

IMAGININGS OF AFRICA IN THE MUSIC OF MILES DAVIS

BY

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THESIS

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Abstract

Throughout jazz's history, many American jazz musicians have alluded to Africa using both musical and extramusical qualities. In musicological literature that has sought out ties between American jazz and Africa, such as Ingrid Monson's *Freedom Sounds* (2007) and Robyn Kelly's *Africa Speaks, America Answers* (2012), the primary interest has thus far been in such connections that occurred in the 1950s and early 1960s with the backdrop of the Civil Rights movement and the liberation of several African countries. Among the most frequently discussed musicians in this regard are Art Blakey, Max Roach, and Randy Weston.

In this thesis, I investigate the African influence reflected in the music of Miles Davis, a musician scantily recognized in this area of jazz scholarship. Using Norman Weinstein's concept of "imaginings," I identify myriad ways in which Davis imagined Africa in terms of specific musical qualities as well as in his choice of musicians, instruments utilized, song and album titles, stage appearance, and album artwork. Additionally (and often alongside explicit references to Africa), Davis signified African-ness through musical qualities and instruments from throughout the African diaspora and Spain, a country whose historical ties to North Africa allowed Davis to imagine the European country *as* Africa. Like other jazz musicians such as John Coltrane, Davis also incorporated Indian musical styles and instruments alongside African and Afrodiasporic elements to reflect an affinity between Africa and India as part of the emerging Global South.

After broadly describing African musical characteristics and ideas on their survival throughout the African diaspora (most notably Paul Gilroy's appropriation of Amiri Baraka's concept of the "changing same"), I outline Davis's imaginings of Africa, which began with 1959's *Kind of Blue* and continued throughout the next thirty years before concluding with 1989's *Amandla*. As Davis's fusion period (the late 1960s to his "retirement" in 1975) reveals

the greatest density of such allusions, I also discuss musicological scholarship that deals with this period more broadly, identifying the literature's strengths, weaknesses, and biases. At the end of this chronological study, I examine Davis's influence in regards to African imaginings by looking specifically at the music of Herbie Hancock, one of his most prolific and successful protégés. In terms of both Davis and Hancock, I argue that their music incorporates imaginings of Africa in ways both new and consistent with those deployed by the likes of Blakey, Roach, Weston, and other musicians more commonly discussed in this regard.

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Introduction

In my music with Tony [Williams], I started putting the backbeat in the drums out front and on top of everything, like in African music. In Western music, white people at this time were trying to suppress rhythm because of where it comes from—Africa—and its racial overtones. But rhythm is like breathing. So that's what I began to learn in this group and it just pointed the way forward.¹

In the above quote taken from his autobiography, the jazz trumpeter Miles Davis describes the change in style that occurred once drummer Tony Williams joined his band in the early 1960s. Davis quickly goes on to include the musical influence that the remaining members of his second “great” quintet (saxophonist Wayne Shorter, pianist Herbie Hancock, and bassist Ron Carter) had on the music, beginning with the 1965 album, *E.S.P.* Some of the commonly highlighted characteristics of this band include its rhythmic innovations, its rhythm section's almost-unprecedented independence, and its penchant for turning well-known standards into barely recognizable yet brilliant arrangements. However, while writers are correct in pointing these features out, rarely do they include discussions of African musical elements present in this music.

In this paper, I argue that an African influence is reflected throughout much of Miles Davis's career, as early as 1959's *Kind of Blue*, even before the above quote by Davis on his style with Tony Williams. Davis's imaginings of Africa would come to take place in terms of specific musical qualities as well as in his choice of musicians, instruments utilized, song and album titles, stage appearance, and album artwork. In addition to allusions that explicitly reference Africa, I argue that Davis used musical qualities and instruments from the African diaspora (primarily from the Caribbean and Brazil), Spain, and India as other ways to signify

¹ Miles Davis with Quincy Troupe, *Miles: The Autobiography* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1989), 277.

African-ness. Norman Weinstein has used “imaginings” to imply “an energetic force which constellates, in ever new and changeable configurations, ideas and images surrounding notions of Africa.”² In this paper I use Weinstein’s concept of “imaginings” because I see Davis’s references to Africa as incredibly diverse and ever changing throughout his career. Moreover, illuminating the above factors will reveal that Davis imagined Africa in his music in ways both consistent and different with his contemporaries like Art Blakey, Max Roach, Randy Weston, and John Coltrane, all of whom have received more attention for their musical connections to Africa.

Indeed, Miles Davis has been almost completely ignored in volumes that seek ties between American jazz and Africa. Book-length musicological works that focus on this subject, most notably Ingrid Monson’s *Freedom Sounds* (2007) and Robyn Kelly’s *Africa Speaks, America Answers* (2012), have so far been primarily interested in connections between Africa and American jazz in the 1950s and early 1960s. Monson’s book is largely concerned with this music as it relates to the Civil Rights movement and the independence of several African countries during these years, as well as U.S. State Department-sponsored tours by jazz musicians in Africa and the Middle East, which promoted American culture at a time when Cold War tensions were at their peak. Though Monson describes many musicians and their actions, she shows particular interest in drummers Art Blakey, Max Roach, and pianist Randy Weston. Blakey’s *Orgy in Rhythm* (1957), as just one of many examples, is cited for its eleven percussion pieces that all invoke Orishas, or gods in West African areas like Yoruba. Roach, on the other hand, is discussed largely in terms of his influential civil rights album, *We Insist! Freedom Now*

² Norman C. Weinstein, *A Night in Tunisia: Imaginings of Africa in Jazz* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1992), viii.

Suite (1960), which made prominent use of the Afro-Cuban bell pattern and in which Roach incorporated both African and Caribbean musicians.

Kelly's *Africa Speaks, America Answers* is primarily "a series of encounters between jazz and modern Africa through an examination of four artists," including the drummer Guy Warren, Randy Weston, bassist Ahmed-Abdul-Malik, and the singer Sathima Bea Benjamin.³ Warren, a native Ghanaian, was notable for his work in fusing jazz with West African music in pieces like "The Talking Drum Looks Ahead" (1956). Weston, on the other hand, was an American with a deep curiosity for his African heritage. His album, *Uhuru Afrika* (1960) was "a declaration of independence for African and mutual interdependence between the continent and its descendants,"⁴ and was subsequently banned in South Africa. Weston himself would make several trips to Africa on quests for authentic African music. Kelly further describes Abdul-Malik's infusion of North African and Middle Eastern music into jazz for spiritual purposes, before his discussion of Benjamin, a South African who migrated to New York to become a professional jazz singer.

A third book on American jazz and Africa, though not strictly musicological, is Norman Weinstein's *A Night In Tunisia: Imaginings of Africa in Jazz* (1992). In this book, the author seeks to understand "how jazz musicians who recognize their African connection create music to acknowledge their profound artistic debt to Africa, how they celebrate one of their chief wellsprings of musical inspiration."⁵ Weinstein discusses a wide array of jazz musicians from the early days of jazz into the 1970s who have in some way utilized "general characteristics" of African music, have incorporated traditional African instruments, invited African musicians to

³ Robin D. G. Kelly, *Africa Speaks, America Answers: Modern Jazz in Revolutionary Times* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), ix.

⁴ Ibid, 61.

⁵ Weinstein, *A Night In Tunisia* 3.

play, have included song or album titles that signify Africa, or have provided extramusical texts that explain the African content of their music.⁶ Not among the musicians he discusses, however, is Miles Davis.

While Davis's imaginings of Africa began in the 1950s and can be found as late as his 1989 album, *Amandla*, they are most evident and abundant from the late 1960s until his "retirement" in 1975. Several scholars have discussed the African influence on the music of Davis during his fusion period, yet those influences are generally discussed only peripherally and are abbreviated, with the primary focus being on Davis' incorporation of electric instruments as well as popular music idioms like rock and funk. Taken at his word, Davis actually seems to have been conscious about doing something African-like; by 1973, he especially felt that "the band settled down into a deep African thing."⁷ It is perhaps unsurprising, but nonetheless illuminating to see how Davis's focus on an African aesthetic during this time also reveals a strong connection to the aesthetics of the Black Nationalist movement of the late 1960s and 1970s.

My arguments in this paper will be supported by existing musicological scholarship, in addition to interviews with Davis, his former bandmates, and artistic collaborators. Lewis Porter has long argued that oral histories of jazz are sometimes inaccurate and are generally insufficient evidence on their own, while Burton W. Peretti has found that they are worthy methods for historical study when taking caution.⁸ In this case, oral histories remain significant because allusions to Africa often rely extensively on the musician's intentions. However, it should still be noted that Davis's own remarks on this subject were largely made in his 1989 autobiography,

⁶ Ibid, 7-8.

⁷ Davis, *Miles: The Autobiography*, 329.

⁸ Lewis Porter, "Some Problems in Jazz Research," *Black Music Research Journal* 8, no. 2 (Autumn, 1998): 195-206; Burton W. Peretti, "Oral Histories of Jazz Musicians: The NEA Transcripts as Texts in Context," in *Jazz Among the Discourses*, ed. Krin Gabbard (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995): 117-133.

thus occurring long after many of his purported Africanisms actually took place. Beyond the goal of documenting imaginings of Africa in the music of Miles Davis, this paper will also serve as a kind of index of scholarship that deals with this subject in regards to Davis and of scholarship on Davis's fusion period in general. In doing so, it is clear that there is an overlap in the strengths, weaknesses, and biases in each sets of literature. Before discussing Davis's fusion music, furthermore, I briefly outline and critique fusion historiography as it has progressed throughout the last few decades.

I begin this paper with a brief description of African musical characteristics and ideas on their survival throughout the African diaspora, in addition to a discussion on the inherent issues involved when one generalizes on the music of such a large geographical area like Africa. In doing so, I argue that although diasporic musics are not literally African, Miles Davis employed certain elements of them to specifically reference Africa. After that, I will provide what is essentially a chronological look at the explicit African and Afro-diasporic influences in Davis's career. Following this, I examine Davis's incorporation of music from other locations across the globe. First, I discuss how his knowledge of the historical ties between North Africa and Spain allowed Davis to reflect an African identity through the use Spanish music and imagery on such albums as *Miles Ahead* (1957), *Sketches of Spain* (1960) and the soundtrack to the film, *Siesta* (1987). Second, I argue that his incorporation of Indian instruments and musical qualities during the 1970s alongside African allusions can best be explained as revealing a close affinity between Africa and India as part of an emerging Global South. Additionally, Davis and other jazz musicians looked to both Africa and India as they sought equality at home in the United States.

After identifying the many ways that Miles Davis incorporated imaginings of Africa into his music, the question arises: might Davis have influenced any of the young bandmates he led in

the 1960s or 1970s in this regard? I seek the answer to this question by looking at one of his most prolific and successful protégés, pianist Herbie Hancock. After leaving Davis's touring band in 1968, Hancock would go on to lead a few different bands in the 1970s. Two of them, Mwandishi and the Headhunters, would each reveal a multitude of African and Afro-diasporic influences in their music. Further explicit references to Africa can be found in Hancock's music as recently as the 1990s, too, yet Hancock is as scantily recognized in volumes dedicated to the ties between American jazz and Africa as Davis. Also like his former bandleader, I will argue that Hancock's music incorporates imaginings of Africa in new ways, but also in ways consistent with those deployed by Davis. After this discussion, I offer my conclusions as to why both Davis and Hancock are left out of books on the subject, while noting other gaps in scholarship on more recent jazz music in this regard.

Chapter One

“African” Music and the Diaspora

It would be remiss to identify African musical elements in any musician’s work without first defining what “African music” actually means; too often, unfortunately, writers do attach this quality to music without much clarification. In his autobiography, Miles Davis is guilty of this when he fails to elaborate on what the “deep African thing” was in his 1970s bands, though he does state earlier that his work with Tony Williams featured an increased spotlight on the backbeat, which he claims is an African quality. In this chapter I primarily draw on the work of ethnomusicologists from the 1950s to the present to understand African music, broadly speaking, as a participatory genre that features an emphasis on complex rhythms, collective improvisation, and contrasting timbres. Following this discussion, I examine the strong influence of African musical practice on music throughout the African diaspora, noting connections pointed out by both ethnomusicologists and jazz musicians. Because of these ties (and despite the fact that these styles remain distinct from African music), Miles Davis would incorporate particular elements of Afro-diasporic music as tools for imagining Africa in his own music.

While the composer and musicologist Olly Wilson has rightly pointed out that we must recognize the diversity of music throughout the large continent of Africa, he still contends, “Nevertheless, as long as one recognizes the limitations of such generalizations they may be useful in tracing relationships which might otherwise be ignored.”⁹ It is with this statement in mind that I proceed cautiously with using the term “African” to describe certain musical situations by the jazz musicians included. In a large majority of cases, specific African musical qualities incorporated by Miles Davis and Herbie Hancock were characteristics of West African

⁹ Olly Wilson, “The Significance of the Relationship between Afro-American Music and West African Music,” *The Black Perspective in Music* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1974): 3.

music. However, there are still significant musical references to other parts of Africa in the music of these musicians, most notably North Africa, which I will make explicit. Further, there are many cases in which Africa is imagined through non-musical cues in relation to several diverse parts of the continent.

An emphasis on rhythm is by far the most cited African musical quality. In a list of general characteristics of African music, Norman Weinstein claims that the core of most African musical events is multileveled rhythmic activity, while Olly Wilson has argued that the primary approach to organizing rhythm in West African music is based on rhythmic contrast (in part through ensembles divided between “fixed rhythmic groups” and “variable rhythmic groups”).¹⁰ Wilson has further noted a percussive approach to singing and playing instruments in the region. In the 1950s, the ethnomusicologist Richard Waterman observed five characteristics common to sub-Saharan Africa, all of which deal with rhythm to varying degrees: metronomic sense, a dominance of percussion, polymeter, off-beat phrasing of melodic accents, and overlapping call-and-response.¹¹ Some have also argued, as Paul Tingen does in his book on the electric music of Miles Davis, that African music is “based on rhythmic complexity and repetition rather than harmonic complexity and development,”¹² though this statement is essentialist and borders on the old colonialist illustration of the rhythmic “savagery” of African music, while ignoring the harmonic and melodic qualities that do truly exist in a great deal of African music. Tingen’s line

¹⁰ Weinstein, *A Night In Tunisia*, 6; See Olly Wilson, “The Influence of Jazz on the History and Development of Concert Music” in *New Perspectives on Jazz*, ed. David N. Baker (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990), 28, and Olly Wilson, “The Heterogeneous Sound Ideal in African-American Music,” in *New Perspectives on Music: Essays in Honor of Eileen Southern*, ed. Josephine Wright and Samuel A. Floyd (Warren, MI: Harmonie Park Press, 1992), 331.

¹¹ Richard Waterman, “African Influence on the Music of the Americas” in *Acculturation in the Americas*, ed. Sol Tax (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 212.

¹² Paul Tingen, *Miles Beyond: The Electric Explorations of Miles Davis, 1967-1991* (New York: Billboard Books, 2001), 126.

might also be read as an outgrowth of a common essentialist description of jazz, that being that jazz is simply a marriage of African rhythm and European harmony.

While rhythmic contrast and complexity are important hallmarks of much African music, there are several more qualities worth discussing. Weinstein's remaining general characteristics include improvisation as a key performance value, collective participation, vocalization styles through both human voices and instruments, and musical events with extramusical functions (be it moral, political, or spiritual).¹³ Olly Wilson supports the view that musical processes in West Africa are communal and presume "the active participations in varying degrees of a communion of participants," while additionally arguing that physical body motion is usually integrated into the music-making process (whether it be dance or otherwise).¹⁴ Finally, Wilson has perhaps most famously identified what he sees as a "heterogeneous sound ideal"; that is, the tendency to use a "kaleidoscopic range of dramatically contrasting qualities of sound" in both vocal and instrumental music. Wilson writes that in African music, contrasting timbres occur both in ensembles as a whole and within individual lines. As an example, he argues that Yoruban drummers have uniquely constructed "talking" drums that allow them to imitate speech, providing a wealth of different timbral possibilities.¹⁵

The African Diaspora and "The Changing Same"

In addition to incorporating musical elements from the continent of Africa, Miles Davis and Herbie Hancock both crafted music incorporating styles and instruments, and working with musicians from the African diaspora beyond the United States. I subscribe to Steven Pond's definition of the African diaspora as the "broad sphere of cultural influence" that originated from the areas of sub-Saharan West Africa where Africans were enslaved and dispersed to different

¹³ Weinstein, *A Night in Tunisia*, 6-7.

¹⁴ Wilson, "The Influence of Jazz on the History and Development of Concert Music," 28.

¹⁵ Wilson, "The Heterogeneous Sound Ideal," 329.

geographical locations across the Atlantic, including parts of the Caribbean, the United States, Central America, and South America, especially Brazil.¹⁶ Davis and Hancock were far from the first jazz musicians to incorporate Afro-diasporic music; the earliest jazz in New Orleans was itself influenced by many disparate styles, including music from Cuba and other Caribbean islands. As another example, in the 1940s Dizzy Gillespie would initiate the genre known as Latin jazz by including rhythms and percussion from the Caribbean and Latin America, most notably with the Cuban drummer Chano Pozo on tunes like “Cubana Be/Cubana Bop” and “Manteca”. Art Blakey’s *Orgy in Rhythm*, too, would later feature a full Afro-Cuban rhythm section that incorporated long percussion solos, bell patterns, and polyrhythms.¹⁷

As several writers have previously pointed out, the most common factors of West African music (as enumerated above) can be found in the music of the African diaspora in the Americas. Olly Wilson argues that in light of this, Afro-diasporic music is thus an extension of West-African music.¹⁸ Throughout this paper, I use Paul Gilroy’s appropriation of Amiri Baraka’s “changing same” to describe this phenomenon. Originally used in a 1966 essay, Baraka used this phrase as a way to argue that all African American music refers to a common body of cultural experience, even as styles evolve or are created. Moreover, Baraka primarily argues that the differences between R&B and avant-garde jazz were artificial, and that the musicians of each style simply had different spiritual ideas and interests; he concludes that these styles are “the same family looking at different things. Or looking at things differently.”¹⁹ In a less spiritual sense, Paul Gilroy would later adopt the “changing same” in *The Black Atlantic* to explain how

¹⁶ Steven F. Pond, *Head Hunters: The Making of Jazz’s First Platinum Album* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 204.

¹⁷ Ingrid Monson, *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out To Jazz and Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 137-38.

¹⁸ Wilson, “The Significance of the Relationship between Afro-American Music and West African Music,” 6.

¹⁹ Amiri Baraka, “The Changing Same (R&B and New Black Music)” in *Black Music* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1968), 211.

music across the African diaspora can sound quite different yet work in similar ways.²⁰ While the music accompanying a Cuban rhumba is clearly different than, say, a traditional Ewe drumming song, there are qualities such as rhythmic complexity and contrast that give them a sort of underlying sameness. Ingrid Monson has found, as a more concrete example of the changing same, that the 6/8 clave bell pattern in Cuban sacred music is essentially the same as the 12/8 bell pattern in West African cultures like those of the Ewe and the Yoruba, despite the difference in geography.²¹

Jazz musicians, too, have noted the connection between African music and that of the Western hemisphere. In his autobiography, Dizzy Gillespie speaks to this issue, and of the idea of the changing same:

A student of our music, if he goes back far enough, will find out that the main source of our music is Africa. The music of the Western Hemisphere (not just our music)...is primarily of African origin. The people of the calypso, the rhumba, the samba, and the rhythms of Haiti, all have something in common from the mother of their music. Rhythm. The basic rhythm because Mama Rhythms is Africa. Africa's children in the Western Hemisphere used different means of expressing their closeness to Mama.²²

Gillespie's autobiography is filled with similar statements tying Afro-diasporic music with Africa; for instance, he claims that shortly after they began working together, Chano Pozo said that although Dizzy did not speak Spanish and he did not speak English, they both spoke African.²³ As I will discuss later, Miles Davis made similar yet less explicit statements during his

²⁰ Paul Gilroy, "Jewels Brought from Bondage: Black Music and the Politics of Authenticity" in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 72-110.

²¹ Monson, *Freedom Sounds*, 141.

²² Dizzy Gillespie with Al Fraser, *To Be, or Not...to Bop* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 483.

²³ *Ibid*, 318.

life, such as his labeling of guitarist Dominique Gaumont as “an African guy”, though he was actually from France.²⁴

With the concept of the changing same in mind, as I turn to identifying imaginings of Africa in the music of Miles Davis, I will discuss musical qualities, instruments, personnel, and song titles as they relate to both Africa and its diaspora without separation. However, I do so with the understanding that Afro-diasporic musical traditions are also significantly influenced by non-African influences. As a further point of clarification, my discussion of the African diaspora will relate only to places outside of the United States because, as I will display, Davis’s allusions to Africa were created through interactions with musical styles beyond his native country. In other words, the sole use of African American styles like jazz, blues, or funk never functioned in this way.

²⁴ Davis, *Miles: The Autobiography*, 329.

Chapter Two

First Imaginings: Modal Jazz, *Kind of Blue*, and the 2nd Quintet

Though Davis's most explicit musical and extramusical references to Africa can be found beginning in the late 1960s, he became influenced by African musical aesthetics as early as the late 1950s with his sextet that included saxophonists John Coltrane and Cannonball Adderley. Of the music that this group began playing around 1957, Davis wrote in his autobiography, "I wanted the music this new group would play to be freer, more modal, more African or Eastern, and less Western. I wanted them to go beyond themselves."²⁵

By at least 1957, not coincidentally, the musician and theorist George Russell had discussed his pioneering theoretical framework for music, the Lydian Chromatic Concept (or "the Concept", as Russell called it) with Davis.²⁶ This theory would become the foundation for the modal jazz style that Davis popularized in the following two years with the albums *Milestones* and *Kind of Blue*. Before discussing Davis's music, I look more closely at the Lydian Chromatic Concept in order to show the ways it was itself, in part, an Africanist innovation and one that would later influence many Afrocentric jazz projects.

First published in 1953 (and continually developed throughout the rest of his life), the *Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization* was George Russell's scale-based music theory that identified scales that should be composed or improvised over certain chords. In contrast to Western classical music theory, for example, Russell found that the C Lydian scale was the most appropriate scale for a C major chord, rather than the C major scale. In addition to the most suitable, "parent" scale, five other scales would also be acceptable for a given chord. With these basic ideas in mind, Russell argued that the Concept would allow musicians more

²⁵ Davis, *Miles: The Autobiography*, 220.

²⁶ Eric Nisenson, *Ascension: John Coltrane and His Quest* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 55-56.

choices and greater freedom when composing or improvising. Though he was a jazz musician, Russell felt that the Concept was only “born out of jazz and its needs, yet embracing all music created in the equal temperament system.”²⁷ As Eric Porter has argued, Russell saw the Concept as less exclusionary than Western theory and more accepting of all styles of music, including African American (and possibly some African) music. Additionally, Ingrid Monson has noted that the Concept was not only a theoretical exploration but also spiritual; it was part of a “quest for deeper knowledge and inner exploration” that included Russell studying many different religions and spiritual beliefs from around the world, thus creating in the Concept “the importance of feeling and soul, and the potential political and symbolic links between jazz and the successful anticolonial struggles of India and the African continent.”²⁸

Russell’s own allusions to Africa through modality began even before the Concept was completed, starting with his 1947 with his composition “Cubana Be/Cubana Bop,” the Latin jazz tune written for Dizzy Gillespie and Chano Pozo. Significantly, Monson notes that following this piece, modal jazz sound would ultimately come to “symbolize and musically frame” Africa in pieces like Roach’s *Freedom Now Suite*, Weston’s *Uhuru Afrika*, John Coltrane’s *Africa/Brass*.²⁹ Furthermore, George Russell would continue to present an interest in Africa in later decades through such pieces as *Electronic Sonata for Soul Loved by Nature* (1968), which included both live jazz performances and pre-recorded tapes with African voices, and the programmatic suite,

²⁷ George Russell quoted in Eric Porter, “Born Out of Jazz... Yet Embracing All Music: Race, Gender, and Technology in George Russell’s Lydian Chromatic Concept” in *Big Ears: Listening for Gender and Jazz Studies*, ed. Nichole T. Rustin and Sherrie Tucker (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 216. See Porter’s article for a more thorough discussion of Russell’s theory.

²⁸ Ingrid Monson, “Oh Freedom: George Russell, John Coltrane, and Modal Jazz” in *In The Course of Performance: Studies in the World of Improvisation*, ed. Bruno Nettl with Melinda Russell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 155-156.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 158.

The African Game (1984), which featured his Living Time Orchestra and the Olu Bata drum ensemble.³⁰

Kind of Blue

Does Miles Davis's modal jazz with his famous sextet of the late 1950s sound African to most listeners? Undeniably, the answer is no. However, given the contrast between Western classic theory and modal jazz's parent, the Lydian Chromatic Concept, as well as early Afrocentric ambitions of jazz musicians incorporating modal composition and solos such as George Russell and Art Blakey, it is not so strange that Davis might have felt an underlying African quality to modality. Certainly compared to his prior music, the dramatic reduction of chord changes on tunes like "Milestones" and those on *Kind of Blue*, paired with solos more concerned with melodic invention, creativity, and freedom than with "playing the changes," makes Davis's modal jazz sound exotic in comparison with mainstream practices of the day.

Beyond George Russell's modality, though, another important influence on *Kind of Blue* was the African Ballet of Guinea (Les Ballets Africains de la Republique de Guinea), a group whom Davis may have seen perform as many as three times shortly before the album's recording with both his then-girlfriend, dancer Frances Taylor, and his collaborator Gil Evans.³¹ A lengthy description by Davis of one of these performances in New York reveals how moved he was by the African musicians and dancers:

Anyway, we went to this performance by the Ballet Africaine and it just fucked me up what they was doing, the steps and all them flying leaps and shit. And when I first heard them play the finger piano that night and sing this song with this other guy dancing, man, that was some powerful stuff. It was beautiful. And their rhythm! The rhythm of the dancers was

³⁰ See Weinstein, "George Russell Teaches Us To Play the African Game" in *A Night In Tunisia*, 73-81.

³¹ John Szwed, *So What: The Life of Miles Davis* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 173. Szwed's description of this is unique in that he is the only writer to suggest that Davis saw the troupe more than once and with anyone other than Taylor.

something. I was counting off while I was watching them. They were acrobatic. They had one drummer watching them dance, doing their flips and shit, and when they jumped he would play DA DA DA DA POW! in this bad rhythm. He would hit it when they would fall. And man, he was catching everybody that did anything. The other drummers got them, too. So they would do rhythms like 5/4 and 6/8 and 4/4, and the rhythm would be changing and popping. That's the thing, that secret, inner thing that they had. It's African. I knew I couldn't do it from just watching them dance because I'm not African, but I loved what they were doing. I didn't want to copy that, but I got a concept from it.³²

Although metrical complexity and rhythmic innovations are not exactly hallmarks of *Kind of Blue*, the excitement Davis felt from watching the West African drummers may have set the stage for the 1960s once he found in Tony Williams an aggressive drummer capable of such feats.³³ According to Davis, though, other factors of the ballet's performance directly affected the recording of *Kind of Blue* in March and April of 1959. The tunes recorded in these sessions were not fully written out by Davis; instead, only musical "sketches" were brought in to reinforce his desire for the kind of spontaneity and interplay witnessed between the African dancers and musicians.³⁴ Spontaneity was certainly achieved to some degree, as all of the tunes but one, "Flamenco Sketches," were recorded in one take. Additionally, after seeing Les Ballet Africains Davis acquired an interest in the African finger piano, typically constructed of a wooden box with metal pins plucked by both thumbs (the specific finger pianos Davis saw and soon acquired have been cited in many writings as either the mbira or kalimba, though the distinctions between the two are irrelevant for the present discussion. However, the fact that these Guineans were

³² Davis, *Miles: The Autobiography*, 225-226.

³³ While there were certainly Guinean musicians, Richard Williams claims Senegalese drummers were also involved in Les Ballets Africains in *The Blue Moment: Miles Davis's Kind of Blue and the Remaking of Modern Music* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2009), 105.

³⁴ Davis, *Miles: The Autobiography*, 234.

playing either of these instruments is odd, given that they both originate in Southeast Africa).³⁵

In his autobiography he claims in vague terms that he attempted to evoke the sound of the finger piano on the tune “All Blues” by adding “a kind of running sound into the mix,” though Richard Williams has suggested that the piano tremolo provided by Bill Evans throughout the piece’s head (which actually sounds to my ears like a collection of trills rather than a tremolo) is the only mbira-like quality.³⁶ More broadly, Davis’s interest in finger pianos would be seen in some of his later songwriting and recordings, too.

At this point I should stress something I alluded to in the introduction: not all of Davis’s musical connections to Africa seem “authentic” in the ways this term usually means. For instance, Bill Evans’s playing on the head of “All Blues” certainly does not sound like most mbira music played in Africa, or how I presume Les Ballets Africains would have performed it, in terms of timbre, social context, or otherwise; in fact, much of Bill Evans’s playing throughout the album was equally influenced by other musical traditions such as French impressionism. More generally, too, Eric Nisenson has written that Davis later confessed to him that *Kind of Blue* was a failure because it did not convey the music of Les Ballets Africains as well as he had hoped.³⁷ Nevertheless, the significance lies in Davis’s own words, in that he was attempting to “get in the sound of the finger piano.” Davis was *imagining* Africa through a technique he otherwise would not have likely used. The idea of African music, though not necessarily recognizable to our ears, still remains an influence on *Kind of Blue*.

1960s and the 2nd Quintet

³⁵ Finger pianos go by a number of names depending on their areas of origin in Africa, shape of the resonator, tuning, etc. For a thorough discussion, see Gerhard Kubik, “Lamellophone,” *Grove Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40069> (accessed January 7, 2015).

³⁶ Davis, *Miles: The Autobiography*, 234; Williams, *The Blue Moment*, 120.

³⁷ Eric Nisenson, *The Making of Kind of Blue: Miles Davis and His Masterpiece* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 138.

Despite a lack of explicit musical references to Africa, there are a few indications that Davis was moving increasingly towards a clearer African aesthetic in the early to mid 1960s. With the addition of Tony Williams, Ron Carter, and Herbie Hancock on 1963's *Seven Steps To Heaven*, there especially seems to be a more percussive, rhythmic element to the music. Williams' aggressive drumming style (with the "backbeat out front," as Davis noted), paired with Hancock's independent percussive playing (rather than a more traditional, simple comping role) and Carter's driving bass lines are especially notable elements as Davis's music started to become much faster and louder than before. These characteristics intensified once Wayne Shorter replaced George Coleman on tenor saxophone, creating Davis's second "great" quintet, especially on the albums *E.S.P.* (1965) and *Miles Smiles* (1966). With the sparse harmonic framework of this group's music, given both the music's compositional nature and the rhythm section's independence, most of Davis's music of the 1960s remained modal.

Davis's first use of a title that mentions something explicitly African can be found in the quintet's fourth album and its title track, *Nefertiti* (1967).³⁸ Nefertiti was the wife of an Egyptian pharaoh sometime during the 1300's, B.C. This couple was known for bringing economic prosperity to ancient Egypt and by starting a religious revolution of only worshipping one god. Davis's title choice drew upon a broader interest in this royal figure during the 1960s, evident in films like 1961's *Nefertiti, Queen of the Nile*, and in Cecil Taylor's 1962 album, *Nefertiti, The Beautiful One Has Come*. While song titles that mention Africa are sometimes inaccurate indicators of how the music is connected to the continent, the track "Nefertiti," named after a North African historical figure, is interesting in that only Tony Williams solos on the track; in fact, the melody is repeated by Davis and Shorter several times while Williams improvises

³⁸ "Nefertiti" the tune was written by Wayne Shorter, though one assumes Davis had the final say on album titles.

underneath. The complexities of the drums, a strong characteristic in much African music, become the focus while the horn players occasionally go in and out of sync, creating an almost heterophonic or round-like effect.

Following *Nefertiti* and the subsequent album, *Miles in the Sky* (1968), *Filles de Kilimanjaro* (1968) would be the quintet's final album, with Ron Carter only playing on four of the tracks before departing. Likely even more recognizable to the average fan than *Nefertiti*, this album title again references Africa, though this time the location is in the Eastern region. Ostensibly referring to women near the famous mountain in Tanzania, John Szwed claims that *Filles de Kilimanjaro* was actually titled in this manner to acknowledge Davis's investment in Kilimanjaro African Coffee, his friend Buddy Gist's company that imported beans from cooperatives in Kenya.³⁹ Davis seems to also have been alluding to an exotic place by naming every piece on the record in French, though it is not one of the native languages of Tanzania. While these two points suggest that any African ties were disingenuous, the saxophonist Steve Potts has claimed that he saw Davis writing the title track "Filles de Kilimanjaro" using a finger piano.⁴⁰ Indeed, one especially cannot help but hear an mbira when listening to Hancock's electric piano repeatedly shift between two notes throughout the opening of the track (were such technologies as the electric piano or synthesizers available to Davis in 1959, they might have greatly changed interpretations of "All Blues." Unfortunately, he had already stopped performing this tune by the time he became interested in electric instruments). All of these details, in addition to the rhythmic complexity of the quintet remaining at the core of its sound, suggest that Davis was indeed trying to attempt to communicate something African, even if it largely feels like a superficial effort to create an exotic mood around this music.

³⁹ Szwed, *So What*, 272. Szwed points out that this title also justified putting Davis's then-wife Betty Mabry on the cover of the record.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 272.

Conclusions

Miles Davis began playing modal jazz around 1957, sensing an African (or at least non-Western quality) that allowed for more creativity and freedom, and likely being aware of how much Afrocentric jazz was being created as a result of George Russell's Lydian Chromatic Concept. Davis's understanding of the Concept, paired with his great intrigue by the music of Les Ballets Africains, led to purposeful recording decisions on *Kind of Blue* including a more spontaneous approach to the music, a reduction of chords, and the invocation of the African finger piano. Davis would continue to create imaginings of Africa into the 1960s with his second quintet by placing rhythm and percussive playing squarely at the center of their sound and by eventually providing Africanized titles to enhance the imagery their music already provided.

Chapter Three

The “Fusion” Period: 1969-1975

Much of Miles Davis’s most explicit (and many of his non-explicit) imaginings of Africa occur during his fusion period; that is, roughly the music beginning with 1969’s *In A Silent Way* until his “retirement” in 1975. Though a problematic term, I define fusion jazz in the most basic sense as a style that includes electric instruments, elements of both jazz and other popular or non-Western music (including but not contained to rock music), and whose common period was during the late 1960s and 1970s. Some other notable fusion groups include Chick Corea and Return to Forever, Weather Report, Herbie Hancock’s Headhunters, and Tony Williams’s Lifetime, to name a few. Before describing Davis’s references to Africa during this period, I first wish to briefly discuss jazz historiography as it relates to fusion, both generally and with specific regard to Davis. Such an overview will highlight the strengths, weakness, and biases of such literature, and will also emphasize the need for future writings to acknowledge the significant non-jazz/rock influences on Davis’s fusion music.

Most jazz and Western music history textbooks describe fusion as the major substyle of jazz that succeeded avant-garde or free jazz in the 1960s. Fusion, also sometimes called jazz-rock, is often generalized as jazz that incorporates elements of rock or other American popular musics (such as the straight-eight note beat), as if this was the only outside influence. For instance, Mark Gridley’s popular jazz history defines it as a simple mixture of jazz improvisation with the instrumentation of and rhythm of rhythm and blues, though Gridley actually prefers the term “jazz-funk” to jazz-rock.⁴¹ Meanwhile, in Norton’s *A History of Western Music*, fusion is described as jazz paired “especially [with] the electric guitar sound and propulsion of rock and

⁴¹ Mark Gridley, *Jazz Styles: History & Analysis*, 6th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1997).

the rhythms and character of soul and rhythm and blues.”⁴² Such writings typically place fusion’s origins in one of two Davis albums: *In A Silent Way* or its more commercially successful follow-up, *Bitches Brew* (1970), both of which prominently display the electric guitar playing of John McLaughlin, include drum beats inspired by rock and funk, and lack the traditional chorus structures in which jazz solos typically occur. There is no doubt that Miles Davis became interested around this time in rock and funk musicians like Jimi Hendrix, James Brown, Funkadelic, and Sly and the Family Stone. Some of the clearest evidence of this interest lies in the bass line to “Yesternow” from *Jack Johnson* (1971), borrowed directly from Brown’s “Say It Loud, I’m Black and I’m Proud,” in addition to his interpretation of Crosby, Stills, and Nash’s “Guinnivere,” recorded in 1970 and released on 1979’s *Circle in the Round*.⁴³

However, the choice to position the beginnings of fusion on *In A Silent Way* or *Bitches Brew* seems somewhat arbitrary for a couple of reasons. First, other jazz musicians’ incorporation of the electric guitar and rock elements predates these albums by a few years, including the likes vibraphonist Gary Burton and guitarist Larry Coryell by as early as 1967.⁴⁴ Davis himself began using electric instruments in 1968 on *Miles in the Sky*, with Hancock and Carter playing electric piano and bass on “Stuff” along with the guitarist George Benson on “Paraphernalia,” while Hancock, Carter, and keyboardist Chick Corea would also play electric instruments on *Filles de Kilimanjaro*, as well. Secondly, Davis’s interest in rock music also began before *In A Silent Way*: his friendship with and affinity towards Jimi Hendrix can be seen on *Filles*, with Davis and Gil Evans reworking Hendrix’s “The Wind Cries Mary” into

⁴² J. Peter Burkholder, Donald Jay Grout, and Claude V. Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 8th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2010), 961.

⁴³ Szwed, *So What*, 310.

⁴⁴ Fabian Holt, “Jazz and Jazz-Rock Fusion” in *In Genre in Popular Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). 81-101.

“Mademoiselle Mabry.”⁴⁵ Tony Williams’s drumming throughout much of the ‘60s, too, clearly reflects his interest in rock groups like the Beatles, Cream, and that of Hendrix. That so many writers have either not acknowledged or have been unaware of these facts may be down to a few factors, most notably that Davis was the most prominent jazz musician among the early purveyors of fusion, in addition to *In A Silent Way*’s signaling of the end of Davis’s second quintet and Columbia’s extensive marketing of *Bitches Brew* to rock audiences (such marketing included advertising and features in *Rolling Stone* magazine, as well as performances at rock venues like the Fillmore East and West). Moreover, the labeling of fusion as the successor of avant-garde or free jazz has often incorrectly implied that such music ended after the 1960s, symptomatic of the issues inherent in rigid stylistic periods, more generally.⁴⁶

In his now-canonical article, “Constructing the Jazz Tradition,” Scott DeVeaux outlines jazz historiography as it developed into what is now a generally accepted official history of jazz. DeVeaux contends that many people challenged fusion as an authentic style of jazz because it did not fit into the common evolutionary ideology of jazz. Those critical were most notably musicians and critics aligned with the avant-garde or with the jazz neoclassicism of the 1980s and early 1990s. Inherent in almost all attacks on fusion, DeVeaux writes, is either an anti-commercialist sentiment or an essentialist view that jazz cannot include electric instruments or rock/funk rhythms, all at a time when a historical narrative was being created in order to portray jazz as an art music.⁴⁷ Stanley Crouch, one of the most outspoken critics of Miles Davis’s fusion, has claimed that *Bitches Brew* set Davis on the path of a sellout, referring to the music as “clutter”

⁴⁵ Szwed, *So What*, 271.

⁴⁶ For example, Mervyn Cooke claims that fusion saved jazz from the “avant-garde dead end” in *The Chronicle of Jazz* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1997), 12.

⁴⁷ Scott DeVeaux, “Constructing the Jazz Tradition: Jazz Historiography,” *Black American Literature Forum* 25, no. 3 (1991): 525-60.

and attacking Davis for his attire and rock ‘n’ roll “stage antics,” amongst other reasons.⁴⁸ Critic Martin Williams, on the other hand, called *Bitches Brew* “a witch’s brew of jazz and every sort of then-popular style, black, white, and Latin...” before dismissing fusion in general as a mistake.⁴⁹ Musicologist Gary Tomlinson has characterized these sorts of criticisms as rhetorics of transgression (i.e. fusion’s commercialism, Davis’s inclusion of white musicians) and absence (i.e. a lack of some of earlier jazz’s musical elements) that do not take into account the “in between situation” that characterizes Davis’s entire life, including his relatively privileged economic status and the racially mixed bands throughout his career.⁵⁰ I would add that while there is no doubt a commercial aspect to much fusion (*Bitches Brew* was Davis’s most successful album to date, while Herbie Hancock’s *Head Hunters* became the first jazz album to go platinum), most of Davis’s music of the 1970s is rather inaccessible compared to the rest of his career. With most pieces lasting anywhere from ten to forty minutes long, a general lack of memorable melodies, and the incorporation of so many disparate musical elements (avant-garde jazz, rock, funk, African, Indian, etc.), it is difficult to see a clear target audience; these are likely reasons as to why some of Davis’s albums in the ‘70s, such as *On The Corner*, failed to meet sales expectations.

More musicological studies on fusion have appeared in the last decade, though it still constitutes a very small percentage of jazz scholarship. Thankfully, this work has significantly challenged many of the conventional beliefs of fusion outlined above. In his excellent book, *Birds of Fire*, Kevin Fellez argues that “jazz-rock” and “jazz fusion” are problematic terms

⁴⁸ Stanley Crouch, “Play the Right Thing,” *The New Republic* (February 12, 1990), reprinted in *The Miles Davis Companion*, ed. Gary Carner (New York: Schirmer Books, 1996): 21-40.

⁴⁹ Martin Williams, “How Long Has This Been Going On?” in *Jazz in Its Time* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 47.

⁵⁰ Gary Tomlinson, “Cultural Dialogics and Jazz: A White Historian Signifies,” *Black Music Research Journal* 11, no. 2 (Autumn, 1991): 229-64.

because they ignore the influence of funk, transcultural, and other styles on different groups widely acknowledged as fusion bands. Fellesz uses Isobele Armstrong's concept of the "broken middle" to describe fusion music as "flowing across, between, and throughout geographic, temporal, cultural, national, ethnic, and general limits," while highlighting various musical influences in case studies on Tony Williams, John McLaughlin, Joni Mitchell, and Herbie Hancock.⁵¹ Steven Pond's *Head Hunters* investigates the music on Herbie Hancock's 1973 album of the same name, in addition to the examining the album's social context, marketing, and recording. Importantly, Pond criticizes artistic and commercial divides, viewing fusion as music that "operates within an artistic apparatus *and* a commercial one."⁵² In his article "Sell It Black," Jeremy Smith examines the parallel and competing interests between Miles Davis and Columbia Records in the marketing of his early fusion records. In part, Smith argues that if jazz scholars can recognize the necessity of material circulation for a record, marketing can be seen less as a corrupt force and more as a significant influence on the creation of musical meaning.⁵³ Finally, Jon Opstad has also written on the harmonic and rhythmic innovations of Herbie Hancock's Fender Rhodes solos of the 1970s, arguing that despite the little attention it has received, Hancock refined his innovations of the '60s by mastering tension and release through the use of "outside playing", altered modes, and rhythmic and metric displacement.⁵⁴

It is clear that musicological literature on fusion remains in low abundance, so it perhaps should be no surprise that other work on Miles Davis's music from the late 1960s forward underwhelms compared to that on his music before it. The only full volume dedicated to this

⁵¹ Kevin Fellesz, *Birds of Fire: Jazz, Rock, Funk, and the Creation of Fusion* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 8.

⁵² Steven F. Pond, *Head Hunters*, 2.

⁵³ Jeremy A. Smith, "Sell It Black: Race and Marketing in Miles Davis's Early Fusion Jazz," *Jazz Perspectives* 4, no. 1 (2010): 7-33.

⁵⁴ Jon Opstad, "The Harmonic and Rhythmic Language of Herbie Hancock's 1970s Fender Rhodes Solos," *Jazz Perspectives* 3, no. 1 (2009): 57-79.

entire period is Paul Tingen's *Miles Beyond*, which traces all of Davis's electric music from 1967 to the end of his career. Tingen provides well-researched information and a wealth of interviews with band members from this era, along with an exceptional sessionography by Enrico Merlin. However, while his writing on the rock side of Davis's music in the '70s and '80s is strong, his discussions of the jazz elements of Davis's music leave something to be desired (indeed, he admits that the book is from "the sympathetic perspective of someone who 'speaks' rock").⁵⁵ George Cole's *The Last Miles: The Music of Miles Davis, 1980-1991*, is similar in this regard and is also so sympathetic to Davis's final decade that it unfortunately becomes a fault.

Among Davis's biographers, Jack Chambers is the least sympathetic to Davis's fusion in his two-volume *Milestones*. Like Tingen, Chambers provides plenty of details about this stage of Davis's career yet seems to have difficulty adequately describing some of the albums, especially *On The Corner*, and ultimately concludes, "Davis's history in fusion music misses both the commercial highs and the artistic lows of Hancock's, but not by much."⁵⁶ In the next Davis biography, *Miles Davis: The Definitive Biography*, Ian Carr includes numerous interviews with Davis collaborators like Dave Holland and producer Teo Macero, yet largely overlooks Davis's music from 1973 to 1975. Additionally, Carr makes some curious comments regarding African musical qualities on *Filles de Kilimanjaro*; he claims to hear a tinge of "kwela" on at least two tracks without ever defining what kwela is (an urban popular music style popular in southern Africa during the 1950s and early 1960s) or mentioning if anyone involved in the production of these tracks was familiar with kwela (I have found no evidence to suggest that they did).⁵⁷ The

⁵⁵ Tingen, *Miles Beyond*, 2.

⁵⁶ Jack Chambers, *Milestones: The Music and Times of Miles Davis* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1998), 184.

⁵⁷ Ian Carr, *Miles Davis: The Definitive Biography* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1998), 238-240. The two tracks mentioned are "Frelon Brun" and "Filles de Kilimanjaro." For information on kwela, see Gerhard Kubik, "Kwela," *Grove Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/15727> (accessed January 8, 2015).

most recent Davis biography is John Szwed's *So What: The Life of Miles Davis*. While Davis's post-1969 music is discussed in fewer pages than the previous part of his career, Szwed provides the most balanced account of this period and includes some really significant information that other biographers have neglected.

While all of these books have some issues as they relate to Davis's fusion period, taken as a whole they provide the reader with a clearer overall picture with multiple perspectives. Further, each one provides something unique to say about Davis's connection to Africa during his fusion period, beginning with *Bitches Brew*.

1970: Bitches Brew

Though the pieces on *In A Silent Way* all have strong rhythmic bases, there is no suggestion of African allusions on the album. With *Bitches Brew*, however, one can see several attempts at presenting an African image. The recording of this album took place without any complete compositions; Davis, Wayne Shorter, and keyboardist Joe Zawinul all offered compositional sketches, some of which were only collections of rhythms or melodic ideas. The musicians on these sessions were more or less forced into collective improvisation by these limitations, while Davis and Teo Macero would later edit many hours worth of tape into more coherent themes and forms (a practice beginning on *In A Silent Way* and continuing throughout much of their partnership). For the first time, Davis also called for two drum sets and two additional percussionists for these sessions, the latter of whom played congas and shakers in addition to lesser-known instruments like the Brazilian pandeiro.⁵⁸ As John Szwed notes, this allowed one drum set player to establish the groove while the other could play around it, while the two percussionists could add to the already-thick rhythmic textures.⁵⁹ From this point

⁵⁸ See Enrico Merlin's sessionography of *Bitches Brew* in Tingen, *Miles Beyond*, 310-312.

⁵⁹ Szwed, *So What*, 293.

forward, Davis would almost always include at least one hand percussionist in both studio albums and live performances, showing his increasing interest in creating intricate polyrhythms.

The resulting sound on *Bitches Brew* is something of a mixture of abstract free jazz, rock, and Latin & African percussion music. While collective improvisation and polyrhythm are not exclusively African musical qualities (among many examples, one can point to polyphonic improvisation in early New Orleans jazz or the general nature of modern jazz drumming since the likes of Kenny Clarke), their increased presence on *Bitches Brew* is accompanied by other qualities that stress a connection between the music and Africa. For example, Joe Zawinul's composition, "Pharaoh's Dance," not only alludes to Ancient Egypt in its title but was also meant to be programmatic. Zawinul once spoke on the compositional nature of this piece:

I brought in Pharaoh's Dance," which related to the building of the pyramids, and the many slave workers that broke their backs. This is why there is so much movement underneath in the piece. I wrote every note of the melody as it's played at the end by Miles, but I hadn't written down a rhythm. Miles phrased it differently every time, and that was his genius.⁶⁰

Even before this tone poem, though, the most obvious imagining of Africa on *Bitches Brew* comes in the form of its album artwork by painter Abdul Mati Klarwein. On the front cover, two African women in tribal clothing (complete with head and arm bands) look out towards a thunderstorm over the ocean while a larger, perspiring black face looks to the sky as well. On the back cover, two other African women are featured: one hooded and wearing several looped earrings, the other wearing what might be some kind of ritual makeup and a red & gown with hints of yellow and green.

⁶⁰ Paul Tingen, "The Making of *In A Silent Way* & *Bitches Brew*," *Miles Beyond*, <http://www.miles-beyond.com/iaswbitchesbrew.htm> (accessed January 9, 2015).

Red and black are both common in ritual colors schemes throughout Africa. In *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance*, Jean Comaroff describes in great detail both pre-colonial and post-colonial rituals of the Tshidi people, who live in the South Africa-Botswana borderland. Comaroff found that red, black, and white were especially central to pre-colonial rites of initiation into adulthood: red signified creative potential and blood (especially from menstruation); black was a signifier for depressed activity and coolness; white, meanwhile, was used for processes of movement and transformation.⁶¹ Though there is no direct connection between Tshidi rituals and *Bitches Brew*, this description might help to explain why red is the most prominent color of the female figure's gown. Klarwein would provide similar artwork for Davis's 1971 album, *Live Evil*, featuring a pregnant African woman wearing nothing but large earrings and red head scarf, being kissed by a black face and accompanied by several hooded figures, possibly African priests or acolytes.

While there are earlier instances of jazz musicians using album artwork to convey Africa, their significance heightened in the mid 1960s following the release of rock LP's like *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*.⁶² Even though Klarwein claimed that Davis never discussed any of the Africanist imagery on these albums prior to its completion, by the time the two had met the painter already had a reputation for art that included both ancient tribal history and contemporary civilization, evident in the painting, "Crucifixion (Freedom of Expression)."⁶³ This aesthetic would be cemented in Klarwein's artwork for albums like Santana's *Abraxis* (perhaps his most famous painting after *Bitches Brew*) and *This Is Madness* by The Last Poets, a group

⁶¹ Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), 103-104.

⁶² See Dizzy Gillespie's Afro-Cuban album, *Afro* (1954), which features what appears to be an African man wearing only a small cloth.

⁶³ Rob Young, "Lush Life: Mati Klarwein," *Mati Klarwein Art*, <http://www.matiklarweinart.com/mediapage.php?lang=spa&from=5&media=1> (accessed January 9, 2015).

with strong ties to black nationalism. Finally, while Klarwein's artwork for Davis's two albums creates an instant connection to Africa for the listener, this artwork can also be seen as part of Davis's broader interest in a "black is beautiful" aesthetic exemplified in the artwork to other albums like *Filles de Kilimanjaro*, *On The Corner*, and *Big Fun* (1974).



Figure 1. Front (right) and back (left) covers of *Bitches Brew*.

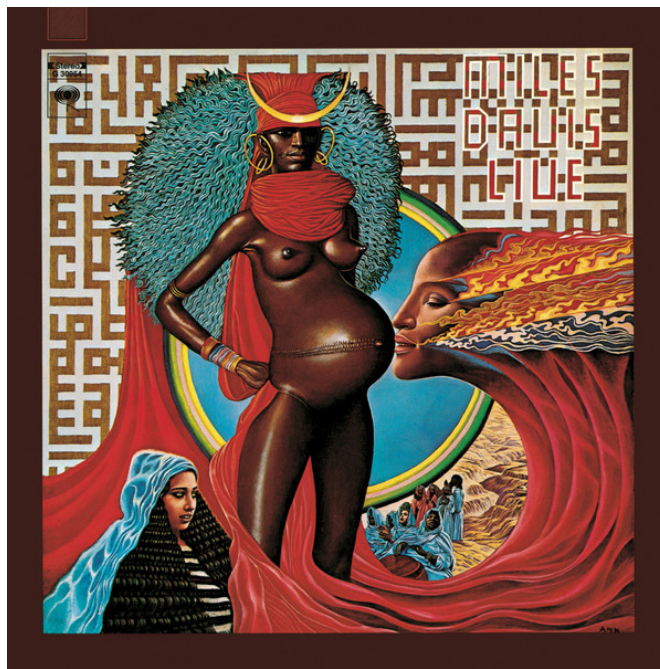


Figure 2. Front cover of *Live-Evil*.

1969-1975: Airtio Moreira, Live-Evil, and the Influence of Other Musicians

The arrival of Brazilian percussionist Airtio Moreira into Davis's live band by late 1969 also marks an important turn in his incorporation of African and Afro-diasporic instruments. Leading the way for future Davis percussionists, Moreira was encouraged to use as many instruments as possible in performance: among these were not only congas, bongos, maracas, and other shakers but also Brazilian instruments like the berimbau, reco-reco, and the ganza.⁶⁴ The instrument Moreira used most prominently, though, was the cuíca, a Brazilian friction drum (likely brought to Brazil by African slaves) with a very large pitch range produced by applying different amounts of tension on the head with the hand.⁶⁵ Moreira used this "talking" drum in Davis's music by responding to soloists' phrases, adding to the overall texture of pieces, and occasionally soloing himself. The barking sound of the cuíca is extremely prevalent on several recordings from Davis's performances at the Fillmore East and West in 1970, and especially in the opening track of *Live-Evil*, "Sivad." While Moreira's playing of the cuíca isn't as melodically ambitious as Guy Warren's playing on "The Talking Drum Looks Ahead" (in which Warren solos over a twelve bar blues), both musicians push their instruments beyond their common cultural context while making the jazz they are creating sound more African than it otherwise would.⁶⁶

More musicians would continue to play a role in Davis's imaginings of Africa in the early 1970s. James Foreman, better known as Mtume, was an especially influential figure in this area. Replacing Airtio Moreira in late 1970 alongside Don Alias, Mtume's percussive role was largely "African", incorporating shakers, bells, and tuned percussion, while Alias played

⁶⁴ Chambers, *Milestones*, 192.

⁶⁵ John M. Schechter, "Cuíca," *Grove Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/47553> (accessed January 9, 2015).

⁶⁶ Kelly, *Africa Speaks, America Answers*, 29-30.

timbales and congas, giving the music more of an Afro-Cuban sound.⁶⁷ Mtume would become Davis's only hand percussionist from 1973 to 1975, while one of his guitarists, Pete Cosey, also began to add percussion to the texture. Beyond Mtume's sonic contributions to the music, Davis wrote in his autobiography that he learned a great deal of African history from the percussionist throughout his tenure in the band.⁶⁸ By the summer of 1974, the guitarist Dominique Gaumont would join the band next to fellow guitarists Cosey and Reggie Lucas. Davis would tell *Downbeat* that year that Gaumont was from Bahia (a Brazilian coastal state that strongly embraces its African cultural heritage), yet in his autobiography he would later call the guitarist an "African guy" that gave him his music an "African rhythmic thing."⁶⁹ The truth, that Gaumont was actually from France, is somewhat revealing of Davis's feelings on who could be African. These sentiments support other evidence that suggests that by the 1970s, Davis likely had a good knowledge of the history of the African diaspora and ideas like Amiri Baraka's "changing same". Consequently, like many black musicians at the time, Davis would intentionally include black musicians and music from the diaspora with the belief that they could produce something African. It might not be a surprise, then, that by 1973 Davis felt that "the band had settled down into a deep African thing...with a lot of emphasis on drums and rhythm, and not on individual solos."⁷⁰

1972: On The Corner

Slightly preceding this "deep African" period is Davis's 1972 album, *On The Corner*. This album would be equally influenced by wide-ranging styles including funk, Stockhausen

⁶⁷ Tingen, *Miles Beyond*, 123.

⁶⁸ Davis, *Miles: The Autobiography*, 320.

⁶⁹ Greg Hall, "Miles: Today's Most Influential Contemporary Musician," *Downbeat* (July 18, 1974), reprinted in *The Miles Davis Reader*, ed. Frank Alkyer et al. (New York: Hal Leonard Books, 2007), 103; Davis, *Miles: The Autobiography*, 329-30.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 329.

classical avant-garde and Hindustani classical music. One of the most obvious factors on this album, though, is its hyper-emphasis on rhythm and groove. So important was the collective groove and texture that *On The Corner* became an ensemble, collectivist event where everyone's participation was equally valid and significant. Michael Veal calls *On The Corner* "an experiment in polyrhythm," drawing rhythms from Africa, the Caribbean, and South Asia. In addition to the use of percussion from these geographical areas (including the Brazilian cabaça, congas, shakers, Indian tabla drums, and more), Veal argues that this emphasis on rhythm was an attempt by Davis to "forge a pan-Third World groove aesthetic."⁷¹ As I will argue later, the idea of creating a bond amongst Third World regions is precisely one of the reasons Davis would incorporate Indian instruments and rhythms.

1973-1975: "A Deep African Thing"

Although Davis's rhetoric on the African qualities of his music from 1973 to 1975 remains a significant factor in a broader understanding of imaginings of Africa in his music, there remained a host of other influences during this time period. There is still a dissonant, free jazz sound to most of the recordings, with sessions being conducted much like I described those of *Bitches Brew*. Additionally, hard rock and funk sensibilities continued to develop, especially in both the rhythmic and solo playing of Davis's guitar players. Since the jazz and rock elements of Davis's music during this period have been thoroughly explored by other writers, I will continue to identify more of the African and Afro-diasporic connections during this time period with the understanding that they make up only a portion of the significant influences on this music.

⁷¹ Michael Veal, "Miles Davis, The Complete On The Corner Sessions (Review)," *Jazz Perspectives* 3, no. 3 (2009): 268.

There are few examples of these connections on *Get Up With It*, a double album released by Davis in late 1974 but whose pieces were actually recorded across the previous five years. On the second piece of the album, “Maiysha,” Davis clearly suggests a Latin feeling with the use of claves and agogô bells. Jack Chambers suggested that the first of the two parts of this tune (making up over nine of its fourteen total minutes) is a conventional samba, presumably because of its laid back feel, soft performances, and the rhythm of the guitar; along with this feeling, however, Enrico Merlin notes that the melody of “Maiysha” is reminiscent of the French chanson, “Que Reste Til de Nous Amour.”⁷² Another tune on *Get Up With It*, “Rated X,” features most notably the use of dense electric organ chords functioning almost as drones. As John Szwed has noted, this drone paired with the steady pulse of the drums, bass, and sitar allow Mtume’s congas, percussionist Badal Roy’s tabla drums, and Reggie Lucas’s guitars to make rhythmic variations throughout. Additionally, these instruments build up a collective groove by their staggered entrances, a quality Szwed attributes to both African and African American traditions.⁷³

The most explicit references to Africa on *Get Up With It*, though, can be found on the thirty-two minute “Calypso Frelimo,” one of two centerpieces of the album along with Davis’s equally long elegy to the recently deceased Duke Ellington, “He Loved Him Madly.” Is this a calypso as the title suggests? Developing primarily in Trinidad, the calypso is a style of song, dance, and music in the Caribbean that is typically played by steel pan bands to accompany Carnival celebrations. Calypsos largely resemble sambas, musically, in part because they are usually celebratory, in duple meter, and in a major mode (though early calypsos were slower and

⁷² Chambers, *Milestones*, 272; Merlin in Tingen, *Miles Beyond*, 328.

⁷³ Szwed, *So What*, 328.

were more likely to be in a minor mode).⁷⁴ “Calypso Frelimo” is at a fairly brisk speed but leans strongly towards some kind of C minor orientation. Nevertheless, there is a strong connection to calypso in Davis’s electric organ playing on the track (Davis began playing electric piano and synthesizer extensively around this time, sometimes not playing trumpet at all both in live performances and on record; in the case of “Calypso Frelimo,” Davis plays the electric organ throughout the piece and later overdubbed trumpet parts with a wah-wah electronic effect). Roughly 28 seconds into this piece, Davis plays a brief motive in C major that provides the only respite from the piece’s minor tonality (see Figure 3). With a timbre similar to steel pan drums, this electric organ motive, played in octaves, appears periodically throughout “Frelimo” with small rhythmic variations and further serves as the only true recurring, melodic theme of the piece, despite only lasting a few seconds each time it appears.

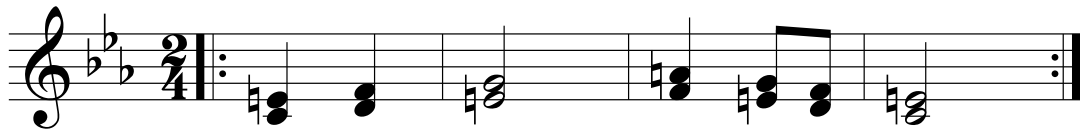


Figure 3. “Calypso Frelimo” electric organ motive (octaves omitted).

Other writers have noted further musical characteristics in “Calypso Frelimo”. Szwed calls it “a thirty-two-minute-long study in Afro-diasporic rhythms of the moment, while critic Greg Tate has labeled it a “dub fugue.”⁷⁵ Tate’s cites the piece’s call-and-response structure as its fugue characteristic and calls it dub because, like the Jamaican music, musical calls are restructured when they are echoed by their response.⁷⁶ While Tate’s assessment clearly attempts to connect Davis’s piece with another music of the African diaspora, his arguments seems like

⁷⁴ Jan Fairley, “Calypso,” *Grove Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/04624> (accessed January 12, 2015).

⁷⁵ Szwed, *So What*, 336.

⁷⁶ Greg Tate, “The Electric Miles,” In *Flyboy in the Buttermilk* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 80.

gross oversimplifications of both fugues and dub. Paul Tingen, for his part, sees African allusions in the piece yet criticizes the recording as too clean, claiming that “Extraneous noises are an intrinsic aspect to music African music, with rattling pieces of dirt, metal, or wood added to many instruments.”⁷⁷ This argument is unfortunately at fault, too, both for its generalization of African music and its negligence of the calypso’s significance in the piece.

In addition to the musical characteristics of calypsos identified above, lyrics to calypsos have often functioned historically as social and political commentary, both in serious and satirical ways. Though we have no way of knowing if Davis was aware of this fact or not, it is essential to note that the second half of the title, “Frelimo,” is a reference to the Frente de Liberacion de Mozambique, one of the major groups fighting for Mozambique’s independence from Portugal in the early 1970s (independence would ultimately come for this country in June of 1975).⁷⁸ Taken in isolation, “Frelimo” is the first title by Davis to display political solidarity with any African people, and one would assume that his African fans felt this solidarity even if a majority of American consumers were unfamiliar with Frelimo or the situation in Mozambique at the time. Looking at the title of “Calypso Frelimo” as a whole, one might conclude that Davis is attempting to connect the African diaspora back to its homeland; an African American performing musical allusions to the Caribbean while subtly tying it to a struggle for African independence, as if to say, “we are all one.”

On other albums recorded in 1974 and 1975, Davis would continue to name song titles with allusions to Africa. Recorded at Carnegie Hall on March 30, 1974 (though not released until 1977), *Dark Magus* is a double album consisting of four songs, each lasting over twenty-five minutes long and subject to various tape edits by Teo Macero, making it an unusual “live” album.

⁷⁷ Tingen, *Miles Beyond*, 154.

⁷⁸ Szwed, *So What*, 336.

John Szwed notes an interesting divide between the album and song titles: suggested by Columbia A&R executive Tatsu Nosaki, *Magus* “is the founder of the ancient Persian religion, Zoroastrianism,” while the titles of each track are Swahili for the numbers one through four (“Moja,” “Wili,” “Tatu,” and “Nne”).⁷⁹ Szwed also helpfully points out that each track actually includes parts of other Davis songs: for instance, “Tatu” includes a portion of “Calypso Frelimo” from the Carnegie performance, while “Nne” begins with the band’s performance of “Ife,” a tune originally on *Big Fun*. While these titles seem to be less significant than the likes of “Calypso Frelimo,” and although cynics might write them off as superficial “exotic” qualities, they still point to Davis’s continued interest in tying his music to Africa, in addition to his continued incorporation of African percussion; for instance, Pete Cosey’s mibra playing is quite noticeable at the end “Tatu.”

Though they would not be released in the United States until 1990, Davis’s final two albums recorded in the 1970s (*Agharta and Pangaea*) were live recordings of two concerts performed on February 1, 1975 in Osaka, Japan. Both of these albums undeniably reflect an increased influence of American rock, R&B, and funk music, while there is a declining presence of jazz and non-Western elements, despite a forty second allusion to Davis’s “So What” during “Interlude,” and the presence of the samba section in “Maishya” (both on *Agharta*), as well as Pete Cosey and Mtume’s continued use of such instruments as the mbira, agogô bells, claves, and waterdrum.⁸⁰ Cosey’s distorted guitar solos and Davis’s wah-wah trumpet lines sound like they like belong to Jimi Hendrix more than anyone else, while the drum set and bass combination of Al Foster and Michael Henderson play some of their most conventional rock and funk patterns. On top of all of this, the added percussion is either overpowered or mixed lower

⁷⁹ Ibid, 338.

⁸⁰ Merlin in Tingen, *Miles Beyond*, 328.

than on previous albums. Consequently, though they are amongst the most obscure, these albums are arguably more accessible to rock, R&B, and funk audiences than any other Davis album from the 1970s. Ignoring the musical characteristics of these albums, though, there is still a sustained interest in alluding to Africa on Davis's part. Agharta, after all, is the name of a mythical city at the earth's core said to be ruled by an Ethiopian leader, while Pangaea is "the mythical primordial continent...from which all present continents were derived through drift" (This is perhaps a derivative gesture towards the belief that all people derived from Africa, thus making it the original continent, so to speak).⁸¹ More significantly, one of the two tracks on *Pangaea* is called "Zimbabwe," which includes the performances of "Moja," "Willie Nelson," and "Nne" as well as a new tune by this name, as Szwed notes. Though not especially noteworthy were this to be a song's title today, in 1975 Zimbabwe was still called by its colonial name, Rhodesia, and would not be called Zimbabwe until its independence from Great Britain in late 1979. Like "Calypso Frelimo" before it, "Zimbabwe" is another example of Davis's subtle attempts at displaying a pro-independence position towards Africa.

Miles's Fusion and Black Nationalism

In addition to the multitude of ways that Miles Davis projected imaginings of Africa in his music from 1970 to 1975, I would next like to posit the suggestion that Davis's fusion period can be viewed through a Black Nationalist perspective. Black Nationalism, sometimes known as the Second Black Renaissance, is the name given to the African American cultural revitalization movement in the 1960s and 1970s that stressed black self-determination and unity. As Ingrid Monson has pointed out, by the late 1960s black nationalism was largely divided into two groups: revolutionary nationalism, which called for self-determination through a Marxist perspective, and cultural nationalism, which rejected Marxism and "favored an African socialism

⁸¹ Szwed, *So What*, 343.

that stressed self-determination, cooperative economics, black unity, and cultural celebration.”⁸²

Cultural nationalists further turned to Africa as a cultural and spiritual model with the belief that it could help create a new black identity in America.

Though Miles Davis disliked the most radical elements of Black Nationalism, certain attributes of his fusion period are characteristic of both revolutionary nationalism and cultural nationalism. In terms of the former group, which is sometimes aligned with the Black Panthers, Davis was also seen as a strong, proud, and uncompromising image of blackness (so much so that he was given the nickname, “the prince of darkness”). This image aligns itself more with revolutionary nationalism and the Black Panthers, as does his incorporation of more “populist” styles of music like rock, funk, and R&B (Davis said in 1971, “I am not a Black Panther or nothing like that...I don’t need to be, but I was raised to think like they do”).⁸³ Eric Porter argues that Davis’s inclusion of white musicians during most of his fusion period, too, also aligns him more with the coalitionist Panthers.⁸⁴ However, there is plenty of evidence to suggest an affinity towards cultural nationalism. As Jeremy Smith notes, Davis’s “general advocacy for economic empowerment for African Americans in the music business” is one such example.⁸⁵ In terms of celebrating African culture, Davis noted in his autobiography that by 1969 he began wearing African dashikis and robes in alignment with the black consciousness movement of the time.⁸⁶ More broadly, though, Davis’s incorporation of musicians, instruments, and musical qualities from Africa and its diaspora, as described throughout this chapter, is perhaps the most notable

⁸² Monson, *Freedom Sounds*, 226-227.

⁸³ Chris Albertson, “The Unmasking of Miles Davis,” in *A Miles Davis Reader*, ed. Bill Kirchner (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Press, 1997), 192.

⁸⁴ Eric Porter, “‘It’s About That Time’: The Response to Miles Davis’s Electric Turn,” in *Miles Davis and American Culture*, ed. Gerald Early (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 2001), 141.

⁸⁵ Jeremy A. Smith, “Sell It Black,” 23.

⁸⁶ Davis, *Miles: The Autobiography*, 310.

connection to cultural nationalism, despite Davis's lack of interest in finding any spiritual models from Africa (or from anywhere else, it should be pointed out).

In addition to these characteristics found in both studio recordings and live performances, by at least 1973 Davis also began projecting a Black Nationalist image on stage by painting every amplifiers' grill cloth in the colors of green, black, and red (see Figure 4).⁸⁷ These colors are significant in at least a few different ways: they were first the colors of the Pan-African flag, which was adopted by Marcus Garvey in 1920 for the Universal Negro Improvement Association and Communities League, before becoming the colors of several African nations, the Black Panthers, and holding special significance in reggae music. Whether this was revolutionary or cultural nationalism, it seems clearly an attempt towards black unity of some sort.



Figure 4. Red, black, and green amp cloths. Vienna, 1973.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ There are contesting views on the specifics of this: Szwed writes that these colors were adopted from the fall of 1970 until April of 1971 (*So What*, 317), while Tinggen attributes them to Davis's bands from 1973-1975 (*Miles Beyond*, 150) and Chris Murphy recalls the colors of red, yellow, and green on the 1975 Japan tour (*Miles To Go: Remembering Miles Davis* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2002), 83-84).

⁸⁸ "Miles Davis Live in Vienna 1973 Stadthalle ganzes Konzert," YouTube video, 1:09:04, posted by "zerfranzt," June 22, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wOA9_TdRFt4.

Conclusions

Whether it is the increased use of percussion, polyrhythm, and collective improvisation, the psychedelic artwork of Abdul Mati Klarwein on *Bitches Brew* and *Live-Evil*, or the understated nod towards African independence in songs like “Calypso Frelimo” and “Zimbabwe,” imaginings of Africa are manifested in numerous ways throughout much of Miles Davis’s fusion period. In addition to these qualities, the increased interest in Black Nationalism, evident by band members like Mtume and the use of African liberation colors on stage, lends credence to Davis’s claim of the “deep African thing” present in his music by 1973. Earlier I claimed that there are shockingly few musicological studies on fusion music in general, and fewer yet that account for the diverse nature of fusion *musics*. In addition to the necessity for more of these studies, work specifically on Davis’s fusion must increase, too. Critics and musicologists alike must acknowledge, among several other styles, the large influence of music from Africa and its diaspora during this period of Davis’s career.

Chapter Four

Miles in the '80s

Compared to the wealth of musical and non-musical references to Africa by Miles Davis in the 1970s, there are relatively few instances of this sort in the final decade of his career. After returning from his first retirement (a nearly 5-year hiatus from 1975 until he began recording again in 1980), Davis's music would become more strongly and clearly influenced by contemporary R&B and pop music than ever before. This is evident as early as his first album of the decade, 1981's *The Man With Horn*, whose title track is a laid back, quasi-erotic R&B ballad with sensual lyrics about an anonymous horn player, though the implication is clearly Davis. On 1985's *You're Under Arrest*, Davis would include a short, spoken word narrative by the singer and bassist Sting, as well two pop songs from the '80s, Michael Jackson's "Human Nature" and Cyndi Lauper's "Time After Time." His final album, the incomplete *Doo-Bop*, would see Davis collaborate with rapper Easy Mo Bee in an attempt to fuse jazz with hip-hop, though it actually features the trumpet and other jazz elements minimally.

Nevertheless, there are some significant occurrences that reveal Davis's continued interest in presenting some kind of Africanist aesthetic. In his touring bands and on most of the studio albums of this decade, Davis would continue to incorporate at least one added percussionist in addition to a drum set player. Among these percussionists was Mino Cinelu, a Parisian whose father was from Martinique, and who played with Davis from 1981 through 1983 and from 1987-1989. Prior to playing with Davis, Cinelu gained experience on percussion, particularly the congas, by performing with African dance companies.⁸⁹ Like Airto Morera before him, Cinelu offered Davis another connection to music of the African diaspora, and he recalls the trumpet player often talking to him about the West Indies and asking about traditional

⁸⁹ Chambers, *Milestones*, 328.

rhythms from such countries as Martinique and Haiti.⁹⁰ Cinelu would be replaced in 1984 by Steve Thornton, an African American who gave the band an “African sound” that Davis liked, according to his autobiography.⁹¹ Percussionist Marilyn Mazur would join the band alongside Thornton in 1988 and would later describe their role division as Thornton playing “more grooves and Latin stuff” while she “could do more sound paintings” with both hand percussion and electronic percussion samples.⁹²

In addition to the ever-present use of African and Afro-diasporic percussion (albeit in a less significant role than Davis’s percussionists of the 1970s), Davis’s continued interest in music from these areas can be seen in testimonies from those involved with his unreleased *Rubberband* project, recorded from October 1985 to January 1986. According to George Cole, Davis hired Randy Hall and Zane Giles to write songs for the album that would incorporate all sorts of musical genres, including funk, pop, rock, and those of Latin America and the Caribbean. Giles recalls Davis explicitly asking for at least one song with a calypso feel to it, hearkening back to his 1974 exploration of this genre on “Calypso Frelimo.”⁹³ Though *Rubberband* would never be released, it would not be the last time Davis would show an affinity towards the Caribbean, while Hall and Giles’s explorations in recording around synthesizers and drum machines would also influence Davis’s future albums, beginning immediately with 1986’s *Tutu*.

Tutu

In addition to its album cover, a pitch-black image save only the dark complexion of Davis’s face, the most immediately noticeable trait of *Tutu* is its title, which refers to

⁹⁰ Dan Ouellette, “Dark Prince in Twilight: Band Members and Close Associates Discuss the Last Years of Miles Davis’ Life,” *Downbeat* (May, 2001), reprinted in *The Miles Davis Reader*, ed. Frank Alkyer et al. (New York: Hal Leonard Books, 2007), 171.

⁹¹ Davis, *Miles: The Autobiography*, 373.

⁹² Tingen, *Miles Beyond*, 250.

⁹³ George Cole, *The Last Miles: The Music of Miles Davis, 1980-1991* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2005), 208-209.

Archibishop Desmond Tutu, a South African clergyman and a crucial activist against apartheid. Tutu won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984 and became the first black Anglican bishop of Johannesburg a year later.⁹⁴ There have been a couple of reasons provided as to how and why the album came to be named after Tutu. Marcus Miller, who composed most of the songs on the album, has claimed that he named the song “Tutu” because it was written with South Africa in mind, and because he wished to “reflect various elements of Miles’s musical heritage, as well as the personality of the man himself.”⁹⁵ After production had already begun, producer Tommy LiPuma reportedly suggested to Davis that “Tutu” become the title track because of the bishop’s work on equality for black South Africans. Regardless of Davis’s own involvement in the naming of *Tutu* (or lack thereof), he would later be quoted as saying that it was a message to South Africa that “we know what you people are goin’ through.”⁹⁶ As some writers have noted, “tutu” is also the Yoruban word for cool; though this might make sense as an origin of the album title, given Davis’s association with cool jazz, it seems to be at best an interesting coincidence. More evidence to suggest a connection to South Africa is in another song title on *Tutu*, “Full Nelson”; Davis claimed that it was named for Nelson Mandela, though it could also be a triple entendre as a play on the well-known jazz tune, “Half Nelson,” and on the rock musician Prince’s last name (Davis and Prince developed a friendship around this time and both were keen to work on a project together at some point).

Musically, there is little to suggest an African or Afro-diasporic influence on *Tutu*, though there are a few points to consider. Prior to writing the piece, “Backyard Ritual,” Davis sent pianist George Duke a tape of the Cuban band Irakere, whose music mixed Cuban folk music with jazz, salsa, classical, funk, and rock influences, as a way for Davis to communicate

⁹⁴ Ibid, 247.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 248.

⁹⁶ Carr, *Miles Davis: The Definitive Biography*, 502.

the musical direction he wanted Duke to go.⁹⁷ Though this point significantly shows that Davis was becoming interested in popular musics of the African diaspora (many of the members of Irakere were of African descent, including its founder), “Backyard Ritual” displays much more of a funk and rock influence than that of Cuban folk music. Beyond this tune, Miller’s “Don’t Lose Your Mind” is the only other piece whose sound seems influenced by a Caribbean style; this time Jamaican reggae is the inspiration, most evident by the bright staccato, syncopated hits of the synthesizer. Despite a lack of any explicitly African musical elements, though, *Tutu* seems to have had an enormous impact on the people of South Africa; George Cole has written that Desmond Tutu wrote a letter to Miles Davis to thank him for his assistance in the anti-apartheid cause, while Marcus Miller claims that that when he visited South Africa in 2001, someone told him that he had created the most important African-American musical contribution to this movement.⁹⁸ If these points are accurate, *Tutu* greatly exhibits the influence American jazz musicians could continue to make in the 1980s through simple imaginings of Africa.

Amandla

Davis’s third major collaboration with Marcus Miller, *Amandla* (1989), would be his final album with allusions to Africa, and continues with the anti-apartheid sentiments of *Tutu*. “Amandla” means “power” in Zulu and Xhosa, and was a common rallying cry by Africans across the continent who were opposed to the injustice in South Africa. As I mentioned earlier, Davis said that *Tutu* was to let South Africans know that Davis (or perhaps African Americans, or Americans in general) knew of their situation; completing this quote, Davis said that *Amandla* “was to say we know what they got to do now.”⁹⁹ Additionally, it should be pointed out that Marcus Miller has said that the naming of *Amandla* was purely Davis’s choice; Davis would also

⁹⁷ Tingen, *Miles Beyond*, 231.

⁹⁸ Cole, *The Last Miles*, 251 and 252, respectively.

⁹⁹ Carr, *Miles Davis: The Definitive Biography*, 502.

be more involved in the production process than on *Tutu*, though he would not write any of the pieces.¹⁰⁰ Along with these political sentiments, the album cover is a drawing by Davis's partner at the time, Jo Gelbard, featuring Davis's head superimposed over what is supposed to be a map of Africa (an idea that the ghostwriter of Davis's autobiography, Quincy Troupe, has taken credit for).¹⁰¹

Musically, *Amandla* is something of a fusion between American go-go music, with its funk influence and dense amount of rhythms, and zouk (Creole for "party"), a relatively new, upbeat dance style from the Creole-speaking Caribbean, especially Martinique and Guadeloupe.¹⁰² Zouk borrows from several musical genres itself, such as rhythms from Africa and other Caribbean styles like calypso, in addition to traits of jazz, funk, and salsa. Quincy Troupe has noted that *Amandla* was especially influenced by Davis's interest in a popular zouk band, Kassav, as well as Franco, a well-known guitarist from Zaria (in Northern Nigeria).¹⁰³ The resulting sound is quite upbeat and features some of the most bottom-heavy, drum-oriented music that Davis created in the 1980s. Though less significant than the album's title, two song titles on the album reference Africa while audibly connecting the listener to its diaspora. The opening track, "Catémbe," is named after a part of the coastline south of Maputo, the capital of Mozambique; Miller has said that his interest in this area originates with a friend whose father fought there during Mozambique's revolution, making yet another connection to African independence.¹⁰⁴ "Catémbe" also happens to incorporate percussion more than any other piece, emphasizing the polyrhythms created by these instruments. A second piece, "Hannibal," was

¹⁰⁰ Cole, *The Last Miles*, 297.

¹⁰¹ Quincy Troupe, *Miles and Me* (Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press, 2000), 108.

¹⁰² Jan Fairley, "Zouk," *Grove Music Online*,

<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/52412> (accessed January 13, 2015).

¹⁰³ Troupe, *Miles and Me*, 155.

¹⁰⁴ Cole, *The Last Miles*, 292.

given its name in honor of Hannibal Barca, an ancient African warrior known for many successful conquests; despite this name, “Hannibal” sounds far closer to music from the Caribbean than of Africa, particularly because it includes samples of actual Caribbean steel drums.

Conclusions

From listening to Davis’s catalogue from the final decade of his career, one would likely conclude that he was less interested in exploring African and Afro-diasporic musics than in American popular music of the time. Though there is undeniably a greater number of R&B and pop-infused tunes, it should be recognized that the 1980s also saw Davis incorporating popular music styles from other parts of the diaspora, evident by his affinity for the Cuban group Irakere and the zouk band Kassav. The incorporation of Afrocentric titles on *Tutu* and *Amandla* also highlights the fact that Davis was still interested in expressing political solidarity with the African continent through his music, even if it was not through the use of instruments or styles native to those areas. Finally, Davis’s synthesis of these titles with music from parts of the diaspora can be interpreted as Davis subscribing to a philosophy similar to Gilroy’s “changing same,” making further connections between African descendants scattered across the globe and those remaining on the continent.

Chapter Five

An Even Broader Africa, and the Global South: Spain and India

Thus far I have examined the ways that Miles Davis incorporated imaginings of Africa using musical and extramusical allusions to the continent and its diaspora, particularly in the Caribbean and Brazil. These examples were not Davis's only excursions into musical traditions from around the globe, though. In Davis's orchestral collaborations with Gil Evans in the late 1950s and early 1960s, there are several musical quotations from Spanish classical and folk music, while he and Marcus Miller would later record the soundtrack to the 1987 film, *Siesta*. Though these Spanish musical elements seem far-removed from the African/Afro-diasporic elements Davis included, in this section I argue that the trumpet player's understanding of the North African influence on Spain allowed him to incorporate Spanish music as an extension of African music in a broad sense. In other words, such imaginings uniquely allow Spain to *become* Africa to some degree.

Beyond this Spanish influence, some of Davis's live and studio performances during his fusion period would feature musicians and instruments from India, as well as pieces that shared some musical qualities with Hindustani classical music. When it comes to understanding Davis's motivations for these incorporations, writers have typically ignored the question altogether or have written the Indian instruments off as purely textural devices (Jack Chambers claims these instruments helped in Davis's search for more "varied percussion colors," while even Gary Tomlinson narrowly limits the Indian musical elements as "raw sound materials" giving "more flavors to the mix").¹⁰⁵ While instruments like the sitar and tabla do undoubtedly add to the texture of Davis's music during the 1970s, I argue that his inspiration was more complex. While not necessarily using Indian instruments and musicians as a way to imagine Africa, Davis did use

¹⁰⁵ Chambers, *Milestones*, 195; Tomlinson, "Cultural Dialogics and Jazz: A White Historian Signifies," 261.

them alongside African and Afrodiasporic elements to reflect an affinity between Africa and India as part of the emerging Global South (The Global South is comprised of most of Africa, Latin America, and Asia, and is commonly described as the areas of the world that have experienced the greatest political, social, and economic upheaval alongside poverty, hunger, and human rights abuses).¹⁰⁶ Moreover, after witnessing and incurring injustice throughout his life, Davis unsurprisingly felt a connection between life as an African American and the experiences of the oppressed in Africa and India.

Spain

Davis and Evans's first ventures into Spanish music can be heard on their first orchestral album, *Miles Ahead* (1957). Most notable in this regard is Evans's piece, "Blues for Pablo," featuring portions of the Spanish composer Manuel de Falla's ballet, *The Three-Cornered Hat*, as well as some unidentified Spanish folk material, according to John Szwed.¹⁰⁷ Also included was the French composer Leo Delibes's art song, "The Maids of Cadiz." While Delibes's original version of this song sounds like a rather ordinary upbeat European classical piece, Evans entirely changed the mood through a reworking of its instrumentation, harmonies, tempo, and meter; the result is a much more "exotic" sound that seems more appropriate for a song that bears the name of an Andalusian city in its title.

1960's *Sketches of Spain* would see an increased effort by Davis and Evans to fuse Spanish music into their orchestral jazz, as they were both greatly interested in Spanish classical music and, especially, flamenco at this time (in a story resembling Davis's encounter with Les Ballets Africains, he reportedly saw Roberto Iglesias's Spanish dancing troupe around 1958 and

¹⁰⁶ See "The Global South," *The Global South*, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/the_global_south/ (accessed March 13, 2015).

¹⁰⁷ Szwed, *So What*, 143.

on way home stopped at a record shop to buy every flamenco record available).¹⁰⁸ The album's centerpiece is an arrangement of the second movement of Joaquín Rodrigo's *Concierto de Aranjuez*, while "Will o' the Wisp" is from de Falla's ballet, *El Amor Brujo*. Most intriguing on *Sketches of Spain* is its appropriation of folk songs from the Andalusia region of Spain. Thankfully, Lewis Porter has pointed out that two of the album's songs are based on field recordings by Alan Lomax that were featured on volume 15 of the Columbia World Library of Folk and Primitive Music, *Spanish Folk Music* (later released as *World Library of Folk and Primitive Music, Vol. 4: Spain*).¹⁰⁹ "The Pan Piper" is based on the track, "Alborada de Vigo," while much of "Saeta" is based on the field recording of the same name.¹¹⁰ "Solea," meanwhile, is a generic term for a flamenco song of lament.

Regarding *Siesta*, a movie shot in Madrid and Barcelona, the producers wanted to have *Sketches of Spain* as a its soundtrack but asked Davis and Miller to compose new music after failing to get permission.¹¹¹ While the soundtrack is less "authentic" than *Sketches of Spain* in that it lacks any arrangements of Spanish art or folk music, the title track still hints at Spanish military-style drumming as well as flamenco in John Scofield's guitar playing and the use of the Phrygian dominant scale.

Shortly after the release of *Sketches of Spain*, Davis commented to a *Downbeat* reporter that flamenco was the Spanish counterpart to African American blues.¹¹² In his autobiography, he takes this idea further by arguing that Andalusian music has roots in African music:

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 207-208.

¹⁰⁹ Lewis Porter, *John Coltrane: His Life and Music* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1998), 209.

¹¹⁰ For samples of these field recordings, see "*World Library of Folk and Primitive Music, Vol. 4: Spain*," *AllMusic*, <http://www.allmusic.com/album/world-library-of-folk-and-primitive-music-vol-4-spain-mw0000236727> (accessed January 14, 2015).

¹¹¹ Cole, *The Last Miles*, 269.

¹¹² George Hoefer, "Miles in the Hot Box," *Downbeat* (October 27, 1960), reprinted in *The Miles Davis Reader*, ed. Frank Alkyer et al. (New York: Hal Leonard Books, 2007), 10-11.

The black moors were over there in Spain, because Africans had conquered Spain a long time ago. In the Andalusian area you have a lot of African influence in the music, architecture, and in the whole culture, and a lot of African blood in the people. So you had a black African thing up in the feeling of the music, in the bag pipes and trumpets and drums.

Davis would further write of the difficulties he faced when attempting to play his trumpet like a Spanish singer would sing because of the “black African scales” he was trying to reproduce.¹¹³ These comments by Davis reflect a broader mid-century discourse; Ingrid Monson has noted that in the mid to late 1950s, many in the African American community were interested in the African influence on Spanish culture, this influence largely being a result of the Moors of western North Africa conquering Spain in the eighth century. She cites the journalist Charles Walker’s 1955 story, “The African Imprint in Spain,” and further mentions that a diplomat from Ghana even attended Davis’s press conference on the release of *Sketches of Spain*.¹¹⁴ It seems more than plausible that Davis would have been familiar with this African connection prior to *Sketches to Spain*, if not *Miles Ahead*, while this fact might also help to make sense as to why Davis would record the *Siesta* soundtrack in between two albums with such politically charged messages to Africa (*Tutu* and *Amandla*). It would seem that in listening to flamenco and other Andalusian folk songs, Davis heard new African qualities that he wished to project in his own music; in this light, *Sketches of Spain* can particularly be interpreted as a projection of Spain as Africa.

India

By the late 1960s, Davis became intrigued by the clothing, cuisine, and music of India, as did many other musicians during the counterculture era. Jack Chambers claims that Davis’s first

¹¹³ Davis, *Miles: The Autobiography*, 241-42.

¹¹⁴ Ingrid Monson, “Miles, Politics, and Image,” in *Miles Davis and American Culture*, ed. Gerald Early (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 2001), 89.

performance that incorporated Indian styles was at UC Berkeley in April of 1968; this concert of Davis's quintet with the Gil Evans Orchestra reportedly featured an untitled rāga, though the "rāga effect" was created by mandolin, electric guitar, steel guitar, and marimba rather than Indian instruments.¹¹⁵ Davis would begin to incorporate musicians and instruments native to India in his studio work by 1969, including the sitarist Khalil Balakrishna and the tabla drum player Bihari Sharma on "Orange Lady" and "Great Expectations," later released on *Big Fun*. Balakrishna and Collin Walcott, an American sitarist who studied with Ravi Shankar, would also be part of the 1972 *On The Corner* sessions and "Rated X" (on *Get Up With It*) alongside Calcutta native Badal Roy on the tabla, who would perform in concert with Davis's band in 1972 as well. As I have already cited, many have noted that these Indian instruments served to thicken the musical texture and rhythmic complexity of these pieces rather than injecting "authentic" Hindustani classical music or other Indian styles into the mix. When Badal Roy came to the studio for *On The Corner*, in fact, the only instruction Davis gave him was to "play like a nigger."¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, on much of this album the sitars provide perpetual drones just as they would do in the ālāp and jhālā sections of rāga performance cycles. On "Rated X," too, the sitars function as pulse-keepers while Roy makes slight variations on the tabla, a practice not uncommon in Hindustani classical music.

These points notwithstanding, it is true that Davis was not having these musicians perform rāgas, nor was he basing songs on field recordings like he did with *Sketches of Spain*. However, I would like to posit two related suggestions as to his motivations: 1) that Davis incorporated these instruments as a way to emphasize the "exotic" image of his music already provided by African and Afrodiasporic elements, and 2) that in doing so, Davis was reflecting a

¹¹⁵ Chambers, *Milestones*, 126.

¹¹⁶ Szwed, *So What*, 328.

social and political affinity between Africa and India as part of a broader geographical coalition. In the same article about George Russell and modal jazz, Ingrid Monson suggests that in the 1960s jazz community the idea of the “East” included not only India but also the Middle East and Africa. Through an analysis of John Coltrane’s engagement with musics from these regions, she explains that these areas were grouped together by American jazz musicians for musical, spiritual, and political thinking. In terms of politics, Monson argues that Coltrane’s use of drones on the 1961 recordings of “India” and “Africa,” created by the use of two double basses and a tamboura, “resonated intensely with the broader interest in India and Africa on the part of the developing civil rights movement.”¹¹⁷ She further discusses some of the historical reasons for this resonance, particularly that India and Mohandas Ghandi’s methods of nonviolent resistance towards colonialism became important influences on those involved in the early stages of the civil rights movement. Monson concludes, in part, that jazz musicians’ incorporation of musical devices from India, as part of an “undifferentiated non-Western world,” was “firmly rooted in contemporary African American social concerns.”¹¹⁸

The undifferentiated non-Western world that Monson describes as the “East” also fits into the Third World or the Global South, two new terms emerging during the Cold War to describe the areas of the world rife with political, social, and economic turmoil. Alfred J. López has noted that although the Global South typically signifies subaltern cultures in Africa, Central and Latin America, and much of Asia, there are “Souths” within the Global North, such as the U.S. South and Eastern Europe.¹¹⁹ Though Davis’s use of Indian musical instruments and drones took place after the Civil Rights movement, as an older musician it seems likely that he still

¹¹⁷ Monson, “Oh Freedom: George Russell, John Coltrane, and Modal Jazz,” 160-161.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 162.

¹¹⁹ Alfred J. López, “Introduction: The (Post)global South,” *The Global South* 1, no. 1 & 2 (2007): 8.

would have linked issues of equality at home with those across the Global South, as conditions for African Americans continued to be inferior to those for white Americans. In this regard, we can also link Monson's argument regarding Indian music and civil rights with the Black Nationalist appeal of Davis's fusion music. When describing his fashion around 1969, Davis even wrote, "Everybody was into blackness, you know, the black consciousness movement, and so a lot of African *and* Indian fabrics were being worn."¹²⁰ Furthermore, it is significant that Davis's incorporation of the sitar and tabla were always accompanied by a dense amount of African and Afro-diasporic percussion, rather than being the lone "exotic" elements. Clearly then, he saw a kinship between the musical styles of Africa and India; read another way, Davis's "play like a nigger" instruction to Badal Roy may not be so much a sign of disinterest in Indian musical styles as a belief that the tabla could adequately sound "black."

Conclusions

Without doubt, Davis's incorporation of Indian instruments and musical qualities are less emphasized than the likes of Yusef Lateef or John Coltrane, the latter of which studied with Ravi Shankar, appropriated chants from the Vedas (Hindu religious books) as melodies and solos, and held spiritual beliefs that incorporated Hinduism, Krishnamurti, and yoga. However, I would argue that a lack of such things in Davis and his music suggests even more that the sitar and tabla were meant to signify something else. Perhaps hearing some quality in Indian music that felt familiar, whether it was the rhythm, modality, or texture, Davis may have intentionally included these instruments and musicians with the belief that they would emphasize a connection between African and Indian music. More significantly, Davis felt a political and social bond between

¹²⁰ Davis, *Miles: The Autobiography*, 310. Emphasis added.

Africa, India, and the African American community, all of which were (and largely continue to be) voiceless members of society at large.

In contrast, Davis was more than aware of the historical influence of Africa on Spain when he recorded *Sketches of Spain* with Gil Evans. Hearing this musical connection in flamenco and other folk music from Andalusia, he was willing to lift styles and melodies directly from their source through field recordings while still feeling that the music was projecting an image of Africa.

Chapter Six

Miles's Influence? Africa in the Music of Herbie Hancock

Given the large number of younger musicians who worked with Miles Davis throughout his career, it would seem likely that many of them might have become influenced not only by his general musical knowledge and stylistic choices, but also the ways in which he incorporated imaginings of Africa into his music. However, many of his most notable alumni were less interested in displaying those “African” qualities in their own ensembles. Tony Williams turned almost exclusively to psychedelic rock in his group, Lifetime. John McLaughlin’s Mahavishnu Orchestra heavily explored Indian music while Chick Corea and Return to Forever incorporated elements of Brazilian music (including Airto Moreira on percussion), though neither would attempt to make any connections between those styles and Africa. Weather Report, founded by Joe Zawinul and Wayne Shorter, also began with Airto Moreira as an avant-garde jazz/rock band but produced a more conventional brand of jazz-pop by the late 1970s with albums like *Heavy Weather*. Nevertheless, one Davis sideman who did go on to incorporate many allusions to Africa as a bandleader and soloist was Herbie Hancock.

Though only a few books and journal articles focus on Hancock autonomously, those that do exist almost all focus on his music of the late 1960s and early 1970s after leaving Miles Davis’s band in 1968, helping to provide any even clearer view of Davis’s immediate influence (Hancock would take part in the recording of three of Davis’s fusion albums, too: *In A Silent Way*, *Jack Johnson*, and *On The Corner*). As mentioned earlier, Steven Pond’s *Head Hunters* provides an excellent account of the music and production of Hancock’s 1973 funk-inspired album of the same name, while Kevin Fellez’s case study of Hancock in *Birds of Fire* also deals primarily with the fusion on *Head Hunters*. Jon Opstad’s article on Hancock’s Fender Rhodes

solos of the 1970s, too, includes some excellent musical analysis of not only *Head Hunters* but also the music of his pre-Headhunters band, Mwandishi. In addition to these writings, Bob Gluck's *You'll Know When You Get There* exclusively explores the music of Mwandishi from their emergence in Hancock's 1968 sextet until their breakup in the spring of 1973; though Gluck's musical analysis leaves something to be desired, his research and interviews with band members are extremely helpful in understanding this period. Finally, Herbie Hancock has recently released an autobiography, *Possibilities*, detailing both his personal life and most of his entire professional career. Reading *Possibilities*, it becomes clear that the two biggest influences on Hancock, both musically and as a bandleader, have been his devotion to Nichiren Buddhism and his time spent working with Miles Davis. As all of these volumes confirm to some degree, Hancock incorporated several musical and extramusical allusions to Africa in his music, some of them clearly influenced by Davis and others different.

1969-1973: The Mwandishi Period

Following Hancock's departure from Davis's band, the keyboardist would display a number of characteristics associated with black cultural nationalism, as Davis himself would begin doing. In 1969, Hancock collaborated with trumpeter Don Cherry, saxophonist Jimmy Heath, and Mtume on percussion, among others, on the album *Kawaida*. Released in 1970, *Kawaida* featured Swahili song titles (predating Davis's on *Dark Magus*), while "Maulana" incorporated chants of Swahili texts and the title track included recitation of the seven principles of Kwanzaa, a holiday specifically celebrating African heritage.¹²¹ Perhaps most notably, each musician in Hancock's Mwandishi band also took a Swahili name in the fall of 1970 (Hancock's being "Mwandishi," or "Composer."), though their English names would continue to be used in

¹²¹ Bob Gluck, *You'll Know When You Get There: Herbie Hancock and the Mwandishi Band* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 16.

marketing materials and on albums because of their name recognition. In his autobiography, Hancock reflects on this choice and the other ways Mwandishi sought to embrace its African ancestry:

...over time we started embracing other visible symbols of the black diaspora. I had never spent much time thinking about my African roots, but all of us became increasingly influenced by African culture, religion, and music. We started wearing dashikis and African talismans, and I began to feel more connected than ever to the civil rights movement and to our shared, collective past as black musicians. This was a powerful transformation, and of course it affected our music.¹²²

Mwandishi would go on to record three albums: *Mwandishi* (1971), *Crossings* (1972), and *Sextant* (1973). Musically, this band was largely shaped by Hancock's time in Davis's second quintet as well as the sounds of *Bitches Brew*. Like *Bitches Brew*, these albums blend modal and avant-garde jazz together along with hard bop and some degree of funk rhythms and grooves, while Hancock would continue to play electric piano and synthesizers. Similar to Davis's recording process, Mwandishi's producer David Rubinson has stated that Hancock and the other musicians largely came in to the studio with only sketches of melodies, bass lines, and grooves, while everything else would be collectively improvised.¹²³ Later on *Crossings* and *Sextant*, Rubinson would have a large role in applying electronic effects in post-production, echoing the presence of Teo Macero in Davis's albums. The resulting sound on most of Mwandishi's work is that of dense textures, rhythmic complexity, and timbral variety through synthesized sounds, percussion, and extended techniques by soloists. As Hancock recalls, "We didn't play songs as much as we created a sonic environment."¹²⁴

¹²² Herbie Hancock with Lisa Dickey, *Possibilities* (New York: Viking Press, 2014), 120.

¹²³ Pond, *Head Hunters*, 136.

¹²⁴ Hancock, *Possibilities*, 134.

On all three albums, added percussion is used to create polyrhythms and enhance the overall rhythmic texture. While future Davis drummer Leon "Ndugu" Chanler would provide congas on *Mwandishi*, a variety of African and Afro-diasporic hand percussion would be used on *Crossings* and *Sextant*, the performance of which was the duty of every band member on *Crossings*. More significantly, the use of instruments like the congas, clave, and cowbell on these two albums would be coupled with Africanist titles and album artwork. The twenty-five minute "Sleeping Giant" on *Crossings*, whose title is likely a reference to the continent of Africa, begins with several minutes of percussive interplay; the claves and cowbell keep the pulse while Billy Hart solos on the drum set. All of this continues while the rest of the band enters into the first of four diverse stylistic sections, the first featuring collective improvisation by Hart, Hancock, and bassist Buster Williams, followed by a more straight-ahead funk section, a dramatically slower ballad-like transition, and a final upbeat section with a collective funk groove below Bennie Maupin's soprano saxophone solo. *Sextant* features even more synthesized percussive and ambient sounds than *Crossings*, giving it a different yet equally exotic sound. The opening track, "Rain Dance," is one of the more dissonant, "out" tunes by Mwandishi, though it still alludes to Africa through moments of collective improvisation and the strong pulse and ostinatos set by the synthesizer (the title of this piece also coordinates with images on the album artwork, as I will describe). The use of synthesizers to create ambient, unusual timbres was also significant because it pointed to a more Afrofuturistic aesthetic that Hancock would project on his next album, *Head Hunters*.

The album artwork for *Crossings and Sextant*, both designed by Robert Springett, seems highly influenced by Mati Klarwein's artwork for *Bitches Brew* and *Live-Evil*. In fact, it should be pointed out that Warner Bros. only agreed to support *Crossings* after Hancock and Rubinson

compared it to *Bitches Brew* and its commercial success.¹²⁵ The front cover of *Crossings* features several robed African men (Steven Pond suggests they may be a shaman or griot and his acolytes), while the back reveals another man who seems to be trying to catch fish with his bare hands.¹²⁶ Like the hint of Afrofuturism in “Rain Dance,” *Sextant*’s artwork includes a mixture of sci-fi, Buddhist, and African imagery: below a large Buddha head, a griot-like figure in a gold cloak points toward a winged figure hovering above an Egyptian pyramid, all the while silhouettes of horse-like creatures stand in the distance behind two African men (likely dancers of the Masai tradition) swaying underneath the moon. Just as they did for Davis’s music, these images would have immediately connoted to the listener a connection to Africa.



Figure 5. Front (left) and back (right) covers of *Crossings*.

¹²⁵ Gluck, *You'll Know When You Get There*, 120.

¹²⁶ Pond, *Head Hunters*, 33.



Figure 6. Front (right) and back (left) covers of *Sextant*.

None of Mwandishi’s albums would ever become financially successful, in contrast to Davis’s albums that inspired both their artwork and many of their musical qualities, and Mwandishi would ultimately split up in the spring of 1973 after Hancock could no longer fiscally support the band. In his next group, though, Hancock would immediately develop new ways of alluding to Africa while playing a musical style that primarily emphasized funk.

1973: *Head Hunters*

Herbie Hancock’s new band, the Headhunters, fit more clearly into a funk aesthetic than Mwandishi, while their music would also be more cleanly produced in the studio and less improvised in its totality. However, they also incorporated several African and Afro-diasporic allusions and musical practices into their first album, *Head Hunters*. This is far from a unique situation, as seen in Miles Davis’s most funk-oriented album, *On The Corner*. In fact, Kevin Fellez has argued that funk musicians in the 1970s used this style, more generally, “to revitalize moribund connections to Africa and preslave pasts while looking to futures beyond

contemporaneous conditions of racial discrimination.”¹²⁷ Moreover, in contrast to *On The Corner*, the music of *Head Hunters* can be viewed as Afrofuturistic in its appropriation of older Afro-diasporic musical practices and its emphasis on new technology, most notably through the use of various synthesizers and the Fender Rhodes, as well as various post-production effects and overdubbing.

One of the most widely discussed elements of *Head Hunters* in musicological writings is Hancock’s appropriation of a Ba-Benzélé Pygmy field recording in the introduction and outro to “Watermelon Man,” an imitation whose origin (an ethnographic LP called *The Music of the Ba-Benzélé Pygmies*) was not rightfully credited. Steven Feld has discussed the ethical issues of this and similar situations in popular music at length in his article, “Pygmy POP,” noting that Hancock viewed this imitation as ethnic affinity, calling it “a brothers kind of thing.”¹²⁸ Perhaps as an act of self-pardoning, Hancock has suggested that the idea to incorporate a recreation of this field recording was that of *Headhunters* percussionist and ethnomusicologist Bill Summers. Indeed, he does seem somewhat ignorant as to what this music was; Summers is credited as playing the “hindewhu” on this track while Hancock writes in his autobiography that they wanted to incorporate “a form of African Pygmy music called Hindewhu.”¹²⁹ Additionally, what Summers actually plays on “Watermelon Man” is a beer bottle, overdubbing five tracks to brilliantly create a hindewhu effect. As Kevin Fellez has noted, while this recycling of other music from the African diaspora can more broadly be seen through the lens of the “changing

¹²⁷ Fellez, *Birds of Fire*, 55.

¹²⁸ Steven Feld, “Pygmy POP: A Genealogy of Schizophonic Mimesis,” *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 28 (1996): 5.

¹²⁹ Hancock, *Possibilities*, 178.

same,” it is somewhat ironic that Hancock and Summers had to rely on the music industry (i.e. an ethnographic LP) to get in touch with their Pygmy brothers.¹³⁰

Aside from the hindewhu effect on “Watermelon Man,” several percussion instruments from the African diaspora are used throughout *Head Hunters*. A beaded gourd, mostly like the Cuban shekere, is prominently heard throughout much of the track, “Sly,” while other instruments like the congas, agogô bells, and log drum are noticeable on the same track and on “Chameleon.” By incorporating these instruments through various overdubs, Bill Summers adds layers of percussion to create rhythmic complexity and to add to music’s thick texture, all the while evoking Afro-Cuban and West African drumming styles, such as that of the rumba, that he learned while studying at UC Berkeley.¹³¹ Furthermore, as Steven Pond has neatly illustrated (see Figure 7), the famous bass line of “Chameleon” also strongly implies a 3-2 son clave pattern. All of these stylistic traits emphasize the notion that *Head Hunters* is not only a fusion of jazz and funk, as conventional wisdom says, but also an intersection of Central African, Afro-Brazilian, and Afro-Cuban styles, in addition to Western avant-garde art music (like Miles Davis, Hancock was deeply influenced at the time by the likes of Stockhausen and Pierre Boulez).

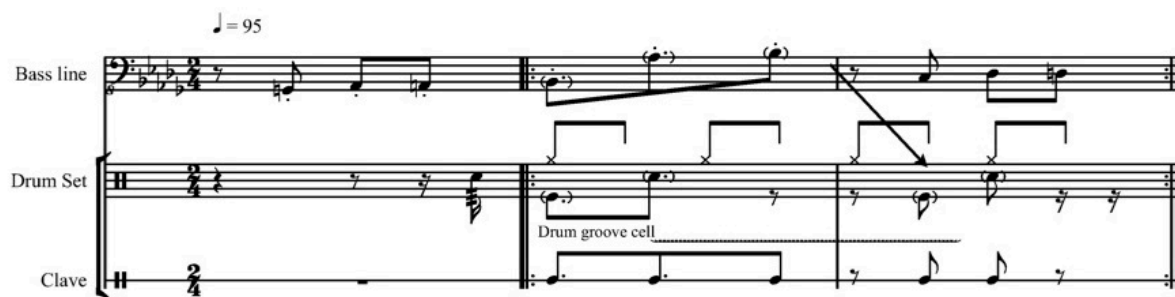


Figure 7. Comparison of “Chameleon” bass/drum set groove (top/middle staves) with 3-2 son clave (bottom staff).¹³²

¹³⁰ Fellesz, *Birds of Fire*, 214.

¹³¹ Pond, *Head Hunters*, 34.

¹³² Reproduced from Pond, *Head Hunters*, 44.

Victor Moscoso's artwork to *Head Hunters* is far less like Mati Klarwein's more primitive paintings for Miles Davis than Springett's was for *Crossings and Sextant*. Instead, it expands on the Afrofuturist elements of *Sextant*'s art while also enhancing the musical dichotomy of the African past and the African American future on *Head Hunters* itself. The front and back covers are nearly identical, each showing the band with their instruments (note the pair of shekeres prominently displayed on the lap of Bill Summers, as well as Hancock donning an Afro and talisman necklace on the back). Significantly, though, the front cover features Herbie Hancock and his keyboard in a vibrant orange-yellow color scheme against the rest of the band's purple tint. We do not see Hancock's face, though; he is wearing what is most likely a kple kple mask, commonly worn in the Baule rituals of the Ivory Coast (see Figure 8). This mask, moreover, also includes an analog VU meter where the mouth should be. By highlighting all of this in a different color, a hybrid relationship between Africa and technology is clearly established. Later albums by the Headhunters would continue to display Afrofuturistic images in their artwork, too; on 1975's *Flood*, for example, Hancock is donning an astronaut suit next to two black dancers wearing yellow and green loin cloths with red ankle cloths, possibly alluding to the cow tails worn by traditional Zulu dancers.



Figure 8. Baule kple kple mask. Wood and pigment, 15cm x 55.5cm x 101cm. Quai Branly Museum (Paris). <http://www.photo.rmn.fr/archive/95-022265-2C6NU0NIM6BP.html> (accessed January 16, 2015).



Figure 9. Front (left) and back (right) covers of *Head Hunters*.

Conclusions

In truth, Herbie Hancock's imaginings of Africa are in many ways markedly different from those of Miles Davis. In comparison to Davis's agnosticism, there is a strong spiritual

component to many of Hancock's musical decisions; in his autobiography, he claims that his Buddhist chanting led to the title of *Head Hunters* and, even before that, to his decision to move to a more Sly Stone-influenced, populist kind of funk.¹³³ While Hancock's interest in "the East" was spiritual, Davis's would be in its ability to reflect a similar identity to Africa and the struggles of African Americans. Despite his use of African and Afro-diasporic music alongside popular musical styles like funk, none of Davis's music would be considered explicitly Afrofuturist. Hancock, meanwhile, can be seen developing such ideas as far back as *Sextant* and as recently as 1994's *Dis is Da Drum*, an album that includes the use of bātà drums, djembe and other African percussion alongside hip hop staples like sampling, scratching, and rapping (Hancock described the music video for the title track as a "visual feast, with morphing totems, plants, snakes, and dancing African figures....a psychedelic jungle come to life").¹³⁴ Hancock's decision to directly imitate a recording of Central African pygmies on "Watermelon Man" is a kind of reference to Africa that Davis also never explored, though one can find similarities between this and Davis's quotations of Alan Lomax's Andalusian recordings on *Sketches of Spain*. Davis would also become much more interested in popular music styles of the African diaspora than Hancock would, at least in terms of their own music.

Even in areas where there are resemblances, it is difficult to know how much Hancock was actually influenced by Davis. The opposite, in fact, may be true in some cases; Davis would have been familiar with Mwandishi's mix of avant-garde and funk when he included Hancock on *On The Corner*. Davis was far from the only jazz musician in the 1970s wearing dashikis in concert, as well, and might well have been encouraged to incorporate Swahili song titles after moments like Hancock's conversion to "Mwandishi." These considerations aside, however, there

¹³³ Hancock, *Possibilities*, 172-173, 179.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 287.

is plenty of evidence to assume that Hancock was deeply influenced by Davis. The possibility for artistic and commercial success through a blend of avant-garde and modal jazz, American pop styles, and music from the African diaspora, as Davis did on *Bitches Brew*, would greatly influence both the Mwandishi and Headhunters bands. Hancock would lead these bands using tools he acquired from Davis, as well; Mwandishi trumpet player Eddie Henderson recalled that even mistakes would become important parts of the collective texture, echoing Davis's infamous line about the nonexistence of mistakes.¹³⁵ Other qualities that Hancock admired on *In A Silent Way* and *Bitches Brew* included collective improvisation, the use of incomplete compositional sketches, and the proliferation of percussion, all of which were essential to much of Hancock's music in the early 1970s. Finally, the power of Africanist imagery in album artwork, exemplified in Klarwein's work on *Bitches Brew* and *Live-Evil*, would clearly resonate with Hancock in his work immediately following these two albums. Furthermore, the amount of words dedicated to Miles Davis in Hancock's autobiography only serves to emphasize how significant the trumpet player would be to his former pupil's career.

¹³⁵ Gluck, *You'll Know When You Get There*, 148.

Conclusion

Having identified a variety of ways that Miles Davis incorporated imaginings of Africa in his music stretching over 40 years, from the late 1950s to the late 1980s, I return to a question I posited in the introduction: why is Miles Davis so largely left out of studies that examine relationships between jazz musicians and Africa? What is so different between him and musicians like Randy Weston, Art Blakey, and Max Roach? Beyond these questions, what do his allusions to Africa say about Davis, a man who never even stepped foot on the continent? Do they even matter?

Davis's exclusion from studies that examine jazz musicians with connections to Africa, I believe, is principally because he has not fit neatly into their common narratives; that is, narratives that have chiefly examined the ways in which jazz musicians began fusing African musical elements into their music as a way to show solidarity with both oppressed Africans and African Americans, almost exclusively during the 1950s and early 1960s and with the backdrop of the Civil Rights movement and the independence of many African countries. In sharp contrast to the likes of Max Roach and his *Freedom Now Suite*, Davis was not an outspoken activist for civil rights, or for any political purpose (his son, Gregory Davis, claims that he may not have ever even voted in an election).¹³⁶ He did not become involved with sit-ins or bus boycotts, nor would he perform at as many benefit concerts as other jazz musicians did for groups like the Congress of Racial Equality or the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (though he would play one NAACP benefit in 1961, as well as a 1964 Philharmonic Hall concert for voter registration that would produce two of his most celebrated live albums, *My Funny Valentine* and

¹³⁶ Gregory Davis with Les Sussman, *Dark Magus: The Jekyll and Hyde Life of Miles Davis* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2006), 144.

Four & More).¹³⁷ Moreover, while several jazz musicians like Dizzy Gillespie, Louis Armstrong, and Randy Weston would take State Department-sponsored tours of Africa during the 1950s and 1960s (in part) to promote American culture, capitalism, and democracy, Davis would never be asked to give such a tour; upon evaluation, as Ingrid Monson points out, the department's Music Advisory Panel gave Davis an A minus for his music a C for "personal behavior."¹³⁸

While Davis was never heavily engaged in politics, his limited activism was actually almost entirely directed to Africa itself, rather than to issues at home. On May 19, 1961, he performed a benefit concert at Carnegie Hall for the African Research Foundation, a group founded by white doctors that wanted to make health care available to newly independent African countries and whose overarching goal was to leave black Africans in charge wherever they worked.¹³⁹ Moving forward more than twenty years, Davis would also perform on the album *Sun City* (1985) as part of Artists United Against Apartheid, a recording that raised money for South African political prisoners (Sun City was a UN-boycotted entertainment resort in northern South Africa).¹⁴⁰ Not totally unlike songs like Max Roach's "Tears for Johannesburg" (part of the *Freedom Now Suite*), the songs on this album are responses to inequality in Africa and are meant to be politically charged. "Revolutionary Situation" features Davis alongside excerpts of speeches by Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu, while the second of three songs he performed on, "The Struggle Continues," includes the remaining members of his 1960s quintet and the Nigerian musician, Sonny Okosuns. These benefits, in addition to Davis's cleverly concealed signs of solidarity through titles like "Calypso Frelimo," *Tutu*, and *Amandla*, clearly

¹³⁷ Monson, *Freedom Sounds*, 191-92, 211.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, 126.

¹³⁹ Monson, "Miles, Politics, and Image," 90.

¹⁴⁰ Cole, *The Last Miles*, 427-28.

point not only to Davis's preferred, more reserved style of political engagement, but also to his long-held interest in the lives of African people.

Davis is also somewhat different from the jazz musicians widely discussed in this context because he never included African musicians in his bands. Inspired by musicians like the Nigerian Babtunde Olatunji, Roach's *Freedom Now Suite* (featuring Olatunji), Weston's *Uhuru Afrika*, and Blakey's *African Beat* would all feature African percussionists, giving each of these projects an underlying sense of authenticity (deserved or not). It must be noted, however, that all three of these musicians would also incorporate Afro-Caribbean musicians into these or similar projects, feeling that they could also emphasize a connection to Africa. This sentiment is not unlike Dizzy Gillespie's partnership with Chano Pozo or, more broadly across the African diaspora, Miles Davis's collaborations with musicians like Airto Moreira, Dominique Gaumont, and Mino Cinelu.

The rationale for Davis's lack of interest in African musicians may lie in a broader explanation of what his allusions to Africa meant. Just as Dizzy Gillespie discovered that "Mama Rhythms is Africa" and Amiri Baraka & Paul Gilroy noted the "changing same," Davis imagined Africa in myriad ways, rather than only modes pertaining to one continent or one area of that continent. To him, the music of places like Guinea, Mozambique, South Africa, Egypt, Spain, Brazil, and the Caribbean were in some way connected, and thus could all be African; as Norman Weinstein argues, "There are charged moments in imagination...where the distances between Africa and the nations of the African diaspora seem to shrink."¹⁴¹ In viewing the music from all of these disparate locations as one, Davis would have seen no need to present an "authentic" African musical experience in the conventional sense, and further knew that he could not even if he wished- recall his comments on seeing Les Ballets Africains shortly before *Kind of Blue*: "I

¹⁴¹ Weinstein, *A Night in Tunisia*, 179.

knew I couldn't do it from just watching them dance because I'm not African...I didn't want to copy that, but I got a concept from it." Unlike Randy Weston's decision to move to Morocco as part of his quest for authentic African music and the roots of jazz, or Sidney Bechet's claim that he relocated to Paris to become closer to Africa, Davis was content to learn about Africa stateside from books, records, and musicians like Mtume, all the while self-assured that he was creating music with African qualities.¹⁴²

Understanding Miles Davis's imaginings of Africa is significant because it provides a perspective to his music that is so often missing. For example, what would *Kind of Blue* have sounded like had Davis not seen Les Ballets Africains prior to its production? Would Davis have agreed to record *Sketches of Spain* without knowledge of the Moorish influence on Andalusian music? Looking at his fusion period, moreover, we must try understand this music less as a simple marriage of jazz and rock but rather a confluence of several traditions in which African and Afro-diasporic allusions are essential to the finished product, whether it is a piece composed on the thumb piano, the inclusion of a wide array of Afro-diasporic percussion, a song title, or the painting on an album's cover. Even broader than identifying Davis's imaginings of Africa, there remains much musicological research to be completed on the relationship between American jazz and Africa after the Civil Rights era, for even older musicians like Miles Davis negotiated with this primarily after the late 1960s. Many important questions remain regarding such issues as jazz's reaction to later waves of African independence, the connections between African allusions and Black Nationalist politics in the 1970s and more recent political movements, and jazz musicians like Herbie Hancock's use of Afrofuturism. Engaging more contemporary jazz music and its creators in this light will not only illuminate both continuities and original techniques of imagining Africa, but may also newly recognize musicians who have

¹⁴² Sidney Bechet, *Treat It Gentle* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1960), 45.

sought to offer an African quality to their music; no doubt have other jazz artists sought to continue learning and expressing, to use Miles Davis's words, that deep African thing.

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