

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

1 2 $\flat 3$ $\flat 3$ 4 5 6 $\flat 7$ $\flat 7$ 1

blue blue

1 2 $\flat 3$ $\flat 3$ 4

5 6 $\flat 7$ $\flat 7$ 1

Ex. 14 Common Melodic Cadences and Patterns in the Blues

Cadences to the tonic

Melodic movement centering around the tonic

Cadences to the fifth degree

Ex. 15 Symmetrical Melodic Behavior of Two Tetrachords

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

Cont. . .

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

Cont. . .

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

Cont. . .

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

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

Unaccompanied Solo Bassoon

E Phrygian/Lydian hybrid

E flat Phrygian figuration

Khachaturian's E Phrygian/Lydian hybrid

Same scale on C sharp = Dorian with minor/major third (no fourth)

Gapped Dorian with minor/major third on G

Ravel's gapped "Russian Dorian"

Blues scale with minor/major third

Spanish Phrygian with minor/major third

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

Ex. 38

Khachaturian's *Toccata* Final chord

Same chord transposed up a semitone

Chord from Level 4 of "Flemenco Sketches"

Oscillating chords in "Julien dans l'ascenseur"

F/E

E/Eb

F/E

Eb/D

guitar voicing

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

Transcribed by P. Bouffard

INTRO *Piano ad lib . . .*

"A" SECTION

9

"B" SECTION

25

Dmi7 A7 Dmi7 G7 Dmi7 A7 Dmi7 G7

29

F6 Bbm7

35

Bbm7 Amin F#o7 Gmi7

37

F#m7 Gmi7 Ami7 Gmi7 F#m7 Gmi7 Ami7 Gmi7

"A" SECTION

41 *F#m7 Gm7 Am7 Gm7 F#m7 Gm7 Am7 Gm7*

45 *F#m7 Gm7 Am7 Gm7 F#m7 Gm7 Am7 Gm7*

EX ONLY

"C" SECTION

57 *Dm13 Ebm13 Dm13 Bm9 Bbm9*

61 *Am11 Ebm13 Dm13*

66 *Dm13 Bm9 Bbm9*

69 *Am11 D7 Gm7*

"INTERLUDE" G DORIAN

76

Guitar melody ad lib ...

77 *Gm7 Am7 Bbm7 Am7 SIMILE ...*

Piano

Bass

81

85

B \flat DORIAN B \flat Mi7 Cm7 D \flat M7 Cm7 SIMILE...

89

95

Fmi13 ad lib ...

97

Ami13 Gmi7 C9sus

101

F \sharp M7 Gmi7 Ami7 Gmi7 F \sharp M7 Gmi7 Ami7 Gmi7

"A" SECTION Piano ad lib ...

109

F \sharp M7 Gmi7 Ami7 Gmi7 F \sharp M7 Gmi7 Ami7 Gmi7

F \sharp M7 Gmi7 Ami7 Gmi7 F \sharp M7 Gmi7 Ami7 Gmi7

CONT. W/BLUES IN F...