

Companion piece to **Birth of the Cool: How Jazz Great Miles Davis Found His Sound** by Kathleen Cornell Berman and Illustrations by Keith Henry Brown

Miles Davis Quotes



People magazine 1981

“Music comes to me mostly at night”, says Miles, “I write it down on anything as soon as it come, I’d write it on your hand. Then tape it and I never turn the recorder off because I might stumble onto something and later not know what I played. It’s my memory bank.

“I’m in a class by myself” he says. “I play very strange—the way sanctified people will play in church or a hillbilly sings. The words fall on funny beats. It’s not a burden. It’s just that I can’t play like anyone else and I can’t write like anyone else. I don’t mess around with music because I love music. That is 90% of my life (the rest is Cisley and a few others—band members).”

“I always listen to what I can leave out.”

“Don’t play what’s there play what’s not there.”

To Dave Holland, as quoted by Ian Carter in Miles Davis The Definitive Biography 1998 p. 247

John Scofield---“He had an ability to strip things down and make them profound.”

Herbie Hancock—“He was a team worker—he listened to what everybody does and he uses that and what he plays makes what everybody does sound better.”

John McLaughlin--“He had the capacity to draw out of people things that even surprised the musicians themselves.”

Blair Jackson—“A musical provocateur” Always gnawing away at the certainties that makes us too comfortable and impedes our creativity. He was never satisfied—He was never comfortable with things the way things were, always looking for something new. He took risks.

He wanted to keep things free.

Jack DeJonette—“Playing with Miles was about being focused and about where the music takes you.”

Miles said to his musicians—“When you play music, don’t play the idea that’s there, play the next idea.”

Got rid of clutter—liked spaces between the notes. Uncluttered phrasing increases the impact. He played only the most important notes.

His Dad—“Miles you hear that bird outside the window? He’s a mocking bird. He don’t have a sound of his own. He copies everybody’s sound, and you don’t want to do that. You want to be your own man, have your own sound. That’s what it’s really about.”

"I prefer a round sound with no attitude in it, like a round voice with not too much tremolo and not too much bass. Just right in the middle. If I can't get that sound I can't play anything."^[8] Kahn

Davis took an active role in the project,^[13] so much so that it soon became "his project". The objective was to achieve a sound similar to the human voice, through carefully arranged compositions and by emphasizing a relaxed, melodic approach to the improvisations.

Mulligan, Gerry. *I hear America singing*: "Miles, the bandleader. He took the initiative and put the theories to work. He called the rehearsals, hired the halls, called the players, and generally cracked the whip."

"Back in bebop, everybody used to play real fast. But I didn't ever like playing a bunch of scales and shit. I always tried to play the most important notes in the chord, to break it up. I used to hear all them musicians playing all them scales and notes and never nothing you could remember." *The Autobiography*.

“I’m always thinking about creating. My future starts when I wake up every morning... Every day I find something creative to do with my life.” Miles Davis

“Sometimes you have to play a long time to be able to play like yourself.” Miles Davis

“Do not fear mistakes. There are none.” Miles Davis

“I'll play it first and tell you what it is later.” Miles Davis

“For me, music and life are all about style.” Miles Davis

“It's not the note you play that's the wrong note - it's the note you play afterwards that makes it right or wrong.”

“A painting is music you can see and music is a painting you can hear.”

“If you're not nervous then you're not paying attention. “

“In music, silence is more important than sound. “

“It's not about standing still and becoming safe. If anybody wants to keep creating they have to be about change.”

“To keep creating you have to be about change.”

“I'm always thinking about creating. My future starts when I wake up every morning... Every day I find something creative to do with my life.”

“First you imitate, then you innovate.”

Miles shows respect for the older jazz players, Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington

“I love Pops, I love the way he sings, the way he plays – everything he does, except when he says something against modern-jazz music. He ought to realize that he was a pioneer, too. No, he wasn't an influence of mine, and I've had very little direct contact with Pops. A long time ago, I was at Bop City, and he came in and told me he liked my playing. I don't know if he would even remember it, but I remember how good I felt to have him say it. People really dig Pops like I do myself. He does a good job overseas with his personality. But they ought to send him down South for goodwill. They need goodwill

worse in Georgia and Alabama and Mississippi than they do in Europe.” *Miles talks about Louis Armstrong.*

You cant play nothing on modern trumpet that doesn't come from him, (*Louis Armstrong*) not even modern shit. I can't even remember a time when he sounded bad playing the trumpet. Never. Not even one time. He had great feeling up in his playing and he always played on the beat. I just loved the way he played and sang.”

“At least one day out of the year all musicians should just put their instruments down, and give thanks to Duke Ellington.”

“...if a cat could play...I would hire him, I didn't give a damn if he was green and had red breath.”

Interviewed by Alex Haley, *Playboy*, 1962

“His sound was not a gift, but something he crafted slowly over time, extracting it like an alchemist from an alloy of breath and metal.” John Szwed, “So What”

“Miles Davis was the sound of his trumpet. It was a sound that was deeply personal to him, and almost mystical in its source and power to project himself through his music.”

John Szwed

“He has this sound that was kind of like a haunting kind of voice, it was really individual, very unique, very special. The way he plays it, sometimes it makes you feel life so deeply, you could almost cry. It didn't sound like a trumpet anymore.”

Charlie Haden

“I always thought that music had no boundaries, no limits to where it could grow and go, no restrictions on its creativity. Good music is good no matter what kind of music it is. And I always hated categories. Always. Never thought it had any place in music.” –



Miles Davis advice to Hugh Masekela;

“You're just going to be a statistic if you play jazz, but if you put in some of the stuff you remember from South Africa, you'll be different from everybody else.”