### Foundations for a New Mode of Expression in Modern Jazz Peter Bouffard (May 2004)

#### Abstract

### Purpose

The primary purpose of this doctoral thesis is to determine and examine factors and influences that laid the foundation for the modal expression on Miles Davis's *Kind of Blue*. Both historical and analytical approaches are employed in order to address the issue in a comprehensive manner. Modal theories, from medieval to modern, are discussed in order to establish a clear understanding of the theoretical foundations of modal jazz. Interrelated relevant areas of study include Davis's contrasting antecedent compositional and improvisatory style, his association with key individuals and their respective modal conceptions that may have influenced his modal tendencies, the music of certain "Impressionist" and "Neo-Impressionist" composers who employed modal procedures, and Davis's affinity for certain "non-Western" musical idioms that embrace distinct modal properties.

In order to understand its foundations, it is necessary to know something about the music on *Kind of Blue*. To this end, a discussion regarding certain consequential historical problems associated with the recording is presented, and an analysis of the two "quintessentially modal" pieces from the recording is offered in an effort to delineate a number of defining musical characteristics present in modal jazz that go beyond conventional descriptions.

On a broader level, the following questions are considered: Is the usage of the label "modal jazz" appropriate and how does the traditional Western European notion of modes and modality impact its meaning? Can a case be made that modality is an inherent aspect of jazz at some level? In an effort to clarify these issues, the analytical conclusions of certain scholars and the fundamental tenets of various modern modal theories are presented.

Finally, both classical and jazz works recorded prior to *Kind of Blue* are analytically examined in order to identify specific precedents and to test the validity of the term modal jazz.

#### Conclusions

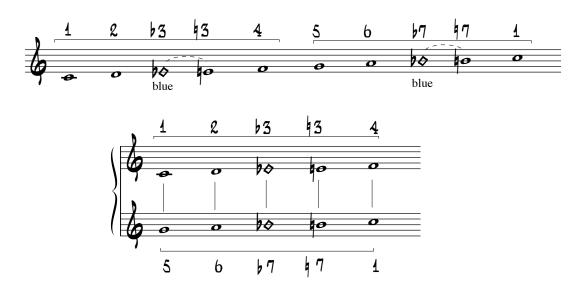
While my analysis of "So What" and "Flamenco Sketches" verifies that these pieces may be appropriately used as the point of departure for discussions concerning modal jazz, through historical accounts, it is clear that Miles Davis did not invent modal jazz. Rather, he was exposed to modal concepts through his interactions with key individuals. These relationships served to help the new musical approach percolate. My brief analytical discussion of Davis's contrasting antecedent bebop style served to emphasize the innovative features of his new mode of expression.

Though the term "modal jazz" is not reconcilable with traditional notions of modal identity, viewed through a more modern modal theoretical prism, most of the problems voiced by Kernfeld and other individuals with regard to the appropriateness of the label can be dismissed. To support this argument, modal concepts and practices from the "Impressionist" school are shown to be closely associated with modal jazz.

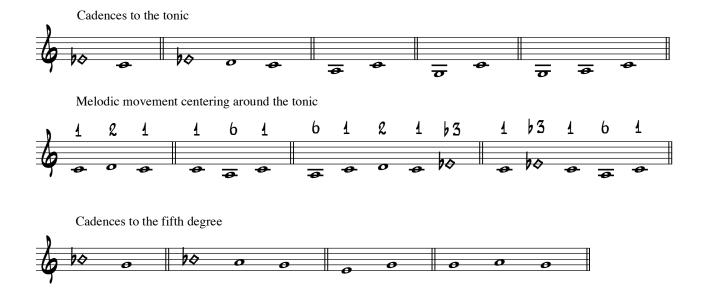
This investigation demonstrates that Davis's modal tendencies are related to, and in some respects founded upon, the distinctive modal quality found in the Flamenco melos, certain musics of Russia and its surrounding Eastern regions, and in the blues—which all share a number of similar modal characteristics. By way of the blues, it is postulated that modal characteristics have played a significant role in jazz since its inception—providing further evidence to support the validity of the term modal jazz.

Finally, to establish clear foundational modal jazz precedents, works by classical composers specifically cited by Davis, in addition to jazz works recorded prior to *Kind of Blue*, are shown to include significant modal features similar to those defined in the analysis of "So What" and "Flamenco Sketches."

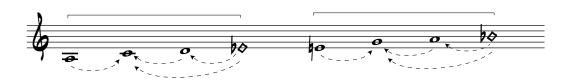
Ex. 13 Sargeant's Blues Scale



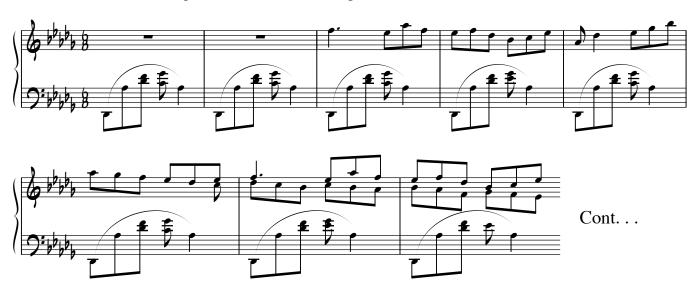
Ex. 14 Common Melodic Cadences and Patterns in the Blues



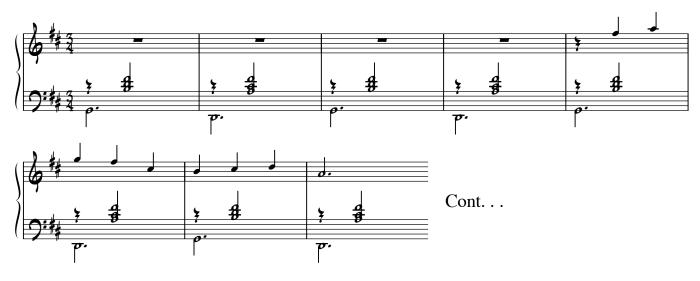
Ex. 15 Symmetrical Melodic Behavior of Two Tetrachords



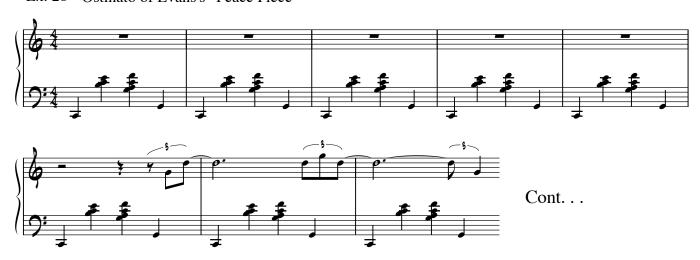
Ex. 26 Ostinato of Chopin's "Berceuse" in Db, Opus 57



Ex. 27 Ostinato of Satie's Gymnopédie No. 1



Ex. 28 Ostinato of Evans's "Peace Piece"



# Ex. 33 Ravel's *Concerto*, F# minor pentatonic motive



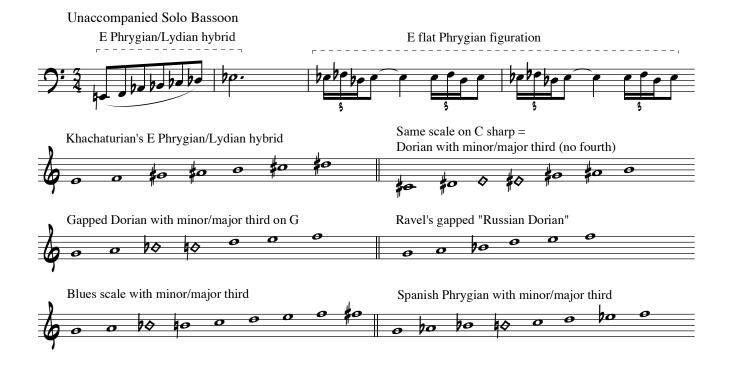
Ex. 34 Ravel's Concerto, C blues over C major/minor ostinato



Ex. 35 Ravel's Concerto, major/minor chords

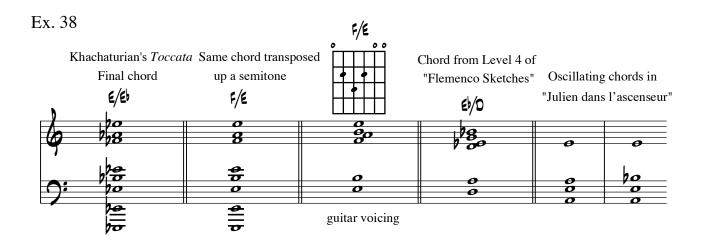


## Ex. 36 Khachaturian's Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, II, mm. 2-5



Ex. 37 Khachaturian's Concerto, II, mm. 12-13





## Ex. 46 Ahmad Jamal's version of "Pavanne"

Transcribed by P. Bouffard





