

# Miles davis essay examples

[Family](#), [Parents](#)



Miles Davis (1926-1991) was one of the most influential jazz musicians in American history. He was on the forefront of several breakthrough development in jazz including cool jazz and jazz fusion. He is one of the most recognizable musicians in the world of jazz and most Americans know his name even if they are not jazz enthusiasts. Davis became an accomplished trumpeter and was known for his smooth sound. Tate (2015) in his article for Rolling Stone magazine credits Davis' cool style and creativity for the creativity and expression that changed the face of jazz music since the 1940's.

Miles was born in Alton, Illinois. His father was a dentist and his mother an accomplished pianist. The family was well to do and also owned a ranch in Arkansas. Davis developed his early appreciation for music through gospel music he heard at church. When he was thirteen, his father bought him a trumpet and arranged for lessons. Miles stated that his father chose the trumpet to annoy his wife (Frankl 28). Despite opportunities to play professionally, his parents insisted that he finish school (Frankl 30). He was accepted to Julliard in New York and moved there in 1944. He began playing in the evenings in two of Harlem's hottest clubs: Minton's Playhouse and Monroes. He eventually dropped out of Julliard and began to play professionally (Frankl 45).

During this time, Davis met some of jazz greats and the originators of bebop such as Fats Navarro and J. J. Johnson. He also played with Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker. With Parker and his band, Davis' signature of smooth and cool jazz was developing. He eventually left the group after Parker had a breakdown and there was too much infighting amongst the group members

(Crisp 67). Davis met Gil Evans and the two together with an unusual assortment of musicians began producing music that was the opposite of bebop. Instead, there sound was very smooth and tried to capture the essence of the human voice. The group was given several months of studio time by Capitol Records. A few years later, the material was released as an album called, Birth of the Cool and cool jazz was born (Crisp 72). This unique sound would change the sound of jazz over the next several decades, the album has been rereleased several times over the years and is considered a classic (Zwerin and Levine).

During the early 1950's, Davis spent time in Paris where black, American artists and musicians were welcomed and not subject to the discrimination they face in the United States. He returned to New York and became severely depressed. His lover and mother of his two children left him and he developed a heroin addiction. He overcame his habit by returning home and spending several months locked in his room to withstand the withdrawals (Crisp 101).

In 1954, Davis impressed the crowd at the Newport Music Festival which led to a contract with Columbia records (Carr 120). Davis formed a new quintet of musicians including John Coltrane and Red Garland. Their music and albums cemented Davis as one of the most prolific and popular jazz musicians of the 1950's (Carr 122). Davis also reunited with Gil Evans and the two collaborated on four albums that would continue to redefine the sound of jazz and was in opposition to bebop in its sound. The notes were held longer and the use of cross harmonizing employed. Miles added alto saxophonist Julian Adderley to his group, many critics consider their work as

Davis' finest musical moment. In 1959, the group released their album Kind of Blue. Instead of chords, the use of scales was used to begin improvisations, this practice was termed “ modal” (Carr 130). The album was a huge success and brought this smoother style of jazz to millions (Carr 130).

Beginning in 1969 and continuing through the 1970's, Davis began to introduce rock and roll elements into his music. This initiative later became known as fusion jazz. He brought in electronic keyboards and a “ wah” (Carr 206) pedal to create that sound with his trumpet. He also brought in rock musicians to collaborate and play with. The beat of his music also had a rock edge to it. The fusion was more upbeat than the music he was known for playing but his distinctive trumpet playing was always recognizable in the music.

Davis also had a talent for recognizing great musicians. Throughout his career he always surrounded himself with the most talented and creative artists around. This sparked to creativity and innovation in the music they played. At times, he was criticized by other black musicians for playing with white musicians. Race was not a concern for Davis, he looked for talent. Being surrounded by such talent allowed for exploration in their music and an openness to play without judgement. This is a signature of jazz and the improvisation it brings to playing music.

The name Miles Davis is known by everyone. He was a gifted musician who truly bridged the gap in America between black and white audiences, jazz buffs and casual listeners. Miles represented an honesty and nakedness in his performances. He played with emotion and it could be felt in his music.

His albums continue to be rereleased as new generations of listeners discover his music. Performers as diverse as David Bowie, Herbie Hancock, James Brown, Brian Eno and Philip Glass cite Davis as being an important influence in their music (Carr 312). Davis' musical sound was innovative and changed over the years mirroring the changes in American society. His diverse body of work from bebop to cool jazz to fusion all showcase his incredible talent and creativity.

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