

Miles Davis's 100

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1. My Old Flame

Rip Sonny Rollins, a gigantic saxophone player, who died on the eve of Miles Davis's 100th birthday. To celebrate their music in sadness,

“My Old Flame” (Arthur Johnston), *Dig*, 1956

2. Ascenseur pour l'échafaud (générique)

To celebrate the works of this musician whose 100th birthday was yesterday, let's listen to this melancholic improvised piece that opens Louis Malle's 1957 movie *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud* (Lift to the scaffold). The atmosphere is quiet but already somber, and the drama will unfold soon.

With Miles Davis on trumpet, we have René Urtreger on piano, Barney Wilen on tenor saxophone, Pierre Michelot on bass, and Kenny Clarke on drums.

“Générique”, *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud*, 1958

3. Airegin

Today, I go back to a 1954 tune recorded with Sonny Rollins, actually a composition of the saxophone player.

Percy Heath is on bass, Kenny Clarke on drums, Horace Silver on piano, Miles Davis on trumpet and Sonny Rollins on tenor saxophone.

After a characteristic afro-cuban introduction, this tune turns into pure hard bop. It's hard to realize that the rhythm section had founded the Modern Jazz Quartet a few years before. Recorded in June 1954.

“Airegin” (Sonny Rollins), *Bag's Groove*, 1954

4. Freedom Jazz Dance (Evolution of the Groove)

Tony Williams drives this tune at a ferocious pace, Herbie Hancock is on piano, Ron Carter on bass, Wayne Shorter on saxophone. No mystery that Miles Smiles...

“Freedom Jazz Dance” (Eddie Harris), *Miles Smiles*

5. All Blues



Figure 1: Miles Davis, Jeanne Moreau, Pierre Michelot, Barney Wilen (partly hidden)



Figure 2: Miles Davis, with Ron Carter, Tony Williams, and Herbie Hancock, February 1964. Photograph by Vernon Smith

Still in quintet, but several years before yesterday's piece.

Stockholm, 1960. With Miles Davis on trumpet, we have John Coltrane on tenor saxophone, Paul Chambers on bass, Jimmy Cobb on drums and Wynton Kelly, piano.

"All blues", *Live in Stockholm*, 1960

6. Nature Boy

Yet another quintet, but we depart from the piano/bass/drums/sax/trumpet: here we have vibraphone (Teddy Charles) and trombone (Britt Woodman), and no piano. Miles Davis is on trumpet, of course, and Charles Mingus (bass) and Elvin Jones (drums) form the rhythm section. This was recorded in 1955.

"Nature Boy" (eden ahbez), *Blue Moods*, 1955

7. Love for Sale

We are now in 1958, with Miles's great sextet on the album "58' Miles featuring Stella by Starlight". But we won't listen to the tune that stands on top of the cover, at least not today.

Cannonball Adderley is on alto saxophone, John Coltrane on tenor saxophone, Paul Chambers on bass, Bill Evans on piano, and Jimmy Cobb on drums.

“Love for Sale” (Cole Porter), 58’ *Miles feat. Stella by Starlight*, 1958

8. Half Nelson

Back to the beginnings of Miles Davis’s career, 1947, when he held the trumpet in Charlie Parker’s quintet. Max Roach is on drums, John Lewis on piano, and Nelson Boyd on bass.

“Half Nelson”, 1947

9. It never entered my mind

One of the early quintets of Miles Davis, with Red Garland on the piano (before he was fired because, so it is said, of his use of substances that made him not show up at gigs).

This comes from a series of 4 recordings from 1956 (*Relaxin’, Steamin’, Workin’, Cooking’*) that Miles had to do to fulfill his contract with Prestige, before he left for Columbia. His coworkers, John Coltrane on tenor saxophone, Philly Joe Jones on drums and Paul Chambers on bass, take on their jobs seriously.

Listen how the pianist starts with lines that sound more like a pop song than a jazz tune.

“It never entered my mind” (Richard Rodgers), *Workin’ with the Miles Davis Quintet*, 1959

10. Miles Ahead

From a 1957 big band recording, with arrangements by Gil Evans. Yet another kind of Miles.

“Miles Ahead”, 1957

11. Straight No Chaser

While Miles Davis played several tunes composed by Thelonious Monk, they only did one recording together, and it seems that it didn’t happen so well between the two musicians, except that the music that came out of it is beautiful.

Today is a 1958 recording, at Newport. John Coltrane is on tenor saxophone, Nat Adderley on alto saxophone, Jimmy Cobb on drums, and Bill Evans on piano.

“Straight No Chaser” (Thelonious Monk), *Miles Davis At Newport 1958*

12. The Sorcerer

Let’s jump to 1967. With Tony Williams on drums, Herbie Hancock on piano, Wayne Shorter on saxophone and Ron Carter on bass, Miles Davis recorded *Sorcerer*. The song that holds the album’s title is a composition by Herbie Hancock. Witchcraft, indeed.

“The Sorcerer” (Herbie Hancock), *Sorcerer*, 1967

13. June night.

A 1924 composition by Abel Baer.

Recorded live in 1960 in Stockholm, with Sonny Stitt on tenor saxophone, Paul Chambers on bass, Jimmy Cobb on drums, Wynton Kelly on piano.

“June Night (Abel Baer), *In Stockholm*, 1960

14. Someday My Prince Will Come

We all know that song through the 1937 Disney animated movie, a song that rapidly became a jazz standard.

Wynton Kelly (piano), Hank Mobley and John Coltrane (tenor saxophone), Paul Chambers (bass) and Jimmy Cobb (drums) give life to this tune.

Apparently, Coltrane didn't know the tune, he came late to the recording session and had to improvise instantly his short chorus.

“Someday My Prince Will Come” (Frank Churchill), *Someday My Prince Will Come*, 1961

15. Right Off

Is it jazz? is it rock? Does it matter? Miles Davis celebrates the achievements of Jack Johnson, an American boxer who, at the height of the Jim Crow era, became the first black world heavyweight boxing champion.

Together with Herbie Hancock on keyboards, Michael Henderson on bass, Steve Grossman on saxophone, the aggressive electric guitar of John McLaughlin, the heavy drumming of Billy Cobham, and the shrieks of Miles Davis's trumpet make this tune a moment of pure energy.

“Right Off”, *A Tribute to Jack Johnson*, 1971

16. All Blues

I tried to avoid it until now, but maybe it's a good time to listen to some piece from *Kind of Blue*.

There's a poem by Langston Hughes, from *The wary Blues*:

I would liken you
To a night without stars
Were it not for your eyes
I would liken you
To a sleep without dreams
Were it not for your songs.

The night is falling on Paris, the sky is dark blue. We're wary of the day that came, of the one that's coming. Everything's blue.

“All Blues”, *Kind of Blue* (1958)

17. Amandla

Thirty years after *Kind of Blue*, Miles had turned his back several times to the music that he had created and that had made him famous.

Marcus Miller (bass, keyboards), Kenny Garrett (alto saxophone), Omar Hakim (drums), Joe Sample (piano) set up the foundations for this funky ballad.

“Amandla” (Marcus Miller), *Amandla*, 1989

18. Seven Steps to Heaven

Back to 1963, with a bizarre recording made of 3 relatively quiet ballads with a standard rhythm section, and 3 up tunes with extraordinary musicians Tony Williams and Herbie Hancock (Ron Carter is on bass on the whole album). The first tunes are not that bad, maybe we’ll listen to one of them one day, but we need more energy to enter the week-end.

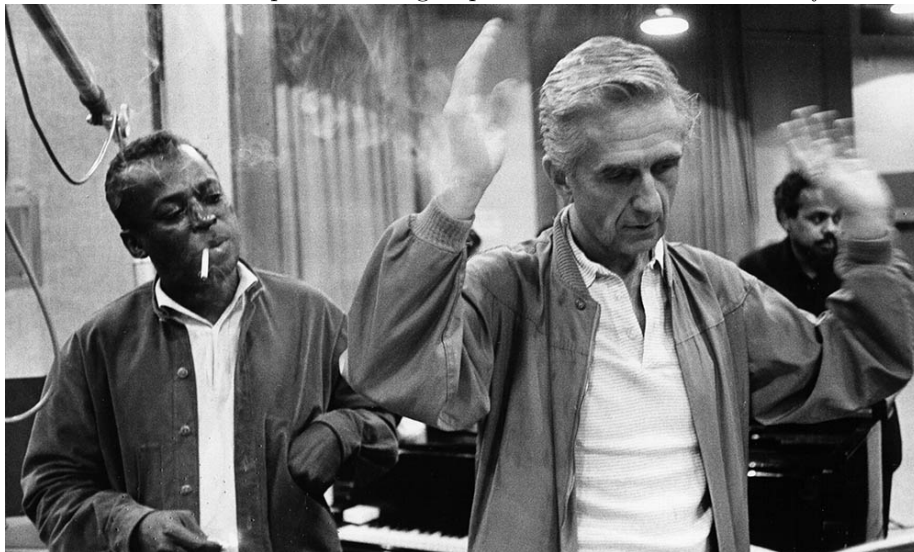
“Seven Steps To Heaven” (Victor Feldman, Miles Davis), *Seven Steps to Heaven*, 1963

19. Boplicity

This was recorded in April 1949 in NYC, in a larger ensemble than what we’re used to.

Alto Saxophone – Lee Konitz Baritone Saxophone – Gerry Mulligan Bass – Nelson Boyd Drums – Kenny Clarke French Horn – Sandy Siegelstein Piano – John Lewis Trombone – J. J. Johnson Trumpet, Leader – Miles Davis Tuba – John Barber

Three sessions of that period were grouped in the album *The birth of the cool*.



The composer is Cleo Henry. This is the maiden name of Miles Davis's mother, but is used as a pseudonym for the collaboration of Miles Davis and Gil Evans, with whom Miles would make several albums for large ensemble. The arrangement is due to Gil Evans.

"Boplicity" (Cleo Henry), *The Birth of the Cool*, 1949

20. Miles Runs the Voodoo Down

With the band he had gathered a year ago for *In a Silent Way*, Miles goes on exploring rock rhythms, but doubles on the rhythmic section: two electric pianos (Chick Corea, Joe Zawinul), two electric basses (Dave Holland, Harvey Brooks), two drum sets (Don Alias, Jack DeJohnette), plus Juma Santos (Jim Riley) on congas.

On top of that, add Miles Davis on trumpet, Wayne Shorter on soprano saxophone and Bennie Maupin on bass clarinet, and John McLaughlin on electric guitar.

A long musical trance.

"Miles Runs the Voodoo Down", *Bitches Brew*, 1969

21. Stella by Starlight

Let's spend a few days listening to various versions of one song that Miles Davis's bands magnified and that all amateur musicians enjoy botching up.

This is the 1958 version from *58 Miles*, featuring Bill Evans, Cannonball Adderley, John Coltrane, Paul Chambers, Jimmy Cobb.

"Stella by Starlight" (V. Young), *58 Miles feat. Stella by Starlight*, 1958

22. Stella by Starlight

Recorded live in Kyoto, 1964. With Sam Rivers on saxophone, Herbie Hancock on piano, Ron Carter on bass, Tony Williams on drums.

"Stella by Starlight" (V. Young), *Live in Kyoto*, 1964

Early 1964, George Coleman played the saxophone in Miles Davis's quintet, but he left in May. Miles hired Sam Rivers following the suggestion of Tony Williams, but he didn't stay long.

23. Stella by Starlight

This version is also from 1964, as the one of yesterday, but it features the standard quintet gathered by Miles at this time : Herbie Hancock, Ron Carter, Tony Williams (as yesterday) and George Coleman on saxophone.

Recorded Live at the Philharmonic.

"Stella by Starlight" (V. Young), *My Funny Valentine. Miles Davis in Concert*, 1964

There is a YouTube video where Herbie Hancock recalls the first time he played for Miles. At a time where Herbie didn't even think he would ever play with Miles, the latter asked him to "play something" and Herbie Hancock, by fear of playing something up, started that ballad, Stella by Starlight.

I wonder how that very little moment led Miles to revisit this song of his 1958 repertoire for his new quintet.

24. Stella by Starlight

Early 1964, George Coleman played the saxophone in Miles Davis's quintet, but he left in May, apparently to play with Lionel Hampton. Miles then hired Sam Rivers following the suggestion of Tony Williams, but Rivers didn't stay long. Followed a time where jazz critics wrote that possibly Miles Davis wouldn't hire a saxophonist again. And then came Wayne Shorter who would not only play for him, but also bring a number of compositions that would re-define the sound of the quintet.

"Stella by Starlight" (V. Young), *Miles in France, 1963 & 1964*

Colophon

This file stems out a series of Mastodon threads, that was unthreaded day after day from May 26, 2026 on. You can also get it on Markdown or PDF formats.

There is also a YouTube playlist that collects all of these recordings.