

Weekend

Coming Back Strong



Miles Davis: He's doing a video because he can.

Miles Davis:

'Stronger, fiercer, more strident'

Miles Davis -- his name strikes a litany of 20th century musical history -- unmatched and still growing. His musical influence goes unquestioned, yet people follow his movements of style -- fashion (clothing), fine arts (painting, sketching, sculpture), even "What kind of car is Miles driving?" "What's Miles listening to?" "Where's he live now?"

But it is precisely this enigmatic quality in resistance to pop trendiness that characterizes the role of Miles Davis as leader, never the follower. No artist could possibly have weathered the recording/performance hiatus that interrupted Miles' career circa 1975-81, only to come back stronger, fiercer, more strident than ever. And the same storms of controversy from critics-left-in-the-dust in the past, have proposed that his recordings since the hiatus -- "The Man With The Horn" (1981), the live "We Want Miles" (1982), "Star People" (1983), and "Decoy" (1984) -- frame a new masterwork as vital, cohesive and (ultimately) influential as any phase that preceded them.

Miles Dewey Davis Jr. was born in "good old" Alton, Ill., on May 26, 1926, and his family moved to East St. Louis, Ill., the following year. His mother wanted to give him a violin for his 13th birthday, but his father (a prominent dental surgeon, occasional artist and local landowner) gave his son a trumpet instead, "because he loved my mother so much," said Miles. He learned to play the chromatic scale in grade school, immediately putting him ahead of his peers.

By age 14 or 15 he already was a card-carrying member of the local musicians' union and was steeped in the jazz scene that flourished on both sides of the big river. His teacher was Edgar Buchanan, who also turned Miles on to the jam sessions in town and taught him to play the way he still does, "fast and light -- and no vibrato."

At age 16 Miles was in his first high school band, the Blue Devils. It was during this time that Miles first crossed paths with Charlie Parker and

Dizzy Gillespie, whose music he knew by heart. His friendship was struck with Bird (only six years older than Miles) and Diz (nine years older).

He graduated high school in 1944. Once again, his mother wanted him to attend Fisk University but his father prevailed and Miles was sent to study music at Juilliard in New York City. He spent my first week in New York and my first month's allowance looking for Charlie Parker, he said later. They roomed together for a while and Bird initiated Miles into the hot club scene centered on 52nd Street. In November 1945 Miles made his first recordings as part of Bird's quintet (Savoy records) -- thus 1984 marks the 39th anniversary of those sessions, and the start of Miles' 40th year as a recording artist.

He had developed a nine-piece band by 1948 that was considered unorthodox in jazz circles -- trumpet, trombone, French horn, tuba, alto and bari saxes, and rhythm -- and their recording on Capitol brought in the talents of arrangers Gerry Evans and Gerry Mulligan (among many other contributors to the project). The so-called "cool" era was born at the onset of the '50s, and bebop would forever be associated only with the '40s.

The first half of the 1950s represented important developments for Miles' style, best catalogued on the dozen or so long-play albums he recorded for Prestige during this period (1951-56) and several appearances on the Blue Note label as well. 1955 proved to be a crucial year as he won the first down beat Critics Pool (tied with Dizzy Gillespie) and made an appearance at the Newport Jazz Festival that introduced his quintet at the time: pianist Red Garland, bassist Paul Chambers, drummer Philly Joe Jones, and John Coltrane on tenor saxophone. Miles had also conquered his heroin addiction by then, and the overall success of his music and his celebrity won him a Columbia record deal.

But the new decade was already starting to take

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UNC-CH findings

Rock videos: Enforcing stereotypes

CHAPEL HILL -- Rock videos, those slickly produced fantasies that have added the sights of television to the hot hits of popular music, may be subtly reinforcing racial and sexual stereotypes, according to a specialist in mass communications research.

But rock videos in general appear to be less violent and less sexually oriented than network programming, says Dr. Jane Brown, assistant professor of journalism at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Brown and her students recently analyzed 112 rock videos to learn some of the hidden visual messages the shows may hold for viewers.

"We now have images in our homes that can go far beyond what we've been used to, and we have little control over them. Children know it's there and they'll find it if they want to."

-- Dr. Jane Brown

Previous "content analysis" studies have examined stereotyping, sex and violence in programs aired by the major networks, but the UNC-CH work is the first reported to focus on rock videos.

Brown said 86 percent of the lead performers in the Music Television videos her group looked at were white males. What few blacks appeared in the productions were usually shown dancing in the background.

Women performers were most often depicted as passive, wandering aimlessly and as failing to get responses from other performers. White men, however, appeared to have purpose and were rarely ignored by other performers.

"Rock videos are only three years old, and we're really not sure how to study them," Brown said in an interview. "It's also not clear whether music television is an entirely new genre, just

television in three-minute segments or maybe the longest commercials ever seen."

What is clear, she said, is that Music Television (MTV), the 24-hour cable channel that exclusively plays rock videos, has had a tremendous impact on both television and the record industry.

"Most people said it would never last, but MTV now claims that 22.6 million subscribers have access to its programming, and it's one of only two cable channels that are operating in the black," she said. "Some 83 percent of the audience is between 12 and 34 years old, and boy does that make advertisers happy."

The programs also have revived the record industry and changed the way rock musicians perform and are introduced to their audiences.

"The idea now is that if you don't have a video, you aren't going anywhere," she said.

Many children have also begun watching music videos instead of Saturday morning cartoon shows. This fact, perhaps more than anything else, has spurred criticism of the medium.

"We now have images in our homes that can go far beyond what we've been used to, and we have little control over them," she said. "Children know it's there and they'll find it if they want to."

"My concern is that we may be raising a whole generation of children who have pre-formed images. In the past, we were allowed to form our own images of what music meant to us."

Brown and her assistants found that the videos displayed a large range of different activities. After singing and playing musical instruments, the two most common activities shown were interactions between two people and walking around.

"Typically, there was a female looking at a male who was looking off somewhere else and not paying attention to the female," she said. "When men were walking around, you could generally figure out why, but with women, however, you

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How Far Should A Woman Go?

Michelle Wright was a Miss America finalist, who like Vanessa Williams, posed nude in a men's magazine. Wright tells Tony Brown that she did it because she is aiming at the entertainment industry. See Wright on Brown's show on Sunday, Nov. 18 at 6:30 p.m. on WUNL-26.

Ask Yolonda

Stepdad's prowling worries 15-year-old girl, but mom ignores it

By YOLONDA GAYLES
Syndicated Columnist

Dear Yolonda: This is not an easy letter for me to write. It concerns a problem that I'm having with my stepfather.

A woman wrote in and said that she felt uneasy about her husband being in the presence of her daughters. Well, that reminds me about the problem I'm having with my stepfather. He has not physically put his hands on me, but living in the same house with

him scares me. He does strange things -- like the time he came into my bedroom and stood over my bed.

Well, unlike the previous story, my mother does know about the situation between me and my stepfather. I've gone to her and tried to tell her about her husband, and why I don't trust him, but she thinks I'm lying. One time she told me that I just don't want to see her happy. Another time she told me that if her husband does stare at me, much of it is due to the way I dress.

I'm miserable living in this house, but I have nowhere else to live. I'm 15, and I have no one who will believe me. Why does my

mother think I'm lying?

Dear Candy: Well, because it's very difficult for a woman to accept an allegation that her husband would be interested in her daughter.

But for whatever the reason, you're in an unfair situation and I urge you to do something before things get out of hand.

Talk this situation over with one of your counselors at school. He or she will follow up and make a referral, if necessary.
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