

# Miles Henry Davis Perspectives in American Jazz

Profession, Singers



Ben Martinson December 10, 2009 Miles Davis: The Last Pioneer in American Jazz Miles Davis represents the pinnacle of modern American Jazz. He was one of the foremost pioneers in the inventions of cool jazz, hard bop, free jazz, fusion and techno. He was, arguably one of the most influential figures in music, pushing the boundaries of what was commonly known as jazz into new directions that most people thought was impossible. Davis was born on May 26, 1926 in Alton, Illinois to Dr.

Miles Henry Davis, a successful dentist, and Cleota Mae Davis. Davis' interest in music was sparked at the age of 13 when his father bought him a trumpet, and arranged lessons with accomplished local musician Elwood Buchanan. Oddly enough, Buchanan discouraged Davis from using vibrato in his music, which was a characteristic that Davis carried throughout the entirety of his career. Interestingly, his mother, Cleota Mae Davis, played blues piano but kept this fact hidden from her son.

Because of his proficiency with the trumpet, he was accepted into the Juilliard School of Music to study classical music. Davis quickly realized that the classical form was not for him, and desired a more non-traditional approach. Davis made the decision to drop out of the Juilliard School because they were not accepting of his non-traditional approach. Davis focused on imperfect melodies in order to distract the users away from the composition of the music, and to concentrate more on the deeply rooted meanings in the music.

Davis stated in an interview, " It's [music] always been a gift with me, hearing music the way I do. I don't know where it comes from, it's just there and I don't question it," (Miles Davis Properties). After Davis dropped out of

Julliard, he got to experience the greatest privilege that any musician of the time could hope for. He received the chance to play with the band of Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie. Davis' performance was rapidly perfected by the influence of Parker and Gillespie (Miles Davis).

He saw his first studio time under Parker and Gillespie with Savoy records in September of 1945. This represented a major change of pace for Davis, because he was now qualified to record as a solo artist. Savoy Records offered to sign him as a band leader, where he soon excelled to the point of starting his own nonet called the " Miles Davis Nonet. " Davis often came off as arrogant or rude because he demanded absolute perfection in all rehearsals and performances from his band members. These demands may have been rooted in the slaps on the knuckles he received as a child from Buchanan.

Davis had rapidly become one of the most famous musicians of the time, and had no intention of slowing down. Davis enjoyed a rapid, lifestyle of fame success, and debauchery. His lifestyle began to catch up with him at the peak of his career when heroine became a severe problem in his life. Heroin addiction was not uncommon for musicians during the 1940s and 1950s. It is speculated that his addiction to heroin may have been influenced by both Parker and Gillespie, the two men that made him into a star (Miles Davis).

However, the difference between Davis, Parker, and Gillespie was that Davis rid himself of his addiction to heroin by locking himself into a room until he was completely free of his habit and prepared to perform again. Davis rapidly got back to the world of jazz by performing at the Newport Jazz

Festival in July of 1955. This performance was one of his best live shows, and proved to Columbia Records that he was ready to record one of his bestselling albums of all time, *Miles Ahead*. This album featured legendary collaborations between Gil Evans and Davis.

It created the new sound of Miles Davis that moved away from Bebop, and more towards unheard of genres of music. In August of 1959 Davis' success continued with the release of his most successful album, *Kind of Blue*. This album went on to earn quadruple-platinum success, and to be the best-selling jazz album of all time. "It Never Entered My Mind" is my favorite track by Davis. It is the first track on Davis' album, *Workin'* performed by the Miles Davis Quintet. The track features Davis playing a very cool, relaxed trumpet solo, with a walking scale on bass. The scale is a riff and it repeats the entire song.

First and foremost when listen to this piece, I just feel extremely relaxed. The song carries a heavy romantic tone to it that one cannot help but fall in love with. It is very much like most of his early trumpet playing because it lacks vibrato, and is overall an extremely smooth piece. On September 28, 1991, one year after receiving the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award, Davis died at the young age of sixty-five from a stroke, pneumonia and respiratory failure. Davis' music has been, and will continue to be popular and one of the most sought after names in American

Jazz. His influence on other genres is wider than most people realize because of the amount of techniques and styles that he experimented with. No audience is out of reach of Davis' music because of his uses elements of

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rock, pop, electronic, jazz and so many more genres. His self-discipline, talent, and love for music have earned him 9 Grammy Awards, including a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award, a spot in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, stars on the Hollywood and Saint Louis Walks of Fame, and a Knighthood in Paris.

These and countless other honors, combined with his record sales are proof of the popularity, influence, and success that Davis will enjoy for years to come in the fields of cool jazz, hard bop, free jazz, fusion and techno. Davis was a stickler for perfection and poured himself into every song he created and performed, and many musicians have him to thank for the success he has brought them.

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