H.P. LOVECRAFT'S
THE MUSIC OF ELDRITCH JOHN

A Modern Update on *The Music of Erich Zann*

Rewritten by T. Christopher Kurth (Last Edit 09/04/22)

Paris, **the Rue d'Auseil**, & **The Music of Eldritch John**:

I have examined maps of *Paris* with the greatest of care, yet have never again found the Rue d'Auseil. These maps have not been modern maps alone, for I realize that names change. I have, on the contrary, delved deeply into all the antiquities of the place; and have personally explored every region, by whatever name, which could possibly answer to the street I knew as the *Rue d'Auseil*. But despite all that I've done, it remains a humiliating fact that I cannot find the house, the street, or even the locality, were—during the last months of my impoverished life as a student of philosophy and mathematics at the *Sorbonne*—I heard ***the music of Eldritch John.***

University of Paris—The Sorbonne:

That my memory is broken, I do not wonder; for my health, physical and mental, was gravely disturbed throughout the arduous period of my graduate residence at the Rue d'Auseil. And, I recall that I took none of my few acquaintances there. But, that I cannot find the place again is both singular and perplexing; for it was within less than an hour's walk of the *university* and was distinguished by peculiarities which could hardly be forgotten by anyone who had been there. Nevertheless, I have never met a person who has seen or ever been to the Rue d' Auseil—much less, resided there.

The River Seine & **The Left Bank**:

The Rue d'Auseil lay across a dark tributary of the river *Seine*, on the *Left Bank*, bordered by precipitous brick and windowed warehouses of uneven height. It was spanned by an old ponderous bridge—much like the *Pont Neuf*, but of much darker stone and considerably smaller scale. And, I recall that it was always shadowy along this particular part of the river—as if the smoke of the neighboring factories perpetually shut out the sun.

Artists & **Intellectuals—Absinthe**, **Morphine**, & **Cannabis**:

The neighborhood was also odorous with a strange smell—like a mixture of *Absinthe* and *Morphine*—which I've never smelled elsewhere. And, which may someday help me find it, since I should recognize them at once—as these substances seemed almost irresistible to the artists and intellectuals living in this peculiar section of the Left Bank. Beyond the bridge were narrow cobbled streets with rails; and then came an ascent—like a miniature *Montmartre*—at first gradual, but increasingly steep, as the Rue d'Auseil was eventually reached. Indeed, I have never seen another street as narrow or as steep as the Rue d'Auseil. It was almost a cliff, closed to all vehicles, consisting of several flights of steps, and ending at the top with a lofty ivied wall. Its paving was irregular—sometimes stone slabs, sometimes cobblestones, and sometimes bare earth—with struggling, greenish *Cannabis*-like vegetation frequently poking out from between the cracks.

Buildings, **Houses**, & **Streets of The Rive Gauche**—**The** '**Infamous**' **Left Bank**:

The houses were tall, peaked-roofed, incredibly old, and crazily leaned backward, forward, and sidewise. Occasionally, an opposite pair, both leaning forward, almost met across the street—like an arch—and certainly, they kept most of the light from the ground below. There were even a few overhead bridges—from house to house, across the street—like they occasionally constructed in olden days, to keep completely off the dirty pavement and gutters.

'**Les Bohemiens**'—**The Denizens of the Left Bank**:

The so-called "*Bohemians*" residing in this place impressed me peculiarly. At first, I thought it was because they were all rather silent and circumspect; but later, decided that it was because they were either very old or penniless students, like myself—of course, some of them were likely middling drug addicts, as well. I do not know how I came to live on such a street, but I was not myself when I moved there. I had been living in many poorer places, always evicted for want of money; until—at last—I came upon that tottering house in the Rue d'Auseil which was kept by an elderly paralytic man named Blandot. It was the third house from the top of the street—and by far the tallest of them all.

Eldritch John—**The Moulin Rouge** & **A Fantastic Saxophone Artist**:

My room was on the fifth floor; the only inhabited room there, since the house was nearly empty. On the night I arrived, I heard *strange music* from the peaked garret overhead; and the next day, asked old Blandot about it. He told me it was from a retiring negro **saxophone**-player; a strange and silent man—likely a 'mute'—who signed his name **Eldritch John** and who played evenings at the *Moulin Rouge* burlesque. He added that John's desire to play in the night, after his return from performing at the cabaret, was the reason he had chosen this lofty and isolated garret room—whose single gabled window was the only point on the street from which one could look over the terminating wall, along the declivity, at the vast panorama beyond. Thereafter, I heard John's playing every night. And although he often kept me awake, I was haunted by the weirdness of his music. Knowing little of the art, myself, I was nevertheless certain that none of his harmonies had any relation to music I had heard before; and concluded that he was a composer of highly original genius. The longer I listened, the more fascinated I became—until after a week, I resolved to make the man's acquaintance.

Meeting '**The Maestro**':

One night, as he was returning from work, I intercepted John in the hallway and told him I would like to meet him and, perhaps, watch him while he played. He was a lean, medium-sized black man, with slightly shabby evening clothes, dark brown eyes, a friendly face, and a head topped with extremely short black hair. Initially, at my first words, he seemed somewhat concerned and even slightly nervous. My obvious friendliness, however, seemed to please him; and he grudgingly motioned me to follow him up the dark, creaking, rickety stairs to the attic.

The Maestro's Quarters & **Grand View**:

His room, one of only two in that steeply pitched garret, was on the west side—with a large window towards the high wall that formed the upper end of the street. Its size was very great, and seemed the greater because of its extraordinary bareness and neglect. Of furniture there was only a narrow iron bed, a dingy washstand, a small table, a desk, a large bookcase, an iron music-rack, and three old-fashioned chairs. Predictably, sheets of music were piled in disorder about the floor. The walls were all bare boards, and had probably never known plaster; whilst the abundance of dust and cobwebs made the place seem somehow more deserted than inhabited. Evidently, Eldritch John's world of beauty lay in some far cosmos of the imagination—rather than the here and now.

The Master's Favorites—'**Cool**' & '**Hard**-**Bop**' **Music**:

Motioning me to sit down, this alleged 'mute' closed the door, turned the large wooden bolt, and lighted a candle to augment the one he had brought with him. He now removed his **saxophone** from its moth-eaten case, and taking it, seated himself in the least uncomfortable of the chairs. Before commencing, he took a paper scrap and confessed that he didn't often have a chance to play '***My Favorite Things***' [60/61]—especially, to a captive audience of one. I said I would stay and listen diligently, for as long as he wished to play. He then returned to the paper writing down '*C'est d'accord avec moi'* ('That's okay with me'). Then he added, be patient then—this could take some time. He wrote, let's start with something composed by my personal mentor, **Miles Davis**, called the ***Birth of the Cool***.[1] After this, he decided to play something else '**Cool**' called ***Time Out*** by **The Dave Brubeck Quartet**.[2] Next, John noted that, as a young man, he first played with **Miles Davis** on his next set, called *'**Round About Midnight***.[3] Then he said that he would also play a few songs from ***The Bridge***[4] and ***Alfie***[5] by a '**Hard**-**bop**' saxophonist named **Sonny Rollins**—John's early rival. **John** then contrasted Rollins' style with selections from each of his own 'Hard-bop' breakout compositions—***Bluetrane***[6] [57/58], ***Soultrane*** [58/58], and ***Giant Steps***[7] [60/60], respectively.

Modern '**Cool**', **The Moulin Rouge**, & **a Bit of** '**Stage Magic**':

He did not employ the music-stand. But playing from memory instead, he enchanted me for nearly three hours with the most incredible *music* I've ever heard; melodies which must have largely been **John**'s own devising—as well as creations from that other artist, the genius composer and trumpeter **Miles Davis**. But, truly the most incredible thing about his amazing performance was that John somehow 'magically' employed a new-fangled Victrola for harmonious backup—that is, from behind large curtains and very near that grandiose attic window. This device apparently provided hands-free accompaniment to his lone saxophone playing via some sort of a novel recording instrument (which he cleverly concealed from the audience)—and which must have been experimental and extremely expensive. I then realized that '*Eldritch John*' was likely his stage name at the *Moulin Rouge*; where he obviously employed some sort of new electronically inspired *stage magic* during his act. Indeed, John appeared to be a mysterious man of many talents—and I was lucky enough to have met him, face-to-face.

A 'Post-Bop' Finale:

Finally, he concluded this wonderful 'illusion' by now retiring his sax—so he could personally sit and 'witness' the last performance—a grand finale by the **Ahmad Jamal Trio**. John noted that this particular set was entitled ***Live at the Pershing Lounge***[8]—however, for such a small trio, John's saxophone was not really needed—so he sat down next to me, closed his eyes, and proceeded to listen meditatively, like an (unexpected) member of the audience. Incredulously, as this amazing presentation came to a close, John invited me back the following night for a repeat performance. All this, merely because I had shown this obviously lonely artist some much overdue respect—and a bit of youthful adulation. I thanked him profusely and told him that I looked forward to his next recital with great anticipation, as my scholastic studies—and concomitant examinations—were starting to fray my psyche beyond all reasonable expectations. No wonder there weren't more Ph.Ds. No matter what, I definitely needed this distraction and I just couldn't believe that a man of his talents would choose to live in such an odd place as the Rue d'Auseil.

'**Modal' Masterpieces**:

The next night proceeded much like the first, except that he had straightened up the room a little—undoubtedly because most magical 'illusions' require careful preparation on the part of their performer. Again, retrieving some paper from his desk, John informed me that he would be introducing me to a new, modal-style of music. He continued this preface by noting that, as far as he was concerned, this '**Modal jazz**' was the very best music that he had ever heard, much less performed. I settled in, as he indicated that **Miles Davis** had also directed the following compositions—except he had graciously allowed **John** a lot of space for far-reaching improvisation, with wonderful effect. He began with ***Milestones***[8] [58/58], as he underscored that this was the very first 'modal' work in modern instrumental music. He immediately followed this groundbreaking composition with something called ***Coltrane's Sound*** [60/64]. Then, after warming up with these works, he proceeded to what, as he previously indicated, was '***the single best jazz album*** *of all time*'—whatever an *album* was (he never made this clear, but I suspected it was like a photographer's '*artistic collection*' or 'photo album'). This modal masterpiece was called ***Kind of Blue***[9] [59/59], and Mile's admitted that this fantastic album was as much John's work as it was his. He rounded out his amazing performance with a composition called ***Crescent*** [64/64] and, then, immediately topped this with an even better piece by an artist named **Wayne Shorter** called ***Speak No Evil*** [64/66]. To describe their exact nature is impossible for one unversed in music. Indeed, **Miles** once said that whenever he performed at his very best, it was as if the band communicated through ***E.S.P.***—*Extra Sensory Perception* [65/65]—so that's what he decided to name his own favorite album. Indeed, these musical works were a kind of *modality*, with recurrent passages of the most captivating quality. In fact, these 'albums' were truly **acoustic masterpieces** of the highest musical order; but—to me, at least—they were most notable for the absence of any of those weirder, wilder notes I had overheard from my room below, on stranger occasions.

Eldritch John's Avant-garde Music—A Love Supreme:

Those haunting notes I had remembered, and had often hummed and whistled inaccurately to myself; so, when John finally laid down his sax I asked him if he would render some of these, as well. He immediately started playing from an album called ***Coltrane***[62/62], which proved to have many of the notes which I had heard in my oft sleepless nights—that is, while often pondering difficult equations. It was definitely interesting, but it wasn't the piece that I had heard so often.

He then wrote in nearly illegible French, '*D'accord, nous ferons ca ensuite'* ('Okay, we'll do that one next'). John suspected that I was likely referring to his much lauded '**Avant-garde**' masterpiece ***A Love Supreme***[64/65]—his own personal favorite, which he had played for himself on many a lonely night. So, he motioned me to sit back down and try to make myself comfortable, as this 'quasi' or 'transitional' Free Jazz composition was rather long and complex.

This unforgettable performance had proved to be as good as I remembered from his many late-night soliloquies; but as I began my next request, his wrinkled satyr-like face lost the placidity it had possessed during his earlier playing—and seemed to show the same curious mixture of concern and anxiety which I had noticed when first I accosted the man in the hallway below. For a moment I was inclined to use persuasion—regarding lightly the whims of 'artistic pretense'—and even tried to awaken my host's weirder mood for '**Free Jazz**' **improvisation** by whistling a few of his more bizarre refrains—melodies which I had overheard a few weeks earlier. But, I did not pursue this course for more than a moment. For when that strange musician recognized my various whistles as melodies from his ***Mediations***, ***Sun Ship***, and ***Ascension*** albums—each in terrible succession—his face grew distorted with an expression wholly beyond analysis. And, his ebony hand suddenly reached out to stop my mouth and silence my crude imitation of these seemingly perilous notes. As he did this, he further demonstrated his eccentricity by casting a startled glance toward the lone curtained window, as if fearful of some intruder—a glance doubly absurd, since the garret stood high and inaccessible above the adjacent roofs. Indeed, this window was the only point on the steep street, as Blandot—the concierge—had told me, from which one could see over the wall, at the summit.

Eccentricities of the Artist:

The strange man's glance instantly brought Blandot's remark to my mind. And, with a certain capriciousness, I felt a sudden wish to actually look out over this wide and dizzying panorama of moonlit roofs and city lights beyond that high hill—which, of all the dwellers in the Rue d'Auseil, only this strange musician could see. I moved toward the window and would have drawn aside the long curtains, when—with a frightful act even greater than before—the mute lodger was upon me, again; only this time he was motioning his head towards the door, as he nervously strove to drag me there with both hands. Thoroughly disgusted with my host, I ordered him to release me, and told him I would go at once. His clutch relaxed; and as he saw my disgust and offence, his own agitation seemed to subside. He tightened his relaxing grip—but this time in a friendly manner—directing me towards a chair nearby. Then, with an appearance of melancholy, he crossed to the littered table, where he subsequently wrote many words with his pencil in the labored French of a foreigner.

A Veteran Psychic Warrior:

The note which he finally handed me was an appeal for tolerance and forgiveness. John said that he was lonely and afflicted with strange fears and a nervous disposition connected with his music—and, with other things… He had enjoyed my listening to his music, and wished I would come again and not mind his eccentricities. But he could not play—to another—his weirder harmonies, and could not bear hearing them from anyone else, as well; nor could he bear having anything in his room touched by anyone, at any time, for any reason. Actually, he had not known, until our hallway conversation, that I could overhear his playing from my room below. And, he asked me if I would arrange with Blandot to take a still lower room—specifically, one where I could not hear him during the night. He would, he wrote, of course defray the considerable difference in rent.

A Philosophical Test:

As I sat deciphering his deplorable French, I felt more lenient toward the strange man. He seemed to be victim to profound physical and nervous suffering—as was I—and my *philosophical studies* had taught me the importance of *ethics* and human *kindness*. Then, in that uncomfortable silence, there came a slight sound from the window—perhaps the shutter rattled in the night wind—and, for some reason, I was startled almost as violently as Eldritch John. So, when I finally finished reading the rest of his message, I shook my host by the hand and departed as a friend—and now also, as a somewhat bewildered '**Jazz aficionado**.' The next day Blandot gave me a much more expensive room on the third floor, between the apartments of an aged *banker* and the room of an old respected French *photographer*. However, now there was no one staying on either of the floors above me.

A Strange Music & **A Forbidden Portal**:

It was not long before John's eagerness for company was not as great as it had seemed when had persuaded me to move down from the fifth floor. He did not ask me to call on him; and when I did call, he appeared uneasy and played listlessly and remained rather aloof. This, of course, was always during the night—in the day he slept, and would admit no one. My liking for him did not especially grow, though the attic room and that *weird music* still seemed to hold an odd fascination for me. I also had a curious desire to look out of that grand window, and over the wall—that is, down the unseen slope at the glittering roofs and spires which must lie there wondrously revealed. Once, I even went up to the garret—during evening hours, when John was away—but the heavy attic door was resolutely locked.

Trance Music:

What I did succeed in doing was to hear the nocturnal playing of that strangely silent *African American* **composer**. At first, I would tiptoe up to my old fifth floor. Then, I grew bold enough to climb the last creaking staircase to that peaked garret. There, in that narrow hall outside the bolted door and covered keyhole, I often heard *mystical sounds* which filled me with an indefinable ecstasy. Somehow, it seemed to subtly elicit a mild *trance* state, combined with vague wonders and brooding mysteries. It was not that the sounds were especially beautiful, for they were not. But, they held vibrations suggesting nothing on this earth—and at certain intervals—they assumed a *symphonic* quality which I could hardly conceive as produced by mere a single player. Either way, Eldritch John was certainly a genius of wild power.

The Hermit & **That Inexplicable Night**:

As the weeks passed, the playing grew ever wilder, whilst this strange black musician acquired an increasing haggardness and furtiveness too pitiful for me to personally witness. Now, he even refused to admit me at any time—and practically shunned me whenever we met on the stairs. Then one night, as I listened at the door, I heard his shrieking saxophone swell into a chaotic babel of sound; a pandemonium which would have led me to doubt my own sanity had there not—there and then—come from behind that barred portal, piteous proof that it was all real. Namely, an awful, inarticulate cry which broke through the man's muted silence and which rises only in moments of the most terrible anguish. I knocked repeatedly at the door, but received no response. Afterward, I waited in that dark hallway shivering with cold and fear, till I heard the poor musician's feeble effort to rise from the floor by the aid of a chair. Believing him just conscious after fainting, I renewed my rapping; and at the same time, I began calling out reassuringly. I heard John stumble towards the great window and close both of the large shutters and sash, and then stumble again to the door, which he falteringly unfastened to admit me. This time his delight at having me present was undoubtedly real; for his face gleamed with relief, while he clutched at my coat as a child clutches a mother's skirt.

Shaking pathetically, the man forced me into a chair, whilst he sank into another—beside which, his saxophone lay precariously on the floor. He sat for some time inactive, nodding oddly, but having the paradoxical suggestion of intense and frightened listening. Subsequently, he seemed to be satisfied; and crossing to a chair by the table, wrote a brief note, handed it to me, and returned to the table where he began to write rapidly and incessantly. The note implored me—in the name of mercy and for the sake of my own curiosity—to wait where I was while he prepared a full account, in English, of all the marvels and terrors which had beset him. I waited, as the inaudible man's pencil flew.

It was perhaps an hour later, while I still waited—during which the musician's feverishly written sheets continued to pile up, higher and higher—when I suddenly saw John startle, as from a hint of a horrible shock. Unmistakably, he was now looking at the curtained window and listening intently. Then, I half fancied I heard the sound myself—though, it was not a horrible sound—but rather, an exquisitely low and infinitely distant musical note, suggesting a player in one of the neighboring houses—or perhaps, in some abode beyond the lofty wall over which I had never been able to look. Upon John, however, the effect was unmistakable. For right then, dropping his pencil, he suddenly rose, seized his sax, and commenced to rend the night with the wildest playing I had ever heard from his strained saxophone—save when listening at that barred attic door.

It would be useless to describe the playing of Eldritch John on that dreadful night. It was more bizarre than anything I had ever overheard, because I could now see the expression of his face, and realized that—this time—the motive was fear. He was trying to make a noise; to ward off something or drown something out—or to break through to somewhere—what, I could not imagine, awesome though I felt it must be. The playing grew fantastic, delirious, and hysterical, yet kept—to the last—the qualities of supreme genius which I knew this strange black man possessed. I recognized the melody from the previous night—it was a wild, wailing eruption of '**Free**' **improvisation**—and I reflected, for a moment, that this was the first time I had ever witnessed John play this way in person.

Louder and louder, wilder and wilder, mounted the shrieking and whining of that desperate sax. The player was dripping with an uncanny perspiration and twisted like a satyr, always looking frantically at that strange curtained window. In these frenzied refrains I could almost see shadowy nymphs and Bacchanals dancing and whirling insanely through seething abysses of clouds and smoke and lightning. And then I thought I heard a shriller, steadier note that was not from his saxophone; a calm, deliberate, purposeful, almost mocking note from far away, in the west.

At this juncture the shutter began to rattle in the howling night-wind which had sprung up outside, as if in answer to the mad playing within. John's screaming sax now outdid itself, emitting sounds I had never thought a saxophone could make. The shutter rattled more loudly, unfastened, and commenced slamming against the window. Then the glass broke, shivering under the persistent impacts; and the chill wind rushed in, making the candles sputter and rustling the sheets of paper on the table—namely, where John had previously written down his supposedly 'horrible' secret. I looked at John, and saw that he was past conscious observation. His almond-shaped eyes were bulging, glassy, and sightless, and his frantic playing had become a blind, mechanical, unrecognizable orgy that no pen could ever suggest.

A sudden gust, stronger than the others, caught up pages of the manuscript and bore some of them towards the window. I followed these flying sheets in desperation, grabbing what I could before they were gone forever out the demolished panes. Then, I remembered my old wish to finally gaze from this window—the only window in the Rue d'Auseil from which one might see the slope beyond the wall, and the city spread out beneath. It was very dark, but the city's lights always burned, and I expected to see them there, even amidst the rain and wind. Yet, when I looked out from that highest of all gabled windows—looking, while the candles sputtered and John's insane sax howled with the night-wind—I saw no city spread out below, and no friendly lights gleaming from remembered streets; but rather, only the blackness of illimitable space! It was an unimaginable space, alive with motion and music, and having no semblance to anything on earth. And as I stood there looking in terror, the wind suddenly blew out both of the candles in that ancient peaked garret, leaving me in a savage and impenetrable darkness, with chaos and pandemonium before me, and the demonic madness of that night-baying saxophone behind me.

I staggered back in the dark, without the means of striking a light; crashing against the table, overturning a chair, and finally groping my way to the place where the blackness screamed with shocking music. To save myself and Eldritch John I could at least try, whatever powers might oppose to me. I even sensed that some chill thing brushed against me, and I screamed; but my scream could not be heard above the hideous wail of the saxophone. Suddenly, out of the blackness, John's madly swinging sax struck me, and I knew I was close to the player. I felt ahead, touched the back of John's chair, and found and shook his shoulders in an effort to bring him to his senses.

Night Flight & '**The City of Light**':

He did not respond, and still his sax shrieked on without slacking. I moved my hand to his head, whose mechanical nodding I was unable to stop, and shouted in his ear that we must both flee from these unknown things of the night! But, he neither answered me nor abated the frenzy of his unutterable music—while all through the garret strange currents of wind seemed to dance amidst the darkness and babel. When my hand touched his ear I shuddered, though I knew not why—knew not why that is, till I felt his mask of death—an ice-cold, stiffened, unbreathing face, whose glassy eyes gazed uselessly into the void. And then by some miracle, finding the door and large wooden bolt, I plunged wildly away from that glassy-eyed thing in the dark, and from the ghoulish howling of that accursed sax—whose fury increased, even as I plunged, running wildly towards the light.

Leaping, floating, flying down those endless stairs and through the dark houses; racing mindlessly out into the narrow, steep, and ancient street of steps and tottering houses; clattering down these steps and over cobbles to the lower streets and canyon-walled river; panting across the small dark bridge to the broader, heathier streets and boulevards we all know and love—all this is the terrible impression, that still lingers with me! And then I recall that there was no wind, and that the moon was full, and the lights of *Paris*—that famous '*city of light*'—twinkled brightly.

The Legend of Eldritch John:

Sadly, I left everything I knew behind; which was not very much—at least, materially speaking. But, what I did manage to rescue was a few of those pages upon which John had feverously disclosed his entire life story. So now, resting under the moonlight, I began to read what he had so desperately written. He began his account by emphasizing that I must not share this story with others, as this could possibly alter world events! Then, he admitted that his full name was John William Coltrane—and that he was, in fact, from the future. And, that he had—while heedlessly experimenting with some advanced sound frequencies and energetic modulations (apparently based on some secret Tibetan *mantras*)—inadvertently opened a dangerous hole in space-time, which subsequently ripped his soul to shreds as an unintended consequence. In other words, this reckless and naïve experimentation had—somehow—shattered his ego; throwing fragments of himself into many different times and places—both past, present, and future. The initial shock of this catastrophe had rendered him mute; but somehow, he miraculously still retained the power to play his beloved saxophone. However, the shock eventually proved too much for his 1967 body—so according to that timeline, John Coltrane died the same year, at the age of 40. Conversely, part of him was also simultaneously thrown back to Paris—or rather, the Paris of 1901. Still, other 'parts' were scattered into a multitude of other times and places. And that—during his precious residence in the Rue d' Auseil—he was desperately trying to discover those same frequencies and modulations… So he could hopefully repair this damage and reunite his various 'egos'—or shattered 'selves'—which, as already mentioned, where currently scattered across the space-time continuum. Every so often, his efforts would meet with some success—but full reunion always seemed to slip away at the last moment. Lately however, things had seemed to go from bad to worse, and his different selves seemed to be drifting father and father away from each other—despite all his, or their, combined efforts!

Earlier, old Blandot had discovered John unconscious on the street in front of this building, and had gradually nursed him back to health. John subsequently revealed his strange story to him—emphasizing that neither of them should unduly tamper with the timeline, lest they forever change future events—perhaps even obliterating John's presence within all the various timelines. Nevertheless, John did use his future knowledge of events—especially, economics—to ensure that Blandot and he would forever remain financially self-sufficient. So, while the garret remained empty above—due to its local proximity to John's temporal accident—Blandot's first floor apartment had all the amenities that either of them could ever want or need. This is in fact why they had never let me see inside their massive first-floor apartment. However, now that John was unfortunately starting to slip-away—and Blandot was getting rather old and increasingly infirm—they were grooming me to possibly take-over operation of the building—at least temporarily, before my leaving Paris for New Orleans.

Of course parts of the story were obviously missing, since several sheets had blown out that gapping attic window, but John's remaining account assured me that all the money I could ever wish for—including valuable gold and platinum—was safely waiting for me, locked away in Blandot's luxurious apartment. John, accordingly, ended his brief biographical account with much thanks and heartfelt appreciation for all the attention that I had given him and old Blandot. And, concluded that I was truly a good man, with noble character, and a strong ethical sense—and that I should definitely continue my studies, no matter what—but that he could not tell me exactly why this was so very important! Furthermore, he added, this planet would come to desperately need men like me, as it would have to endure not just one but three World Wars, during my incredibly long life. He ended with the quote, "Stay strong—and stay good—the world needs you! But whenever you need a rest—think of me and my heartfelt music: It's my lasting gift to an ignorant and suffering humanity. Namely, every single one of my brothers and sisters, whether they appreciate it or not."

John finished with a humorous postscript, apparently communicated to him by one of his future selves. He said that, believe it or not, an **Episcopal church** in **San Francisco** had actually cantonized him as a 'Saint'—**St**. **John Coltrane**. So, I should forever think of him as my very own patron saint—that is, whenever I needed a laugh and a smile. "And, cheer up Etienne—what we do and say really does matter—I am living proof of this! Besides, my future 'selves' have already indicated to me that humanity survives into the far, far future—at least, in nearly fifty percent of these timelines."

My Own Postscript:

Nowadays—despite careful searches and investigations—I have never since been able to find the Rue d'Auseil. Doubtless, with John's untimely demise, the neighborhood seems to have vanished entirely from this 1907 space-time dimension. But, I am not wholly sorry; as I still retain John as my real-life *patron Saint*. Besides, I didn't really need all that wealth after all—as my name is Etienne-Laurent de Marigny—and with John's providential help, I discovered time travel! However, I will always remember fondly the amazing music of Eldritch John. Though ironically, with the help of my strange contraption I call '*De Marigny's Clock*', I can see him play whenever I wish. And finally, with the advent of modern computing, everyone else can likewise listen to him on *YouTube*—absolutely for free—so, enjoy John's most holy gift!

THE END—However, this is not really the end; it's the beginning of *The Chronicles of Etienne-Laurent de Marigny*.

H.P. LOVECRAFT'S
THE MUSIC OF ELDRITCH JOHN

A Modern Update on *The Music of Erich Zann*

Rewritten by T. Christopher Kurth

Lovecraftian Mysteries:

Howard Phillips Lovecraft has often been referred to as the new American Poe. If you think of Lovecraft as a 20th-century update on the Gothic horror and mysterious Classics of Edgar Allen Poe, then you'll truly understand what Lovecraftian terror is all about. However, H.P. Lovecraft also introduced Science Fiction—and even genuine scientific knowledge—into the traditional horror and mystery genres. As the century progressed, this new style of writing came to be called Weird Fiction. While less respected by so-called serious writers, weird fiction is actually quite close to a more sophisticated literature known as Magical Realism—a genre that is quite popular today.

Lovecraft, however—while avidly writing about the supernatural—always claimed to be an atheist. Though, he did admit that the apparent realities of religion were probably connected to an afterlife continuation of our dreams and dreaming life—that is, after our physical form had dissolved back into the natural elements. This is why nearly half of his corpus is concerned with his Dreamland mythos. Although not nearly as well-known as the Cthulhu mythos, these obscure dream-based works are, in fact, very suggestive of eastern shamanism—particularly, the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*.

Lovecraft & the Occult:

However, this is where H.P. Lovecraft's story truly gets weird! A few people have actually learned the incredible facts behind Lovecraft's strange vision of life, death, and The Beyond. Apparently—as Lovecraft himself later admitted—there is much more TRUTH lying behind his strange tales than anyone ever realized.

More incredible still, Lovecraft was allegedly initiated into these mysteries by a suspicious occult organization; which apparently revealed much of their secretive history—and magickal workings—to this young, aspiring writer. Moreover, he was even encouraged to write about what he had learned—just so long as he claimed that everything they revealed to him was fiction. Evidently, this exceedingly ancient brotherhood—sometimes referred to as the *Dugpas* of Tibet—had decided that it was time for humanity to finally grow up and face the hard truths of existence—namely, that humanity was definitely not alone in the universe. And, that our universe—or multiverse—is actually far stranger than we ever imagined. However, in order to achieve this somewhat dubious enlightenment, humans had to first be exposed to these ideas gradually—so as not to cause widespread hysteria and panic. Then, once these ideas had been effectively introduced into our mass consciousness, men of science would come to realize that much of what had been formerly thought of as Science Fiction was actually quite real and indisputably true—Cthulhu's existence, for example. Ironically, Lovecraft was THE MAN this clandestine Order chose for such a peculiar but extremely important mission. And, of course, this is why this long dead writer of existential horror is so significant today!

But, don't take my word for it. Listen to how I learned the bizarre truth behind Lovecraft's tale, *The Music of Erich Zann*. Spoiler alert: It's completely true—only these mysteries are not just found in New England. Paris, France is also one of these places! But I'm getting ahead of myself. First, let me describe to you how I discovered the real story behind *The Music of Eldritch John*.

Dear Reader,

I am an educator. And while I primarily teach philosophy, logic, and mathematics, I also decided to try my hand at English composition. However, writing is definitely secondary to my role as an educator. And while I may someday choose to write fulltime—nowadays—my odd choice of Lovecraft is merely so I can keep people's attention on what truly matters—namely, **philosophy** & **critical thinking**! Of course, this is also the goal of all real education—indeed, the very word 'academics' originated with Plato's Academy. So, **my rewrites of H.P. Lovecraft are really just clever**—dare I say *Crafty*—**ways to smuggle more realistic and relevant information** to readers.

Thus, ***The Music of Eldritch John*** **is *really* about a mysterious** '**Jazz Traveler**' **who surreptitiously introduces the very best jazz albums** (**of the 50s & 60s**) to a naïve young student. Consequently, the ***Jazz Appendix***—at the very end—is really the whole point of the tale (though, it's always a work in progress). **These footnotes explain—in much more detail—the albums mentioned in the story**. So be sure to request them, if you are especially interested in jazz. Again, these informative appendices are really the whole reason—or **the *raison d'etre*—for my Lovecraftian rewrites**. E**njoy**! I realize that you probably have more pressing things to do; but hopefully, you too will come to realize that **this weird tale really does represent the best acoustic jazz** of the 50s & 60s—all while **disguised as an engaging** "**horror story**." Then, try actually listening to the albums that John recommends….

Sincerely,

T. Christopher Kurth

P.S.: If you enjoyed this "informative" story,
take a look at our family website for more offerings at: *miskatonicuniversity.online*
Likewise, feel free to contact me at the following email: *professorkurth@gmail.com*

P.P.S.: If you found this approach especially entertaining and worthwhile,
then any money you wish to donate to the *Children's Organ Transplant Association*—in honor of my son, Adam—will support his lifelong transplant expenses. Learn more at ***COTA for AdamK.com***. And for those who have already donated, please consider these stories as a heartfelt gift of appreciation—Thank You!

APPENDIX A: MODAL JAZZ: ***Famous albums*** *done in the Modal style*.

_MILES DAVIS –ASCENSEUR POUR L'ECHAFAUD (57/8)

_MILES DAVIS –MILESTONES (1958) Columbia [*The Original "Modal"* ***Trumpet***]

_MILES DAVIS –KIND OF BLUE (1959) Columbia [*Modal*] [1]

_MILES DAVIS –E.S.P. (1965) Columbia

_MILES DAVIS –MILES SMILES (1967) Columbia

_JOHN COLTRANE –MY FAVORITE THINGS (1960) [55]

_JOHN COLTRANE –COLTRANE'S SOUND (1960) Atlantic [*Modal* ***Sax***]

_JOHN COLTRANE –CRESCENT (1964) Impulse! [*Modal* ***Sax***]

_BILL EVANS –EVERYBODY DIGS BILL EVANS (19**58**/59) Riverside

_BILL EVANS TRIO –PORTRAIT IN JAZZ (1959/60) Riverside

_BILL EVANS TRIO –EXPLORATIONS (1961) Riverside

_BILL EVANS–SUNDAY AT THE VILLAGE VANGUARD (19**61**) [4]

_BILL EVANS TRIO –WALTZ FOR DEBBY (1961/**62**) Riverside

_HERBIE HANCOCK –CANTALOUPE ISLAND (1962) Blue Note [29]

_HERBIE HANCOCK –EMPYREAN ISLES (1964) Blue Note [*Modal Piano*]

_HERBIE HANCOCK –MAIDEN VOYAGE (1965) Blue Note [17]

_WAYNE SHORTER –JU JU (1964/65) Blue Note [*Modal* ***Sax***]

_WAYNE SHORTER –SPEAK NO EVIL (1964/66) BN [***Sax***] [71]

_WAYNE SHORTER –ADAM'S APPLE (1966/7) Blue Note

_MILES DAVIS –LIVE AT MONTREUX (1991/93) Warner Brothers

_JOHN COLTRANE –A LOVE SUPREME (1964) [2]

African Drumming, **Trance**, & **the Origins of Jazz**

By David M. Kurth & T. Christopher Kurth

I can honestly say that instrumental jazz is some of the best music that I've ever heard. The rest of my family agrees, but I have listened to a lot more Jazz than most folks. Although I'm still a novice—though, I do play the keyboard—I can honestly tell you that this sort of music is all I need to get high! Jazz music is like combining meditation with electronic dance music—especially, when it's heavy on percussion. And, this natural high reminds me why music is so closely connected to religion. And, why Jazz likely has its origins in African shamanism and shamanic **trance**.

According to neurologists, instrumental music works by powerfully engaging the right hemisphere of the brain. This natural right brain **entrainment** eventually leads us into a light **trance**—resulting in altered and much happier mental states. Vocal music can also do this, but it's less effective. This is because the lyrics tend to re-engage the left hemisphere—or the 'talkative' brain—bringing us back down to earth.

This is the reason why I think that Jazz—and that ancient Congo drum beat—will ultimately outlast all other forms of music. However, I'm including EDM Rave instrumentals within my overall definition of **instrumental Jazz**—and especially, Jazz-Rock Fusion. Finally, this approach suggests a more objective aspect to both music and music appreciation—specifically, neurology and the human brain! It also points to an underlying **scientific** basis for art and aesthetics. Ironically, this is exactly what Pythagoras and Plato claimed—nearly 2,500 years ago!

APPENDIX B: **MILES DAVIS—FOUNDER OF MODERN JAZZ**: His Great Acoustic Works

By T. Christopher Kurth & David M. Kurth

There are two or three artists who have contributed rather disproportionately to the development of jazz as a modern art form, contributing much more than their musical colleagues and fellow travelers. In fact, their unique contributions would often give rise to entirely new styles of musical expression—especially, as the 20th century progressed. During the first half of the century, this distinction clearly belonged to none other than Louis Armstrong. However, around the 1940s, this role briefly passed to the legendary Charlie Parker. Nevertheless, starting around 1948 Miles Davis (a protegee of Parker) would ultimately give birth to the musical art known as '**Modern Jazz**'—specifically, jazz as most of us now define this genre of instrumental music. Indeed—unlike Bird's blisteringly fast-paced Bebop—Miles would actually pioneer the kind of contemporary jazz that we both know and listen to, today. Accordingly, ever since 1949 (and up until his retirement), Miles would implement each of these noteworthy changes through a series of **eight groundbreaking albums** which each, in turn, birthed (or celebrated) a new style of jazz—namely; ***Birth of the Cool*** (1950) 'Cool Jazz'; '***Round About Midnight*** (1955) 'Hard Bop'; ***Miles Ahead*** (1957) 'Third Stream'; ***Milestones*** (1958) 'Modal Jazz'; ***E.S.P.*** (1965) 'Post-Bop'; ***Miles Smiles*** (1966) 'Free Jazz'; ***Ascenseur Pour l'echafaud*** (1957) 'Smooth Jazz'; and finally his ultimate album ***Kind of Blue*** (1959) 'Acoustic Jazz'—and thus, the most representative album of the entire Acoustic Jazz genre!

Though, if we were being exceedingly thorough, perhaps we might begin with the early 'Bebop' contribution that Davis made while playing with Charlie Parker; say, *Bird at the Roost (Vol. 1)* around 1948. However, **Modern Jazz actually starts with the *Birth of the Cool***, so this would eliminate Charlie Parker's (and even Davis's) earlier Bebop works—yet, this almost seems like a sin against "the Bird" and the spirit of jazz. Conversely, we could also include several of Mile's pioneering Fusion or 'Jazz-Rock' albums; but—as indicated by the title—herein, this discussion is intentionally limited to Davis's 'Acoustic' works.

Note, to help with classification and clarity of intent, these major jazz 'styles' are initially presented within single quotes—and thereafter, appear alone in formal caps.

First, Miles Davis broke into the jazz scene with an album aptly named the ***Birth of the Cool***—which after a series of earlier singles, was finally released in 1950. This groundbreaking album was the result of a nine-piece band—called a "nonet"—which was assembled by Miles Davis, while serving as its lead trumpet. This project grew out of several earlier New York concerts arranged by Gil Evans—a man who would become the single most important professional partner in Miles' long and varied career (i.e., apart from Charlie Parker's initial inspiration). The recording of this **Cool Jazz** masterpiece began during two sessions in 1949 and was finally finished by March of 1950. Although several tracks were immediately released as popular singles, the entire album was ultimately held back a few years before finally being released by Capitol Records in 1957.

This unique style of jazz—introduced and encouraged by these earlier New York concerts—had been gradually emerging during the latter part of the 40's Bebop era—think back to the 'Cool-ish' sounds of Lester Young. In fact, Thelonious Monk—an independent giant who had emerged from the 40's Bebop clubs like *Minton's Playhouse*—had been cooling down his piano playing, already, for nearly two decades. This should have been a sign that change was coming. Nevertheless, Miles's innovative 1948 nonet is generally recognized as the watershed "happening" that truly birthed this new way of doing jazz. Although it wasn't the only time Davis would profoundly influence music history, it just might have been his single most important contribution. Why? Well, just consider that nowadays what we usually refer to as Modern or contemporary jazz, in many ways, starts with the *Birth of the Cool*. Likewise, this also wouldn't be the last time that Gil Evans—and classical music—would come to influence and change jazz for the better.

Remember, Miles had already been exposed to Bebop's high-energy approach for several years, having played with both "Bird" and "Diz"—that is, Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie (two of the most recognizable names in Bebop). Also recall that Louis Armstrong was still playing New Orleans Jazz and Big Band, which was obviously a much older genre than Bebop. Surprisingly though, Thelonious Monk had already anticipated this change—that is, by playing his own style of progressive piano—but seemingly, without much notice. However, Miles noticed—and don't forget Gil Evans. In fact, Gil had been constantly pushing for a slower tempo and a much more lyrical style of jazz all along—after all, he was a Classically trained musician. Actually, Cool Jazz likely grew directly out of Davis's and Gil's late-night salons—with notable members like Gerry Mulligan, Max Roach, and John Lewis—which were regularly held in Gil Evan's very own New York apartment during the late-1940s.

Now, many apocryphal tales circulate regarding the life of Miles Davis, but Ron David summed them up best when he claimed that "*Miles had [finally] taken stock of his own limitations (as a trumpeter) and decided that trying to play faster, higher, and hotter than everyone else was a doomed enterprise.… Miles, unlike Bird and Diz, wasn't blazingly fast… But, he was deep… So, Miles took the opposite approach: he would play lower, slower, and cooler than anybody else*."[1] Whatever the truth behind this origin story, some aspects of it had to be true—because this is exactly what happened during the early part of the 1950's. Jazz simply became a whole lot easier to listen to and it was precisely this 'Cooler' approach that, paradoxically, caught the public's attention—and financial appreciation. So, while it didn't Swing like Benny Goodman, it was still really cool in an altogether new and different way. Indeed, the pop vernacular for the word "cool" (like the related slang for "hip") has pretty much remained unchanged for almost seventy years—try saying that for any other popular expression or American slang.

Second, the album ***'Round About Midnight***—recorded in 1955 (& release in 1957)—proved to be Miles Davis's most important contribution to the **Hard Bop** genre. As Ron David puts it, in the early to mid-1950s the consummate master of the Cool Jazz was Miles Davis. And while "*he had been in the forefront of the creation of the Cool, he was also in the thick of the reaction that murdered it: Hard Bop*."[2] Indeed, Miles Davis' 1957 album *'Round About Midnight*—his very first record with Columbia—represented his latest technical and stylistic development, which ultimately came to be known as 'Hard Bop'—a newer 'Bop style' that is still going strong, despite the fact that it's sometimes appropriated (and occasionally mis-appropriated) under the category of Post-Bop, nowadays.

No doubt it is easier to think of a 'musical style'—any musical style—as springing forth fully developed and wholly distinct, but Hard Bop wasn't born all at once. In fact, you can actually hear a gradual stylistic evolution on this 1955 album. Overall, it still has a rather Cool sound, but there are subtle differences. Again, to quote Ron David, "*at first Cool Jazz was seen as elegant and lyrical. By the mid-1950s, it began to feel repressed, emotionally empty, and uptight*."[3] So, one of the first 'innovations' that one might notice about Miles's new album, *'Round About Midnight*, is how it really wasn't very 'new' at all. The song selections actually appear to represent "*a summation of the earlier bebop era*"—apparently, trying to tap into the ambience and emotional warmth of this earlier music. Incidentally, the 2001 bonus track, "*Budo*," just happens to be a traditional Cool Jazz standard. And even the album's title song, "'*Round Midnight*," was based on an earlier Thelonious Monk composition.

However, as the story goes, in 1955 Miles Davis—having finally won his fight against a debilitating heroin addiction—suddenly burst forth onto the Newport Jazz Festival scene with a 'new' hit song, "'*Round Midnight*." And somehow, he inexplicably managed to play his trumpet with an intensity and depth of emotion that was apparently lacking in his earlier works. Of course, Davis always maintained that nothing had really changed. Besides, *Walkin'* was technically his first 'Hard Bop' work—but, there did seem to be a fresher liveliness to his playing. To the untrained listener it may just seem like the sound quality suddenly got a bit better. But, there is actually more to it than just an advance in acoustic engineering. No doubt, Miles had significantly modified his trumpet sound by introducing his famous Harmon mute. However, this fact—alone—doesn't completely explain the profound change in Miles's performance. To put it more esoterically, as Miles Davis mysteriously remarked, "*the music that we were playing…was so bad [in a good way] that it used to send chills through me at night*!"[4] Simply put, there was a "*rhythmic drive and fire*"—without falling back on Bebop's "*high-notes*" and "*speedy pyrotechnics*"—that was obviously lacking on other so-called Cool Jazz albums. Also, Miles—in his own way—seemed to be trying to fill the void left by the sudden (but predictable) heroin caused death of Charlie Parker, just a few months earlier (at a mere 34 years of age). Doubtless, "*Parker was a hard act to follow*," but someone would eventually rise to take his place. And despite differences in energy and instrumentation, that 'someone' appeared to be Miles Davis—although, many people suspected that it could also be that profoundly introspective saxophonist, Sonny Rollins.

Either way, Miles Davis' new album, *'Round About Midnight*, recorded with his first ever quintet—representing a renewed sense of vitality and artistry—more than any other Miles album, captured this new direction in jazz! You might say that it was yet another 'milestone' in Miles's already illustrious career—but that was yet to come. This innovative jazz quintet—"*Davis's first great quintet*" (of several others that would follow)—would feature of course, Miles Davis (on the trumpet), a young heroin using John Coltrane (on tenor saxophone), Paul Chambers (on bass), Red Garland (on piano), and 'Philly' Joe Jones (on drums). Additionally, the original Newport Jazz Festival bonus track features none other than Thelonious Monk (on piano) and Gerry Mulligan (on baritone sax). And as usual, behind the scenes, the ever-present Gil Evans also did the arrangement for *'Round Midnight*. Ironically, critics initially gave this production only a moderate reception, but—like Dave Brubeck's 1959 masterpiece—as the decade ended, its stock rose considerably. Today, *'Round About Midnight* is considered to be "*a masterpiece of the hard bop genre and one of the greatest jazz albums of all time*!"

Note, ***Workin' With the Miles Davis Quintet*** (from 1956) could also be included here—namely, to recommend yet another good example of a popular Hard Bop album from this prolific period. Fortunately, there were several recordings like it, all equally representative of this period of work. Nevertheless, *Workin'…* seems to have the best audio quality. Unfortunately, far too many 1950s albums—especially those before 1957—could benefit from a vigilant program of audio sound restoration.

Third, Miles's later significant **Third Stream** or 'Orchestral Jazz' contributions—such as ***Miles Ahead*** (in 1957), ***Porgy and Bess*** (in 1958-59), and ***Sketches of Spain*** (in 1956-60)—were all collaborations performed with the Gil Evans' orchestra—and likely, rank as one of Miles's greatest contributions in the world of music. However, as has already been declared, Modern Jazz actually starts with the '*Birth of the Cool*,' so while Davis's 'orchestral works' are definitely 'acoustic,' they actually sound very different than what most people have come to expect from modern jazz—specifically, whenever people reference or think about 'Jazz.' Actually, this seems to be the point that Wynton Marsalis was trying to make (for years), although he has been constantly criticized for making it—perhaps because it sounds so "old fashion" and even a bit reactionary. In fact, Ron David describes him as being a "*Young Fogey*"—although he's not so young nowadays. And—ironically—lately, he has developed a penchant for orchestral works. However, Miles's Third Stream 'Orchestral' Jazz—which included some truly awesome compositions—might better be included within the larger 'Classical Music' genre—although this could (and should) be debated. In fact, if you include *Miles Davis at Carnegie Hall* (performed with a complementary orchestra, in 1961) and/or Gil's *Out of the Cool* (also recorded in 1961) and *The Individualism of Gil Evans* (recorded in 1964), then you could dedicate an entirely separate 'genre' simply covering the very best Third Stream (or 'Classical-Jazz') orchestrations done by either Davis or Evans. …Not to mention, the many earlier 'quasi-orchestral' works done in the 20s, 30s, and 40s by popular Big Bands—that is, in the older style of Swing.

Fourth, in 1958, Miles Davis then released a truly groundbreaking new album called ***Milestones***. In fact, this was his very first album showcasing the new **Modal** technique of jazz composition—notably, in the feature track "*Miles*." Unfortunately, this particular album often gets overlooked by many jazz critics, but this is probably due to the phenomenal success of Davis's *Kind of Blue* album, the following year. This prior album, though, definitely deserves more attention than is usually receives. Remember, 'jazz critics' are just writers who happen to critique another's creative efforts. Unfortunately, they are often far too close to the 'sweet sounding' action to get a bird's eye perspective of the historical implications of any new album or jazz composition. This of course, is the advantage of writing about these events sixty years later. So, with this broader historical perspective in mind, let us try to understand the importance of Miles Davis's contribution and his (appropriately named) groundbreaking album—*Milestones*! Note however, that *The Penguin Guide to Jazz* recently "selected [*Milestones*] as part of its suggested 'Core Collection', calling it '*one of the very great modern-jazz albums*'."

We might start by considering just why it has this rather grandiose sounding title—namely, *Milestones*. Davis didn't just use this because it was clever—although it is an ingenious play on both his name and the relevance of his systemic contributions to jazz. Instead, Miles "self-consciously" insisted that he was definitely breaking new ground—yet again—even if other people didn't understand its significance at the time. As Ron David elegantly indicated, "*Milestones quietly featured an innovation that would* [*finally*] *free Jazz from the constraints of Bebop*."[5] Significantly, the song "*Miles*" (sometimes referred to by its full name, "*Milestones*") was his very first foray into the technical intricacies of Modal jazz composition. Indeed, this proved to be a truly novel new way of doing jazz—Coltrane is but one example. And—yes—this was indeed another 'milestone' for Miles's amazing musical biography—or rather, discography.

Surprisingly, this album also features other interesting innovations that likewise are not immediately apparent—notably, a subtle mix of Bebop, Hard Bop, Modal, Post-Bop, and even a slight touch of the Blues. Of course, all this is something that would be judiciously put to good effect the following year. Indeed, "*Allmusic's Thom Jurek called Milestones a classic album with blues material in both bebop and post-bop veins, as well as the 'memorable' title track, which introduced modalism in jazz and defined Davis' subsequent music in the years to follow.*" Additionally, Jurek also gave the album a solid five stars in his review.

Although note that Davis's talented—but short-lived—sextet would happen to be one of the last times that Miles (playing trumpet) recorded with Red Garland (on piano), Paul Chambers (on double bass), and 'Philly' Joe Jones (on the drums). Likewise, this album happily featured some extraordinary performances by 'Cannonball' Adderley (on alto sax) and John Coltrane (on tenor sax) as well. Indeed, "*Andy Hermann of PopMatters felt that the album offers more aggressive swinging than Kind of Blue and showcases the first session between saxophonists Coltrane and Cannonball Adderley, whose different styles 'feed off each other and push each musician to greater heights*.'" Daryl Long, from *Miles Davis for Beginners* recounts how it sounded at the time, "*Each tune is set up by Cannonball's big, round, rolling sound (with a little touch of Trane), followed by Miles's spare musings with Philly Joe lighting flash fires beneath them, leaving Coltrane to burst into breathless, brilliant, boundless, screaming improvisations*."[6]

As an added bonus, Davis plays both trumpet and the piano on the second tract, "*Sid's Ahead*," which provides some interesting insight, since most people have forgotten that Miles could also play the piano. Remember though, that Miles was first and foremost a composer (and an arranger)—the same should also be said of Gil Evans—and this was in fact the secret to his success both as a musician and as an artist. Finally, as if providing a lasting tribute to the progressive pianist who probably started it all—namely, that (finally) famous musician, Thelonious Monk—Miles actually dedicates the album's last song to Monk, which was likewise originally written by Thelonious, called "*Straight, No Chaser*."

Fifth, Miles Davis's famous 1965 ***E.S.P.*** album—short for **Extra Sensory Perception**—was the very first album performed by his "*second great Quintet*" and also one of the longest jazz albums for its time. And after *Kind of Blue*, this work is also considered to be a seminal **Post-Bop** masterpiece, as well. Surprisingly, this 'much younger' second quintet included Miles Davis (on trumpet), Wayne Shorter (on tenor sax), Herbie Hancock (playing piano), Ron Carter (on the double bass), and an even younger Tony Williams (on drums). It is sometimes whispered that this album was actually Miles' favorite album—and according to legend, he apparently gave the name E.S.P. to this particular album because these fantastic players seemed to be reading each other's minds! Interestingly, unlike many of his other works, this album actually included all new, unexpected compositions contributed by the band's brand-new members—an unlikely scenario, to say the least. Nevertheless, the outcome pleasantly surprised Miles and proved to be one of jazz's all-time greatest albums as a result! The Modal jazz of his previous works also continues to be on display, as this album forges ahead truly making music history—and apparently, also clearing the ground for much later stylists like Wynton and Branford Marsalis and Chris Botti—musicians who are all usually understood to be the direct inheritors of this contemporary Post-Bop style.

Sixth, although Miles truly hated **Free Jazz**, he inevitably felt its all-pervading influence—avant-garde experimentation was in the air—at least during the sixties. This ubiquitous (and often pernicious) influence subtly found its way into several of Miles' albums—usually having been smuggled into his recording sessions via younger band members. Although this discussion is limited to Davis's acoustic works, eventually Miles did experiment with Free Jazz improvisation—and discordant harmonies—while working on his later Fusion albums (mostly performed in the early seventies). So, keeping this cultural background in mind—early on—Miles probably came the closest to avant-garde 'Free Jazz' in his famous work ***Miles Smiles***. Miles recorded this album in 1966, but it was later released by Columbia in 1967. This was the second album performed by his now famous "*second quintet*." It featured Miles (on trumpet), Wayne Shorter (on tenor sax), Herbie Hancock (on piano) and a young Tony Williams (on the drums). This Modal album was well received by critics—who typically gave it five-star ratings. These same critics tended to describe this album as falling somewhere in between Hard Bop and Free Jazz. Also, this composition is well known for its playful use of alternative cords and rhythms—for example, on three songs Hancock dispenses with the left-hand cords of traditional piano and plays only the right-hand cords. Note, although some people claim that Wayne Shorter's playing wasn't up to the level of the other band members, Shorter's contribution of his noteworthy song "*Footprints*" proved to be the album's single biggest hit! Indeed, many critics and jazz aficionados even claim this particular song as their personal favorite. Nevertheless, when compared side-by-side with Davis's *Kind of Blue* album, the groups avant-garde experimentation seems only to have lessened the albums overall appeal—kind of like getting cherry ice cream, when all you really wanted was chocolate—still good, but could have been much better. Perhaps *Down Beat* magazine captures this best when it claimed that the "*simpler, drier, more austere sound… unrehearsed, rough… [still] holds up so well simply because it was more a jazz record [than most other avant-garde works]*." Nevertheless, regardless of these newer stylistic—and sometimes controversial—differences, this album still ranks as one of the very best 'acoustic' albums ever made by this youthful Davis team.

Seventh, a nearly unknown Cool Jazz album—entitled ***Ascenseur Pour l'echafaud***—actually marks Miles Davis's foreign-based foray into an instrumental style that would later be labeled **Smooth Jazz**. Despite the fact that most jazz critics never mention it and the album is typically ignored by American jazz connoisseurs, this album just might be one of the best jazz albums ever produced! However, *Ascenseur Pour L'Echafaud* (meaning "Elevator to the Gallows") unfortunately happens to be a French movie soundtrack! Indeed, Miles performed this entire album while simultaneously watching it on the big screen in front of him.

So, why have most people most never heard about this album? Besides the blatantly obvious fact that it was performed in French, most movie soundtracks merely tend to be popular while the movie is playing at the box-office (and sometimes for a short time after the movie has been enthusiastically viewed by the public), but then—when the movie is gradually forgotten—the soundtrack also tends to fall by the wayside—even if it really shouldn't! If skeptical, just try to thinking of a favorite soundtrack, only to discover how hard it is to actually recall a single popular movie score. *Titanic* sometimes comes to mind, but does anybody still listen to it? So, even though this French-made film was very popular in 1957, most people—today—have completely forgotten just how good the accompanying soundtrack really was.

However, there are several reasons why *Ascenseur Pour L'Echafaud* is a true masterpiece that still deserves attention. First, this particular soundtrack is just better than the rest! Second, this entire movie soundtrack is performed by Miles, not just one or two songs played by him that happen to be mixed together with other artists. Indeed, Davis plays hard for ten short tracks of continuous jazz (thus, there are no words and no singing). Third, if one were to actually watch this old movie, they will notice that the music is a strong component of the narrative, and not just made to be barely heard while playing in the background. Fourth, although this soundtrack hails from 1957, the entire album still holds together marvelously well. Fifth, Davis's playing is at its all-time technical best! Especially, considering just how well this 1957 album was performed by an essentially unknown band of French musicians—nevertheless, Miles made it awesome! Sixth, although there is a slight brooding feel to the various compositions, it also happens to be perfect for relaxation. Indeed, this is probably jazz's single biggest appeal—that is, jazz is interesting and energetic enough to keep one's attention, but usually not so frenetic that it stresses people out (unless it's Free Jazz). Consider just one example from Classical music. While Wagner's "*Ride of the Valkyrie*" is truly an amazing composition, you can't really use it for relaxation. The same is also often true for most Rock-and-Roll. Seventh and most importantly, Miles's *Ascenseur* may be the most immediately accessible jazz album ever made!

For all these reasons, *Ascenseur Pour L'Echafaud* may be the perfect first album for those completely new to the genre—yes, even better for 'newbies' than *Kind of Blue*. And, despite the fact that Miles Davis's *Kind of Blue* and John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme* tend to be the first two albums most jazz aficionados tend to recommend, they are not necessarily the most 'accessible' albums for the absolute beginner. These may be truly amazing recordings—and at the top of everybody's list—but they are still a bit too sophisticated for the completely novice ear. And while this may sound a little snobby, it's likely true nonetheless. Again—consider, for example—if any artist were to recommend Coltrane's *A Love Supreme* to someone who had grown up only listening to country music—well, it just might scare them away from jazz forever! This album is just too avant-garde for most 'newbies.' If skeptical, then try doing exactly this—the results will likely be predictable. Conversely, try playing *Ascenseur Pour L'Echafaud*, by Miles Davis, and it just might win a convert for life. And for jazz, conversion is a matter of life and death, because it desperately needs young musicians and a new audience to keep this music alive and well into the 21st Century.

Eighth, Miles Davis' ***Kind of Blue*** (1959) is unquestionably the most "famous" **Acoustic Jazz** album of all time. So, despite the various controversies over what constitutes classic Post-Bop or modern Acoustic Jazz, Wynton is probably right in emphasizing traditional 'acoustic' jazz over electric-based instrumentation—though he, and the entire Marsalis family, seem to look back much further than just the 1950s. Also, likely without encountering much debate, of the major Modern works—that is, what most musicians inevitably call 'Classic Jazz'—unquestionably, the most famous examples took shape in the early 50s and into the late 60s. And despite how marvelous later innovations may have sounded—such as 70s and 80s Jazz Fusion or contemporary Smooth Jazz and Latin Rhythms—the so-called "golden years of acoustic jazz"—lasting from 1949 until 1969—still provide a significant and important 'center of gravity' for everything else that followed! Naturally, this is why we should give this particular music the attention it deserves.

So, given that this view is essentially correct, then—as a consequence—this subsequently (and considerably) narrows the Acoustic Jazz 'styles' worth careful examination—and collection—down to just the ones described in this paper—notably, Cool Jazz, Hard Bop, Third Stream, Modal Jazz, Post-Bop, and Smooth Jazz (and fortunately, excluding most Free Jazz compositions). Note however, that most Acoustic and/or Post-Bop compositions typically sound like a cooler, but more progressive 'Hard Bop' mixed with 'Modal' Jazz—so maybe these genres shouldn't get their very own designation. However, this is highly debatable—and in all fairness—later Acoustic and Post-Bop compositions can sometimes get pretty far out (though still not as far out as Free Jazz)!

So why give all this history and background before—finally—getting around to talk about the very best Acoustic Jazz album (of all time)? Well, like the progressive Hard Bop style before it, **Modal Jazz** immediately dominated the sixties musical scene—not to mention later decades, as well. However, in the ***Kind of Blue*** album, "*these [early] modal techniques were continued and expanded on [thus, making this a truly] groundbreaking album*."[7] Again without much debate, *Kind of Blue* is now universally considered to be the single best acoustic composition ever made. More ink—by far—has been spilled over this one "masterpiece" than any other jazz work in history! So, trying to write something new about this album—that hasn't already been said—is a tall order. If anyone doubts this, then just take a look at some of the articles that have been written about this uniquely famous album—that is, either in books, magazines, or on the internet. Then, witness how truly famous it really is—indeed even after all these years! Somehow, it's still one of the best-selling albums in the entire world. Then, finally sit down and listen to it—chances are you'll listen to it more than once! Jazz is sort of contagious that way.

So, let's conclude with a few cursory facts about this famous "*unrehearsed recording session*"—Miles Davis (of course, played trumpet), John Coltrane (was on tenor saxophone), Cannonball Adderley (played alto sax), Bill Evans (played the piano), Paul Chambers (played double bass), and Jimmy Cobb (played the drums). Incidentally, Wynton Kelly also stepped in to play (the piano) for one song. Thus, in exacting order, this incredibly famous song list includes: "*So What*," "*Freddie Freeloader*," "*Blue in Green*," "*All Blues*," and finally "*Flamenco Sketches*"—and note, every one of these songs became an instant jazz standard! In fact, there's likely not a single jazz musician—in the entire world—who isn't familiar with this playlist. Consider, that—besides the great classical composers—this honor is held by only one American musician—namely, the late, great Miles Davis!

In conclusion, of the approximate eight (or nine or ten) albums that may be distinguished as genuine 'Classics' of the great Acoustic Jazz Era—spanning a single score of two golden decades, lasting from 1950 to 1970—Miles Davis has contributed the highest number of superior albums. Specifically, from the short list of **acoustic masterpieces** already mentioned: ***Birth of the Cool*** (1950); '***Round About Midnight*** (1957); ***Miles Ahead*** (1957); ***Milestones*** (1958); ***E.S.P.*** (1965); ***Miles Smiles*** (1967); ***Ascenseur Pour l'echafaud*** (1958); and finally, and most famously, ***Kind of Blue*** (1959).

Remember though, this short list focuses only on his Classic 'Acoustic' albums—and not his many **Fusion** compositions—that is, his 70s electronic works—starting in 1969, with ***In A Silent Way***. However, even when narrowing this field considerably, no other jazz artist—or really any modern 'artist,' for that matter—has produced so many musical 'masterpieces' as Davis! In fact, so amazing was his musical genius, it is tempting to think of him as being almost 'magical.' This fact was not lost on his associates, as they convinced **Miles Davis** to name one of his best 1967 albums the ***Sorcerer***. Indeed, if not for its last vocal track ("*Nothing Like You*"), this would also rank as one of his best albums—and thus, this is a good place to conclude this important list. However, based on his unmatched contribution to America's music and culture, if we were to put a person of color on our national currency—that is, other than an American president or founding father—then, as we've clearly shown, it should obviously be Miles Davis. So, take note and spread the word—and therein, may St. John and Brother Thelonious bless you—oh, my brother aficionados! Amen.

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African Drumming, **Trance**, & **the Origins of Jazz**

By David M. Kurth & T. Christopher Kurth

I can honestly say that instrumental jazz is some of the best music that I've ever heard. The rest of my family agrees, but I have listened to a lot more Jazz than most folks. Although I'm still a novice—though, I do play the keyboard—I can honestly tell you that this sort of music is all I need to get high! Jazz music is like combining meditation with electronic dance music—especially when it's heavy on percussion. And, this natural high reminds me why music is so closely connected to religion. And, why Jazz likely has its origins in African shamanism and shamanic **trance**.

According to neurologists, instrumental music works by powerfully engaging the right hemisphere of the brain. This natural right brain **entrainment** eventually leads us into a light **trance**—resulting in altered and much happier mental states. Vocal music can also do this, but it's less effective. This is because the lyrics tend to re-engage the left hemisphere—or the 'talkative' brain—bringing us back down to earth.

This is the reason why I think that Jazz—and that ancient Congo drum beat—will ultimately outlast all other forms of music. However, I'm including EDM Rave instrumentals within my overall definition of **instrumental Jazz**—and especially, Jazz-Rock Fusion. Finally, this approach suggests a more objective aspect to both music and music appreciation—specifically, neurology and the human brain! It also points to an underlying **scientific** basis for art and aesthetics. Ironically, this is exactly what Pythagoras and Plato claimed—nearly 2,500 years ago!

APPENDIX C: JAZZ TRAVELER: **Best** of **Cool Jazz**, **Hard Bop**, & **Modal Jazz** (from 1950 to 1970)

MILES DAVIS – *BIRTH OF THE COOL* [1] (1950)/**GERRY MULLIGAN** – **RE-BIRTH OF THE COOL** (1992)
The *Cool* TRUMPET of MILES DAVIS / The *Cool* SAXOPHONE of GERRY MULLIGAN.

The original album, ***Birth of the Cool***, was the result of a nine-piece band—technically called a "nonet"—assembled **by** that **famous American trumpeter**, **Miles Davis**. It grew out of several 1948 New York concerts **arranged by** such notables as **Gil Evans**—who incidentally, would become the single most **important professional partner in Miles' long and varied career** (apart from, of course, Charlie Parker's crucial "*initial*" impetus). Recording this masterpiece began in earnest during two sessions in 1949 and was finally finished by March of 1950. While several tracks were immediately released as popular singles, the entire album was held back a few years before finally being released by Capitol Records in 1957—just in time for Valentine's Day.

The new style of jazz introduced (and encouraged) by these earlier New York concerts had been gradually emerging during the latter part of the 40's Bebop era—think back to the "cool-ish" sounds of the Lester Young & Buddy Rich Trio, for instance. In fact, **Thelonious Monk**—an independent giant who had emerged from 40's Bebop clubs (like *Minton's Playhouse*)—had been cooling down his piano playing already for almost two decades. This should have been a sign that a change was coming. Nonetheless, Miles Davis' innovative 1948 nonet is generally recognized as the watershed "*happening*" that truly birthed a **new way** of doing jazz. Although this wouldn't be the only time that Miles would profoundly change music history, it may have been his single most significant contribution. Why? Well, just consider that nowadays what we usually refer to as **modern** or "***contemporary*" jazz**—in many ways—**starts with the *Birth of the Cool***! Also, this wouldn't be the last time Gil Evans and European classical music—with techniques such as "complex polyphony"—would come to influence and apparently change jazz for the better.

Remember, Miles had been well versed in Bebop's "high energy" approach for several years; having already played with both "Bird" and "Diz"—i.e., Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie—namely, two of the most recognizable names in Bebop. Also, recall that Louis Armstrong—at least to begin with—was *still* playing New Orleans style jazz, which was an even older genre than Bebop. Surprisingly though, it was Thelonious monk who had anticipated all this, already playing his own style of progressive piano for decades—but seemingly without much notice—however, Miles had noticed! And, don't forget about Gil Evans. Indeed, Gil had been constantly pushing for a slower tempo and a more lyrical style of jazz. After all, he was a "classically trained" musician. Indeed, "***Cool* jazz**" likely **grew directly out of Gil's late-night salons**—with notable members like Gerry Mulligan, Max Roach, and John Lewis (of MJQ fame). These were regularly **held in Gil Evan's** very own **New York apartment**, during much of the late-1940s.

Likewise, many apocryphal tales abound regarding the musical development of Miles Davis, but Ron David summed this up best when he claimed that "*Miles had [finally] taken stock of his own limitations (as a trumpeter) and decided that trying to play faster, higher, and hotter than everyone else was a doomed enterprise.… Miles, unlike Bird and Diz, wasn't blazingly fast… But he was deep… So, Miles took the opposite approach: he would play lower, slower, and cooler than anybody else*."

Whatever the truth behind his inspirational "origin story," some aspects of it simply *had* to have been true, because this *is* exactly what happened during the early part of the 1950's. Jazz essentially got a whole lot easier to listen to and it was precisely this "cooler" approach that paradoxically caught the public's attention—and "financial" appreciation. Although it didn't Swing like, say, Benny Goodman, it was nevertheless really *cool* in an altogether new and different way. Moreover, the pop vernacular for the word "*cool*" (like the related slang for "*hip*") has pretty much remained unchanged for nearly seventy years—try saying that for any other popular expression or American slang.

Now, the for bad news.☹ Despite the fact that the *Birth of the Cool* is such an important album, the "original" audio sound quality of these 1949/1950 recordings just isn't very good. In fact, this is the central problem of nearly *all* jazz recordings done in the 1940s and early 50s. And unfortunately, with regard to anything recorded even earlier than that, well, good luck! Sorry to say, but these recordings just sound terrible—at least "acoustically" speaking. Benny Goodman, Woody Herman, and Duke Ellington would have been amazing to see and—more importantly—*hear* in person, but you wouldn't know it by listening to most of their records. However, you can get a feel for just how true this statement really is by turning up the volume on one great modern or "modernized" dance sequence—specifically, "*Sing, Sing, Sing*" by Goodman—from the 1993 movie *Swing Kids*. Wow, it would have been *amazing* to really be there in person (that is, until the Nazi Gestapos showed up to arrest you). The same is true of course for famous jazz singers, like Billy Holiday. But, unless radical advances in sound engineering can somehow rescue these old recordings, their real impact will inevitably be lost on most contemporary listeners. And, this is unfortunately true for far too many early 1950s albums as well.

But, in the case of the *Birth of the Cool*, there is also some (very) good news! **Gerry Mulligan**—who was central to the initial 1949 project—faithfully re-recorded the *original* album for everyone to appreciate anew. Gerry simply **renamed it the *Re-birth of the Cool*** and then released it without much fanfare in 1993. All twelve of the original tracks are accounted for—the only thing he changed was their order of presentation. So, **if you want to hear the *true* impact of the *original* recording**, **this newer remake is just the album** you're looking for.

Try playing both the older 1950s recording and the newer 1993 version back-to-back. You simply won't believe the difference. Then you too just might come to realize, like so many jazz aficionados have *already* come to realize, that—unlike rock and roll (which typically sounds better in studio)—jazz is best heard live, up-close, and in person. Of course, a good sound system can also make a huge difference whenever playing *any* jazz recording—unfortunately, not so much with regard to rock-and-roll. All you truly need for *most* rock-and-roll songs are really big speakers and volume knob that goes way up—perhaps, even up too far.☺

THELONIOUS MONK QUARTET – ***MISTERIOSO*** (1958)
The *Bebop*—and "transitional" *Bop*—PIANO of THELONIOUS MONK.

Misterioso is the name of a live album by the Thelonious Monk Quartet recorded on August 7th, 1958 at The Five Spot Café in New York City (and released by Riverside Records later that same year). ***Misterioso* is** considered by some to be **Thelonious Monk's *best* album**, sounding (despite the clinking of glasses in the background) even better than his extraordinary 1957 studio album *Brilliant Corners*—and at least comparable to his critically acclaimed 1963 album *Monk's Dream*.

Part of this exceptional performance was also released under the title *Thelonious in Action* (1958), but *Misteriso* is more representative of Monk's talented ensemble, which features a noteworthy (and an almost overshadowing) saxophone performance by Johnny "the Little Giant" Griffin. This quartet format—a format which came to define Monk's later career—likewise included the distinctive polyrhythms of Roy Hanes on drums and Ahmed Abdul-Malik on bass. The well-known drummer Art Blakey, even makes a retroactive "appearance" on a 2012 re-released bonus track (entitled "*Medley*").

The album and title song *Misterioso* cleverly refers to Monk's sometimes eccentric, but lovable behavior—both with regard to his unusual piano playing technique and his signature act of dancing in circles (his middle name was "*sphere*" after all)—as well as his reputation as a deep and occasionally troubled thinker. Also, the album's abstract cover art *The Seer*—a 1915 painting by Giorgio de Chirico—was intended to attract the East Village intellectual and artistic crowd, while simultaneously capitalizing on both Monk's genius and enigmatic character. This apparently worked—as this became one of Monk's signature albums!

Having cultivated his unique style of progressive jazz piano for many years without much outside recognition (and subsequent financial support), the Monk household went through some pretty hard times. Though no matter what happened, his wife and family always stuck by him and friends helped out whenever they could. He even lost his cabaret card due to a trumped-up charge of drug possession, simply because he refused to rat out his old buddy Bud Powell. Luckily, friends and advocates—as well as the owners of The Five Spot—saw his potential and pleaded his case before the city. The state capitulated, but mandated that he must first find steady employment. So, after providing Thelonious' with a new gig and a brand-new venue, it just happened that this particular *live* performance—on top of an earlier 1957 debut with none other than John Coltrane—marked his triumphant return to the American jazz scene. Consequently, it also helped to make The Five Spot Café one of the hippest places in New York City during the late 50s and early 60s.

Considering his progressive take on the piano, perhaps really more than any other player, Thelonious Monk represents the best example of what Bebop jazz was all about. Yet, unlike other famous Bebop artists—like Charlie Parker or Dizzy Gillespie, for instance—Monk played more slowly and deliberately and with much more introspection than any of his contemporaries. In fact, one critic even said that "...Thelonious Monk was a genius who was able to see notes on the piano that didn't even exist in Western music." So, despite the fact that Monk's piano playing *originated* in Bebop (and you can still even hear a bit of early ragtime in his keys), he—much more than Ornette Coleman—truly represented the shape of jazz to come!

Moreover, Monk's style can best be seen as characterizing a transition not only to the Hard Bop that would later overshadow him, but also as a bridge to *all* the progressive jazz that ultimately followed. Incidentally, jazz critics do tend to characterize *Misterioso* as Hard Bop, and not really situated in the older Bebop genre at all. Indeed, most musicians feel that Thelonious was radically ahead of his time—and as one cat put it—certainly "one of the hippest figures in jazz." The supreme jazz trumpeter, Miles Davis, was particularly an admirer and he tried to help Thelonious' career by featuring many of Monk's compositions in his own recordings and performances.

For anyone interested in learning a bit more about this fascinating man, there is a **1988 biographical film** called ***Thelonious Monk**: **Straight, No Chaser*** (produced by the well-known actor Clint Eastwood). This documentary takes an intriguing, in-depth look at the life and times of this legendary jazz artist. And quite remarkably—despite battling mental illness his entire life—it shows that Thelonious was not only mentally astute, but also very aware of the world and the worldly politics around him. For example, once during an interview, Thelonious was asked, "What types of music *other* than jazz do you like?" Thelonious emphatically replied, "I like ***all*** kinds of music!" To which the reporter responded (probably trying to racially profile or perhaps just pigeonhole him) "Well, do you like *country* music?" Then after a long, uncomfortable silence, Monk turned to his friend (sitting next to him) and whispered, "You know, I think that this reporter chap may be a bit hard of hearing." Yes, that was Mr. Monk making a *logic* joke—namely, a reference to the "universal" distributive principle generally implicit in the word "*all*." And, while this may seem like an immaterial inside joke—shared particularly among intellectual types—it definitely shows that Thelonious Monk was no dummy. Indeed, Monk was well aware of the racial tensions and stereotypes surrounding him.

The other gem that can be gleaned from this film—and from Thelonious' extraordinary example of grace under the pressure of his mental affliction—is just how hard everyone worked to get the music to sound just right. And what is more, just how "*mathematically*" challenging musical composition can truly be. Try listening closely the musician's technical deliberations and you will see just how much practice and concentration goes into making something that hard look so very cool and easy.

Finally, if you're one of those critics who feel that Griffin's Hard Bop saxophone drowns out Thelonious' keyboard a little too much, then the **1957 album *Brilliant Corners*** is probably the next **best example of Monk's "vibrant" Bebop piano playing**. Either way, Thelonious' progressive style helped pave the way for the Modern jazz era. Starting around 1950, jazz was beginning a new renaissance that would change music forever. This amazing period of innovation was eventually overshadowed by the rock-and-roll music of the 60s and 70s youth culture. However, its impact upon *musicians* was—and still is—immense. And, it continues to provide a steady source of inspiration even today.

DAVE BRUBECK QUARTET – ***TIME OUT***[2] (1959)
The *Cool* PIANO of DAVE BRUBECK.

Although the blind virtuoso pianist Lennie Tristano—a now virtually *unknown* giant of Cool jazz—was many musician's first choice for "what constituted good playing" in the 1950s (note, Bill Evans was *profoundly* influenced by Tristano); it was conversely **The Dave Brubeck Quartet** that ultimately took the jazz world by storm, especially as the decade came to a close. The now platinum album ***Time Out*** (1959) **stands out as a singularly stunning** (studio) **masterpiece** of the cool jazz era which, over the course of two years, came to dominate both the adult contemporary *and* pop music charts. Nevertheless, with its "deviation from standard time," its novel musical and cultural experimentation, as well as Brubeck's forceful piano playing (he essentially "beat the hell out of his piano"), *Time Out* didn't sound very much like a typical "cool jazz" album.

Regardless of style, it was apparently a very "cool" album to *own* and was the very "first instrumental jazz album to sell over a million copies." Indeed in the early 60s, *Time Out* was a regular staple at New York and LA parties and proved to be a standard bachelor pad favorite. There's an underground joke that a whole new generation of jazz lovers was quite literally conceived while their parents were listening to this album …while cavorting in bed.

Likewise, Paul Desmond's composition, "***Take Five***"—the album's most popular song—**is still the highest selling jazz *single* of all time**, selling well over a million units (and even more remarkably, it still seems to be going strong today). Needless to say, *Time Out* has proved to be one of Columbia's most economically successful records ever, which is probably why it occasionally gets neglected by some jazz critics—indeed, "Brubeck rarely gets his due!" The Dave Brubeck Quartet was (and still is) *so* overwhelmingly ubiquitous that their music sometimes gets overlooked, much like the Beetles, out of sheer familiarity. If you're not convinced, then just consider how often you've heard the single "*Take Five*" playing either on TV or while hanging out at the mall or while simply shopping at the grocery store—you'll probably get the point once you think about it, even just a little.

Dave Brubeck Quartet's original studio band consisted of Dave Brubeck on piano, Paul Desmond on the alto sax, Eugene Wright on bass, and Joe Morello playing the drums. And while *Time Out* may not sound so *novel* to modern sensibilities, everything about this album was artsy and innovative back in 1959. Moreover, the initial reviews weren't especially positive, but then people (including jazz critics) found themselves listening to the songs, again and again. And much to everyone's chagrin, these compositions proved to be curiously melodic and undeniably catchy—Brubeck really did have a "knack for melody." There are at least three different answers as to why this album ultimately did so well, despite being so demonstrably experimental for its day. Remember, at the time the so-called "*Cool jazz*" sound was the *only* jazz that most people were familiar with—Swing had already become a distant memory and, unfortunately, most people didn't grow up around New Orleans. So, why did this *particular* album do so well?

First, *Take Five*, as already mentioned, did not try to limit itself to the popular Cool jazz sound of the day. That's why it's still a little too quirky to serve as a so-called "standard" example for the genre. Indeed, Brubeck consciously set out to blend (early) Cool jazz with (later) West Coast tastes—and then amplify this combination with a slightly hotter sound—a la Charles Mingus, for example. The resulting fusion was thus fairly unique, but it didn't stop there.

Brubeck's second major innovation was his subtle blending of Western jazz (and even classical music) with a slightly Eurasian sound, especially music from Eastern Europe and Turkey. This is a tricky proposition and it has to be done just right, otherwise the result wouldn't sound like jazz at all. Or perhaps even worse, it wouldn't have even been *recognizable* to most Westerners, much less to a North American audience. This paradoxical effect is not really new and most musicians are well aware of this problem. To be specific, if you tried to smuggle even just a little bit of a modern Western tune into, say, a traditional Turkish melody, it would really stand out and tend to dominate the entire composition. While this surely has more to do with psychological habituation (and social enculturation), than it does with the *music*, per say, it cannot be overlooked, especially if you want people to listen to and to actually *like* your music. Needless to say, Brubeck managed to get the cultural mix just right—just enough cultural seasoning to make it sound interesting, but not too much, so that you choke on it.

The third major innovation, perhaps closely related to ethnic tradition and cultural bias, tends to be more technical and a subject that requires at least some musical training to understand and still more to master. Specifically, Brubeck experimented with some rather unusual time signatures—for example, 9/8, 6/4, and 5/4 to be precise. The song "*Blue Rondo a la Turk*" (a play on a Mozart song title) is in 9/8. "*Take Five*" is in 5/4. "*Everybody's Jumpin'*" and "*Pick Up Sticks*" happen to both be in 6/4. These are rather rare meters for both Western jazz and classical music and they are probably the biggest reason why these songs remain so interesting to the modern ear. That is, they paradoxically sound somehow both familiar (and easy to listen to), and yet they also somehow seem different (and surprisingly unique)—again, apparently all at the *same* time! Indeed, that's the real paradox surrounding this album.

Incidentally, Paul McCartney was inspired by several of Brubeck's and Desmond's compositions and even turned *his* inspiration into the pop hit single "*All My Loving*." Truly, just as jazz musicians will sometimes explore classical music for ideas, rock musicians are notorious for mining jazz in order to come up with their own fresh ideas—of course with jazz-rock fusion, this process obviously works both ways. If only more people knew this, both jazz and classical music would, perhaps, take center stage yet again. But, until adults start purchasing more music—like they tend to do in France (and more surprisingly in Japan)—the current situation is not likely to change.

Finally, unlike most *classical* music—where a single instrument is typically lost within the collective orchestral experience—*Jazz* allows musicians to highlight their chosen instruments and boldly remain consummate individualists. However, the popular "jazz solo" does not really make a "musical group" and can even be deleterious to the overall effect of the performance. Or to state it even more bluntly, jazz musicians can (sometimes) be like a bunch of wild cats, each pulling in an opposite direction, and desperately trying to do their own thing. Now, getting these cats to work together as a unified team is (often) a difficult task. So, if there was a fourth innovation that Brubeck deserves recognition for, it was his consummate dedication to the "group effort" and his constant "commitment to collective invention within his group." He really did get the best out of each and every one of his players!

For all of these reasons, and for still other inscrutable reasons that remain within the special purview of "*pure* art for art's sake"—and thus seem to remain outside the ability of rational analysis to truly fathom—this particular jazz album continues to captivate listeners, while others seem to die on the vine. And, speaking of life, death, and potential immortality, apparently "Paul Desmond left the rights to [the] royalties of his compositions to the American Red Cross—who receives approximately $100,000 a year from this gift!" That's amazing—and it's a touch of immortality that stands as a lasting tribute to the power of jazz—and even more to the powerful effect both musical ideas *and* intellectual innovation has on Western culture.

MILES DAVIS – ***'ROUND ABOUT MIDNIGHT***[3] (Recorded in 1955 & Release in 1957)
The "cool" ***Hard Bop*** **TRUMPET of MILES DAVIS**.

As Ron David puts it, in the early to mid-1950s the consummate master of Cool jazz was Miles Davis. And, while "he had been in the forefront of the creation of the Cool, he was also in the thick of the reaction that murdered it: Hard Bop." **Miles Davis' 1957 album**, ***'Round About Midnight*** (his very **first record with Columbia**) **represented** this **new** technical and stylistic development which ultimately came to be known as the **Hard Bop jazz**—a newer style that is still going strong, despite the fact that it's sometimes appropriated (and occasionally *mis*appropriated) under the category of Post-Bop, nowadays.

Although it is no doubt easier to think of a "musical style" as springing forth fully developed and wholly distinct, Hard Bop—like most earlier "styles"—wasn't born all at once. You can, undeniably, hear a gradual stylistic evolution on this recording. Overall, it still has a rather Cool sound, but there are subtle differences. Again, to quote Ron Davis, "at first Cool Jazz was seen as elegant and lyrical. By the mid-1950s, it began to feel repressed, emotionally empty, and uptight." So, one of the first "innovations" that you might notice about Miles' album, ***'Round About Midnight***, is how it really wasn't very "new" at all. The song selections actually appear to represent "a summation of the earlier bebop era," apparently trying to tap into the ambience and emotional warmth of this earlier music. Incidentally, the 2001 bonus track "*Budo*" just happens to be a traditional Cool jazz standard. And even the album's title song, "*'Round Midnight*," was based on an earlier Thelonious Monk composition.

However—as the story goes—in 1955 Miles Davis (having finally won his fight against a debilitating heroin addiction) suddenly burst forth onto the Newport Jazz Festival scene with a "new" hit song "*'Round Midnight*"—and somehow inexplicably managed to play his trumpet with an intensity and depth of emotion that seemed lacking in his earlier works. Of course, Davis always maintained that nothing had really changed—besides ***Walkin'*** was technically his first Hard Bop work—but there did seem to be a fresh liveliness to his playing. To the untrained listener it may seem like the audio sound quality suddenly got a little bit better. But, there was actually more to it than just an advance in acoustic engineering. No doubt, Miles did significantly modify his trumpet sound by introducing the Harmon mute. But this fact alone doesn't completely explain the profound change Miles' performance. To put it rather esoterically, as Miles Davis mysteriously remarks, "the music that we were playing…was so bad [in a good way] that it used to send chills through me at night!"

Simply put, there was a "rhythmic drive and fire"—without falling back on Be Bop's "high-notes" and "speedy pyrotechnics"—that was ostensibly lacking in so-called cool jazz. Also, Miles Davis, in his own way, seemed to be trying to fill the void left by the sudden (but predictable) death of Charlie Parker just a few months earlier (at a meager 34 years of age)—consider that even pop graffiti seemed to prophesize mournfully that "Bird died for our sins!" Doubtless "Parker was a hard act to follow," but someone would eventually rise to take his place. And, despite differences in energy and instrumentation, that "someone" appeared to be Miles—although some people suspected that it might also be the profoundly introspective saxophonist, Sonny Rollins.

Either way, Miles Davis' new album, *'Round About Midnight*, recorded with his first ever quintet—with a renewed sense of vitality and artistry—more than any other album, represented this brand-new direction in jazz. You might say that it was yet another "milestone" in Miles' already illustrious career. This innovative jazz quintet— "**Davis's first great quintet**" (of several that would follow)—would of course feature Miles Davis on the trumpet, a young (heroin using) John Coltrane on tenor saxophone, Paul Chambers on bass, Red Garland on piano, and "Philly" Joe Jones on drums. Additionally, the original Newport Jazz Festival bonus track featured none other than Thelonious Monk on piano and Gerry Mulligan on baritone sax. And as usual, behind the scenes, the ever-present "Gil Evans did the arrangement for "*'Round Midnight*." Ironically—and also as usual—critics initially gave the production only a moderate reception, but like Brubeck's 1959 masterpiece, as the decade ended its stock rose considerably. Today, "*'Round About Midnight* is considered to be "a masterpiece of the hard bop genre and one of the greatest jazz albums of all time!"

SONNY ROLLINS – ***SAXOPHONE COLOSSUS*** (1956)
The "**early**" ***Hard Bop*** **SAXOPHONE of SONNY ROLLINS**.

Probably the best way to introduce Sonny Rollins is to first contrast him with someone like Miles Davis—at the time, both Miles and Rollins were heralded as Charlie Parker protégés. Though, Miles Davis—certainly more than any *other* musician—is now rightly considered the foremost creator of modern jazz. Indeed, Miles stepped out from the shadow of Charlie Parker and other Be Bop artists to revolutionize jazz with the *Birth of the Cool*. Miles then—along with others, like Art Blakey for instance—helped to spearhead the Hard Bop reaction to the Cool with *'Round About Midnight*. He would then go on to pioneer Modal jazz with *Kind of Blue*, as well as helping to popularize Third Stream jazz in the 60s alongside Gil Evans (with albums like *Sketches of Spain*). And as his final masterstroke, he inaugurated Fusion with his controversial album *Bitches Brew* in 1969. Miles' crowning achievement, however, was his seminal 1959 album *Kind of Blue* which is, without a doubt, his best-known and best-selling creation. Note, however, every one of these albums is now considered ground-breaking and seminal, having each birthed a distinctive genre around them.

Enough with Miles, what about Sonny Rollins and how is this historical lead-in relevant to him? Note, even though—from at least 1950 onwards—Miles' creativity was pivotal to each one of these major innovations, he wasn't necessarily the best *representative* of each of these particular genres—with the notable exception perhaps of *Modal* jazz. If he were, then that would simplify the history of Modern Jazz considerably: All that you would need to do is study his work, and his work *alone*. However, *if* you were to do that—and some people have preceded in *exactly* this way—you would miss out on many of the best jazz albums of the twentieth century. Indeed, you would miss out on not just one, or two, or three, but over two dozen of the very best jazz albums in recent music history—performed of course by artists *other* than Miles Davis. Further, at least three of these recordings would be some of the best *Hard Bop* albums ever produced—specifically, ***Saxophone Colossus*** (in 1956), ***The Bridge*** (in 1962), and even the soundtrack ***Alfie*** (from the 1966 movie)—all three of which were done by Sonny Rollins—probably the best Hard Bop saxophonist of all time.

Of course, the other awesome *Hard Bop* player proved to be none other than John Coltrane—who, of course, would then rather go on to become the supreme *Modal* saxophone player of all time! In fact, these two artists sometimes went head-to-head, playing some of the best jazz ever witnessed. Interestingly, rumors suggest that it was artistic competition—specifically from young Coltrane—that may have been the primary cause of Rollin's subsequent insecurities and occasional retreats into obscurity. Regardless of his motivations, Sonny always strove to do his very best and it showed. In a 2004 *Jazzwise* interview with Saxophonist Alan Barnes, Barnes remarked, "You know he [Rollins] would have made music whether he had an album deal or not. He had to make it."

Fortunately, however, the studio album ***Saxophone Colossus*** (released by Prestige) proved to be a *major* commercial success for Rollins and some critics even feel that is was his *best* piece of work, period. Incidentally, it also **happens to be the number one jazz album** (**ever**) **in Japan**—the Japanese public being a surprisingly consistent consumer of jazz music. Although Sonny had previously débuted with other famous artists, he had yet to fully break out on his own. All this changed for Sonny in 1956, as one critic put it, with "one of those happy coincidences where all elements came off equally well." Sonny's innovative, saxophone-driven quartet consisted of naturally Sonny Rollins on tenor sax, Tommy Flanagan on piano, Doug Watkins on the upright bass, and none other than Max Roach on drums—also famous for his collaborative efforts with Clifford Brown.

The album consists of just five tracks, but each one of these proved to be a Sonny Rollins masterpiece. "*St. Thomas*," although usually credited to Sonny, was an inspired remake with a slight calypso beat (heralding from the aforementioned Virgin Island). "*You Don't Know What Love Is*" sounds like it came straight out of a detective thriller or, perhaps, the set of *Casablanca*. "*Strode Rode,*" named after Chicago's Strode Hotel (where trumpeter Freddie Webster died) has a hip, celebratory sound with an interesting staccato effect, featuring some impressive drumming by Max Roach. "*Moritat*" (also called "Mack the Knife") is probably the most recognizable toon, as it comes from Bertolt Brecht's musical *The Threepenny Opera* and it has received a lot of air play other the years. Finally, "*Blue 7*" is an eleven-minute tribute to jazz blues and has received considerable *critical* attention for both Sonny's notable technique and his seemingly effortless ability at "thematic improvisation." The entire summer-time session was recorded by the famous sound engineer Rudy Van Gelder at his Hackensack, NJ studio on June 22nd, 1956. However, Rollin's best work (at least according to some) was still on the horizon, bridging Sonny's colossal sax playing ability with even deeper insights and popular conceptions yet to come.

Saxophone Colossus, according to one jazz critic, was so "…**very accessible** because he [Sonny] plays every note with conviction and has a great sense of melody." This not only explains why *this* album was so successful, but it also describes *all* of Sonny's enduring music. Again, consider that this Harlem sensation became so popular, so fast, that he apparently started to question the validity of all the attention that he was given—nearly over-night he seemed to become "a legend, almost a god to a lot of younger musicians. Some thought he was playing the saxophone on the level of Bird [i.e., Charlie Parker]." So, between 1959 and 61 Sonny suddenly withdrew from the spotlight so he could—believe it or not—"*practice*" some more! And incredibly, he was even occasionally spotted doing just that—"practicing"—atop New York City's Williamsburg Bridge, just prior to his triumphant return about a year or so later.

SONNY ROLLINS – ***THE BRIDGE***[4] (1962)
The "smooth" *Hard Bop* SAXOPHONE of SONNY ROLLINS.

Sonny's self-imposed exile between 1959 and 1961 wasn't the first time he withdrew from public life—and it wouldn't be his last "monastic-style" retreat either. Earlier, around 1953, he left Harlem to take some time off by moving to Chicago for a few years. "He reemerged at the end of 1955 as a member of the Clifford Brown-Max Roach Quintet, with an even more authoritative presence." By "'56, he was finally recording under his *own* name," with inspiring results.

Certainly, Sonny's 1956 signature album *Saxophone Colossus* stands as a lasting tribute to this early creative period in Rollin's rather lengthy discography. Ironically, the enormous success of this particular album, coupled with comparisons to his mentors Charlie Parker and Thelonious Monk—and by 1957, John Coltrane—had caused Sonny to turn inside to seek answers once more. In fact around 1961, you could find Sonny—sometimes in the dead of night—playing his saxophone to passing boats and traffic atop New York's Williamsburg Bridge (which connects Brooklyn to Manhattan). Hey, this is the stuff that legends are made, right? Maybe his neighbors simply threw him out for making such a damn ruckus? Either way, as the tale goes, Rollins emerged *again*—in late '61—a changed man. Like *Kung Fu*'s Kwai Chang Caine wandering the old West, nothing could be more humbling than being treated like a panhandling bum—namely, while mingling with New York City's homeless population.

Whatever happen during the interim, Sonny's playing had mellowed out a bit—too say the least. In fact, as a well-known example of the *Hard Bop* school, Sonny's playing in '62 was as *smooth* as you can possibly get and still be considered "*Hard Bop*." Although jazz critics usually tend to rave about his earlier 1956 album *Saxophone Colossus*, in many ways his **1962** return **album *The Bridge* represented his best work**. Although—as usual—critics didn't recognize it as the masterpiece it truly was, when it first came out—at least not immediately. This Bluebird/RCA Victor recording featured Sonny Rollins on tenor sax, Bob Cranshaw on double bass, and Ben Riley on drums (with Harry Saunders replacing Riley on drums for one song on track 5). However, this time Sonny introduced an additional instrument into the mix, with Jim Hall subsequently playing the guitar. And…hey, where's the damn piano man? Well, allegedly "**longstanding difficulties with incompatible pianists**" **caused Sonny to try doing *without* a piano player**. So, if—in addition to Sonny's ultra-smooth saxophone playing—there's just something about **this album that sounds different**, the lack of a piano is probably the reason!

Unfortunately, the avant-garde character of this album has been considerably underestimated. In a 2003 *Jazzwise* interview, bassist Alex Dankworth had this interesting insight about *The Bridge*, "At the time it was a bit more way out than most jazz." Unless of course you're on drugs, then radical sounding "Free Jazz" undoubtedly seemed even farther out. Ironically, "the growing popularity of Ornette Coleman's free jazz" had apparently "eclipsed" Sonny's new masterpiece. And as ancient superstitions always claimed, eclipses are never a good "star" sign. Unfortunately, in this particular case, it *seemed* as though Ornette had a bit of a schizoid break or that far too many people were already taking drugs back in 1962.

Indeed, while drugs may provide an amazing *emotional* high; they contrariwise also tend to precipitate an underwhelming *intellectual* low. Sorry, but Miles Davis was right, most so-called "free jazz" is just awful—and not truly "full-of-awe." Indeed, you simply have to be on drugs—or just illogically wired (or perhaps, even stark raving mad)—to *actually* like the unbelievably "far out stuff." Whereas—as if to further punctuate this stylistic (or *neurological*) distinction—the "overriding logic in his [Sonny Rollins'] playing found him hailed for models of thematic improvisation." And further still, it proved that Sonny was avant-garde enough for most artists—yet still completely sane—while doing his own peculiar thing, with truly "awe-inspiring" results. Simply put, *The Bridge* is a masterpiece! Finally, as if we all collectively came to our senses, in 2015 it was thusly inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame.

However, if you feel that you *must* use "drugs" to truly appreciate Sonny's vision, then one writer recommends that you **simply** "**put on *The Bridge*, take a tumbler of whiskey and imagine you're staring out at New York City**." Perhaps try meditation, instead—indeed, Sonny actually meditated quite a lot. In fact in the late sixties, like so many of his artistic kin, Sonny obligingly went to India and "spent a lot of time in a monastery." Apparently, jazz, meditation, Eastern philosophy, and quasi-religious mysticism just naturally go together—like they also did so intensely for John Coltrane as well. And—just like Coltrane—for Sonny "jazz *was* religion" …and no drugs were needed to reach the highest, angelic heights! Conversely, if you want instead to hear what demons sound like, then just try listening to Albert Ayler's, *Spiritual Unity* [sic] (1964)—or worse, the Peter Bortzmann Octet's *Machine Gun* (1968). And even if you can't stand listening all the way through these two absurdly radical "*Free jazz*" albums, both are really great for scaring little kids away from your house on Halloween. Warning: Ayler's stuff just sounds like pretentious bullshit, but Bortzmann really seemed to be a bit of devilish practical joker. *Machine Gun* may just be a long-standing practical joke—a "joke" that unfortunately damaged the reputation of truly great Jazz artists, like Sonny Rollins.

SONNY ROLLINS – ***ALFIE***[5] (1966)
The "**very best**" ***Hard Bop*** **SAXOPHONE of SONNY ROLLINS**.

Despite the fact that most jazz critics never mention it, ***Alfie*** **is probably the best single piece of work ever produced by Sonny Rollins**. However, *Alfie*—like Miles Davis' album *Ascenseur Pour L'Echafaud*—also happens to be a movie soundtrack. Why have you most likely never heard about this album? Well, movie soundtracks tend to be immensely popular whenever the movie is playing at the box-office (and for a short time after the movie has been enthusiastically viewed by the public) but then, when the movie is gradually forgotten, the soundtrack also tends to fall by the wayside—even though sometimes it really shouldn't. If you're skeptical, just try to thinking of a favorite soundtrack and you will soon discover how hard it is to actually recall even one popular movie score. *Titanic* usually comes to mind, but does anybody still listen to it now? So, even though the 1966 movie *Alfie* (starring Michael Caine) was a very popular movie for its time (and it was even remade in 2004 with Jude Law), most people have, unfortunately, forgotten just how good Sonny's accompanying soundtrack really was.

There are at least seven reasons why ***Alfie*** **is a true masterpiece** that still deserves your attention. First off, this particular soundtrack is just *better* than all the rest! Second, this is an *entire* movie soundtrack performed by Sonny Rollins, not just one or two songs played by Sonny that happen to be mixed together with other artists. Indeed, Sonny plays hard for six entire tracks of *continuous* jazz (there are no words and no singing). Third, if you actually watch the old movie, you will notice that the music is a strong component of the narrative, and not just made to be barely heard while playing in the background. Fourth, although the initial title track is repeated with only slight variation at the end of the score— "*Alfie's Theme Differently*"—the *entire* album holds together marvelously well. Fifth, Sonny's playing is at its all-time *technical* best, having matured for several years since the release of *The Bridge*, in 1962. And consider for a moment just how well that 1962 album was performed—it was simply awesome! Sixth, although there is a lively, *energetic* feel to the album, it also happens to be perfect for *relaxation*—indeed, this is probably jazz music's single biggest appeal. That is, jazz is interesting and energetic enough to keep your attention, but (usually) not so frenetic that it stresses you out (that is, unless it is precocious "Free jazz"). Consider just one example from Classical music—while Wagner's "*Ride of the Valkyrie*" is truly an amazing composition, you can't really use it for relaxation (…but it seems just perfect for an aerial combat assault a la *Apocalypse Now*!). The same is true unfortunately for most Rock and Roll—unless of course it's *The Dark Side of the Moon* by Pink Floyd (…by the way, which one's Pink?). Seventh, and most importantly, Sonny Rollins' ***Alfie*** **may be the most immediately *accessible* jazz album ever made**! Please reread the previous sentence, again. Then consider purchasing this album for both yourself and, perhaps, for a friend as well.

For all these reasons, ***Alfie*** **is a perfect *first* jazz album for anyone new to the genre**—yes, even better at least for "newbies" than *Kind of Blue*. And, despite the fact that Miles Davis' *Kind of Blue* and John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme* tend to be the first two albums most jazz aficionados recommend, they are not necessarily the most "accessible" albums for an absolute beginner. They may be truly *amazing* recordings, and at the *top* of everybody's list, but they are still rather (a bit) sophisticated for the completely novice ear. And, while this may sound a little snobby, it's most likely true nonetheless. Again consider, for example, if you were to recommend Coltrane's *A Love Supreme* to someone who had grown up listening to traditional country music their entire life—it just might scare them away from jazz forever! This album is just too avant-garde for most newbies. Try doing this if you're skeptical—the results should be somewhat predictable.

However, **try playing *Alfie*** (**by Sonny Rollins**) **and you might just win a jazz convert for life**. And at least for jazz, conversion *is* a matter of life and death, because we desperately need young musicians and a new audience to keep this music alive in the 21st Century. Besides—as both Sonny and Coltrane would agree—"jazz *is* religion," right! We must all do our part to carry on the faith. And while this may sound a bit tongue-in-cheek—but, only just a little—if you check the internet, you might be surprised to find that there really is an African Orthodox (Episcopalian) Church in San Francisco dedicated to St. John Coltrane. Wow, apparently jazz fans can get pretty *enthusiastic*. However, visiting this "holy shrine" has to be on ever jazz aficionado's bucket list …it's certainly on mine! ☺

JOHN COLTRANE – ***BLUE TRAIN***[6] (Recorded in 1957 & Released in 1958)
The "**early**" ***Hard Bop*** **SAXOPHONE of JOHN COLTRANE**.

Miles Davis and John Coltrane are, without a doubt, two of the most famous and easily recognized jazzmen of the last seventy years. More ink has probably been spilled over these two personalities, than all the other players combined. More significantly still for both men, their fame rested not only on their *technical* mastery, but also on their radical *ideas* that ultimately transformed the art for generations to come. And consequently, while Miles (over the course of his long career) did more to change the music *technically*, it was John Coltrane that essentially gave modern jazz its *heart and soul*. Indeed, "John Coltrane is clearly one of the leaders of the jazz identity"—for Christ's sake, Coltrane even has a Church named after him (…more about that later ☺).

Of course, Coltrane is best known for his "*Modal* mastery" of both the tenor and soprano saxophone (and apparently the alto sax, as well), but people sometimes forget that he likewise produced two of the greatest *Hard Bop* albums of all time—***Blue Train*** (in 1957) and ***Giant Steps*** (in 1960). Even though Coltrane describe these albums as his "*old music*," ***Blue Train*** **remained one of his favorite albums** despite all his later innovations. This was probably due to it being "Coltrane's first album as a leader"—and that he had also just recently "returned" from a drug induced exile to play with the so-called "the Five Disciples" of Miles Davis' celebrated Quintet.

Although in the early '50s, young Coltrane had been hand-picked by Miles Davis himself for his famous Quintet; at least early on, Coltrane was regarded as *merely* a "good" sax player, and not yet truly "great." ***Blue Train*** changed all that and proved to be the **breakout album that he desperately needed**—Coltrane (nicknamed "Trane" by his colleagues) had recently, but regrettably, been let go from Miles' Quintet because of frequent absenteeism. Despite this unhappy setback, Coltrane's **1957 Blue Note** recording (at the Van Gelder Studio in Hackensack), not only demonstrated that he was a truly an excellent saxophone player, but that he was also a terrific composer. One critic wrote, "It's very interesting to hear how Coltrane was playing before he started heading to the freer, passionate playing that he later developed in the mid 60's. Did you know that a few years earlier, Coltrane was considered just a mediocre player?" But we are getting ahead of ourselves—Trane had yet to break his heroin addiction.

According to his family and friends, Coltrane had *always* practiced as a kid, but by the late '50s he had become "an icon of musical discipline," practicing constantly—morning, noon, and night. Okay, maybe not in the "morning," he was a bit of drunk and a regular heroin user after all. Nevertheless, his cousin witnessed that despite his heavy drinking (and heroin use), Trane could still be found playing his saxophone—apparently, he would even nod off with it resting on his stomach. Interestingly, some critics have suggested that it could have been his slight tendency towards obsessive behavior that may have helped him through his difficult time as a junkie. Whatever happened, Coltrane just kept on playing…and praying! This also brings up an amusing anecdote with regard to Miles Davis. Apparently, Miles would sometimes get impatient with Trane's rather long solos. Coltrane complained that he just didn't know how to "stop playing." Miles once countered, sarcastically, "Try taking the [damn] horn out of your mouth!"—of course, there were a few expletives thrown in for good measure.

Actually, getting kicked out of the most famous jazz quintet in the world was just the 'kick"—or "*kick in the head*"—that Coltrane needed in order to turn his life around. Sequestering himself in his family's (now famous) **Philadelphia residence**, he went "cold turkey" as they say—finally breaking his heroin addiction once and for all. Friend, Archie Shepp recalls, Coltrane actually said, "I promised the Lord…I will become a preacher on my horn." Of course, **Trane's** "**Dark Night of the Soul**" **would later inspire his single *greatest* composition**, ***A Love Supreme*** in 1964; but first Trane had to get clean.

For some people, just breaking an addiction to heroin would have likely remained their single greatest achievement in life, but not so for Saint Coltrane—he would go on to change jazz history…and perhaps religious history, as well. Just after his visitation by the "Holy Spirit," as the story goes, he sought out "The Monk"—Thelonious monk, that is—and "found himself" playing "inspired" saxophone solos during "the long silences [between] Monk's [piano] playing." That was back in 1957 at New York's Five Spot Café—the same place that also gave Thelonious his own new lease on life. Indeed, this was just the break that both of these "Holy Jazz Men" needed.

Of course, Coltrane's next big break was the release of his *Blue Train* album, in1958, which incidentally happened to be "the only Blue Note recording with Coltrane as the leader on the session." Incidentally, it also was recorded while Trane was likewise an "artist in residence" at The Five Spot with the (aforementioned) Thelonious Monk Quartet. However, this time the artists performing on *Blue Train* were graciously provided by Miles Davis' band: with John Coltrane (on tenor sax), Paul Chambers (on bass), and "Philly" Joe Jones (on drums). Two additional players, Lee Morgan (playing the trumpet) and Curtis Fuller (playing trombone), though, were both hailed from Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers—note carefully how **the additional trombone** (ever so slightly) **changes the overall sound of the album**. Finally, Kenney Drew played the piano. Drew was allegedly the "new guy," although he had actually worked with a few of them before. Though Miles was absent, he graciously granted this "Hallowed Communion" of "The Five Disciples," who thus went on to pour their hearts out, creating a quintessential masterpiece of jazz blues. While "these songs and performances show [the] immense strength and power he [Coltrane] had developed up to this point," his new album *Train* helped to spirit Coltrane away to his next great "Giant Step"—ultimately, débuting a "new melodic and harmonic" technique called a "*Coltrane change*," which was originally revealed on two songs from his *Blue Train* album—specifically, "*Moment's Notice*" and "*Lazy Bird.*"

JOHN COLTRANE – ***GIANT STEPS***[7] (Recorded in 1959 & Released in 1960)
The "**definitive**" ***Hard Bop*** **SAXOPHONE of JOHN COLTRANE**.

Before moving on to become the supreme exemplar of Modal jazz, Coltrane succinctly recapped everything that he had learned about Hard Bop in one **signature album**—which, as he said, summarized his "old music"—with yet **another jazz masterpiece**, ***Giant Steps***. This composite work also happened to be "**his *best* album up to that point**." According to one enthusiast, "The great man himself knew that this album was a culmination rather than a new beginning, but that probably accounts for its consummate artistry as much as any other reason."

Indeed, *Giant Steps* was both commercially successful and artistically influential; a combination that was bound to make Saint John Coltrane a pop culture icon. One writer claims that "It's pretty difficult to overestimate the influence this single album—or more narrowly, its title track—has had on the development of jazz…" However, John was always a slightly shy man, who was rather humble—even a bit self-critical—with regard to any successes that he garnered during his prodigious—but all too short—musical career. Apparently, he essentially saw his musical work as an inspirational gift to Afro-American culture.

Giant Steps, recorded in 1959, was Trane's "fifth studio album" and his first to be released under the Atlantic label (in 1960). For these recordings, John Coltrane (of course) played his now famous tenor saxophone. Paul Chambers also reprised his role, playing the upright bass. However, now Tommy Flanagan played the piano (on all but one song). And, Art Taylor played the drums (also on all but one song). "*Naima*" was the one song that had a few substitutes (both on the initial and alternative takes)—specifically, Wynton Kelly and Cedar Walton on piano, as well as Jimmy Cobb and Lex Humphries on the drums. Note how many of these musicians, including John Coltrane himself, also played on *Kind of Blue* (with the Miles Davis Quintet)—that is, earlier that very same year! And alongside the entire *Kind of Blue* song repertoire, both Coltrane's "***Giant Steps***" and "***Naima***" would go on to become **instant jazz standards**.

And as if that weren't enough, still further demonstrating just how central Coltrane's album was to the jazz community, over the years ***Giant Steps*** **would also become a** sort of **training album** (or "practice template") **for up and coming saxophone artists**. Partly because of this, *Giant Steps*—more so than even *Kind of Blue*—has become an "endlessly renewing font of inspiration." This album is "classic" **Coltrane at his Hard Bop best**. Of course, this "inspirational" quality is exactly what is expected whenever anything is labeled truly "classic." Specifically, with regard to the album's popular title track, one musician/writer explains, "'*Giant Steps*' seems to be the most cliché song to learn for a jazz musician who officially wants to enter the 'big leagues' of jazz. This is because it's a really fun, but difficult, song and Coltrane's three-tonic system sounds so hip." He recommends that musicians not only learn '*Giant Steps*' to "feel accomplished," but also to "learn '*Countdown*' to get yet another boost of confidence."

The pop jazz historian, Ron David aptly depicts Trane's astonishing mastery of his saxophone, "…which included impossible-seeming 'split notes,' where Coltrane played several notes (or tones) at the same time, [that] seemed to fly at you with such simultaneous fury that they became known as 'sheets of sound'." This is especially fulfilling to anyone lucky enough to witness it first hand, while in concert. Indeed, Trane's album *Giant Steps* has encouraged more young artists to take up the jazz saxophone than even Charlie Parker did, a generation earlier. More so than anyone else, St. John became an artistic hero and spiritual guide for an entirely new generation of jazz men—regardless of their particular color or creed!

CHARLES MINGUS – ***PITHECANTHROPUS ERECTUS*** (1956)
The "**early**" ***Post-Bop*** **UPRIGHT BASS of CHARLES MINGUS**.

Pop jazz historian, **Ron David**, **describes this** "**early**" **Post-Bop school of jazz as** "**the Uncool school**." *Like* Cool jazz it had rebelled against the earlier intensity of Be Bop; but *akin* to Hard Bop, it was now in full rebellion against the stultifying aspects of the Cool genre—especially as it was assimilated into West Coast W.A.S.P. culture—most particularly, with the meteoric rise of Californian surfer-jazz icons like Gerry Mulligan and Chet Baker. In fact, Chet Baker is a perfect example of this phenomena, because he became immediately popular throughout Anglo-American culture not only for his romantic trumpet playing talents (he was actually a very accomplished player), but also for his boyish good looks—much like Chris Botti is perceived nowadays (and, he too, is also an excellent player). Ron David notes, however, that "Although the Cool school had hogged the spotlight (and the cash flow) for a few years, the overheated boppers had continued to flourish, especially in the black neighborhoods of Northeastern cities."

David then goes on to talk about the early origins of this rather hard to define, "Post-Bop" style, mentioning how the "base virtuoso Charles Mingus and drummer Max Roach had set up their own record company to specialize in [this] new jazz." Note, though, how all this experimentation was going along independently of Miles Davis. And although their record company didn't do so well, it did help Mingus and Roach to establish themselves as "anti-establishment" players of a new, freer style of jazz—a truly unique way of playing that was "absolutely crucial to the development of free collective improvisation in the following decade" (at least according to *The Penguin Guide to Jazz*). "In the mid-1950s," as Ron David concludes, "Mingus formed a workshop to explore Bebop, Gospel, and Blues—and to create compositions and arrangements large and various enough to include them all." **The new**, **experimental sound produced by Charles Mingus** (and his early collaborators) **is best captured by the 1956** Atlantic **album *Pithecanthropus Erectus***.

Although you can clearly discern the experimental, "free jazz" aspects smuggled into this recording—such as car horns honking—this album still stays well within the limits of the emerging Hard Bop consensus. Only this time, Charles Mingus takes the lead, playing his upright bass with dramatic effect. Jackie Mclean also plays the alto saxophone, while J.R. Monterose plays tenor sax. Additionally, Mal Waldron plays the piano, while Willie Jones plays the drums. The overall effect of this unique collective improvisation stands as a lasting tribute to both artistic and intellectual innovation, without being *excessively* artsy or intellectually pretentious—something that cannot be said for later "Free jazz" works. Interestingly, Steve Huey (with *AllMusic*) remarks, "Mingus noted that this was the first album where he taught arrangements to his musicians by ear in lieu of putting the chords and arrangements in writing." Wow, that's amazingly hard to get right.

The title, while admittedly being rather difficult to pronounce, was meant to reference recent scientific findings in anthropology with regard to the evolution of humankind—especially with regard to our ancestral, ape-like origins. Mingus thought of his composition as a "tone poem" about the inevitable rise and fall of mankind due, ultimately, to our lack of empathy and compassion for our fellow man. The title song, "*Pithecanthropus Erectus*" even has a clever tripartite meaning, referring to our ancestral beginnings as an "Upright Ape-Man," our need to be ethically and morally "Upright" (in all our social interactions), and the "upright bass" that Mingus used to relate his cautionary tale—see the original liner notes for a more detailed explanation of this interesting work. And if you like this album … ah, um … well, just wait until is you hear his 1959 masterpiece!

CHARLES MINGUS – ***MINGUS AH UM*** (1959)
The "**free**-**ish**" ***Post***-***Bop*** **BASS of CHARLIE MINGUS**.

By the late 50s, Charles Mingus was widely regarded as "**the godfather of the upright bass**." But **nothing had prepared the world for his 1959** (studio) **album**, ***Mingus Ah Um***. As has been said many times before, 1959 was an extremely good year for jazz! To start off, popular West Coast/Cool jazz trumpeter, Chet Baker, released his signature album entitled, simply *Chet*. Then in early Spring, Miles Davis (and Gil Evans) would unveil his (or their) remarkable Third Stream arrangements from Gershwin's (1934) opera *Porgy and Bess*. Next, from late June to August, Dave Brubeck would take the summer off to record his phenomenal album *Time Out* (planned for release later, during the 1959 Christmas season). However, earlier that spring, Miles Davis (with Gil) had also recorded his monumental work *Kind of Blue*, which was released in August—that is, about the same time that Brubeck was taping *Time Out*. But as if all this wasn't good enough, Charles Mingus finally signed with Columbia and, in May that very same year, he recorded his quintessential masterpiece *Mingus Ah Um*—to be released on September 14th (also with plenty of time to take advantage of the 1959 Christmas season—or Kwanza, if you were into celebrating black history like Charlie Mingus was).

Speaking of celebrating black history, that is exactly what *Ah Um* is all about. Penguin's *Guide to Jazz* describes this Post-Bop album as "an extended tribute to ancestors." Mingus goes out of his way to fuse African rhythms with negro Spirituals, Voodoo-like Soul music, and Christian Gospel music. He then adds some old time Blues to the mix and stirs it up with just the right amount of New Orleans Dixie-land, big band Swing, and Be Bop. One critic says, "Charles Mingus had a way of making his band sound complex, original, and of course swing like crazy. In addition to the swinging tunes, there are some amazing ballads filled with colorful and inventive horn arrangements." Mingus even tried his hand at the piano, while finally "cementing his status as a legendary composer."

After this album, jazz would never be the same again. As has already been suggested, Mingus's work is hard to classify so most critics tend to refer to his music as "Post-Bop" or "Avant-garde." But notice how very early Mingus began this progressive experimentation—that is, well before the release of his 1956 album *Pithecanthropus Erectus*. Like Thelonious Monk before him, Charlie Mingus was stubbornly ahead of his time and both of these "Post-Bop Masters" deserve more recognition than they tend to receive. But while Monk was much more reserved and quite about his situation, Mingus tended to scream for attention at the top of his lungs—and rightfully so. Indeed, drummer John Marshall (referring to *Mingus Ah Um* album in a 2004 *Jazzwise* interview) says, "It [*Ah Um*] was a precursor to the whole thing that opened up in the 60s." Unfortunately, few people tend to realize this fact.

In many ways, this unconventional album— "It's a roller coaster ride through fast and slow tempos, cacophony and perfect harmony, and a touch of madness"—marks the true beginning of Free jazz. Again, all while still appealing to Hard Bop sensibilities…and human sanity. Something that simply cannot be said of Ornette Coleman's so-called "Free jazz" album, *The Shape of Jazz to Come*—which by the way also (unfortunately) came out in 1959. *Mingus Ah Um* is truly a masterpiece, and it grows on you—like Dave Brubeck's *Time Out* and Miles Davis's *Kind of Blue*—each and every time you listen to it.

Although the same thing has also been *claimed* of Ornette Coleman's work, it just doesn't compare. Coleman's album tends to grow on you rather like the dawning of an "insider's jest" or "practical joke"—a joke at everyone else's expense. To describe it all matter-of-factly, Free jazz has been (fairly) described as "experimental jazz." And at the risk of belaboring this point, not every experiment is a success. Such is life…and the same thing goes for any work of art. The only difference is that artistic experiments are much more subjective. However, art is not completely subjective, or it would altogether fail to communicate anything—much less aesthetics. Nevertheless, the vast majority of musicians, and jazz critics, alike, agree that Mingus's work was a triumphant success; while most (but not all) of Coleman's work was largely a failure—a very, very interesting failure (a bit like listening to a far-off train wreck)—but a mistake, nonetheless. And to drive home this point, according to Wikipedia, "Mingus Ah Um was one of fifty recordings chosen by the Library of Congress to be added to the National Recording Registry in 2003." But to be fair, nine years later the National Recording Registry also put Ornette Coleman's 1959 album on their list (right next to the Ramones), so what the hell do they know?

Unfortunately, the personnel that made up Mingus's innovative band are, nowadays, largely unknown to the general public—which is a little sad—but at least their work lives on in perpetuity. Of course, Charles Mingus plays his upright bass (and even tries his hand playing the piano on "*Pedal the Blues*"). John Handy plays the alto sax. Booker Ervin plays the tenor sax. Shafi Hadi, however, plays both alto and tenor sax (on alternating tracks). Willie Dennis and Jimmy Knepper both play the trombone (again on alternating tracks). Horace Parlan plays the piano (sharing his keyboard with Mingus on the song already mentioned, above). And finally, Dannie Richmond plays the drums (throughout all the aforementioned tracks).

Finally, Mingus's compositions are so evocative that something really needs to be said about each one of these songs. Track 1 "*Better Git It in Your Soul*" is a jazz gospel piece—described as "ruckus jubilation," as well as a spiritual "command" emanating from early childhood sermons from the Watts district of Los Angeles, California. Track 2 "*Goodbye Pork Pie Hat*" is "an elegy to tenor saxophone poet Lester Young" (and of course also to Charlie Parker, as they both favored this style of headgear). Track 3 "*Boogie Stop Shuffle*" is an inspirational 12-bar blues piece (set in four themes). Track 4 "*Self-Portrait in Three Colors*" is actually a soundtrack to a John Cassavetes' movie called *Shadows* (that was unfortunately never used, apparently "for budgetary reasons"). Track 5 "*Open Letter to Duke*" is a tribute to Mingus's lifelong idol, Duke Ellington. Track 6 "*Bird Calls*" while obviously suggestive of Charlie Parker, was also supposed to literally mimic bird calls. Track 7 "*Fables of Faubus*" is a "scathingly satirical" poke at "the infamous former governor of Arkansas who strongly opposed racial integration in schools in 1957" (and who caused President Eisenhower to actually send the National Guard to force the issue). Track 8 "*Pussy Cat Dues*" is a rather personal subject (and really shouldn't be discussed in front of children). Track 9 "*Jelly Roll*" is a Mingus special composition "for Jelly Roll Morton, jazz's first important composer." And finally, tracks 10, 11, and 12 are additional bonus songs, not appearing on the original LP.

One final note is worth mentioning. Although *Ah Um* is sometimes described as a "quasi-Free Jazz" album, it still fits comfortably within the framework of the contemporary Hard Bop of its day, as well as within the Post-Bop genre of today's Modern acoustic jazz scene. The drummer Bill Doyle aptly observes that Mingus's album is "timeless" and "could have been recorded yesterday." Indeed, the abstract expressionist art on the original album cover still looks fresh—a perfect complement to this timeless music. Note how Mingus's progressive style contrasts noise with harmony within his more adventurous compositions. Indeed, Mingus sometimes starts off with a sort of noisy backdrop of discordant sound—or perhaps intersecting melodic dis-harmonies—and then, gradually finds the order and harmony somehow extant within the original piece. Interestingly, this is sort of a musical analogy to how some older camping flashlights—called Mag-lights—could be gradually focused (and re-focused) from an original diffuse background of fuzzy light into a tightly focused, laser-like beam of bright light (so as to clearly envision whatever you are looking for). Then, as if imitating this particular flashlight, towards the end of Mingus's songs he will often go out of harmonic focus, yet again, reminiscent of the initial melodic disharmony or acoustic fuzziness that he started with at the very outset of the composition.

Indeed, it's a fascinating musical technique and a novel way to conclude an arrangement. Listen for it, because once you finally notice this peculiar "musical trope," you probably won't mind the little bit of noise cleverly mixed into the melody. That is, so long as the initial noisy and discordant sound quickly transforms into a more pleasing melody—hopefully, before you get sick of merely hearing noise. Again, unfortunately this is not usually the case for many Free Jazz compositions. They tend to *start* out with a strong sense of musical harmony and then gradually progress into some sort of noisy disharmony and, then, dramatically escalate to an even nosier cacophony of discordant sound and then, finally, they conclude this disastrous experimental soundscape with either a loud crash or a gradual whimper of—well—some sort of pretentious bullshit or dramatic whatnot. Remember however, you just don't get to truly appreciate the *good*, without also sometimes experiencing the bad. *Maybe* that's really Free Jazz's "inside joke"—an artistic joke that we are all supposed to eventually appreciate? Either way, it really stands in sharp contrast when played next to a truly brilliant player like the late, great Charlie Mingus.

AHMAD JAMAL TRIO – ***LIVE AT THE PERSHING LOUNGE*** [8] (1958) / ***DIGITAL WORKS*** (1985)
The "**early**" ***Post-Bop*** **PIANO of AHMAD JAMAL**.

1958 saw the rise of another unlikely **jazz superstar**, **Ahmad Jamal**. While it's not surprising that Ahmad Jamal—born Frederick Russell Jones—would eventually become a piano virtuoso (he did start playing the piano at the tender age of three), what surprised everyone was the fact that his seemingly innocuous debut album went on to become an overnight sensation. This indeed happened, despite the fact that this January 15th, 1958 album ***At the Pershing: But Not for ME*** was not only **his first album with the Argo label**, but also "**his first album ever recorded live**."

Captured in only one take during a winter's evening lounge performance at Chicago's Pershing Hotel—you can even hear glasses clinking in the background—Ahmad Jamal would ultimately go from being a relatively unknown pianist to a household name in a mere twelve months. This is the sort of "rags to riches story" that every artist dreams about. And is even harder to believe, given that the album's initial reviews were only mediocre at best.

Actually, the fact that jazz critics always seem to miss the mark is one reason why they should just stick to what they really like about a performer, leaving all the rest for the crowds to decide (unless of course they are uniformly horrible, then it's their duty to save people their hard earned cash). However, this was obviously not the case with Ahmad Jamal's album. Evidently, an initial review by *Down Beat* magazine claimed that while Jamal was a skilled piano player, he was merely playing "cocktail music." Can you believe that? He was apparently playing "cocktail music" in a !@#$% cocktail lounge. That's like saying that the Dodgers were *merely* playing baseball at Dodgers' stadium. First of all, this particular assertion is *merely* a tautology…or the sort of thing you write when you don't really have anything worthwhile to say. Secondly, *apparently* the public really liked his "cocktail music," since they are exactly the sort of people that actually go to a "cocktail lounge" to hear some good piano playing.

But the crowds didn't just *like* his music, they liked it enough for it to stay **on the** "***Billboard Magazine*** **album charts for 107 weeks**." In fact, this album—like *Time Out*—went on to become an international sensation—**selling** "**more than a million copies**." Apparently, 1958 was also a good year for unknown piano players as well. So, if this album is so good that it was "destined" to become internationally famous, why would anyone disparage it for being exactly what it originally billed itself to be—*LIVE, At the Pershing Lounge*? Or rather than repeating the obvious, what was it about Ahmad Jamal's music that you could possibly criticize in the first place? Let's try to venture a few guesses.

First, Ahmad's group was *merely* a trio. So, besides Jamal playing the piano, all that was left was Israel Crosby playing the double bass and Vernal Fournier on the drums. This clearly is going to sound a little different than a regular jazz quartet and, especially, when compared to a quintet. Maybe it didn't sound "complete" enough to the critics who may have been used to hearing a saxophone or a trumpet—or maybe even both? Remember, though, Jamal was showcasing his piano talent and, thus, having fewer instruments is a good way to do just that. Incidentally, Jamal also experimented with a piano-guitar-bass trio—likewise with great success.

Second, Jamal apparently played his piano with an excessive "precision" and "control"—using a "light-but-tight approach," like Thelonious Monk before him—while slowing down the pace and playing fewer notes in order to emphasize the notes that he was playing. This technique, however, worked well for Monk and Jamal—and they were so successful with this "minimalist approach" that, according to one critic, Miles copied it with his trumpet! To quote him, apparently "**Ahmad Jamal had a big influence on Miles Davis** because if you play less notes, what you play has more impact." In fact, this would go on to become a Miles Davis mantra, especially when Miles played against the backdrop of Gil Evans's entire orchestra. Nonetheless, this does sound quite a bit different than, say, Be Bop jazz.

Third, critics may have taken exception to the fact that Jamal "plays varying textures and often doesn't play at all for measures at a time to show off his swinging rhythm section." Again, Thelonious Monk was known for doing exactly the same thing; but apparently, now audiences were finally comfortable enough to these techniques that they finally appreciated how sometimes "less is more" (and not always a bore). But maybe the critics thought—like Lennie Tristano did—that a pianist should play every single note with flawless precision and without exception.

Fourth, Ahmad Jamal's "imaginative arrangements" were apparently so simple, but also so simultaneously beautiful, that he could make even the "cheesiest" sounding TV showtune sound like a work of unsurpassed artistry. And while **his most famous song is**, **undoubtedly**, "***Poinciana***"—"**which was a massive hit**"—he had a way of making every track into "an object lesson in how to draw the best from [each and every] tune." Indeed, "beautiful" is just that—*beautiful*—and this is an acoustic lesson that many Free Jazz artists all too often forgot. Or to put this even more bluntly, you can be as inventive and as experimental as you can get away with, just so long as it still sounds good to the human ear—however, don't be different just to be *different*; rather, try to do it better than before!

Apparently, for all these reasons, Ahmad Jamal's work proved that progressive jazz doesn't have to *sound* so cutting edge to actually *be* cutting edge, it just has to sound better than usual in order to catch people's attention. In fact, this is exactly the kind of "musical jujitsu" that the Cool Jazz artists used against Be Bop, in the late 40s, and it if it worked in 1948, then—as Ahmad Jamal emphasized—why shouldn't it work in 1958? Well he proved his point, because his music eventually "became 'standard music' at parties" everywhere "and…appeared on jukeboxes" across the nation. And remember, this is jazz we are talking about, not rock and roll.

But, now for the bad news. Even though this was recorded in 1958, the audio sound quality isn't especially good. It's not just because this was a live recording (but that didn't help); rather, it just sounds like the recording equipment wasn't set up correctly (so as to capture the very best sound possible). This sort of thing is always a problem and was the reason why sound engineers, like Rudy Van Gelder, were always in constant demand. But there is another a way to hear Ahmad Jamal at his very best—besides of course, seeing him live in concert.

Ironically, even Ahmad Jamal's worst critics have acknowledged that every one of his songs sounds uniformly "perfect"—so it really doesn't matter which album you buy; they all sound like Ahmad Jamal. And, while this is a nice way of saying that all his music sounds the same, what *really* matters is that all his music is exceedingly good! Indeed, the same criticism has been leveled against the popular singer Sting. But, who cares—all his music may sound the same, but it also sounds uniformly excellent. That's not a bad thing—rather, it's a really, really good thing. It means that you have mastered your art form. Well, Ahmad Jamal—like, say, Mozart—has simply mastered his chosen instrument. Indeed, Ahmad has mastered his piano to the point where the only thing anyone can truly criticize has merely to do with *subjective* issues of style and personal taste.

So, if you want to hear Ahmad Jamal at his very best—and no matter what, he is a consummate virtuoso artist (indeed like all famous jazz legends)—then **purchase his 1985 studio album *Digital Works***. Even though "*But Not for Me*" and "*Poinciana*" are the only two songs that appear on both of these albums—and *Allmusic* only gives it an "above average" score (i.e., it's just one of his above average, but *awesome* albums)—*Digital Works* manages to capture all the MAGIC that makes Ahmad Jamal one of the very best jazzmen still alive—and still performing—today! Even though, nowadays, he is over eighty years…young. ☺

MILES DAVIS – ***MILESTONES*** [9] (1958)
The "**original**" ***Modal Jazz*** **TRUMPET of MILES DAVIS**.

In 1958, the trumpeter and composer Miles Davis released a groundbreaking new album called *Milestones*. This was his **very first album showcasing new Modal techniques of jazz composition**, notably the feature track "*Miles*" (which should "not to be confused with the earlier composition with the same title recorded by Davis and Charlie Parker in 1947"). Unfortunately, this particular album often gets overlooked by many jazz critics, but this is probably due to the phenomenal success of Davis's *Kind of Blue* album, the following year.

Remember always that a "jazz critic" is just a writer who happens to critique another person's creative efforts (present company included). Unfortunately, they (or we) are often far too close to the "sweet sounding" action to get a bird's eye perspective of the possible historical implications of any new album or jazz composition. This of course is the advantage of writing about these events nearly sixty years later. So, with this broader historical perspective in mind, let us try to understand the importance of Miles Davis (in general) and this original groundbreaking album (in particular). Note that *The Penguin Guide to Jazz*, in hindsight, finally "selected [*Milestones*] as part of its suggested 'Core Collection', calling it **'one of the very great modern-jazz albums**'."

We might start by considering why it has the grandiose title that it does—namely, *Milestones*. Davis didn't just use this designation because it was clever, although it *is* an ingenious play on both his name and the relevance of his "systemic" contributions to the jazz scene. Instead, Miles "self-consciously" *insisted* that he was definitely breaking new ground (yet again), even if other people didn't understand its significance at the time. As Ron David elegantly indicated, "***Milestones*** **quietly featured an innovation that would** [finally] **free Jazz from the constraints of Bebop**." Significantly, the song "*Miles*" (sometimes referred to by the full name "*Milestones*") was his very first foray into the technical intricacies of "modal jazz" composition—indeed, this proved to be a truly novel new way of doing jazz (Coltrane is but one example) and, yes, another "milestone" for Miles Davis's biography…or rather, his *disc*ography.

Of approximately the top twenty (or twenty-five) albums that may be distinguished as genuine "Classics" of the Acoustic Jazz Era—spanning the score of two *truly* "golden" decades, from 1950 to 1970—Miles Davis unsurprisingly has contributed the highest number of albums—that is, at least five and perhaps even more. Specifically, the *Birth of the Cool* (with Gerry Mulligan) in 1950, *Workin' With the Miles Davis Quintet* in 1956, *'Round About Midnight* in 1957, *Milestones* in 1958, and *Kind of Blue* in 1959. This short list, of course, focuses only on his "classic" acoustic albums, produced during the fifties.

Workin' With the Miles Davis Quintet (from 1956) is included here to recommend yet another *good* example of a popular Hard Bop album from this prolific period. Fortunately, there were several recordings like it that are all equally representative of this excellent work. Nevertheless, *Workin'…* seems *to* have the best audio quality of these various early recordings. Unfortunately, far too many 1950s albums—especially those before 1957 or 58—could benefit from a vigilant program of audio sound restoration. Hopefully, if this observation is repeated enough times, someone with the right combination of passion and know-how will finally take action (maybe there is even a financial grant to be had somewhere, somehow)?

If we were to be exceedingly thorough, we might want to include an early Be Bop contribution that Davis made while playing with Charlie Parker, say, *Bird at the Roost (Vol. 1)* in 1948; and more especially, Miles's later significant "Jazz-Orchestral" contributions, such as *Miles Ahead* (in 1957), *Porgy and Bess* (in 1958/59), or *Sketches of Spain* (in 1956/60), all collaborations performed with the Gil Evans' orchestra. However, as has *already* been declared, "Modern Jazz" actually starts with "*the Cool*" so we should probably eliminate Charlie Parker's earlier Be Bop work—sorry, Charlie (indeed, it almost seems like a sin against the spirit of jazz). And while Davis's "orchestral works" are definitely "acoustic," they *really* sound very different than what most people expect—that is, whenever they reference or think about *classic* "Acoustic Jazz." This of course, seems to be the point that Wynton Marsalis has been trying to make all these years, although he has been constantly criticized for it—possibly because it sounds so "old fashion" and even a bit reactionary. Indeed, Ron David describes him as being a "*Young Fogey*," although he's not so young nowadays (and he has also ironically developed a penchant for orchestral works, as of late).

Besides, Miles' "Third Stream" Orchestral Jazz works—and they are truly awesome compositions—should probably be included in the "Classical Music" genre, although this too could (and should) be debated. In fact, if you include *Miles Davis at Carnegie Hall* (performed, with an complementary orchestra, in 1961) and *The Individualism of Gil Evans* (recorded in 1964), then you *could* dedicate an entirely separate volume covering simply the best Third Stream "Jazz-Classical" orchestrations—not to mention earlier "quasi-orchestral" works done in the 20s, 30s, and 40s with popular Big Bands, in the so-called "Swing" style of Jazz—which naturally represents a plausible long-term project (and incidentally happens to be in the works).

Despite the various controversies over what constitutes *Classic* "Acoustic" Jazz, Wynton is probably right, although he (and the entire Branford family) seem to look back much further than the 1950s. Likely without encountering much debate, THE major Modern works of what musicians *usually* called "CLASSIC JAZZ" unquestionably took shape in the early 50s and on into the late 60s. And despite how marvelous *later* innovations may have sounded—like 70s and 80s Jazz Fusion (the album *In A Silent Way* being a splendid example) or even contemporary Smooth Jazz and similar Latin Rhythms—the golden years, lasting from 1950 to 1970, still provide both a significant and important center of gravity for everything else that followed. And naturally, this is why we should all give this *particular* music the attention that it truly deserves!

So, given that this worldview is basically correct, then as a consequence, it considerably narrows the historical "styles" of jazz worth carefully examining—and collecting—down to just the just ones described in this work—notably, Cool Jazz, Hard Bop, and Modal Jazz. Note, however, that most Post-Bop compositions just sounds like "progressive" Hard Bop so it probably shouldn't get any special designation. However, this is still highly debatable—and in all fairness, some later post-Bop compositions can actually get pretty far out (but still not as far out as Free Jazz works).

So why give all this background before finally getting around to talk about Modal Jazz proper. Well, like the "Progressive" Hard Bop style before it, Modal Jazz ultimately came to dominate the entire sixties musical scene (not to mention much of the seventies, as well). So, while saving any *technical* analysis of "Modality" for the *Kind of Blue* album—because historically "these modal techniques were continued and expanded on [this] groundbreaking album"—we will conclude this section with a little more discussion about Davis's noteworthy musical "milestone"—that is, his album now justly bearing the name *Milestones*. And again, why this album definitely deserves more attention than is usually receives.

Surprisingly, *Milestones* also features other interesting innovations that are likewise not immediately apparent—notably a subtle mix of Bebop, Hard Bop, Post-Bop, and even a slight touch of the Blues. This is something that would obviously be put to good effect the following year. Indeed, "*Allmusic*'s **Thom Jurek called *Milestones* a classic album with blues material in both bebop and post-bop veins**; as well as the 'memorable' title track, **which introduced modalism in jazz and defined Davis' subsequent music in the years to follow**"—note, he additionally gave the album a solid five stars for his review.

Although Davis's talented, but "short-lived," sextet would happen to be the last time that he (while playing trumpet) recorded with Red Garland (on piano), Paul Chambers (on double bass), and "Philly" Joe Jones (on the drums), it just happily featured some extraordinary performances by "Cannonball" Adderley (on alto sax) and John Coltrane (on tenor saxophone). Indeed, "**Andy Hermann** [of *PopMatters*] **felt that the album offers more aggressive swinging than *Kind of Blue*** and showcases the **first session between saxophonists Coltrane and Cannonball Adderley**, whose different styles 'feed off each other and push each musician to greater heights.'" Daryl Long, from *Miles Davis for Beginners* recounts how it sounded at the time, "Each tune is set up by Cannonball's big, round, rolling sound (with a little touch of Trane), followed by Miles's spare musings with Philly Joe lighting flash fires beneath them, leaving Coltrane to burst into breathless, brilliant, boundless, screaming improvisations." There is also a quote like this in *Miles: The Autobiography* (with Quincy Troupe), but it's usually printed on the album's liner notes so you can read more about this on your own, if you feel so inclined.

As an added bonus, Davis plays *both* his trumpet *and* the piano on the second tract, "*Sid's Ahead*," which provides some interesting insights, since most people have forgotten that Miles Davis could *also* play the piano. Remember though that Miles was first and foremost a composer (and an arranger)—the same should also be said of Gil Evans—and this in fact is the secret to his (and Gil's) success, both as a musician and as an artist. Finally, as if providing a lasting tribute to the progressive pianist who probably started it all—namely, the *now* famous musician Thelonious Monk—Miles dedicates the album's final song to Monk, which was likewise *originally* written by Thelonious, called "*Straight, No Chaser*." Note, if you're the type that also likes to *see* how things looked back then (and most of us are), then *Straight, No Chaser* additionally happens to be the title of an interesting biographical movie about Thelonious Monk, which parenthetically happened to be produced by the famous actor Clint Eastwood in 1988.

MILES DAVIS – ***KIND OF BLUE*** [9] (1959)
The "**famous**" ***Modal Jazz*** **TRUMPET of MILES DAVIS**.

Note, this album—without a doubt—is the most famous acoustic jazz composition ever made. More ink has been spilled over this one "jazz masterpiece" than any other jazz work—by far! So, trying to write something new about this album—that hasn't already been said—is truly a tall order! For now, just **take a look at some of the articles that have been written about this famous album** on the internet—**you**'**ll be amazed at just how really famous it truly is**.

Then, sit-down and listen to it for yourself (if you haven't heard this one already). Chances are, you'll listen to it more than once. And **the more you listen to it—the more you will tend to like it**. **Jazz is sort of contagious**, that way.

While these informational notes are nearly finished, I also need write about **MILES DAVIS**'s ***E.S.P.*** (1965) album (my favorite one by Miles) and **WAYNE SHORTER**'s ***SPEAK NO EVIL*** (1964/66) (personally, my very favorite jazz album—period!). And also about two more **JOHN COLTRANE** works (likewise, his best two albums) named ***COLTRANE'S SOUND*** (1960/64) and ***CRESCENT*** (1964).

…Enjoy!!!

[**To be continued**—A work in progress!]