The production of *Miles Ahead.* Jazz in the mainstream and the formation of the canon

Fernando J. Ortiz de Urbina Rodríguez
(Open University, UK)
fer_urbina@yahoo.com

BIBLID [2605-2490 (2018), 1; 23-38]

The production of *Miles Ahead.* Jazz in the mainstream and the formation of the canon

Miles Davis's second album for a major label, *Miles Ahead*, established him in mainstream culture. It resulted from the conjunction of maverick musicians and their producer working under the umbrella of a major corporation. This meeting of forces made this album thrive, but its own weight diminished one of its tributaries' importance by mistitling one of its pieces.

Keywords: *Miles Ahead*, Miles Davis, Gil Evans, George Avakian, Columbia Records, arrangements, record production, Ahmad Jamal.

La producción de *Miles Ahead*. Jazz, cultura popular y la formación del canon

Miles Ahead fue el segundo disco de Miles Davis para un sello importante, y contribuyó a su establecimiento como músico de jazz en el imaginario popular. Aunque se publicó en un entorno dominado por los avances tecnológicos y un mercado capitalista, brota de un trabajo cooperativo entre músicos y no músicos, cuyo resultado fue una obra de arte imperecedero.

Palabras clave: *Miles Ahead*, Miles Davis, Gil Evans, George Avakian, Discos Columbia, arreglos, producción discográfica, Ahmad Jamal.

***Miles Ahead* diskoaren ekoizpena. Jazza, herri-kultura eta kanonaren sorrera**

Miles Ahead Miles Davis-ek disko zigilu garrantzitsu batentzat egin zuen bigarren diskoa izan zen eta jazz musikari gisa errotu zuen herri-imajinarioan. Teknologia aurrerapenek eta merkatu kapitalistak menderatutako ingurunean argitaratu bazen ere musikari eta musikari ez direnen arteko lan kooperatibotik ernetu zen, horren emaitza artelan hilezkorra izanik.

Gako-hitzak: *Miles Ahead*, Miles Davis, Gil Evans, George Avakian, Columbia Records, moldaketak, disko ekoizpena, Ahmad Jamal.

musikene

Dedication:

In memory of George Avakian (1919-2017)

Introduction

Recorded in May and August 1957, *Miles Ahead* — Miles Davis's second album for Columbia Records — is a ten-part concerto for flugelhorn and a 19-chair orchestra conceived by Davis and arranger Gil Evans as a suite of themes collated from a variety of sources. It has generally been lauded by commentators and critics — Max Harrison, not given to pleasantries, considered it "life-enhancing" (Harrison, 1997, p. 92) —, and has remained in catalogue ever since it was released in late 1957 (Cugny, 1989, p. 120). As the story goes, a last-minute appearance by Davis at the first Newport Jazz Festival in July 1955 was the push producer George Avakian needed to finally sign him to Columbia. For Davis — who pleaded with Avakian whenever he saw him (Carr, 1998, p. 87; Szwed, 2002, p. 117) — this meant leaving behind specialist labels for one of the "Big Four" record companies.[1]

Jazz histories tell how it became separated from popular music at the time it evolved from swing to bebop in the mid-1940s (Gioia, 1997, p. 204; Harrison, 1997, p. 246; DeVeaux & Giddins, 2009, p. 279). However, while remaining at the avant-garde of music and recording technology, this is the record which turned Miles Davis into a popular figure beyond the realm of jazz (Barfe, 2005, p. 181). It is a jazz album which was produced through methods better identified with mainstream popular music, fitting Simon Frith's vision of jazz as depending "on keeping its mainstream and avant-garde expression in tension" (Frith, 2007, p. 19). As an instance of an imbalance in that tension, I will also examine the mistitling of Ahmad Jamal's "Medley" as "I Don't Wanna Be Kissed (by Anyone but You)" in Davis's album, and its implications regarding the canons of jazz and popular music.

Columbia records, the LP, and George Avakian

By the mid-1950s, Columbia Records Inc., part of the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), kept a roster of classical and jazz artists — such as Leonard Bernstein, Glenn Gould, Erroll Garner, and Louis Armstrong — which can be described as popular. However, in its popular music catalogue, the label showed a conservative slant: in

1. The other three being, at the time, RCA, Decca, and Capitol (Barfe, 2005, p. 187).

Jazz-Hitz, 01 (2018), pp. 23-38
ISSN 2605-2490, e-ISSN 2605-2555

1956 — with both singers aged 21 — it signed Johnny Mathis, while direct rivals RCA went for Elvis Presley. With regard to physical formats, Columbia had the upper hand, having introduced the 33-RPM long-play disc back in 1948 (Wilentz, 2012, p. 127). The company is customarily described as the initiator of the "LP" — their trademark (Marmorstein, 2007, p. 165) — in terms of technology, but it also played a role in turning the new format into a distinctive musical entity: LPs like the original cast recording of *My Fair Lady*, one of Columbia's big hits of 1956, were produced not as a mere duplication of a performance, but as something designed specifically for an audience at home (Sanjek, 1996, p. 353). Besides the format, Columbia also provided exceptional recording facilities: from 1949 to the early 1980s, these included an abandoned Armenian church at 30th St in Manhattan (Simons, 2004, p. 24). Now demolished, it occupied a perimeter of about 100 feet with a 100-foot high ceiling, an enormous room equipped with the latest technology, "including a vast collection of Neumann U47 and M49 microphones" (Simons, 2004, p. 25).

Of Armenian descent himself and born in Russia in 1919, by his late teens George Avakian was already writing about jazz for music magazine *Tempo*, and while a student at Yale University he pioneered the release of archive recordings at Columbia (Kernfeld, 2002). By 1955, he was responsible for most of the jazz output at the label, both current and reissue, but this only represented about 15% of Avakian's work (Tanner, 1955, p. 7; Barfe, 2005, p. 179). His mission statement was, in his own words, to "produce the most imaginative and most profitable pop albums [he could] think of" (Hentoff, 1956, p. 18). In the context of Columbia's commitment to the LP, and with regard to jazz, by 1956 Avakian had already produced two successful Louis Armstrong albums devoted, respectively, to W. C. Handy and Fats Waller, as well as Duke Ellington's comeback LP, *At Newport*.[2] At age 37, Avakian was already considered a veteran jazz producer (Hentoff, 1956, p. 17).

Avakian had three ideas for the newly-signed Davis: do a large-scale project with Davis as the only soloist, taking advantage of Columbia's technical and financial clout; request a new composition from Davis, as he had done with Ellington for *At Newport*, whose title would be "Miles Ahead"; and let Davis choose the arranger (Avakian, 1996, p. 32). Producer's ingenuity aside, around the time Avakian imagined this project, the output of albums was overtaking that of singles for the first time and, in particular, jazz albums were showing "strong gains in terms of variety" (Grevatt, 1956, p. 18). Within that trend, by the time *Miles Ahead* was published a year later, Columbia — that is, Avakian — would have five albums among the eight

2. *Plays W. C. Handy* (CL 591), *Satch Plays Fats* (CL 708), and *At Newport* (CL 934), released in 1954, 1955, and 1957, respectively.

best-sellers in jazz (Billboard, 1957, p. 6). As it was reported at the time, Avakian consistently outsold most of the competition (Hentoff, 1956, p. 17).

By the mid-1950s, parts of Avakian's job as a producer, namely overdubbing and tape-splicing, were neither uncommon and, significantly, nor hidden from the general public. Far from it, they were used as promotional hooks, as it was done in 1947 when Jascha Heifetz recorded both parts of Bach's *Concerto in D Minor for Two Violins and Orchestra* (Billboard, 1947, p. 144). In popular music, Les Paul's methods were part of the publicity for his heavily overdubbed records with Mary Ford in the early 1950s (Clarke, n. d.). In jazz, back in 1941, promotional photographs were distributed to show Sidney Bechet's feat of recording all instruments for one disk.[3] Nonetheless, 15 years later it was deemed necessary to publicly debate post-production techniques vis-à-vis artistic honesty, when Lennie Tristano had to defend overdubbing and tape-editing in an interview for *DownBeat* (Hentoff, 1956, pp. 11-12, 42).

Regarding the role of technology in the production of musical art, by 1955 Columbia had began their historic partnership with Glenn Gould, a young and eccentric piano virtuoso who would become vocally opposed to the idea of recording as mere representation, favouring detail and precision over naturalism (Hecker, 2008, p. 79). It is significant that *Miles Ahead* was produced at the very label where Gould, who saw performance as a supply of raw material for assembly or reconstruction, would become obsessed about tape-editing (Hamilton, 2003, p. 354). On his part, Avakian was clear on how he was to use his then new standing within the corporation — after a promotion to director of the "pop album department" in February 1957 (Billboard, 1957, p. 20) —, and its state-of-the-art facilities and technology. As he put it himself, "if it is possible to improve the performance artistically, without hurting the artist in any way, I owe it to the artist to use the processes that are available to me" (Hentoff, 1956, p. 53).

Avakian applied in practice what has been enunciated from a theoretical point of view: the end-product in recorded music is, by definition, mediated by engineers and producers (Hamilton, 2003, p. 351). Whereas colleagues such as Blue Note's Alfred Lion endorsed a naturalistic view of authenticity in jazz — its "spontaneous immediacy" — Avakian was vindicated both by the musicians themselves, and by recordings as significant as Duke Ellington's *At Newport* and Louis Armstrong's "Mack the Knife" (Hentoff, 1956, pp. 53-54). Davis himself embraced that "Gouldian" approach from his very first albums at Columbia, *Round About Midnight* and *Miles Ahead* — tape-splicing in both, no overdubbing in the former (Fine, 2014, p. 98) —,

3. "Blues of Bechet" b/w "The Sheik of Araby" (Victor 27845).

Jazz-Hitz, 01 (2018), pp. 23-38
ISSN 2605-2490, e-ISSN 2605-2555

which would climax a decade later on *Bitches' Brew*, with its music cut, re-arranged, and spliced by Teo Macero without Davis being present (Frith & Zagorski-Thomas, 2016, p. 6). Thus, Davis and his producers aligned themselves with Glenn Gould in taking the recording, not as mere representation, but as a work unto itself (Freeman, 2005, p. 87).

The musical direction of Gil Evans

Born in Toronto, Canada, in 1912, Gil Evans showed musical values which "owed more to bebop and the French impressionistic composers than to swing" and, aged 45 when *Miles Ahead* and *Gil Evans & Ten* — his own first recording as a leader — were published, could be justly described as a late bloomer (Davis, 1990, p. 28).[4]

Seven years after the last session for what would become *Birth of the Cool*, *Miles Ahead* closed a hiatus during which soloist and arranger had not been in touch, let alone work together. Whereas Davis's travails are well documented, less is known about Evans's whereabouts: he worked as an accompanist, and freelanced as an arranger, all with little visibility, among other reasons because he refused to work for less than "scale" — the minimum salary established by the musicians' union — since, as he told Nat Hentoff in 1957, he was "enough of a union member to refuse" (Hentoff, 1960, p. 174).

Luckily for Davis and Evans, Avakian had the determination and the means to produce the best possible recording out of the performances registered in the studio. This would prove to be indispensable, given the difficulties posed by Evans's music regarding sound textures and his convoluted notation. As Scott Reeves summarized it,

> [Evans and Ellington] drew on sources of material and rhythms not typically associated with the jazz idiom. Each in his own way combined traditional instruments in innovative ways and expanded the tonal spectrum of the jazz orchestra. Both wrote melodies of an improvisational character and developed personal means of incorporating dissonance within a traditional harmonic context (Reeves, 2002, p. 3).

What brought Evans and Davis together originally was, rather than music, sound (Chambers, 2002, p. 7). Evans's originality regarding timbre and texture are undis-

4. *Gil Evans & Ten*, recorded in September 1957 and released c. March 1958 by Prestige Records as PRLP 7120.

puted (Hodeir, 1986, p. 154; Lajoie, 2015, p. 19). From his time as Claude Thornhill's chief arranger, Evans's work consisted in the ruthless and almost total eradication of clichés, especially those established in the swing era (Harrison, 1991, p. 140). To that end, he blended instruments, not by section, but "in an almost infinite variety of ways" (Harrison, 1991, p. 133).

With Avakian's support, Evans formed an orchestra modelled, like the *Birth of the Cool* nonet, on Claude Thornhill's. From that idiosyncratic big band, Evans brought in two French horns and one tuba (Hentoff, 1960, p. 169; Sidran, 1995, p. 17). This added weight to an already expanded brass contingent — five trumpets, four trombones — towering over a woodwind section reduced from the regular four or five saxophones to four chairs comprising a sole saxophone — alto — and one bass clarinet, plus several combinations of clarinets, flutes and oboe. With this set-up, achieving a balance between sections and instruments was only feasible in the recording studio. As Ian Carr put it, quoting Max Harrison, Evans's sound combinations were "new not only to jazz writing but to all orchestral music", and not self-balancing acoustically (Carr, 1998, p. 110).

Similar contemporary ensembles rarely reached the size granted to Evans. Besides conventional big bands, in the arranger-focused Jazz Workshop series produced by RCA between May 1955 and December 1956, the average formation was the octet, while, also in 1956, Teddy Charles recorded for Atlantic with a ten men ensemble.[5] *Miles Davis + 19: Miles Ahead* — the complete title on its cover — proudly doubled those numbers. This is one of the reasons why executing and recording the music in all the Davis-Evans Columbia LPs would become a daunting task, but more so in *Miles Ahead* as the pioneering effort for that kind of orchestra with Davis as only soloist (Owens, 1995, pp. 232-233). On a par with his creativity, Gil Evans's arrangements are renowned for their difficulty, so much so that they were used as punishment in later editions of Thornhill's orchestra (Chambers, 1997, p. 30). As Gunther Schuller put it, "Evans succeeded in preserving, even in his most elaborate scores, the essential spontaneity and improvisatory nature of jazz, achieving a rare symbiotic relationship between composed and improvised elements" (Chambers, 2002, p. 15). Rather than just a series of solos improvised over written ensemble passages, in Evans's case this entailed music composed to sound as if it were improvised, achieving jazz theorist George Russell's tenet that the finest jazz composition "might even sound more intuitive than a purely improvised solo" (Harrison, 1991, p. 134).

---

5. *The Teddy Charles Tentet* (Atlantic 1229). RCA's Jazz Workshop series included LPs by Al Cohn (LPM 1161), Hal Schaefer (LPM 1199), Manny Albam (LPM 1211), Billy Byers (LPM 1269), Hal McKusick (LPM 1366), Johnny Carisi (scheduled as LPM 1371, unreleased until 1987), and George Russell (LPM 1372).

Jazz-Hitz, 01 (2018), pp. 23-38
ISSN 2605-2490, e-ISSN 2605-2555

To that end, Evans wrote exacting scores and parts, as remarked by Johnny Carisi and Gerry Mulligan, both mentored by Evans in the late forties (Stein Crease, 2002, p. 132). According to Carisi, Evans did "notate [scores] the way you would play them exactly. So if you could read them exactly, that's how they would sound, just as if you'd improvised a line, even if the whole band was playing it" (Stein Crease, 2002, p. 144). Mulligan himself highlighted how Evans's notation made parts look harder to play than they were (Hentoff, 1960, p. 175). As for Davis's input in the arrangements, although it is known that he and Evans worked together, in 1960 he described their method as "I give [Evans] an outline of what I want, and he finishes it" (Crawford, 1997, p. 107). Davis's keenness to delegate on *Miles Ahead* has also been confirmed by Avakian (Rowe, 2017).

Although the ensembles Evans put together for Miles Davis do not constitute an established orchestra, they included some permanent members: Romeo Penque and Danny Bank on woodwinds, as well as Bernie Glow, Ernie Royal, and Louis Mucci on trumpets, played in all 13 recording sessions Evans did for Davis and Columbia between 1957 and 1960. In the trumpet section, although Glow would play most of the lead parts, Evans would also assign them to Royal or Mucci, even within the same piece, depending on the sound he was looking for (Kirchner, 1996, p. 61). Evans's selectiveness is proven by the fact that, in the four sessions for *Miles Ahead*, out of 19 chairs there were only two minor substitutions: one in the trombones, and one in the woodwinds. Furthermore, some of the players in *Miles Ahead* were long-time Evans associates, such as Mucci, Carisi, Lee Konitz and Bill Barber, all Thornhill alumni (and the latter three also veterans of *Birth of the Cool*). As Evans explained himself,

> [My arrangements a]re very personal, and they're not so highly stylized that it's easy to catch on to what I have in mind right away. My arrangements don't sound right unless they're played by a certain group of players and unless I've rehearsed them (Hentoff, 1960, p. 175).

Despite the musicianship and dedication invested in this music, the end result was far from perfect. As trombonist Joe Bennett explained, lack of rehearsals due to union rules made it necessary to mail the music "to the players — with each individual name printed on his part — before the dates" (quoted in Kirchner, 1996, p. 49). There were other problems, as exposed below by an anonymous musician hired for the recording of *Porgy and Bess* — a year after *Miles Ahead* — who also told Max Harrison about insufficient rehearsals as well as poor performances marring the potential of arrangements as written, and Evans's sometimes equivocal conducting. On the other hand, this anonymous player also pointed out that

> one could say that it is remarkable that both LPs are as good as they are. Whatever excellence those recordings possess I would attribute (aside from Gil's own magnificent scores, of course) primarily to the supreme abilities of some of the leading players, like Ernie Royal, Bill Barber, the very fine reed men (on all manner of flutes and bass clarinets), and in general the respect which all of us, despite what I've said above, have for Gil Evans (Harrison, 1991, pp. 141-142).

A		B	
1	"Springsville" (Carisi)	1	"Blues for Pablo" (Gil Evans)
2	"The Maids of Cadiz" (Leo Delibes)	2	"New Rhumba" (Ahmad Jamal)
3	"The Duke" (Dave Brubeck)	3	"The Meaning of the Blues" (Bobby Troup/Lea Worth)
4	"My Ship" (Kurt Weill/Ira Gershwin)	4	"Lament" (J. J. Johnson)
5	"Miles Ahead" (Miles Davis/Gil Evans)	5	"I Don't Wanna Be Kissed" (Harold Spina/John Elliot)

Table 1: *Miles Ahead* LP track list

As stated above, in order to exploit the possibilities offered by the LP, *Miles Ahead* is formed of ten discreet pieces linked to form a suite, seemingly Evans's idea (Harrison, 1991, p. 139). Evans drew mostly from jazz, but also popular music, musical theatre, and Western art music to choose seven of the ten pieces, even though he considered himself a "commercial arranger" who wrote "popular music" (Harrison, 1997, p. 108; Lees, 2000, p. 72).[6] It was through his arrangements and choice of instruments that he achieved such a coherent "unity of style" as to dissolve the original pieces and their contexts, and take the suite as a single work (Hodeir, 1986, p. 154). This unity of style came about not only by the usual paraphrases and re-harmonisations; as Francis Davis put it,

> much of Evans's "improvisation" takes place beforehand, on score paper or in his imagination [...] he tends to isolate and expand discreet elements of his source materials [...] and discard the rest. As a result, his interpretations have the aura of newly imagined works, ontologically independent of their original inspirations (Davis, 1990, p. 29).

6. All but "Miles Ahead", a new composition, and Davis's choices, "The Duke", and "New Rhumba" (Szwed, 2002, p. 140). Evans's choices came from jazz, but also Western art music ("The Maids of Cadiz"), musical theatre ("My Ship"), and popular music ("The Meaning of the Blues").

Jazz-Hitz, 01 (2018), pp. 23-38
ISSN 2605-2490, e-ISSN 2605-2555

A prime example of Evans's "written improvisation" for the ensemble can be found in bars 116-132 of "Springsville", the opening track of the album, where Evans also added a whole new section absent in the original recording by Johnny Carisi.[7] While he followed the original structure of the piece, Evans notably increased both its tempo and its length, from 116 bars and 150 BPM, to 194 bars and 233 BPM, respectively. In this piece, he also took a short lick by guitarist Barry Galbraith from Carisi's recording, in bar 90, and had Davis paraphrase it in bar 147, one of several instances in the album where Davis was provided by melodic ideas by Evans (Cugny, 1989, p. 113).[8]

The end result

Whereas the musical aspects of the suite *Miles Ahead* have been widely discussed, little heed has been paid to its sequencing in the original LP, which sounds like a producer's job, even if Avakian attributes it to Evans (Avakian, 1996, p. 33).[9] Since the introduction of the LP, Avakian had "decided to follow the 16-inch radio program transcription of placing a particularly strong performance — 'a grabber' —" at the beginning and the end of each side of the record (Szwed, 2002, p. 141). In *Miles Ahead* the pieces are evenly distributed by tempo, with some obvious "grabbers" like Davis's clarion call opening the record, or the Berg-esque pyramid and its retrograde placed, respectively, before "The Meaning of the Blues" and at the very end of the album (Lajoie, 2015, p. 28).[10] However, for all the care and effort put into the suite and its sequencing for the LP, these were readily discarded when the music was marketed in three 7-inch EPs, for which all ten tracks were duly chopped apart and positioned in a different sequence.[11]

---

7. Recorded in June 1956, but unreleased until 1987 (V. A., 1987).

8. Miles plays it in bar 147 of all eight complete and incomplete takes and rehearsals released in 1996, but one (rehearsal with piano, CD5 #2) (Davis, M. & Evans, G., 1996). In the original, Galbraith plays five descending eighth-note triplets at bar 90 (V. A., 1987).

9. I have found no discussion of the sequencing of *Miles Ahead* in any of the sources listed at the end of this article, except for the attribution to Evans by Avakian.

10. In relative terms, rounded to the nearest half-point and the slowest tempo being "1", as sequenced in the LP, tempi are 4, 1, 2, 1, 2; 1, 1.5, 1, 1, 3.

11. Columbia B-10411: "My Ship", "Lament" b/w "New Rhumba".
Columbia B-10412: "Blues for Pablo", "The Maids of Cadiz" b/w "I Don't Wanna Be Kissed".
Columbia B-10413: "The Meaning of the Blues", "Springville" [sic] b/w "The Duke", "Miles Ahead".
In relation to the LP, the sequence would therefore be 4, 9, 7; 6, 2, 10; 8, 1, 3, 5.

Miles Ahead was an instant success in all respects (Szwed, 2002, p. 144). Marketed as a jazz album, in terms of post-production this composite suite comprised everything from a lone single-take track to a three-minute piece made of nine splices and several overdubs.[12] Unaffected by Tristano's polemic one year prior,[13] *Miles Ahead* sold so fast, that the original cover could be changed at Davis's request, from a white model on a sailboat — a link to the Newport Jazz Festival and the idea of Miles moving ahead (Szwed, 2002, p. 140) —, to his own image playing, not flugelhorn, but trumpet. Incidentally, this followed on the first 12-inch LP issue of *Birth of the Cool* earlier that year with a similar image by the same photographer, Aram Avakian, George's brother.

The wide consensus around *Miles Ahead*'s musical value should not discount the weight added by the label publishing it (Carr, 1998, p. 110; Lajoie, 2015, pp. 12, 24). For instance, Willie Ruff, at the time an unknown young African-American French horn player said that "having my name on *Miles Ahead* and [...] *Porgy and Bess*, brought me and my horn more recording work and recognition than I ever expected" (Ruff, 1991, p. 279). As Avakian put it, this first Davis-Evans album on Columbia was "something which, to my surprise, became extremely commercial, sold a million copies and made [Davis] a big name in Europe" (Barfe, 2005, p. 181).

Given the role of *Miles Ahead* in establishing Davis, its relevant singularities are worth pointing out. On the one hand, Davis plays exclusively the flugelhorn throughout — a feat he would never repeat (Carr, 1998, p. 112) — producing a sound very different to his iconic closely-miked, stemless-Harmon-muted trumpet (Skea, 2001, p. 62). On the other, and following on Robert Walser's interpretation of Davis's music in his essay "Out of Notes: Signification, Interpretation, and the Problem of Miles Davis", *Miles Ahead* affirms the non-modernist nature of Davis's work, given that, as a Columbia release, it was certainly not "autonomous from mass culture" (Walser, 1993, p. 346). Besides, by replacing the original contexts of the original pieces with the new one provided by Evans's arrangements, Davis and Evans avoided any constraints from genre boundaries (Walser, 1993, p. 349).

In his essay, Walser also discusses Davis's effect on audiences worldwide with regard to aspects such as his technical ability and the production of meaning, or "signifyin'" (Walser, 1993, p. 345). Regarding Davis's technical ability, while

---

12. The master of "The Meaning of the Blues" is take 2. The master of "I Don't Wanna Be Kissed" jumps to and fro takes 2, 5, 3, 5, 3, 5, 3, 5, 8, and 2 (Schaap, 1996, p. 170).

13. After *DownBeat* published Nat Hentoff's article "Multitaping isn't phony: Tristano" referenced above (May 16, 1956; p. 11-12, 42), the same magazine carried letters to the editor by pianist John Mehegan replying to Tristano ("Those Tristano Tapes", June 13, 1956; p. 4) and by saxophonist and Tristano disciple Warne Marsh replying to Mehegan ("Obligated", July 11, 1956; p. 4).

Jazz-Hitz, 01 (2018), pp. 23-38
ISSN 2605-2490, e-ISSN 2605-2555

Walser rightly dismisses "objective musical standards" as insufficient to assess Davis's relevance, when he recorded *Miles Ahead*, Davis did mind his own mistakes enough to engage in multiple takes as necessary and allow Avakian to gloss over them (Walser, 1993, p. 344). Furthermore, Walser appeals to collaboration and collective work as he criticizes the reading of jazz as an individualistic expression, which he links to the support lent by United States State Department and its use of it as "propaganda for capitalism" (Walser, 1993, p. 348). *Miles Ahead* is one case not fitting that model: it is a work of music which would not exist without the mutual collaboration between three people, an African-American and two immigrants — a Canadian and an Armenian —, and the technical and financial means provided by a mainstream corporation in Eisenhower's USA. Indeed, as a major record label in the United States at the time, Columbia contributed to enhance *Miles Ahead*'s prominence. In particular, whatever place the ten pieces in the album occupy in posterity is arguably due to their inclusion in *Miles Ahead*. Regarding posterity and canons, as well as identity and provenance, it is worth inspecting its closing piece.

Ahmad Jamal's "Medley"

The last track on *Miles Ahead* is entitled, in all its editions, "I Don't Wanna Be Kissed (by Anyone but You)", a song credited to Harold Spina and Jack Elliott. As recorded by Davis, it is an almost verbatim arrangement for orchestra of "Medley", the only piece in Ahmad Jamal's 1955 LP *Chamber Music of the New Jazz* carrying no credits, neither on the sleeve, nor on the label.[14] This has been dismissed as a mistitling — implicitly in the original release, explicitly in more recent times — and the new name and credit of the piece stamped by Columbia on *Miles Ahead* in 1957 has since been accepted in all literature, both scholarly and otherwise (Schaap, 1996, p. 178; Lajoie, 2015, p. 30). Still, during the recording sessions for *Miles Ahead*, Columbia staff referred to it as "Ahmad's Medley", "Ahmad's Tune" or "Ahmad's Miles" (Schaap, 1996, p. 178). Tellingly, in an interview in the early 1980s Jamal himself still referred to it as "Medley" (Lyons, 1983, p. 113).

According to the Oxford dictionary, a "medley" is a "collection of songs or other musical items performed as a continuous piece" (Oxford Dictionaries, n.d.). Indeed, Jamal's "Medley" includes at least two different songs: it uses "I Don't Wanna Be Kissed" for its first two 32-bar choruses. This is then followed by one 32-bar chorus

14. Argo LP-602, also the source for "New Rhumba".

of "A, You're Adorable" (a/k/a "The Alphabet Song") (Ahmad Jamal - Official Website - Discography, 2017; Ortiz de Urbina, 2017). Finally, the piece closes with 16 bars and a coda of what appears to be original music by Jamal. Regarding "A You're Adorable", according to aural evidence and available scores (Sher, 2001, p. 190), Jamal generally follows its chord progression — he uses fewer chord substitutions than he adds extensions — and, while he deviates from the original melody, this is hardly a rare occurrence in jazz. Incidentally, where Jamal stays closer to the original, on bars 65-68 and 73-76, Evans jotted down melodic ideas for Davis to play (Lajoie, 2015, p. 30).

"I Don't Wanna Be Kissed", the source for the part of the "Medley" originally identified, was recorded four times in late 1949, it never made it to *Billboard*'s "Honor Roll of Hits", and it all but disappeared after May 1950. [15] On the contrary, "A, You're Adorable" appeared regularly in said chart between March and September 1949: it was recorded by at least 13 different artists for ten commercial labels and three transcription libraries, with Jo Stafford and Perry Como competing for the best-seller spot (Billboard, 1949, p. 24). After that early burst in the market, it has remained in American culture as a nursery rhyme, and has been covered by acts as diverse as Supertramp (Discogs, n.d.), Sesame Street's Cookie Monster (Muppet Wiki, n.d.), and actor John Lithgow (Discogs, n.d.).

Through Jamal's "Medley", both songs are now part of the jazz canon under the name of the less popular of the two. This misidentification affects more than its mere title: between the wrong signifier — "I Don't Wanna Be Kissed" — and an inaccurate signified — Davis's recording —, Jamal's fundamental role as arranger/composer of this piece has effectively been banished from history. Since it would have been reasonable to presume Argo's label to be correct, albeit incomplete, the canonisation of this mismatch can only be due to both commentariat and Academia taking a decision by an anonymous Columbia staffer at face value — even the current owners of Jamal's original recording changed its title on their 2004 CD reissue.[16] Given that, instrumentation aside, the music on both Jamal's and Davis's versions is the same, this universal acceptance of Columbia's reading of the text of "Medley" points at

---

15. Doris Day's version with Ray Noble (Columbia 38679) appears to have been the most popular. The other three were by Bob Grabeau & Jan Garber (Capitol 870), Dale Nunnally & Ray McKinley (RCA Victor 20-3709), and Evelyn Knight (Decca 27000). All four appeared on *Billboard* between February and May 1950.

16. The reissue is Verve/Universal 0602498625736.

In the bibliography listed at the end of this article, any reference to the different title in Jamal's original recording is merely noted. In his liner notes to *Miles Davis - Gil Evans: The Complete Columbia Studio Recordings*, Phil Schaap dismisses the original title and says that "nobody seems to have a clue that this piece is indeed 'I Don't Wanna Be Kissed" (Schaap, 1996, p. 160). Only Lajoie (2005) notes the different chord sequence to that of "I Don't Wanna Be Kissed", but does not link it to its original title, "Medley".

Jazz-Hitz, 01 (2018), pp. 23-38
ISSN 2605-2490, e-ISSN 2605-2555

corporate — Columbia over Argo —, rather than artistic — Davis over Jamal —, hierarchies altering the canon. This misnaming of Jamal's piece also shows the schism between the worlds of jazz and popular music: what critic Max Harrison judged a "rather inconsequential" composition from a musical standpoint, Phil Schaap has subsequently described as a "hit song" on the only possible basis of its inclusion in *Miles Ahead* (Harrison, 1991, p. 139; Schaap, 1996, p. 160).

Conclusion

Miles Ahead defies a number of conventions. On first impressions, it might be merely perceived as a collection of Miles Davis's solos played over Gil Evans's backgrounds. However, a closer look reveals it as the resultant of four indispensable vectors — Davis, Evans, Avakian, and Columbia Records —, of the equilibrium and synergies between those tensions: the solos; the arrangements and sound; the original idea and risky bet; and the corporate clout in a capitalist market. Davis himself — his name, image, instrument, and solos — and the prevailing swing rhythms are the immediate jazz signifiers in the album, but it is the lush arrangements by Evans and the Sisyphean task of engraving them on vinyl what made it a singularity. Compared with contemporary arranged jazz albums, *Miles Ahead* is larger, bolder, and it draws from a wider variety of genres. In the dichotomy commerce-*versus*-art, *Miles Ahead* found a way to stand on both camps.

This is no archetypal jazz album, inasmuch as it is not a live performance recorded in a studio, targeted to a niche audience with a forecast for modest sales. In fact, some of its main features are closer to contemporary orchestral pop albums: its production values, the commercial appeal, the eclectic repertoire, the ensemble of professional virtuosi. It was indeed produced as popular music: Avakian's experience shows that his idea of the best possible album for the artist included both commercial and artistic values and, in order to realize it, he was ready to use any means necessary. On his part, Evans was adamant that he wrote popular music and, much like Avakian — nominally a pop producer — related to studio techniques, he was ready to use any piece of music he considered suitable, regardless of its original context. This shared ruthlessness and the one-upmanship between producer and orchestrator — the Ivy-leaguer and the union man — in achieving their objectives seem to be the guiding lines along which the committed support of a carefully selected orchestra and the acquiescence of the leader roll on, in a collective effort. The weight of all that heavy machinery is best illustrated by the disappearance of Ahmad Jamal's role in shaping the closing piece of the album, and Columbia's power — through a best-seller album — to unwittingly inform the canon.

Relying on the possibilities offered by the LP, *Miles Ahead* is also a stepping stone for studio experimentation. Even without a theme — beyond its sound palette and Davis's solos —, it may be considered a precedent for concept albums such as *Pet Sounds* and *Sgt. Pepper's*. The suite itself never really happened as we hear it. It was impossible for it to be recorded live in the available timescale, unlike other jazz recordings produced through a naturalist approach to recording, in practice a first-take, warts-and-all production method which — objectively and for all its aesthetic and moralistic overtones — is simpler and cheaper to carry out. If anything, *Miles Ahead* proofs that technology and the market can help the production of exceptional art, and make it available to everyone.

References

Ahmad Jamal - Official Website - Discography. (2017). Retrieved August 3, 2017, from Ahmad Jamal - Official Website: http://www.ahmadjamal.com/about/discography

Avakian, G. (1996). Miles and Gil Remembered. Liner notes, 26-37. In *Miles Davis - Gil Evans: The Complete Columbia Studio Recordings* [CD]. New York City: Sony Music Entertainment, Inc.

Barfe, L. (2005). *Where Have All the Good Times Gone? The Rise and Fall of the Record Industry*. London: Atlantic Books.

Billboard. (1947, September 20). Album Reviews. *Billboard*, pp. 48, 130-131, 144.

Billboard. (1949, July 16). The Nation's Top Tunes. *Billboard*, p. 24.

Billboard. (1957, February 23). Avakian Heads Col's New Pop LP Department. *Billboard*, p. 20.

Billboard. (1957, April 29). Avakian Sets 2 Pop LP A&R Appointments. *Billboard*, p. 23.

Billboard. (1957, October 28). Best Selling Albums - Jazz. *Billboard - Audition Supplement*, p. 6.

Carisi, J. (1987). Springsville [Recorded by J. Carisi]. On *The RCA Victor Jazz Workshop: The Arrangers* [CD]. J. Lewis.

Carr, I. (1998). *Miles Davis - The Definitive Biography*. London: Harper Collins.

Chambers, J. (1997, March 1). Sketches of Miles Davis and Gil Evans. *Coda* (272), 29-31.

Chambers, J. (2002, November). A Common Wave Form; Gil Evans and Davis. *Coda* (306), pp. 9-18.

Clarke, D. (n.d.). Paul, Les. Retrieved from *Donald's Encyclopedia of Popular Music* (formerly *The Penguin Encyclopedia of Popular Music)*: http://www.donaldclarkemusicbox.com/encyclopedia/detail.php?s=2817

Crawford, M. (1997). Miles and Gil: Portrait of a Friendship. In B. Kirchner, *A Miles Davis Reader*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution.

Cugny, L. (1989). *Las Vegas Tango: Une vie de Gil Evans*. Paris: P.O.L.

Davis, M & Evans, G. (1996). *Miles Davis - Gil Evans: The Complete Columbia Studio Recordings* [CD]. New York City: Sony Music Entertainment, Inc.

Jazz-Hitz, 01 (2018), pp. 23-38
ISSN 2605-2490, e-ISSN 2605-2555

Davis, F. (1990). *Outcats - Jazz Composers, Instrumentalists, and Singers*. New York City: Oxford University Press.

DeVeaux, S., & Giddins, G. (2009). *Jazz*. New York City: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

Discogs. (n.d.). Retrieved from Discogs.com: https://www.discogs.com/Supertramp-Crime-Of-The-Century/release/6397262

Discogs. (n.d.). Retrieved from Discogs.com: https://www.discogs.com/John-Lithgow-Singin-In-The-Bathtub/release/3132042

Fine, T. (2014). Miles Davis: The original mono recordings. *ARSC Journal*, 45(1), 98-103,114.

Freeman, P. (2005). *Running the Voodoo Down - The Electric Music of Miles Davis*. San Francisco: Backbeat Books.

Frith, S. (2007). Is Jazz Popular Music? *Jazz Research Journal*, 7-23.

Frith, S., & Zagorski-Thomas, S. (2016). Introduction. In S. Frith, S. Zagorski-Thomas, *The Art of Record Production: An Introductory Reader for a New Academic Field* (pp. 1-12). London, New York City: Routledge.

Gioia, T. (1997*). The History of Jazz*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Grevatt, R. (1956, November 3). Billboard Tab Shows LP Output Overtaking Singles. *Billboard*, pp. 18, 22.

Hamilton, A. (2003, October). The Art of Recording and the Aesthetics of Perfection. *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 43(4), 345-362.

Harrison, M. (1991*). A Jazz Retrospect*. London: Quartet Books.

Harrison, M. (1997). Jazz. In P. Oliver, W. Bolcom, M. Harrison, *The New Grove Gospel, Blues and Jazz* (pp. 223-354). London: MacMillan Reference Limited.

Harrison, M. (1997). Sheer Alchemy, for a While. In B. Kirchner, *A Miles Davis Reader* (pp. 74-103). Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution.

Hecker, T. (2008). Glenn Gould, the Vanishing Performer and the Ambivalence of the Studio. *Leonardo Music Journal*, 18, 77-83.

Hentoff, N. (1956, December 12). George Avakian. *DownBeat*, pp. 17-18, 53-54.

Hentoff, N. (1956, May 16). Multitaping Isn't Phony. *DownBeat*, pp. 11-12, 42.

Hentoff, N. (1960). The Birth of the Cool. In D. Cerulli, B. Korall, & M. Nasatir, *The Jazz Word* (pp. 166-176). London: Dobson Books.

Hodeir, A. (1986). *Toward Jazz*. New York City: Da Capo.

Kernfeld, B. (Ed.). (2002). Avakian, George. Retrieved September 4, 2017, from *Oxford Music Online*: http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/subscriber/article/grove/music/J019100

Kirchner, B. (1996). An Overview (1947-1960). Liner notes, 38-67. In *Miles Davis - Gil Evans: The Complete Columbia Studio Recordings* [CD]. New York City: Sony Music Entertainment, Inc.

Lajoie, S. (2015). *Gil Evans & Miles Davis Historic Collaborations 1957-1962*. Advance Music.

Lees, G. (2000). *Arranging the Score: Portraits of the Great Arrangers*. London: Cassell.

Lyons, L. (1983). *The Great Jazz Pianists: Speaking of Their Lives and Music*. New York City: Quill.

Marmorstein, G. (2007). *The Label*. New York City: Avalon.

Muppet Wiki. (n.d.). A, You're Adorable. Retrieved from Muppet Wiki: http://muppet.wikia.com/wiki/A,_You%27re_Adorable

Ortiz de Urbina, F (2017). Correspondence with Ahmad Jamal via e-mail on September 18, 2017.

Owens, T. (1995). *Bebop: The Music and Its Players*. New York City: Oxford University Press.

Oxford Dictionaries (n.d.). Definition of medley in English by Oxford Dictionaries. Retrieved from Oxford Dictionaries: https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/medley

Reeves, S. (2002). Gil Evans: The Art of Musical Transformation. *Annual Review of Jazz Studies*, 1-40.

Rowe, M (2017). George Avakian Interview by Monk Rowe - 4/21/1998 - Clinton, NY. Retrieved from https://youtu.be/LI5XKcirT60?t=1h2m20s

Ruff, W. (1991). *A Call to Assembly*. New York City: Viking Penguin.

Sanjek, R. (1996). *Pennies from heaven - The American Popular Music Business in the Twentieth Century*. (D. Sanjek, Ed.) New York City: Da Capo.

Schaap, P. (1996). Annotations for Alternate and Rehearsal Takes. Liner Notes, 145-164. In *Miles Davis - Gil Evans: The Complete Columbia Studio Recordings* [CD]. New York City: Sony Music Entertainment, Inc.

Schaap, P. (1996). Discography. Liner Notes, 165-194. In *Miles Davis - Gil Evans: The Complete Columbia Studio Recordings* [CD]. New York City: Sony Music Entertainment, Inc.

Sher, C. (Ed.). (2001). *All Jazz Real Book - C Version*. Petaluma, California: Sher Music Co.

Sidran, B. (1995). *Talking Jazz*. New York City: Da Capo.

Simons, D. (2004). *Studio Stories*. London: Backbeat.

Skea, D. (2001). Rudy Van Gelder in Hackensack: Defining the Jazz Sound in the 1950s. *Current Musicology*, 54-76.

Stein Crease, S. (2002). Gil Evans: *Out of the Cool - His Life and Music*. Chicago: A Cappella Books.

Szwed, J. (2002). *So What - The Life of Miles Davis*. London: Arrow Books.

Tanner, P. (1955, June). George Avakian - An Appreciation. *Jazz Journal*, pp. 7, 36.

V. A. (1987). Springsville. In *The RCA Victor Workshop: The Arrangers* [CD]. Germany: RCA/BMG (1956).

Walser, R. (1993, July 1). Out of Notes: Signification, Interpretation, and the Problem of Miles Davis. *The Musical Quarterly*, 77(2), 343-365.

Wilentz, S. (2012). *360 Sound*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books.

Delivery date: 01/11/2017
Review date: 06/02/2018
Acceptance date: 14/03/2018