actualize an album of fluid movements and imperfect perfection. “Saeta” and “Solea” recite a sentimental melding of the musicians, internal call and response operating outside of the traditional sense of the word. The interaction is synchronously obvious and hidden. Miles spoke and the orchestra whispered.
"That will always be my kind of music, man. I play Kind of Blue everyday- it’s my orange juice"
-Quincy Jones¹

"For slow action, I put on Kind of Blue" - Anthony Kiedis of Red Hot Chili Peppers when asked for his favorite make-out music.²

"... the trance-like atmosphere it created, [Kind of Blue] is like sexual wallpaper... Barry White of its time."
-Donald Fagen of Steely Dan³

Breakfast drink, smooching soundtrack, or baby making music, Kind of Blue has made an impression on people the world over, musicians, non-musicians, and critics alike. “I had a record player in my car, you should’ve seen it. When I moved to Florida I listened to Kind of Blue the whole way down. It was what was playing when I met your uncle.”-Jeanne Gentile (my aunt). It has been almost 50 years since the recording sessions that produced Kind of Blue took place, on March 2 and April 22, 1959. My mother was just 5 years old and my father not yet born when the album was released August 17 of the same year. This album has been imprinted into my aural memory in my 21 years and will stay there forever (which may not be too long if my mother sees I have disclosed her age). In the same regard as Birth of the Cool defined a turning point in jazz, Kind of Blue signaled another "right" turn. The album marks the graphical

²Ibid.
³Ibid.
crescent of hip, the apex of the all encompassing artistic awe held by so many in the early 1960s. Jon Scofield recalled its aura during his times at Berklee School of Music: "[I was] hanging out at this bass player's apartment [in Boston] and they didn't have Kind of Blue. So at two in the morning he said he'd just go to the neighbors and ask for their copy, not knowing the people, assuming they'd have it. And they did. It was like Sergeant Pepper!" 

30 Street Studio welcomed Miles Davis on trumpet, Bill Evans on piano ("Freddie Freeloader" features Wynton Kelly), John Coltrane on tenor sax, Cannonball Adderly on alto sax, Paul Chambers on bass, Jimmy Cobb on drums, and Teo Macero recording. "[30 St.] had something you don't find in today's studios..." said Sony VP Mike Berniker, he went on to say, "There wasn't any metal in there. There was a correspondence between the sounds of the strings and other instruments and the sound of the room because of the wooden surfaces." 5 5 tracks, and one bonus alternate take of "Flamenco Sketches", were recorded over two days to make an album that would stand to sell over four million copies and be ranked number 12 on Rolling Stone's 500 greatest albums of all time.6 So what? January 29, 1959, Disney releases Sleeping

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4 Ashley Kahn, Kind of Blue: The Making of the Miles Davis Masterpiece, (Cambridge: Da Capo PrIbid.ess, 2001) 78.
5 Ibid.
6 "Gold and Platinum search of Kind of Blue." RIAA database.

"So What" Oh that bass! Paul Chambers must have known he “caught the big one” at his first experimental pluck, when fishing for the soulfully melodic bass that hooks the listener at the start of the track. After a few bars pass, Bill Evans entices the rest of the band with challenging chords evoking the response “So what?” Upon repeating the ambiguous rebuttal several times further explanation is given by Miles. An impeccably placed crash by Jimmy Cobb gives way to one of the greatest trumpet solos in history. Oh that crash! Shivers shake my spine each time I hear it. Miles plays so heavy; a simplistic exaggeration of sorts coolly tells a story soooo right. Coltrane’s fingers operate as if he were born sax-in-hand, Oh that Coltrane! Cannonball steps in to devastate while Cobb, Evans, and Chambers float in the background. “So what?” they repeat when the brass has had its say. Evans’s solo reminds us why he’s a legend just before Paul Chambers speaks up to remind us where the song started. It is astounding what change Miles will go through in the next ten years; the 1960s are his most important decade of transition and prosperity. Dum doo, so what?

1960 had arrived. A new decade that would see many changes in Miles. Davis was getting older but showing no signs of fatigue or staleness in his art. He was on top of the world looking straight up. It was near this time John Coltrane had decided to leave the bird’s nest, just as Miles had left the Bird’s nest to create a name of his own. It was a heavy blow to Miles, the self-contained introspect, who announced Coltrane’s departure at their last gig together; it was a seldom seen sign of appreciation from a forlorn Miles. He did not record much for some time; he lived in New York City, and he recorded his famous Carnegie Hall performance. Joint pain was becoming a terrible constant in Miles’s life, and he found himself abusing painkillers. He also met up with old foes alcohol and cocaine. He was growing tired of the race questions that followed him from interview to interview. He became disenchanted and lewd to the many out of his favor. Once he said “I’d rather have someone curse me out than ignore me.”

Despite all the drama in Miles’s personal life, his musical urges needed an outlet. He started recruiting a new band. Davis drafted a group of young first-round picks that could satiate his hunger to hear new approaches. Drummer Tony Williams (age 17), bassist Ron Carter (age 26) and the twenty-three year old watermelon pianist Herbie Hancock filled the void. The

exceptionally young bucks were called up to the pros, and after only 3 days they were in the studio. They did not name the resulting album one, two, three, or even five steps, *Seven Steps to Heaven* was a transitional album conceived from two sessions. The *May* session featured the new quintet (George Coleman on tenor saxophone) and the new members mentioned 4 sentences ago while the *April* session offered Frank Butler on drums and Victor Feldman on piano. The album is schizophrenic, (a descriptive term used first by author Ian Carr that I had to borrow), in that two coasts and two eras were competing behind the scenes. Williams V. Butler and Feldman V. Hancock were two very uneven matches; out with the old and in with the new had an odd effect on the music. Both Hancock and Williams would make wonderful music with Miles but I feel in this case you can really hear the first-timer jitters. At first they played within the limits of their predecessors, but soon under the guise of George Coleman’s sax solos, their identities became clear. 1963! The line between rhythm and solo was punching out, the free-range session of varying influences was punching in. The “Sam and Ralph” relationship seemed to irk many clinging to the traditional jazz properties. Miles never was one to care about what others thought. The band’s progression can be clearly heard in the five performances released between 1963 and 1965. At the end of the studio session hiatus, ESP was dropped.
July 16, 1967 will forever be remembered as the day John Coltrane died. And so it goes. No attention will be given to Coltrane to save this biography from a tangent of uncommon proportion. Now Miles was a 41 year old grandfather, struggling with loss and on the brink of production. He viewed creativity differently than most. Miles seemed to view creativity in a recurrent 3 stage process: first you start with what you know, second you get into new and less familiar areas, and in the third stage the new area is absorbed and becomes second nature.  

As Herbie Hancock and Miles were becoming very close, it follows that they might share music. Herbie's eclectic tastes were mirrored by Miles's. When Leonard Feather visited him for an interview in 1968 he found a wide variety of albums strewn across the hotel room floor: James Brown, Aretha Franklin, Dionne Warwick, Tony Bennet, The Byrds, and The Fifth Dimension. Miles always kept a completely open-mind to new music, which is probably why we see him gather so many young musicians throughout his career. The 56 year old Miles later said to Leonard Feather in 1982, "I like Journey. I like The Who."  

"In the late 1980s he befriended Pince, he loved his music and his attitude, and

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There are so many turning points in Miles’s career I think MapQuest might be needed to track it. After 1963’s *Seven Steps to Heaven* we would be instructed to take a sharp turn towards improvisational elastic nirvana and head straight up for miles, or rather, Miles. The albums *E.S.P.* and *Miles Smiles* begat the era of Miles’s second quintessential quintet featuring accompanists: Herbie Hancock on piano, Wayne Shorter on tenor sax, Ron Carter on the double bass, and the greatest jazz drummer of all time, Tony Williams. With their venturing away from composition and adventuring towards “jamming”, the two albums represent the start of this “story’s” climax. Tony Williams and Herbie Hancock, and eventually Miles, developed what they called “controlled freedom.” It consisted of a plethora of counter rhythms and overlapping. All play would be dependent on those surrounding them; the musical mind-reading needed to achieve this partially led to the naming of *E.S.P.* (extrasensory perception).

To give life to the supernatural 1965 album *E.S.P.* let me put on “Agitation”. Tony Williams you dog. The song begins with an abstract pre-Bonham drum solo; played with the ease of an expert but the whimsy of a child getting his first drum set eager to hear what each piece sounds like. He continues for
almost two minutes before he settles into a fast paced rhythm that Miles jumps onto like a treadmill already going full speed. Miles’s play only gives way just after four minutes when Shorter takes the reins. His flying fingers flow perfectly as soon as Miles passes the baton. Carter’s bass line has an entrancing allure, his journey throughout the song is marked by speeding curiosity of highs and lows. The various stutter-steps he takes as the musicians around him play freely signaling exciting breaks from the norm, particularly at 7:07 when he releases us from the edge of our seats. What we do not hear is any bebop or hard bop undertones; so let me introduce to you, an act you’ll know for years, the post-bop era of Miles Davis.

It was 1966, why was Miles smiling? Could it be because this year saw the first acid test at the Fillmore in San Francisco? Surely not in lieu of the Detroit Red Wings defeat by the Montreal Canadiens in the Stanley Cup Final? No, Miles’s smiles must have been due to the incredible musicians in his company, his good health (for Miles anyway) and the direction his music was taking. Wrong again. Miles was smiling because Columbia told him to. The cover art of Miles Smiles, a smiling Miles, was created to portray the woman-beating, narcissistic, hard-ass Miles Davis as a kinder gentler man to his audience. The cover art was efficacious, as long as no one came in contact
with Miles; speaking of which, just before *Miles Smiles*, Miles came into some interesting contact with saxophonist Archie Shepp. Miles returned to New York to play the Vanguard after a long jaunt away. During an intermission a young saxophonist on his way to stardom, Archie, asked Miles if he could sit in for a song. The avant-garde star sat in for the song "Four", he stepped into solo shortly after Wayne Shorter a wooed the audience. The whole band played with an intensity Miles himself had not been able to spark. He was amazed at the tenacity of the young musician to even suppose he could play with Miles, but then to get up and outshine him? It was a wake-up call for Davis, the new generations of jazz artists weren’t the respectful devotees that awed in his presence that he was used to.¹

It’s 2009, why am I smiling? Could it be because I am approaching graduation? Yes. However, it is also because I am listening to "Freedom Jazz Dance" on full blast. Williams dances on the snare and stomps on the high-hat creating a stress-free yet face-paced atmosphere. From 0:50 to 2:36 Miles solos for 87 measures, 38 of which he is resting.² The space between his trumpet’s interjections occupies 44% of the solo, and it is when


he isn’t playing that you really hear what he is trying to attain. Shorter’s solo picks up right where Miles leaves off and continues on until 4:46, where Herbie begins his 1:20 solo. The three soloists play off of Williams and Carter so well the extrasensory perception essential to E.S.P. had obviously carried over. Every take on Miles Smiles is the first complete take. Miles would solo first and if the band came together well he would continue on until the song was complete, otherwise he would start over. The album shares the vibe of a live performance since many mistakes are left in. Long ago, in April of 1961, Miles told a reporter from the San Francisco Chronicle, “When they make records with all the mistakes in, then they really make jazz records.”

The “controlled freedom” exhibited throughout “Freedom Jazz Dance” is a signature sound of the subsequent Miles Davis recordings.

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Prince idolized Miles." June 13th, 1968, Miles was drawing in new influences, the times a-were a-changin'. American culture had changed immensely since Miles started recording. The fervor for change of the country was born from World World II and now Vietnam was nothing but conducive to delta. Davis had divorced from his wife, Frances, in February of 1968, and soon became romantically involved with a woman half his age, Betty Mabry. The two were married in September; she would one day be the cover girl for the cult classic *Filles De Kilimanjaro*. It was also she who introduced Miles to Jimi Hendrix. The nation was in the compulsive hands of rock and roll, and Davis was not immune. In July, Miles found himself at London’s jazz club Ronnie Scott’s, where he found bandmate bassist Dave Holland. Miles wanted Dave and Miles got what he wanted; it took one call from Jack Whittenmore to have Dave get on a plane to America. Within a day of arrival Dave was the only white person in Harlem’s Count Basie’s as he got on stage to preform with only a petite salutation from Miles. "Miles did something that said 'everybody go', and it just started up. And it was like trying to keep up with a tidal wave," Dave said of his first time playing with the band. *Miles in the Sky*, released in 1968, featured (for the first time) an electric piano played by Herbie Hancock, who lost

his electric virginity against his will when he walked into the session looking for an acoustic piano but only finding a Fender Rhodes. "You want me to play that toy?" said Herbie.²⁵ Miles simply nodded "yes" and Herbie soon found the electric piano was no toy, but a tool of fusion. Some roots still held strong in songs like "Black Comedy" while others were transitory in their explorative methods. The team of Miles Davis and Gil Evans were still partners in composing and arranging of music, but the allotted freedom Miles gave his band members was increasing in measure.

When Herbie Hancock left a man who needs no introduction, though will be given one, joined Miles's band. Chick Corea was to play piano on the new album Filles de Kilimanjaro. Corea plays both ivory and plastic keys, but the album is primarily electric. "The piano is over... it belongs to Beethoven," said Miles. However, just as Miles had done with Herbie, he introduced Chick to the electric piano for the first time. "I didn't know what to do with it. Miles heard something that he didn't describe to me too much; he just wanted me to play it."²⁶ Herbie had already recorded three tracks, leaving two for Chick, "Felon Brun" and "Mademoiselle Mabry". The latter track is attributed to Davis, but it actually is a reworking of Jimi Hendrix's "The Wind Cries

Mary” done by Gil Evans. Miles and Gil had been in talks with Jimi on collaborating before his death on September 18th, 1970. And so it goes.27 When Miles was asked what he heard in the music of Jimi Hendrix’s he said, “It’s that goddamned motherfucking machine gun.”28 Whilst he may have been taking his fair share of painkillers at the time, here Miles probably refers to the incessant drive of Jimi’s play. His play-it-by-soul charisma would let loose a whole artillery on those fortunate enough to have seen him. Dave Holland saw many similarities between the two; their dress, their approach to recording, and bigger-than-life personalities were reasons for full compatibility.

Teo Macero and Miles Davis began work on their next baby in early 1969. In a Silent Way featured three pianists (Hancock, Corea, and newcomer Joe Zawinul), Dave on bass, Tony on the skins, and resident rookie hotshot John McLaughlin on guitar.

[BREAK: IN A SILENT WAY]

1970, more like 19—heavenly. Tony Williams left the band for personal reasons, and/or God saw it time for Jack DeJohnette to join the MD Express. His yogi-like flexibility was crucial to the success of Bitches Brew’s abstract qualities. The band

The number one movie in America was *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. Miles Davis was on trumpet. *Midnight Cowboy* won Oscars for both best motion picture and best director (John Schlesinger). Herbie Hancock on electric piano. Kurt Vonnegut published *Slaughterhouse Five*. Wayne Shorter took his place on soprano saxophone. A stabbing of a patron by a hired Hell’s Angels at the musical event Altamont marked the “end of hippies.” Joe Zawinul on organ and John McLaughlin strummed strings. The number one single in the US was “Get Back” by little known British quartet The Beatles. Tony Williams on drums, Dave Holland on bass, and Chick Corea on electric piano. President Nixon was in office.

1969. The year that saw the release of tone poem *In a Silent Way*, the possible mother of both jazz fusion and ambient rock. The album Stanley Crouch called “droning wallpaper music”. A time in which Miles Davis began to dress more lavishly, wearing silk shirts and baggy pants more so becoming Queen Latifa than Miles Davis. Full blown electric-jazz fusion seemed to approach the world in a silent way, sneaking its way in here and there. This whole album embodied the essence of the new integrative style. *In a Silent Way* was also the first album to be primarily arranged and edited by Teo Macero. The new style of
recording Teo and Miles developed changed their studio experience forever. When Miles walked in the tape started rolling and never shut off. Everything in the studio is recorded, Teo said “Only artist [Miles] in the whole world where everything intact.” With the technological advancements that produced the 3- and 4- track recorders came the real editing prowess of Macero. He said, “Whoever doesn’t like what I did, twenty years from now they can go back and redo it.” Many successes of the sessions that spawned In A Silent Way occurred by sheer happenstance. Davis met McLaughlin the day before they were to enter the studio, February 18, 1969, through Tony Williams. Miles invited John, he told him to bring his guitar along with him. Miles called Joe Zawinul the morning of the session and casually asked him to show up with some music. Miles forced the electric piano/organ on his players, the new instruments were instrumental to his “new sound” he strove for.

The trumpet phases of Miles in the Sky’s “Country Son” and the broken keyboard figures/steady cymbal obstinato (repeating bassline, I had to look that up) of Filles de Kilimanjaro’s “Tour De Suite” combined to conceptualize In a Silent Way. Teo sits in the booth listening to magic on top of the incessant

1Ian Carr, Miles Davis: The Definitive Biography (New York: Avalon, 1998) 244.

2Ibid.
whir of spinning tape that becomes a discriminative stimulus to playing. Side one, titled “Shhh/Peaceful”, and track two operate as an exposition/development/recapitulation track, meaning thirds 1 and 3 are identical to trick the listener of structure. (Yeah, that’s right, I learned that) Side one was completely in the tonality of D, while the drums held a steady rhythm with very little improvisation. At this time I would like to point out this album, particularly this track, is my favorite thing to play when driving on an expressway anytime when it’s warm enough to have the windows down. Not with friends though, only alone or with a girl you want to spend the rest of your life with. The winding down of the exposition, “Shhh”, that 15 to 20 seconds always seems to catch me at an open patch of highway. Listening to it now I can picture a lone tree in a farmer’s field that at some point a person, exhausted and hot from the summer’s sun, sought shade from. The development of the song is more interesting, Chick Corea seems to really stand out to me; his tones always have a quality that float above the rest. They aren’t necessarily better, they just exude some sense of linger that you wouldn’t hear from Herbie.

“In a Silent Way/It’s About that Time” has the same three part composition as “Shhh/Peaceful”. McLaughlin first tried varying complex chords (probably trying to show his chops on his
first day) to a Miles Davis who was not amused, “Play it like you don’t know how to play it.” John proceeded to strum a simple E-chord. A famous line of Miles’s was uttered on this day; he said “Don’t play what’s there. Play what’s not there!” Dave Holland interpreted this to mean don’t get too comfortable, play the next thing. The development of the song, “It’s About that Time”, is the only part to feature a solo. There are three total solos: First John, then Wayne, and finally Miles. The build up between each solo is the same. The ‘call’ ‘call’ ‘response’ technique is very similar to 1969’s popular ‘puff’ ‘puff’ ‘pass’ paradigm. The players seem so darn in tune with each other I am surprised this wasn’t labeled ESP II; alas, it was not, still everyone seems to be playing on the same metaphysical field.

This album was recorded and released while American soldiers were dying for our county in Vietnam. Protests were happening all over the country. People were taking their first real stance against the establishment. Hell-no-we-won’t-go music was blaring all over the country, as well as the outspoken anti-war songs that seemed to multiply every day. American music was getting violent as it demanded peace, groups were playing louder, and progressive rock was taking form. Assassinations of JFK, Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr. In the midst of this In a Silent Way calmly, coolly, whispered to the masses. While some
loved the album, others gave Miles a very hard time for turning his back on jazz. Those people should’ve been sent to Vietnam.

“Criticizing someone for playing rock was like criticizing them for speaking French, Spanish, or German.”—Bassist Marcus Miller

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now consisted of: Wayne Shorter on soprano saxophone, Bennie Maupin on bass clarinet, Chick Corea and Larry Young and Joe Zawinul on electric piano, Don Alias/Lenny White/Billy Cobham played drums alongside Jack, Airto Moreira on percussion, Dave Holland on bass with Harvey Brooks on electric bass, Juma Santos on the shakers and congas, and John McLaughlin on guitar. The first session of *Bitches Brew* was one for the history books. As the story goes (so cool) Miles did not like Teo’s secretary and wanted her out of the studio; Teo, fed up with the spoiled Miles, outright refused to send her away. “You’re not my boss and I’m not going to take your bullshit any longer. I don’t give a goddamn whether you like her or not...Take your fucking trumpet and your fucking musicians and get out of here!” A disgruntled Miles stormed out of Teo’s control room and right into the studio, he told Teo to turn on the machines. They bickered throughout the entire session, cursing and gesturing profanities. Brewed amongst the bitching of these two artists was *Bitches Brew*. Macero and Davis had created a double album consisting of over one and one half hours compiled of unforgettable solos and unseen measures. A funky, groovy response to the time antiquated the old Miles and started his revolution with a Molotov cocktail of freedom. The band had seemingly limitless energy, pouncing on any opportunity to play as long and loud as they could. Later in life Miles would meet and work with cellist Paul Buckmaster,
who said this of *Bitches Brew*, "It was really the album that when I first heard it I thought I was gonna climb the walls... and ceiling... I could hardly take it, it was so intense. It was everything I had imagined some kind of future music to be."\(^{29}\) Stanley Crouch, the jazz critic, on the other hand reports he had listened to the album "Stone cold sober, a little change in consciousness, and a great change in consciousness to try to like it. Formless long pieces to go nowhere."\(^{30}\)

Dizzy Gillespie spoke to Leonard Feather in 1970 about what Miles had become: "As for his music, Miles has a deep, deep, deep, spiritual value to it... [When asked about his music of 1970] I'd really like to spend some time having him explain it to me, because I'd like to know what he is doing." He explained to Leonard he liked Miles's earlier works more because he understood it, which is why he needed Miles's help in getting with the times.

The music of *Bitches Brew* was incomprehensible to many of the prestigious bebop and hard bop music literates, its electronic sound coupled with rock undertones appealed to a younger crowd. Columbia had Miles playing with Blood Sweat and Tears, singer Laura Nyro, and rock band The Band. Another interesting side of *Bitches Brew* is its cover art. A psychedelic visualizer of


black figures existing in limbo between heaven, Earth, and the sea; with a gigantic crimson flower spewing for yellow flames like so much pollen. When opened the primary black figure on the cover has its inverse in white on the back, and a divine woman that looks like Erykah Badu (even though it was done a year before her birth). The drug-induced style and the racial messages make the *Bitches Brew* album art stand out in front of the rest.

In **March of 1970**, Miles was arrested while sitting in his Ferrari in a “no waiting zone” in Manhattan. When a suspicious police officer asked him for his papers he searched in the glove box revealing his knuckle dusters (sort of more offensive brass knuckles) which were classified as an illegal weapon in the state of New York. The ordeal reminded him he was still a black man up-to-no-good to the American establishment (a.k.a. “The Man”). He also realized the new class of oppressed was mainly comprised of the youth, no matter what race. Miles said, “It’s just the whole attitude of the police force... It’s the way they treat all the young people that think the same way, so no matter what color you are, you get the same shit... The whole system is fucked up and the board of education doesn’t want to change it.”

His 1970 recordings at the Fillmore East had him billed

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as an "extra added attraction" to accompany the smooth sounds of The Steve Miller Band and the haunting high-notes of Neil Young and Crazy Horse. The audience did not greet Miles with much excitement, nor did Miles feel excited about his welcome, nor did he play any sort of encore, nor was he asked to, nor did he enjoy any of the four concerts he did there. Wayne Shorter now left his band to pursue a solo career. To replace the incomparable sax soloist Shorter stood Steve Grossman. The all-too-easy alliteration is mind-blowing. In April of 1970, after the addition of keyboardist Keith Jarrett, Miles's band was now a septet. Now he was billed at the Fillmore East’s estranged relative, Fillmore West. San Francisco was not comprised of the musically-challenged degenerates of the East Village in New York City. The concert hall was now a home-away-from-home to the psychedelic dead-heads and America’s sizable counterculture, recently hosting concerts featuring bands like The Who, The Grateful Dead, Jimi Hendrix, and Big Brother and the Holding Company, as well as non-rock acts like Aretha Franklin, Otis Redding, and poetry readings. Miles played to a packed house filled with a much more receptive audience. Steve Grossman was an incredible sax player; he played this performance at white heat.\(^\text{32}\) He later said, “When I was with

Miles], he was in really peak condition, he was really beautiful." Dave and Chick were the main instigators of free jazz, and the Fillmore West concert was no exception. Billy Graham said, "That one set was better than all four back east." Miles smiled and said, "I know."33 Shortly after the success of the Fillmore West concert, both Dave Holland and Chick Corea left Miles to start projects of their own. So it goes.

Miles was being terrorized by many members of the black press for catering to white rock groups by being their "added attraction". He got trashed for having a white fellow, John McLaughlin, play guitar. Miles did not appreciate the bad press; the open racism of the black press was unnecessary and backwards in thought. Joe Zawinul defended Johnny M saying, "Shit! Nobody can play as good as him." And he then proceeded to call for any black guitarist who thinks he is as good or better to prove himself and they'd take both of them in the band. As for complaints of Miles catering to the white man he said, "I don't sell out to nobody."34 Although this may cause one to think he sold out to everyone, he meant that he sells out to no one and the double negative got the best of him. The funkiness of their live performances also received complaints from stale jazz critics. John McLaughlin once argued only European musicians

34 ZygoteIIZygote 12 Aug. 1990.
are afraid of funk, and that it is precisely what separates the whole jazz tradition from European music.

With Dave Holland gone, Miles was in need of a new bassist, he replaced Holland with 19 year old Michael Henderson who had previously played with the likes of Stevie "My Eyes Don't Cry No More" Wonder and Aretha "Queen of Soul" Franklin.

A TRIBUTE TO JACK JOHNSON BREAK

From August 26-August 30 in 1970 on the Isle of Wight in England a gathering of 600,000 attended the Isle of Wight Music Festival. The performers were very diverse in nature: Bob Dylan, Joe Cocker, Jefferson Airplane, Supertramp, The Doors, and Donovan to name a few. More important to the task at hand was the Saturday, August 29, 1970 performance of Miles Davis before the largest crowd a jazz artist had ever, and probably will ever, play to. It was consciousness-revolution music, hell-no-we-wont-go to Vietnam music. It was marking the end of an incredibly important decade in music and questioning authority as well as marking the beginning of the next one. Joni Mitchell played an earlier set and saw Miles when walking on stage. She said, "Miles didn’t know what to do with a woman except drag her into his lair."35 She recognized his strengths as an innovators; she knew every time he changed he knew he could face

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"Jazz is dead." "The definition of jazz is changing." Jazz this, jazz that, jazz me with a baseball bat. Why was the culture so desperate to label what Miles Davis was doing? Since I last "spoke" to you during In a Silent Way the public was torn between accepting and rejecting Miles's "new brand of jazz". I believe a sub-genre should be created called "Davisian" and when you listen to it, just listen to it. No need to define the sounds that leave a sweet taste in your mouth, just swallow it, with your ears that is. Now that I have got that off my chest, where were we? Oh, yes, of course. A Tribute to Jack Johnson, released April 7, 1970, is a tantric album dedicated to pro surfer/singer Jack Johnson. Born May 18, 1975 it is amazing Miles was able to foresee such legendary hits as "Flake" and "Bubbletoes". Ha. I hope that joke was well received. Miles's love of boxing has been well documented, and I don't have to remind you that he said the strength of Johnson helped him overcome his heroin addiction. Dave Liebman once commented on Miles, "There's really something between the boxing and his way of playing. He start throwing... and you'd put up your hands... fast reactions and combinations... block and feint and jab and
everything. It's the speed in and out, time, nuance, the improvisational aspect was beautiful."

The album discussion is forthcoming, but first history never hurt anyone (except Oedipus). The late Arthur John Johnson a.k.a. The Galveston Giant a.k.a. Jack Johnson, born March 31, 1878, was the greatest boxer in the world at the start of the twentieth century. He stood at six foot one and one half inches, in his professional career he won 73 bouts (40 K.O.), lost 13 (9 K.O.), and drew 9. No matter how many fights he won in the ring, he always struggled against racism and prejudice; his greatest accomplishment being how well he took it. Once when he was pulled over and given a 50 dollar speeding ticket (the maximum traffic penalty), he gave the police officer a 100 dollar bill telling him he planned to drive just as fast on the way home. Johnson won the World Colored Heavyweight Championship on February 3, 1903. Jack had become one of the first celebrity athletes; he even had endorsements from patent medicines. Johnson challenged James J. Jefferies, the present World Heavyweight Champion, but he refused as blacks were not allowed to fight whites in title bouts. After James had fallen and

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Johnson went to Australia to fight Canadian Tommy Burns, he became World Heavyweight Champion (of all races) in 1908. Socialist Jack London called out for the “Great White Hope” to put the [inferior-black man] in his place. On July 4, 1910, in front of 22,000 people, Jack faced the now all-too-willing-all-too-racist Jefferies. Jefferies was there to prove “that a white man is better than a negro.” After 15 rounds of getting pummeled, Jefferies gave up to protect himself from being knocked out. Jack was the greatest in the world; it follows then that race riots broke out all over the place. Jack fought until he was 60 years old; he died in a car accident on his hot-headed hurried way home after being refused service on account of his skin color.

The miniature biography syncs greatly to the music of A Tribute to Jack Johnson. Right off to a good start the start of the album is “Right Off”, quick lick from John McLaughlin, bassist Michael Henderson starts soft and then makes his presence known. The two play in what John calls E boogie. Billy Cobham quiets at 1:40 while John sorts through some internal dialogue, making a decision he calls someone forth, MILES! (2:23) As the screeching high notes grasp your attention, it is easy to picture his body deflating almost at once into his

4Ibid.
trumpet. This entrance is regarded as one of the great moments in jazz. McLaughlin has a bluesy constant to Miles’s hyper horn. The manic-depressive exchange creates a cool center. At 10:50 far-away scales from John signal a break, Miles comes back in. At 12:00 the rest of the boys come back. At 15 minutes in, Herbie’s character gets loud, he wants attention, he holds a chord like a child holding his breath, he starts to yell “Why not me?” As Miles begins to give him an answer, empathetic tones turn into pleas. The matter-of-fact off beat banging of Herbie seems to accept their ruling and backs off ... Cobham’s backbeat is so conducive to foot tapping I am surprised you can’t hear it on the track. 18:35, Johnson wins the world colored heavyweight championships, I picture him, through John and Mike, asking everyone around him “Who’s the best in the world?” and they answer with a short “You are!” Jack continues on his way after asking Jefferies to fight him. Herbie’s Farfisa organ has reached a tipping point, but cools off quickly. As we near the end, the “Fight of the Century” takes place at John’s fingertips, and the song finishes with Jack’s victory.

“Yesternow” coolly lets us know of the aftermath. The absence of the high-volume force of “Right Off” may give the impression of peace, but imagine a riot scene to the relaxed electric bass of Michael Henderson. The restraint of the rock-
bassist stays steady, waiting for something, like a madman playing the part of an everyday citizen. In reality he is playing a slowed down version of “Say it Loud, I’m Black and I’m Proud” by James Brown. The purposefully misplaced cymbal clashes of Cobham at and around 4:20 show brief periods of boiling blood. Miles’s long solos throughout the whole track seem more purposeful and reserved than the frequent screaming outbursts in “Right Off”. Teo Macero, when just over halfway, introduces new players. The uncredited Sonny Sharrock on guitar joins John McLaughlin. Dave Holland takes over on electric bass and Jack DeJohnette takes the sticks. Steve Grossman uses the soprano saxophone solo to cut the tension present in the building rhythm, he takes the environment to a new level; like Miles, he seems to be demanding greatness from those around him. Later in the track you can hear Chick Corea on electric piano, which loses some of the far-out feel Herbie delivered with his (unwanted) Farfisa organ. Over 13 combinations of groups were used in recording this album; however this last one and the first make up 90 percent of the material.

“I’m Jack Johnson- heavyweight champion of the world! I’m black! They never let me forget it. I’m black alright; I’ll never let them forget it.”

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Actor Peter Brock speaking as Jack Johnson at the end of “Yesternow” over the orchestral piece “The Man Nobody Saw”
massive rejection. Like many artists of the era Joni was sick of pop music's formulaic chords and structure, and she really dug Miles's chords from his inner core.

The 38-minute of "Call it Anything" was praised and received well by many who probably hadn't encountered Miles's music before. The raw energy of Miles, the neurotic energy of Keith Jarrett, and the drug-induced energy of Airto Morita combined to captivate the audience in a pure emotional state. When Airto played he would do his best to appease Miles, though he was not one to show gratitude often. Airto said (in broken English), "I know he like it even though he never told me... I know he like it." Jack DeJohnette laid down a real groove with a strong beat and aggressive fills at all the right spots. Miles would say that Jack "Provided the fire... he was putting the heat on."36

In September of 1970 Miles went to the funeral of Jimi Hendrix. He vowed to never go to another funeral again, apparently it was very drab situation. Also Miles was glad to have his son home from Vietnam, however he had changed. In December of 1970 Live Evil was comprised of 8 tracks, four recorded live and four in the studio. John McLaughlin returned for the live recording. The concert was given with little regard to those attending, but the openness and genuineness of the humanistic crowd gave the Miles Davis Septet a chance to unravel

36 Ibid.
in a controlled manner. "What I Say" is the most honest example of uncontrolled premeditation the band lets go. Jack DeJohnette plays an insistent psyche-rock beat while Keith Jarrett matches and then challenges him. The intensity on this one track lasts for a quarter hour, and then settles to an enthused lively crowd. After this incredible performance Jack DeJohnette leaves the band.

1972 was home to the under-appreciated album On the Corner, it was prepared under the heavy influence of avant-garde musician Stockhausen and the relationship that had formed between Miles and Paul Buckmaster. Paul had come from England to stay with Miles, at his house, for six weeks. A few days after his arrival Miles told him of an impending recording session that was to be held in 3 weeks time. The first session Davis booked several musicians that all seemed to bring friends along. The album had yet another new line-up: two drummers, bass player, cellist, three keyboard players, two percussionists, a tabla player, saxophonist, sitarist, guitarist, two reed players, and Miles himself. The actual names and instruments of performers were left off the album's sleeve for the first time in Davis's recording history. He made this decision to force critics to really give attention to the performers and their tools by making them decipher who and what was playing. This was the first time Miles had ever met drummer Al Foster, and he was recording with him
within hours. He took Foster with him to play in his band for live performances at the end of *On the Corner*’s production. Davis also took conga player James M'Tume who happened to be the son of Jimmy Heath (the tenor sax player mentioned many pages ago).

1973 found Miles touring with Michael Henderson, Al Foster, Badal Ray on tabla, James M'Tume, sitarist Balakrishna, guitarist Reggie Lucas, and organ slammer Cedric Lawson. Davis was more reserved in these performances, as his leg was in a cast after he got into an accident with a wall, but many accounts tell of him rocking out hard from his stool center stage. His old comrades were dripping wet with success: the Mahavishnu Orchestra (featuring John McLaughlin), Weather Report (featuring both Joe Zawinul and Wayne Shorter), and Herbie Hancock’s outfit were doing very well. Herbie Hancock’s *Head Hunters* (1973) had become the fastest and biggest selling jazz record of all time. Even with all his success, Herbie remained grounded and would often visit Miles; even though one may think his head would be the size of a watermelon, man. Teo Macero said this of Miles’s old sidemen, “Of all the people that played with [Miles] they’d start out being a little aggressive and all of a sudden revert back and then establish themselves in a groove... He has moved constantly.” Miles’s ever-present need to reinvent himself may have held him back from the success of his peers, though in retrospect his non-complacency is what destined him
to become the most recognized jazz artist in the world. When people like Herbie, Wayne Shorter, and Chick Corea would play with Miles it would be easy to wonder where they went. It was Miles’s presence that would push people to perform higher and more dangerously than they might on their solo/other projects, he transformed them. Big Fun, a double-album comprised mostly of tracks recorded in 1969 and 1970, was put out in 1974. Two days before Miles’s birthday, May 24, 1974, Duke Ellington passed away. So it goes. Big Fun was then dedicated to the man Miles once implored all musicians to get down on their knees and thank. At a gig’s after-party in the Davis hometown of St. Louis, Miles came face to face with the mother of his first three children Irene Birth. She showed up, guns blazing, accusing Miles of being a decrepit dead-beat father and blamed him for the excessive trials and tribulations she had been subjected to over the years. For what may be the only documented time, Miles cried in public.

Whether it was the lack-luster music he was creating or the truth Irene Birth made him face or the 1975 death of Cannonball Adderly or something really cool I don’t even know about, Miles Davis went off the grid. The years 1976-1980 are known quite simply as ‘The Silent Years’. “Sex and drugs took the place that music had occupied in my life until then and I
did both of them around the clock.” said Miles of his hermitdom. Many friends came to visit Miles around this time fearing he was on the path of self-destruction they had all lost so many friends to. John McLaughlin said, “It was very depressing- I was very worried about him- whether he’d live or die.” Jack DeJohnette said, “[Miles] kept saying, 'I can come back anytime I want... I can do it in 3 or 4 days.'” When Miles stepped into the recording studio March 2, 1978, a bassist named Tim Stevens played his very best to a completely stoic Miles Davis. Miles had not said a word the whole day long, Tim asked him how he did; Miles said “Cool.” Stevens’ heart exalted joy, but when Davis expanded he deflated as he had played perfectly, “The brilliance comes in your mistakes- that’s how you discover new things... if you play it safe you’ll never progress.” He also laid this gem on Tim, “Music is like a conversation. When you play the bass, make a question- then wait a minute and answer it.” Devoid of visitors in 1978, Miles hung up pictures of people like Bird, Diz’, Coltrane, and Max Roach all over his walls. His house was filthy, infested with cockroaches, covered in trash, absent of light. Cicely Tyson, the actress, was the only

39 Ibid.
person who would frequent his house and take care of him. In August of 1979, when Paul Buckmaster came to spend time with his good friend and mentor, he found a Miles Davis on the brink of death. Buckmaster called Dorothy Wilburn (Miles’s sister, now married) in Chicago and pleaded for help. She was on the scene in less than 5 hours. Dorothy and Cicely decontaminated Miles’s lavish landfill, cleaning and deroaching. The actions of these two women, along with the warning given by Buckmaster, were the only things that kept Miles alive. He began practicing again, and soon he was ready to record.

The silent years were over. Had Miles passed away, the world would have been without the 10 albums released in the subsequent 10 years from 1981-1991. The frenzied fusion that took place between 1968 and 1974 would never be seen again, attempts were to be made in vain. In 1981, Miles Davis, now 55, was weathered. However, he still had innovative tendencies of a much younger man and none of the musical routine or standardization that can come with old age. In 1980 Miles wanted to get back in the studio for two reasons: His love of music and his dangerously low bank account. Some argued the latter drove most of his music throughout the 1980s. Columbia would not provide any financial backing until he got in for a session, which is reminiscent of his trouble in finding a label after his using days in the early 1950s. While Davis was slowly getting back into his old rhythms,
his trumpet was rusty, figuratively and literally. He went back to the basics jamming with old friends and his 22 year old nephew Vincent Wilburn. Vincent was the son of Dorothy, Miles’s Florence Nightingale that he kept close contact with after she presumably saved his life. When Miles heard Vincent’s band, he thought he’d found a group to record with, and they entered the recording studios soon thereafter. The band was short two pivotal roles: a drummer and saxophonist. A call from Miles to Dave Liebman produced Bill Evans and a ring to Teo Macero drafted Chaka Khan’s drummer Sammy Figueroa. One day after they started recording Miles found himself in the hospital with a leg infection. While there Miles had many friends visit and call, including a conversation with Gerry Mulligan that was reported by Brian Case in 20/20 Magazine. Gerry, excited about the possible triumphant return of Miles Davis, phoned Miles, “I hope you’re going to play pretty this time for us cats that love you.” Miles said, “No, man- I’m gonna get a funky-ass band, and go out and make some money.”41 When Miles gave Dave Liebman a taste of what he had recorded, Dave thought the music was of a commercialized Miles concerned about radio-play.

Only two tracks recorded by Miles and his nephew’s band made it on the impending album: “The Man with the Horn” (title

track) and "Shout". The Irving infused septet was not able to provide the sound Miles wanted. Meanwhile he was growing very close to saxophonist Bill Evans (Bill Evans 2). He was morally and habitually comparable to the Miles Davis that had come to New York so long ago in 1944. Bill kept a watchful eye over Miles and in exchange Miles would retell him stories of Bird and Coltrane. On good days he would talk for hours, and every word he uttered would be memorized by the hungry ears of Bill Evans. Bill said, "It was like I was the first person at the time Miles could trust... I was like his right hand man at the time." Four other tracks were recorded with a new band, aside from Bill Evans who stayed on sax, for the 1981 album The Man with the Horn. Reviews were either apathetic or poor; only the drumming of Al Foster kept the tracks strong. The young Chicago musicians seemed out of place in correspondence with the New York professionals. Their two tracks were hidden in the middle of the album, whereas Miles’s "Fat Time" and "Ursula" played alpha and omega to the album. "If you start playing stuff you think people will like and then nobody likes it, you really feel like a jerk," said guitarist Marcus Miller. 42

Near the end of the 1970s Cicely Tyson asked him if he would ever play again, he said, "Well I don’t know if there’s anything

there." Cicely believed Miles produced from his gut and if there was nothing to give he couldn’t fake it. Really? The track “Shout” may have caused her to give her logic a second-thought. The remedial radio-play wreck signified the beginning of the end of Miles Davis for some. History would show he still had a trick or two up his sleeve (which he would save for 3 years and use on _Decoy_). At Boston’s Kix Club, in June of 1981, Miles was given a jolt of hope and reality. A man in his mid-thirties with cerebral palsy sat front row entranced in Miles’s playing. Miles played a bluesy solo standing right in front of the man. Looking down and seeing tears streaming down his face almost caused Miles to break down. He said of this experience, “It was almost like he was telling me everything was alright and that my play was as beautiful and strong as ever. I needed that…”43 The Kix Club concerts were recorded and released as part of a live double-album _We Want Miles_ in 1982.

In January of 1982, while Cecily was away in Africa, Miles played at home. Miles was unsupervised and up to no good; his tom-foolery was cut short by the loss of feeling in his left hand. Cicely talked to Miles and told him it was probably a stroke and to immediately get to a hospital, she got on the next plane home. Cicely’s theory was proven to be true at the hospital.

The brush with death pushed Miles to quit all of the bad habits he enjoyed so much; even smoking, which at the time before his stroke, Miles was sitting comfortably at 3-4 packs a day. Once he felt back up to par he was up to tour. John Scofield joined Miles’s band in November of 1982. Scofield saddled up as the “other guitarist” and learned most of the theme music Mike Stern wasn’t playing. The band recorded Star People and released it in the spring of 1983. November 6, 1983 was a momentous occasion for Miles. Radio City Music Hall held an event in his honor, MilesAhead: A tribute to an American Music Legend. Perhaps when issuing his one-word “Thank You” to the full house he should have had a retirement speech prepared. In 1984 the album Decoy gave a little help to the disintegrating music of Miles. The only album worth its weight in plastic of the 1980s featured three closing tracks that played like a post script that changed the whole meaning of an album. “What it is,” “That’s Right.” and “That’s What Happened” have Davis’s and Scofield’s dominating solos and leaving the audience haunted in a live last track. On November 6, 1983, Radio City Music Hall held an event called MilesAhead: A Tribute to an American Music Legend. Presenter Bill Cosby urged Miles to make a speech; he simply leaned toward the microphone and said, “Thank You.”
In 1991, two days after Miles performed with Quincy at Montreux at an evening devoted to Gil Evans, he had one last live concert in Paris at an outdoor venue, La Villette. Members of the “University of Miles Davis” met to pay tribute, and this time it was to Miles. Herbie Hancock, Jon Scofield, Al Foster, Wayne Shorter, John McLaughlin, Chick Corea, Steve Grossman, Dave Holland and Joe Zawinul were all at some point directly influenced by Miles; they came to worship their idol once more. They played “Donna Lee” and “Out of the Blue” to start off in the bop tradition. The modal jazz piece “All in Blue” from Kind of Blue came next and transitioned into the two tracks on In a Silent Way. Miles was surrounded by his former protégés, with all of them facing him he looked like a god amongst men (or more like a god amongst demigods). These incredibly accomplished self-actualized men followed Miles’s directions like keen puppies wanting to play, any indication of approval reinforced like a dog-biscuit. They moved into renditions of Herbie Hancock’s “Watermelon Man”, McLaughlin’s “Katia”, Prince’s “Pentration”, and many more. The warm open-air stage became a

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true landmark preserving the genius of Miles and reminding those who forgot.

September 28, 1991, the acolyte of Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, was dead 12 weeks after the Paris concert from losing a fitful bout with pneumonia. He was 65.
CONCLUSION

Miles once said to pianist Keith Jarret, “You know why I don’t play ballads anymore?... Because I love them.”\(^4^5\) He sacrificed his love to keep from getting stale and to ensure he wouldn’t experience the zestless routine that comes with repetition. Miles was a musician first and foremost. Miles could lullaby you with a kind sweet ballad and then light your mattress on fire with rapid bursts of notes. “[Miles] had a dialoging style. It was like listening to him have a conversation with himself, with one of his voice’s imitation a fast-talking, sweet-rapping street hustler.”\(^4^6\) He convoluted inner dialogue may have been incomprehensible to those without the musical training of Miles, but when spoken through his horn anyone could relate to his thoughts and emotions. He evoked empathy from the apathetic concurrently exhibiting free speech and uninhibited feeling through his music. “[Miles] changed the sound of the trumpet for the first time since Louis Armstrong,” said Gil Evans just before his death.\(^4^7\) He changed his sound roughly every half-decade; his progression and ingenuity has yet to be matched.

Carlos Santana once said, “With music you want to penetrate

\(^4^5\) The Miles Davis Story, dir. Mike Dibb, DVD, Channel 4 Television Corporation, 2001.
\(^4^6\) Quincy Troupe, Miles and Me, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000) 71.
\(^4^7\) The Miles Davis Story, dir. Mike Dibb, DVD, Channel 4 Television Corporation, 2001.
the listener until you reach what Miles Davis used to call ‘a spiritual orgasm.’” When hearing Carlos’s statement, critic Stanley Crouch responded, “Well that’s bullshit. That’s all just part of the Miles Davis myth. He was trying to make some money.”

I find myself sitting somewhere in the middle. Although I wasn’t feeling my spirit orgasm during *In a Silent Way*, I was definitely not listening to money driven aural kitsch. The “Miles Davis Myth” may be labeled as such because much of what he accomplished seemed to be bigger-than-life; in my research I have concluded most of the proposed fiction is indeed fact:

Miles Davis was the fortunate son of a dental surgeon.  
Miles Davis was a band geek.  
Miles Davis played with Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie at the age of 17.  
Miles Davis attended Juilliard.  
Miles Davis was a boxer.  
Miles Davis has gone quadruple-platinum.  
Miles Davis was thrice divorced.  
Miles Davis was father to three.  
Miles Davis was one of the greatest bandleaders of all time.  
Miles Davis was a composer.  
Miles Davis was an arranger.  
Miles Davis was a talent agent.  
Miles Davis was a junkie.  
Miles Davis was a pimp.  
Miles Davis was a bebopper.  
Miles Davis was a hard bopper.  
Miles Davis was a modal jazzman.  
Miles Davis was a rocker.  
Miles Davis was a hip-hop artist.  
Miles Davis was a bad dude.  
Miles Davis is the greatest jazz artist of all time.

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48 Ibid.
WORKS CITED


The Miles Davis Story, dir. Mike Dibb, DVD, Channel 4 Television Corporation, 2001.

I researched as many sources as I felt necessary to provide an in focus picture of Miles Davis’s life. I drew heavily upon Miles Davis: The Definitive Biography by Ian Carr, his work consistently contributed the most descriptive analysis of Miles’s life and career. I also received a great deal of inspiration from the documentaries I was lucky enough to see. Although I tried to give life to his music, there is nothing better than listening to the real thing; so I must insist you find time to sit down and listen to In a Silent Way as soon as possible.