



Masters of Innovation Series Book 1
Miles of Innovation:
Creative Lessons from the Genius of Miles Davis
By Robert Cullen and Keith & Kent Zimmerman
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Drawing from the dual backgrounds of *New York Times* bestselling authors *Keith and Kent Zimmerman* as music and popular culture biographers and *Robert Cullen*, professor, lawyer, author and expert in leadership and innovation, comes *Miles of Innovation: Creative Lessons from the Genius of Miles Davis*. In this book, the first in their *Masters of Innovation Series*, the authors hold up the life, times and creative genius of jazz legend Miles Davis as an inspiration to business leaders, entrepreneurs and students of innovation around the world. Innovation is **THE** hot business topic in this new, chaotic and disruptive world economy. Everyone is now required to innovate: employers, employees, managers, engineers and leaders from Silicon Valley to the Sudan

to Shenzhen, China. Thought leaders include academics at the Stanford Design School, Tom Kelly of the world famous design firm IDEO and professor and former managing editor at Business Week, Bruce Nussbaum, who recently wrote *Creative Intelligence: Harnessing the Power to Create, Connect, and Inspire*. ***Miles of Innovation*** explores in a provocative yet understandable manner, the creative secrets of a musical legend and how to use those secrets for their own benefit. By citing specific musical eras of Miles Davis's successful and at times controversial career in music, Cullen and "the Zimmermen" reveal to business readers a most unlikely guru from which to draw inspiration and comparison. Not everybody can be a Miles Davis, just like not everyone can become a Steve Jobs, Elon Musk or a Richard Branson. But ***everyone*** can learn from the distillation of Miles Davis's genius on how his musical output relates to the everyday tenets of managing creatives types and shepherding innovators and entrepreneurs. Creative techniques are learnable, explainable and usable; this book will isolate those tactics of ingenuity through the story of a musical mastermind.

Keith and Kent Zimmerman have co-authored over 20 pop culture books, including the 50th anniversary of the Monterey Jazz Festival. They've collaborated on books with Alice Cooper, the Hell's Angels Motorcycle Club, the Sex Pistols, Earth, Wind & Fire, Trace Adkins and the Mythbusters. For over a dozen years the Zimmermen worked in the jazz world alongside artists, radio programmers and record labels. On the academic side, Robert Cullen is a professor at Santa Clara University and teaches leadership, creative problem solving and entrepreneurship to law students and is the author of *The Leading Lawyer: A Guide to Practicing Law and Leadership*.

Miles' musical career was a bellwether of constant change, permutation and

reinvention, much like what business leaders across the world navigate on a daily, monthly and quarterly basis. Every era of Miles' career--from the Bebop and *Birth of the Cool* movement of the late 1940s until his death in 1991 meshing jazz, electronics and hip hop--are applicable to today's business strategies and management innovation.

Miles of Innovation details managerial and entrepreneurial topics that correlate with the music and spirit of Miles Davis including:

- Mastery, education, expertise and experience before innovation
- Fostering creative FLOW and the hard work of experimentation
- Developing the environment for creativity and change
- Reframing existing concepts, cross-pollinating theories and ideas from different and unrelated fields
- Finding, developing and empowering creative talent
- Partnering and collaborating with unlike minds to generate new music and new systems
- Reinvention
- Leading and transitioning from one extreme market condition to the next
- Team building while managing an organization through chaos and constraints
- And finally, managing innovation and success in lieu of inevitable burnout and decline

Miles operated in constant motion and volatility, change and flux, revolution and reincarnation. *Miles of Innovation* breaks down the Davis legacy into eight concise eras/chapters, ranging from his education at Julliard, playing with the pioneers of Bebop to his experimentation forming the unusual *Birth of the Cool* nonet ensemble. Next came

the eras of Hard Bop, his “Blue Period,” the Prestige recordings that led to his first great quintet featuring John Coltrane. Miles shook the jazz world by signing with Columbia Records, assuring his place as the world’s *Numero Uno* jazz figure. Later Davis converted to a whole new operating system by eschewing eight- and twelve-bar song structures and European scales to convert to a groundbreaking “modal” style of playing which resulted in the best selling jazz album of all time, *Kind of Blue*.

What followed were the fruitful collaborations with arranger Gil Evans, including the majestic orchestral tones of *Sketches of Spain*. Davis then formed his second “classic quintet” made up entirely of young lion creatives Herbie Hancock, Tony Williams, Ron Carter and Wayne Shorter, recording such bold improvisational works as *Miles Smiles*, *ESP* and *Sorcerer*. Riding a wave of controversy, Miles alienated his core audience by plugging in and tripping out. He electrified his music with *In a Silent Way*, *Bitches Brew*, *Live Evil* and *On the Corner*. Despite rattling his loyal core audience, he increased sales and widened his base with younger music consumers and future devotees in contemporary genres like EDM and hip hop.

Even in his final years, Miles Davis remained an innovator, rejuvenating himself by incorporating fresh elements of funk, keyboard synthesizers, avant-garde classical and hip hop beats. Months before his death in 1991, Davis acquiesced (perhaps grudgingly) to honor his legacy at the Montreux Jazz Festival in Switzerland, performing onstage alongside younger proteges in a large orchestra conducted by Quincy Jones.

Miles of Innovation features input from both business thinkers and recording artists. A *New York Times* article published November 10, 2013 (entitled “Making Sure Miles Stays Forever Young”) asserts that Miles is surely a timeless icon for all ages, and that

his estate is anxious to spread that legacy. Through their own music industry connections, the authors will reach out to the estate to see if their cooperation makes sense for the project.



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Chapter-by-Chapter Summary

Chapter/Era One: Mastery: Innovation Requires Deep Knowledge, Skills and Expertise...First!

"Sometimes you have to play a long time to be able to play like yourself." Miles Davis

Backstory: Born and raised in St. Louis, Missouri, Miles Davis takes trumpet lessons at age 13 with a teacher that wisely teaches him to play *without* a vibrato. (It becomes his sound for life.) At age 16, Miles plays professionally in clubs around East St. Louis. When vocalist Billy Eckstine visits the area, Davis sits in as third trumpet and meets saxophonist Charlie “ Bird” Parker and trumpet player John “ Dizzy” Gillespie from the Eckstine orchestra. After graduating high school, Miles moves to New York City and enrolls in the Julliard School of Music. While attending Julliard, Davis seeks out Bird and Dizzy to play their revolutionary form of jazz called Bebop. Miles drops out of Julliard, dissatisfied with its traditional Euro-centric curriculum. He becomes a seeker and thus begins his “expertise before innovation” phase. Miles learns to swim from the deep end, playing bebop onstage with Charlie Parker. Miles learns to play super fast, constantly on the brink of failure. “I wanted to quit every night,” he said.

Milestones of Innovation: *There is a powerful myth that newcomers, people with little expert knowledge, through objectivity and an inexperienced mind, can see a situation anew and deliver crucial insights, change and innovation. This is rarely true and is certainly not the case with Miles and almost all significant innovators. Innovation requires an enormous amount of specific information, practice and hands-on experience best learned through long periods of study and training. Malcolm Gladwell made famous the research that suggests it takes thousands of hours to become an elite performer. So*

says neuroscientist, musician Dr. Daniel Levitin: “The emerging picture from such studies is that ten thousand hours of practice is required to achieve the level of mastery associated with being a world-class expert—in anything.” Miles, like all the great innovators, relentlessly tries to improve, practice and play by seeking out his mentors and peers. He immerses himself as a virtual intern within the New York Bebop contingent, gigging alongside fellow rebels Bird, Dizzy, Max Roach, Bud Powell, and Thelonious Monk. In jazz as in business, missions are established and breakthroughs occur by interacting with groups—or cliques—of people who commiserate common expert knowledge, skills and experience. It also takes in-depth knowledge and skills as Miles begins his journey towards innovation after his initial education in musicology.

Chapter/Era Two: Early Stages of Innovation-- First Leaps Through Experimentation

"I'll play it first and tell you what it is afterwards." --Miles Davis

Backstory: New York City, 1948. Miles moves on from Charlie Parker's quirky, idiosyncratic Bebop and collaborates with big band arranger Gil Evans on a new thing. They travel in the opposite direction, trying a more subdued and relaxed approach. The early Davis/Evans recording sessions in 1950 would later be popularized as “Cool School.” Miles fuses legato textures of Evans’ big band charts to create a breezy nonet-nine piece, blending in nontraditional jazz instruments like baritone saxophone and French horn. The album *Birth of the Cool* helps launch the social trend of young music fans being called “hip and cool.” He influences the culture of the time the same way figures like James Dean, the Beat writers and Elvis Presley did.

Meanwhile, Miles gets addicted to heroin after touring Paris. Before kicking drugs in 1954, he pioneers (with saxophonist pal Sonny Rollins) yet another contrary new sound called Hard Bop. Hard Bop is slower paced and harder edged than Cool School. It features more space and understatement, utilizing rhythmic elements of blues and R&B. Represented as his “Blue Period,” Hard Bop becomes the forerunner of the “straight ahead” jazz movement of today, popularized by Art Blakey & the Jazz Messengers and trumpet player Wynton Marsalis.

In 1955, a drug-free Miles performs at the Newport Jazz Festival and catches the attention of Columbia Records, fronting a hot quintet with pianist Red Garland, drummer Philly Joe Jones, bassist Paul Chambers and future tenor sax icon John Coltrane. Miles records his acclaimed quintet on his Columbia debut, ‘*Round About Midnight*. His use of the Harmon mute marks the second time he revolutionizes the sound of his horn, the first being the lack of vibrato in his playing. With the quintet sound gelled, his follow-up Columbia LP *Milestones* expands to a sextet with Cannonball Adderley's alto sax adding more muscle and confidence.

Milestones of Innovation: *Here Miles is the lead experimenter, and with Birth of the Cool, he moves ahead of the curve by breaking the rules, challenging current popular assumptions, and mixing novel combinations. The role of the Experimenter is best explained in the book, The Ten Faces of Innovation, Strategies for Heightening Creativity, by Tom Kelly: “The experimenter may be one of the most classical roles an innovator*

plays. Great inventors come to mind when we think of experimenters, men like Di Vinci and Thomas Edison...like Edison, they strive for inspiration but never turn away from perspiration.” We can identify this archetypal creative thinking technique here: Miles is an “idea generator” by “thinking in opposites” and pushing in reverse directions. His curious mind moves in many directions, asks many questions, incubating different concepts. One question he clearly asks...as do many creatives: what if we do the opposite? As a result, Miles moves from hot jazz to cool jazz; from fast to slow. His “Cool” sound achieves commercial acceptance after a full album of the sessions is released seven years later. Then by introducing Hard Bop, not even his best work, Miles fails forward in order to succeed quicker. His innovations unveil a more hard-edged sound than Cool School as Miles tries various approaches, learning from malfunctions and trial, but making ideas more tangible through “prototyping and modeling.” By merging with Columbia Records, Davis raises his brand recognition through access to a more skilled label support staff and increased financial resources. His ideas are spreading, people begin to understand them and he starts to build his creative juggernaut. He is on his way to commercial success...by building solid teams around his experimental ideas.

Chapter/Era Three: Chapter/Era 3: Miles’ Legendary Innovation: Changing the Rules by Going Modal

“Don’t play what’s there, play what’s not there.” Miles Davis

Backstory: In 1959, Miles enters the studio in March and April with a couple key changes in his group and a whole new operating system. Miles develops a new style of jazz expression: playing in a “modal” fashion. Modality is a fresh style of improvisation in which solos and tones vacillate within one overall key (and an elongated riff) instead of playing through strict, traditional 8- or 12-bar chord change structures. Keeping the powerful horn frontline intact--Miles, Cannonball and Trane--Miles adds a bright new pianist named Bill Evans. Evans also embraces modality, and is highly influenced by early 20th century “impressionistic” dreamy classical composers like Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel. Evans’ piano fills make *Kind of Blue* decidedly more sumptuous, florid, and extra-sensory, as opposed to being more gospel, bluesy, gritty and funky like Hard Bop. Davis introduces an improved sophisticated and luxurious product that has “Miles” style stamped all over it. You can snap your fingers or gently sway to the mellifluous swing of songs like “So What” and “All Blues.” By blending in the modal element, music lovers and fans of the Miles Davis brand give *Kind of Blue* a rousing thumbs-up. It is a global artistic triumph.

Milestones of Innovation: *Miles is at his innovative best with the invention of Kind of Blue. This is a time when completely different concepts are combined for totally new results. Miles creates a grand new sound that changes the space and time of the jazz medium. He is naturally using many techniques. Through R&D and rigorous testing he’s “reframing” the sound and structure of the idiom. This reframing tool is best identified by Michael Morgan, in his 1993 book, Creating Workforce Innovation. Reframing helps one to look at ideas from various and different perspectives—just like Miles looks at tones, structure and rhythm in a new way. He also “combines” ideas by connecting international and ageless musical platforms and traditions in ways never done. Using influences*

spanning from the Middle Ages, ancient Greece and African to experimental, turn-of-the-20th century classical, Miles is modernizing old concepts and structures infused with contemporary forms.

“Combining” is a skill that typifies great thinking. Innovative and curious thinkers combine thoughts, ideas and information in ways that most others do not; they do this intuitively. Consider Einstein's equation, $E=mc^2$. Einstein did not invent the concepts of energy, mass, or speed of light. Rather, he combined these concepts in a novel way which restructured the way he looked at the universe. Miles combines ideas in fashions previously unheard of, and also recruits and hires the brightest minds and future stars to realize his vision. It's freethinking, unconstrained, and enduring--innovation coming from the blending of new and different combinations. Miles “combines” old and different ideas with new players and brings together an inventive new world through his creative mind.

Chapter/Era Four: Sketches of Miles and Gil: Directing—Partnering—Collaborating (1957-1963)

“For me, life and music is about style...I never thought that the music called ‘Jazz’ was ever meant to reach just a small group of people, or become a museum thing locked under glass like all other dead things that were once considered artistic.” Miles Davis

Backstory: In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Miles takes his rich modal stylings and partners again with arranger Gil Evans to record a series of albums featuring Miles accompanied by a large jazz big band ensemble orchestra. By recording *Miles Ahead* with 19 pieces in 1957, Miles embraces the Euro-classical influences he turned his back on as a student at Julliard. Miles and Gil form a close and intricate working bond during rehearsals and in the studio. Miles' big band performs live on network television. Gil Evans' charts are punchy, but smooth as butter, and Miles' muted musings are highly delectable. Miles has the opportunity to stretch out thematically with a reworking of George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*. Then one of Miles' most popular albums, the exotic *Sketches of Spain*, receives major critical kudos in 1960. The album cuts across various lifestyle demographics and is such a unique work that five years later, Grace Slick co-writes the Jefferson Airplane's psychedelic anthem “White Rabbit” after repeated listens to *Sketches* and Ravel's *Bolero*...while stoned on acid.

Milestones of Innovation: *The key to this period of Miles' creative development is his partnership and collaboration of innovation. Miles and Gil. This is a very standard process: we see it in music, sports and business—Rodgers and Hammerstein, Montana to Rice, Hewlett and Packard. The elements include creative collaboration and joint brainstorming. We can all learn from this standard creative process. But one thing happens with Miles and Gil which does not always happen...a fantastic, groundbreaking result. Success comes from clear communication, trust, a joint desire to innovate, openness to experience, risk-taking, tolerance for ambiguity imagination, imagery, and also mutual trust. Miles is a co-leader--and player coach--and is as much behind the scenes as in front of it. He relies on Gil to be his equal and joint innovator, and their innovation it driven as equal and co-creative partners. Being a big band production, it is also a more structured endeavor, making the seamlessness of the players even more*

crucial. They jointly brainstorm, build on each others ideas, create innovative structure, which allows Miles and the band to still improvise and invent. Here Miles is “coaching innovation” as he’s empowering and partnering.

Chapter/Era Five: Reaching the Next Pinnacle: Conductor of Change ; Empowering Others to Soar; Recruiting Rookie Talent (1964-1969)

"Do not fear mistakes. There are none." Miles Davis

Backstory: Between 1964 and 1968, after a brief but well-spent association with saxophonists George Coleman and Hank Mobley, Miles settles in with a steady lineup by forming his second acclaimed five-piece. Dubbed by jazz historians as his “Classic Quintet,” Miles enlists a younger stable of players with Herbie Hancock on piano, Wayne Shorter on saxophone, Ron Carter on bass and a 17-year old prodigy drummer named Tony Williams. The group’s chemistry is initiated in December 1965 when Miles brings the group into the Plugged Nickel nightclub in Chicago during the Christmas holiday. Here Miles woodsheds and beta-tests on older Miles standards like “My Funny Valentine” and “Round Midnight,” as the band steamrolls through seven sets in two nights! Luckily the tapes were rolling, and the results are legendary. While the band members are relative rookies, each has already recorded their own solo projects on Blue Note Records while Miles spent part of 1965 on personal hiatus. In addition, Hancock and Shorter are accomplished composers who add to the quintet repertoire. As a result, Miles emerges from the studio with sterling efforts like *ESP*, *Miles Smiles*, *Sorcerer*, and *Nefertiti*. While it could be argued that the Quintet was his premiere acoustic jazz band, the group’s *Miles in the Sky* and *Filles De Kilimanjaro* albums in 1968 usher in another important left turn in Miles’ creative flow. Recorded during America’s volatile 1960’s counter-culture civil rights social revolution, Miles geared up for modernity by introducing electric piano, and later, electric bass, into his sound. *Filles*, while introducing electric bass and multiple keyboards into the mix, features Afrocentric album cover art tagged with the moniker “Directions in Music by Miles Davis.” Gradually veering into more adventurous aural horizons, Miles would soon expand his ensemble and make radical changes that will befuddle his traditional fan base, but recruit a younger and broader demographic toward his musical vision.

Milestones of Innovation: *In developing his second groundbreaking quintet, Miles becomes the key “driver” of greatness. He mentors the team by experimenting, training, empowering, coaching, brainstorming, scrambling, reassembling and improving. Miles is the project director, the conductor of innovation, the go-to person for sparking positive change--and he’s the one who leads the session but lets others take center stage. He pushes and challenges his players, taking them beyond rote and into the creative realm. He provides a safe harbor for risk taking and recovery from failure. Miles knows, like many crack movie directors, that casting is a critical element to success. He hires the top young lions of jazz because young people are sometimes less fearful, not having developed well worn patterns of creativity. They are ready to follow their leader into the creative unknown. Onstage, Miles, the driver and manager, kickstarts the band with a melody and then walks off while the band soars into an improvisational frenzy. Then just*

at the precise time, he reels them back by cuing them with a short flurry of notes. Miles is cocky, but his courage is contagious. He builds top level innovative teams by supplying the structure, shepherding creativity, mentoring and training, and then staying out of the way when the curtain goes up. Jazz is a collaborative/creative/interactive process; it's management by playing around.

Chapter/Era Six: The New *Bitches Brew*: Fusing Ideas and Change Agents, Cross Pollination, New Combinations, and a Brave New World.

(1969-1971)

"It's not about standing still and becoming safe. If anybody wants to keep creating they have to be about change." -Miles Davis

Backstory: When the world was psychedelic-ized in 1967, it transformed music, art, commerce and lifestyle into a countercultural purple haze. Yet Miles was poised and ready to adapt. *In a Silent Way*, released in early 1969, signaled a seismic atmospheric and textural shift towards the electric New Directions of Miles's music. Instead of soaring bop riffs and angular swing patterns of rhythm, this music features thoughtful layers of hovering and twinkling electric piano and organ and fluid electric guitar passages. Miles' intermittent trumpet solos on *In a Silent Way* are notably more ethereal and introspective. But when Miles wails, he does so more like a rock guitarist onstage at the Fillmore in San Francisco than a jazz trumpeter at the Plugged Nickel in Chicago. Miles plugs in, tunes in, and spaces out. Then he adds amplified guitars, bass and keyboards to the extended, pastoral compositions, some composed by a young Austrian keyboardist, Josef Zawinul.

By this time Miles has abandoned playing traditional jazz standards altogether. He's also dispensed with the powerful, driving acoustic hard bop sound of the Quintet. Miles' fans are outraged when he refuses to play "My Funny Valentine" anymore. The jazz pundits describe *In a Silent Way* as "wallpaper music" and accuse Miles of selling out to the current rock sounds. Yet as a result of his stubborn changes, Miles cultivates a whole new audience. When jazz radio refuses to play his latest music, the underground FM rock stations hop aboard and fill the airplay void.

By 1969 Miles acknowledges the rock and funk artistry of Jimi Hendrix, James Brown and Sly Stone by incorporating those elements into his own music. The electric sounds of keyboardist Chick Corea, bassist Dave Holland, and guitarist John McLaughlin are contrary and controversial. New drummer Jack DeJohnette plays with gale force. Miles' new horn frontline now consists of trumpet, bass clarinet with Wayne Shorter shifting over to soprano sax. When Columbia Records releases *Bitches Brew* in 1969, they do so as a specially priced double set album, highly uncommon for the day. Over the next year, his artistic momentum grows organically as young people discover Miles' creativity and as fair minded jazz listeners reconsider and embrace his New Directions and musical message. Viola! Miles is reborn and earns his first gold record. His image changes as much as his music. Gone are the dark sharkskin suits, to be replaced by the colorful and freaked out fashion attire worn by rock 'n' rollers and hippies. In 1972, by the time the *Live-Evil*, *Miles At Fillmore* and *Jack Johnson* albums are released, Miles adds wah-wah pedals and various distortion effects to his music. He's joined by progressive musicians like reed player Gary Bartz, keyboardist Keith Jarrett, Brazilian

percussionist Airto Moreira. His innovations begat another new genre of instrumental music, soon to be called Jazz Fusion.

Milestones of Innovation: *Miles thrives on chaos by embracing the most volatile ingredients of the American experience, be it the Black Power movement, the drug culture or social rebellion, and he instills it into his music, rather than resisting it. One way to innovate involves “combining and cross pollinating.” More ideas mean better ideas and Miles increases the chances of innovation when he enlists a diverse group of creative “ideators.” Miles goes outside the jazz world, for which he is criticized, to create a new varietal of music—fusion. As in the plant world, new genetics occur when there is an introduction of different pollen. The same is true in music (and for that matter anything). Different ideas arise from different combinations. Miles brings together different genres through greater diversity by bringing together a variety of musicians from different backgrounds to produce new product. These are young players who have lived and grew in a different context, viewing the world from a different angle and through different shaped lens. Cross pollination involves forming new coalitions and mixing cultures. Miles not only learns to love change, he’s willing to gamble his most loyal commercial base of customers in favor of potentially engaging a larger group of followers, even if it involves growing that new market share from scratch, gradually over protracted periods of time. That’s the true mark of an innovator. Risk over timeliness.*

Chapter/Era Seven: *On the Corner & On the Edge: Taking Your Team to the Edge of the Cliff* (1972-1974)

"Jazz is the big brother of Revolution. Revolution follows it around." -Miles Davis

Backstory: By 1972, Miles is so obsessed with street culture, he absorbs it into high art. He mixes hardcore funk with Afro-centricity and Black Power, infused with obscure shadowy strains of Duke Ellington. By the time Miles preps for the sessions that are to become 1972’s *On the Corner*, he is without any of the trained musicians he had mentored during his more “straight ahead” jazz days. Gone are Keith Jarrett and Dave Holland, to be replaced by funk bassist Michael Henderson, guitarist Reggie Lucas and pop percussionist Mtume. Fans of contemporary black music are happy with *On the Corner*; jazz critics with magazines like *Downbeat* are still turned off by his “jungle sounds” and “space music.” After *Big Fun* and *In Concert* spreads out the funk, Miles retreats deeper into drugs like cocaine. Through a British rock arranger named Paul Buckmaster, Miles is turned on to the avant-garde electronic classical sounds of German composer Karlheinz Stockhausen. By this time, Miles is spinning out of control artistically. Suffering from Sickle Cell Anemia, Miles gives up playing the trumpet altogether. Yet he continues to tour the world, recording live (on records like *Agharta*, *Pangaea* and *Dark Magus*)...and is featured playing the Hammond organ! Miles hasn’t just jumped the curve of creativity and innovation, he’s jumped off the cliff and is headed for a fall!

Milestones of Innovation: *Most importantly, throughout this admittedly wacky era of his music, Miles understands the science and mystique of FLOW. According to*

Hungarian philosopher Mihály Csikszentmihályi's teachings of "positive psychology," FLOW occurs when a person is engaging creatively and becomes fully immersed and locked into a state of highly energized focus, total involvement and absolute enjoyment of the process. It's a state of complete, single-minded absorption in the most positive sense, in which all of one's motivational and emotional powers are harnessed and wrapped up in the task at hand. Socially, culturally, and creatively, this era is epitomized by Miles's search for Flow. Many creatives search for Flow through drugs, drink, meditation and other mind altering techniques. Miles certainly had those experiences previously. But here, he is searching for reinvention, as many in society were (and are) at the time, through experimenting with meditative music, mind shaping sounds, sometimes involving new partnerships that simply lacked his musical mastery. During this trying era, Miles and his group seem to believe that creative flow can be achieved in space, in mind and in sometimes bizarre musical ways. While he is still driven to innovate, unfortunately he seems to have driven down the wrong road.

Chapter/Era Eight: A Lifetime of Innovation, Burnout, Reinvention and The Challenge of Staying Relevant Past Your Shelf Life (1975 - 1992)

"I have to change. It's like a curse." Miles Davis

Backstory: Nothing lasts forever; even the brightest star burns into a supernova. Everybody flares out creatively and faces a Waterloo sooner or later in their careers--or as Leonard Cohen calls it, "your invincible defeat." With two broken ankles from a car accident, hip replacement surgery, and nursing a cocaine habit, Miles hits the wall between 1975 and 1981. He crashes and burns. Yet by 1981 Miles returns to innovative form, guided by youth, groove, technology and contemporary pop culture. He resurfaces on Columbia with *Man With a Horn*. His new touring band, recorded live on *We Want Miles*, Miles introduces talented musicians like Mike Stern, Al Foster, Marcus Miller and John Scofield to the scene. In 1983 *Decoy* explores more modern funk and on 1985's *You're Under Arrest*, Miles flirts with modern standards, performing Michael Jackson's "Human Nature" and Cyndi Lauper's "Time After Time." On the live front, Miles is back headlining concert halls and opera houses. By 1986, Miles leaves Columbia to sign with Warner Brothers Records. *Tutu*, released in 1986, is controversially awash with electronic keyboards, while 1989's *Amandla* signals a slight return to conventional electric jazz with young post-bop players like alto saxophonist Kenny Garrett and organist Joey DeFrancesco. On July 8, 1991, Miles appears with a large orchestra at the Montreux Jazz Festival conducted by Quincy Jones. Miles performs arrangements written by his old partner Gil Evans alongside soloists Garrett and Wallace Roney, two young musicians he mentored. A few months later, Miles Davis dies on September 28, 1991. It takes three ailments, a stroke, pneumonia and respiratory failure, to kill him. In 1992 his last studio album, *Doo-Bop*, is released. As a final middle-fingered salute to the jazz Politburo--and writers Stanley Crouch and Delfaye Marsalis--*Doo-Bop* is an uncompromising collaboration with a rapper named Easy Mo Bee.

Milestones of Innovation: *Innovation is a frame of mind, a desire to constantly re-create the future. Miles hates the status quo. Innovation is a lifelong constant brain*

function, not just a spark of a sudden idea. Miles exemplifies the notion that developing a body of work is more important than critiquing other people's accomplishments from the cheap seats. Steve Jobs once famously emailed a Silicon Valley troll, "By the way, what have you done that's so great? Do you create anything, or just criticize other's work and belittle their motivations?"

Miles Davis helmed dozens of creative teams because change was how he lived. By some genetic, deep seeded and inward urgency, he didn't quite feel alive unless he was changing and creating. Miles demonstrated the mind frame, skills and characteristics of a creative genius: a standard of world class excellence (mastery) for himself and others, a desire for continuous learning and improvement, an abnormal need to change the status quo and create a new future state, and a desire--no, an obsession--to take the "road less traveled" Miles had no fear of failure; as if mistakes are simply part of the process. Miles the innovator thought outside of his own expertise and broadened himself by forces other than music. He wore designer clothes by Issey Miyake and Yohji Yamamoto, whose fashions, like Miles' art, weren't simply based on current trends. He was a prolific painter and illustrator. He boxed in the ring. He was a worldly man, and refused to "dumb down" his art for mass consumption. From Bebop to Hip Hop, Miles was the Apple and Tesla of his time, truly an American innovative tour de force.

Miles of Innovation Sample Chapter



Chapter/Era 3: Miles' Legendary Innovation: Changing the Rules by Going Modal

"Don't play what's there, play what's not there." --Miles Davis

Evolution of Innovation

At this juncture of the Miles Davis odyssey of innovation, the making of the *Kind of Blue* album is Miles' grandest accomplishment--and it's happening at a crucial time when Miles is making significant changes in his musical presentation. In looking back, it is easy to recognize the techniques that come naturally to an innovative mind; *combining or synthesizing* ideas in new ways previously unthought-of in the jazz world. Miles is thinking *laterally*--a term coined in 1967 by Edward de Bono a famous medical doctor, psychologist and professor who was a leading researcher in creative thinking. Notice that Miles was using this technique naturally long before it was identified as a creative thinking technique. Miles is thinking horizontally when everyone else is thinking vertically. He also *thinks in opposites*, going from hot to cold, fast to slow, complicated to simple. He has *created the environment* of grand collaboration between an intimate group of master musicians. After spending 10 years in the music world, learning, developing a deep understanding of his craft, mastering and changing the sound of his instrument, experimenting with and leading many bands, he comes to the recording sessions that will produce the most innovative and commercially successful album of all time: *Kind of Blue*.

Going Modal

When Miles enters Columbia Studios on 30th Street in Manhattan on March 2 and April 22, 1959 to record *Kind of Blue*, he is prepared for greatness. He has been experimenting for years, has handpicked his players and prepared their minds and skills for change. He has been thinking, experimenting, composing and challenging the status quo of jazz for 10 years. He has invented a whole new way of playing, he has changed the rules, and in computer terms, he adopts a whole new operating system to his music. With his latest quintet primed and ready after extended nightclub appearances in New York, Chicago and San Francisco, Miles delves into a whole new methodology in the studio that will transform jazz in a gigantic way.

For the *Kind of Blue* sessions, Miles throws a curve ball at his team of players: John Coltrane and Cannonball Adderley on saxes, pianist Bill Evans, bassist Paul Chambers and drummer Jimmy Cobb. Miles adopts a radical new style of playing called “modal jazz.” Modal jazz boils down jazz improvisation to being dependent on just one scale and a group of single notes within the scale. As a result, the soloists now stay within one “mode” to create melody and improvisation.

Bebop and post-bop jazz is based on traditional “tonal” melodies comprised of many major and minor chords. Horn and piano soloists improvise around each chord change and the music soars up and down in a vertical dramatic pattern. It demonstrates jazz musicians as virtuoso talents on their instruments. They must play through many chord changes in a single solo, an incredible pathway to musical improvisation. But Miles sees this as a negative. He observes that jazz compositions and pop standards are getting too “thick” and busy with chord changes. Miles is increasingly annoyed that jazz is becoming

too busy and frenetic. Jazz is in danger of losing its audience by becoming less melodic and heartfelt. To progress, the race of jazz musicians and composers toward faster and more complex needs to end.

Interestingly, the traditional way jazz players soloed before the *Kind of Blue* sessions relied on a vertical, up and down, high and low flight of the music. The music emanates from a traditional vertical, top-down discipline. The reliance on modes changes this. The modal style of soloing keeps the players on one single scale throughout many chord changes in which the musician creates melodies and solos through a more horizontal model of playing. The modal system forces them to play more economically, simply and in a way that is more discernible to the listener. Davis describes it as “a return to melody.”

“A no chords [approach] gives you a lot more freedom and space to hear things.” Miles says, “When you go [with modal playing], you can go on forever. You don't have to worry about changes and you can do more with the [melody] line. It becomes a challenge to see how melodically innovative you can be.”

So Miles unveils the concept of modal improvisation to his band on the first day of sessions. Instead of handing out sheet music dictating their parts and complicated chord changes, he hands each player a piece of manuscript paper with just a few chords scribbled on it. These charts are more skeletons of composition in an uncomplicated and clean manner. None of the players realize they are making history and breaking down boundaries. As they play by using modes, the melodies are born spontaneously. While there are various stops and starts in fleshing out the performances, the first time a song finishes all the way through, Miles moves on to the next tune.

The musicians are clearly on a creative high wire responding to Miles' challenging and innovative ground rules. But the music feels fresh. For example, *Kind of Blue's* opening song on the album, "So What" begins with the piano and bass meandering for a few bars, with no distinct time or tempo. As the bass kicks in with the piano, they settle on a gentle swinging rhythm. Then the song builds further as the horns join in with perky accents that, if they had words, would be singing the hook, "So What!" By the time drummer Jimmy Cobb crashes his cymbal, the song swings into gear with a breezy, sauntering solo from Miles. The musicians support each other's solos as a unified body, everyone focusing on modal playing and mutual interaction. "So What" becomes the anthem of modal jazz for decades to come.

As Miles charts new directions, *Kind of Blue's* integrity for melody recruits many new modern jazz fans and record buyers. Miles expands and reinvigorates his music and educates his customer base by changing musical strategies and engaging their tastes. With *Kind of Blue*, Miles introduces a sophisticated and luxurious product, one that has the "Miles" brand boldly stamped on it. You can snap your fingers or gently sway to the mid-tempo swing of "So What"...or the blues-based "Freddie Freeloader" and "All Blues"...or bask in the eloquent and alluring Spanish overtones of "Flamenco Sketches"...or ponder the post-Impressionistic tones of "Blue In Green." "The beauty of *Kind of Blue's* modal style," says Grammy award winning jazz pianist Michel Camilo, "is that the audience reacts to the beauty of simplicity." Jazz has changed, bop to hard bop to a whole new way: cool, simple, elegant, hip and the fans go along for the ride.

Miles leads his creative team from high structure to less structure. He has moved from hot jazz--playing cascades of fast solos and angular flurries of notes to a cooler,

more intimate and sensual style. He takes the opposite direction from the driving hard bop style he developed with saxophonist Sonny Rollins in his previous era of innovation to a much cooler, subdued stance.

How did Miles discover modal theory? It came from a book published in 1953 by a composer/pianist named George Russell. *The Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization* intellectually explores the origins of melody and harmony and suggests going back to ancient times for answers. Many modern musicians, including Bill Evans and John Coltrane fervently studied Russell's findings as Russell advocated the use of modes--some identified as Aeolian, Dorian, Mixolydian--to create melody. These modes came from the ancient Greeks and the Middle Ages before musicians had developed major and minor chords present in the works of classical composers like Bach, Beethoven and Mozart. It is a return to less complexity; actually a return to the foundations of music that allows jazz to progress, take a turn and entertain in new ways.

In addition, Miles' interest in modal jazz expression came from his pianist, Bill Evans. Evans had studied classical theory, and while Miles was influenced by the florid style of pianist Ahmad Jamal, Evans' style was shaped by the 20th century "Impressionistic" classical composers, most notably Claude Debussy, Erik Satie and Maurice Ravel. Evans' dreamy piano chord clusters and vamps makes *Kind of Blue* decidedly more sumptuous and extra-sensory, as opposed to the more gospel, bluesy, gritty and funky feel of Miles' previous Hard Bop style.

Classical composers like Satie and Debussy first explored modal music styles from ancient Greece and the Middle Ages as the aural response to the intense popularity of Impressionist painters like Claude Monet and Pierre-Auguste Renoir. Classical

composers then explored modality for the next five decades before *Kind of Blue*.

The making of *Kind of Blue* distinguishes the difference between “creativity” and “innovation”; Miles is the master of both skills. Creativity is about *unleashing the potential* of the mind to conceive new ideas. Many seasoned jazz musicians are both naturally creative and are also trained in creative improvisation. Creativity—the production of new ideas—is fundamental to improvisation, since it is not enough for improvisers to produce music that has already been composed: they must produce something that, to them at least, is new. Creative concepts, and in the case of jazz, improvised solos manifest themselves in many ways and they become something we can hear and feel. In *Kind of Blue*, Miles pushes his band to new levels of creativity. However, *Kind of Blue* is more than a push towards greater creativity. It is a monumental shift in how jazz is created. He changes the total direction of the jazz industry.

There are many creative types in the world and certainly many in the jazz world. They’re trained to improvise, bobbing and weaving around melodies in a cerebral fashion. They create within the current rules, structures and models. But there are few people that completely change the game, develop new rules, new structures, novel and radical industry shifts. Einstein, Bell, Ford, Jobs, Gates and in the jazz world—Miles Davis. By going modal, Miles *changes the rules* of how music is made, composed, enjoyed and provides band members new channels of communication. This characterizes pure innovation. He’s pushing his colleagues to become more creative in a simpler horizontal linear sense by playing around one or two modal scales instead of vertically playing up and down a busy ladder of traditional chords—going from complex to simple, physical to cerebral. Miles changes jazz composition as did Claude Monet when the art world

changed from conventional art to impressionism in Paris during the 1870s.

Clearly, Miles, as the writer of all the tunes on *Kind Of Blue* is the innovator, the collaborator, the grand experimenter and main facilitator of change and new directions. He's also the behind-the-scenes man in charge, doing what it takes to hire and recruit the most talented people needed to birth his vision through. Ultimately it is Miles who must stand behind his personnel choices.

For example, when Miles recruits pianist Evans, he is criticized by his peers for not using a more gospel/blues-based African-American player. Then he must convince Cannonball Adderley to commit to him for a full year, even though Cannonball has designs to form his own group with his trumpet playing brother Nat. And while John Coltrane is an invaluable jazz visionary, Miles knows that 'Trane lacks the organizational business skills to run his own team. So Miles keeps Coltrane in the fold by helping him score a solo deal with Atlantic Records and lending him his personal booking agent to set up gigs while the Davis quintet is off the road.

As an innovator, Miles is changing the rules by combining ideas and influences, not just from the jazz era, but from a thousand years of musical lineage. *Kind of Blue* singlehandedly changes the flavor of jazz from hot to cool, fast to slow, from big to intimate, and from earthy to sophisticated. As an innovator, Miles is blending ideas and concepts the same way Albert Einstein did. While Einstein didn't invent the concept of energy mass and speed of light, he did *combine* both phenomenon into an innovative fashion which begat the axiom $E = mc^2$. Like Einstein, Miles coalesces disparate elements in order to create something completely new.

As Miles introduces modality, his team isn't soloing so much as they are *interacting*.

They understand that Miles is adopting a horizontal structure as opposed to a vertical one in order to better manage the creative process. He no longer stands at the front of the stage, the big cheese leader and primary soloist, treating his support players as subordinates. Instead, he's the facilitator uniting his team to set new standards by adopting new ways of playing. Miles' 1959 quintet is all about execution without using a top down system of command, a serious break away from the traditional pyramidal configuration of band leader (like the old military model of leadership where the person on top is solely in command) to active participant, catalyst of new ideas. In a more inverted structure, Miles supports and trusts his team by "pushing down" the innovative responsibility to all players. He knows that five minds are better than one, and that they'll only succeed by working collaboratively. He empowers the band to change with him. The Miles Davis concept of innovation is different than pure creativity. His innovation is about changing the rules *and* the game.

In your typical classical or big band operating system, a hierarchy is made up of first-, second- or third-chair players in each section, based on a player's seniority and experience. Miles' group, however, functions on a more intimate level, treating each other as creative equals. It's the combined efforts of the team that's driving innovation.

Throughout the eight eras of Miles' music that we outline in this book, musicians come and go. They leave, and sometimes return months later. The energy of Miles' teams either lasts a few years or runs its course in a matter of months. Then it's time for Miles to move on to something else. He is the first to realize when he's gone as far as he can with each creative team. He knows when it's time to try something else--be it a new quintet/sextet or return to Gil Evans to record another large ensemble orchestral project.

Through it all, Miles is the eccentric key man, the one with the Columbia Records label pedigree, the guy who bought the white Ferrari with CBS corporate money twelve months before *Kind of Blue* was conceived in the studio. Now that's confidence in innovation...and pure chutzpah!

But it all paid off. Over time, *Kind of Blue* became the bestselling jazz album of all time. Its sales figures now surpass four million units sold. The rock publication *Rolling Stone* rates it firmly at #12 on its 500 Greatest Albums of All Time list. By adopting his now de rigueur modal operating system, Miles challenged an industry and energized his loyal customer base. *Kind of Blue* became the perfect storm of jazz enrichment. Jazz fans can point to *Kind of Blue* and cite, "That is when the music changed." Five decades later, it still sells, and even people barely familiar with the persona of Miles Davis perceive him as "Mr. Cool," an icon of fashion and taste.

Kind of Blue became a game changer in popular music, just as Amazon became a game changer in the world of retail. Or as Spotify changes the perception of music ownership, from owning and buying CDs to streaming music from outer space. Or as Netflix will one day bypass the movie theaters and DVD rental shops by downloading films and creating their own proprietary programming. *Kind of Blue* did what Alexander Graham Bell did to communications, what Toyota did with the Prius and what forward passing did to football. Miles changed the game, the rules and the stage on which he played.

Milestones of Innovation

One can identify the specific innovation techniques of Miles and try to use them to create new ways of thinking. However, it is not that simple. He was a driven

man...driven to move out of the status quo, to create new environments and change. We all know people who cannot stand change; it is Miles who cannot stand the status quo. One might say that he is driven to change as if he has a genetic, emotional and intellectual aversion to staying still. It is that motivation, an incredible inner drive and some of these techniques that created *Kind of Blue*.

Here are some of the ways in which Miles Davis developed change.

- **He understood historical trends, cross border and cross cultural ideas.** Miles knew his history and discovered modes by understanding the history of western European music. Jazz is heavily influenced by American blues, African rhythms, Afro-Cuban trends, ragtime, bebop. Big Band, Dixieland and is a melting pot of musical combinations. Miles was an expert in many musical forms and used modal European theory to create a new way of playing. Miles looked *back* in musical history to discover modes; essentially he looked back in order to move forward.
- **Think vertically and laterally.** Vertical thinking is logical, concerned with analytics, playing by the rules, and is more structured. The trend in jazz from the bebop era was to follow the musical structure, the plan and play the right notes—those contained in the everchanging complicated chord changes. The trend was up and down; sequential and logical. Miles wanted change: when everyone was improvising, thinking and playing vertically, he wanted to stop, listen and play *laterally*. He created less structure, more freedom and wanted more melody. Lateral thinking is concerned with the movement of ideas, concepts and values, instead of looking to up and down logical analytics. Miles wants to generate new pathways. In his way, players do not have to be moving towards something; they may be just as easily be moving away

from something. It is the movement or change that matters.

- **New Pathways.** With lateral thinking one does not move in order to follow a set direction, but one moves to discover a new one. With lateral thinking, one designs an experiment to provide an opportunity for change. Vertical playing moves as if there is one direction guided by the chord structure; modal playing can go in many directions. The jazz world was stuck in a rut of vertical thinking, soloing, composing and Miles looked beyond this existing system to one which was more fluid. Here is the difference: vertical thinking and in this case, vertical improvisation is concerned with playing notes that are “right”, the ones contained in the specific chords. Modal playing and lateral playing is concerned with new pathways, less concerned with hitting the right notes but playing in a way which generates more ideas, more approaches and more ideas.
- **Think in Opposites:** The curious mind is always asking “what if”. We have seen Miles looking back, looking up, downward and sideways. It is not hard to see him thinking: what if we do the opposite of what we are doing? Not fast but slow, not complex but simple, not hot but cold. Again, with hindsight, creative theorists call this “thinking in opposites.” On a technical level, this was identified by Albert Rothenberg a Harvard Psychiatrist in 1971.
- **As a theory, there are four steps to thinking and creating an opposite idea:**
 - ✓ A strong *motivation* to create;
 - ✓ *Deviation*-departing from what is true or currently known;
 - ✓ *Simultaneous opposition*- identifying opposite possibilities;
 - ✓ *Construction*—the formation of the new opposite.

Let's just call it thinking in opposites and Miles certainly did.

The New York Times

Making Sure Miles Stays Forever Young

By LARRY ROHTER

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LOS ANGELES — Miles Davis died here more than 20 years ago, but in some ways he remains as much a presence as ever, and not just because recordings continue to be issued under his name. A book of his paintings and drawings was published last week, a biopic about him is in the works, a stamp with his image circulates, and a museum exhibition devoted to his life is traveling the world.



Miles Davis and his music are being promoted beyond reissued albums. Overseeing those initiatives, and others, are his three heirs: his son Erin, his daughter, Cheryl, and their cousin Vince Wilburn Jr. Like those who manage the estates of Jimi Hendrix, Bob Marley or John Coltrane, they are grappling with a complicated challenge: How do you keep this trumpeter, an archetype of 20th-century popular music, in the public eye and maintain his brand, even as his original core audience is aging?

“We’re talking to everybody, because we’re involved in growing and promoting and exposure,” Erin Davis said during a long joint interview late last month at the office of the heirs’ publicists here. “It’s taken me 20 years to realize what we’re doing and how it affects the future.”

The heirs confront a paradox: With more than four million copies sold in the United States alone, Davis’s 1959 album “Kind of Blue” is the most popular jazz record of all time. But the rest of his catalog, which includes historic recordings like “Birth of the Cool” and “Bitches Brew” and covers a gamut of styles from hard bop to fusion and funk, is not as familiar to the public.

Davis left behind an enormous body of work: In a recording career spanning nearly 50 years, he made well over 100 albums. The release of a limited-edition 70-CD boxed set in 2009 was followed two years later by a 20-CD box with miniature sleeves that mimic the original LPs. On Monday, a set of remastered mono versions of the first nine

albums Davis recorded for Columbia Records, now a part of Sony, is being issued.

But there is much more in Columbia's vaults, in the archives of television and radio networks in countries where Davis toured, and in the family's own collection. (Davis recorded all his shows and rehearsals once the technology became available.) The heirs, however, talk of the need to exercise restraint, to avoid the risk of diluting the value of the Davis name.

"We don't want to rehash or saturate the market with 'Oh, here's another Miles record,'" said Mr. Wilburn, who played drums in his uncle's ensembles in the 1980s and now leads his own band. "We don't put things out just for the sake of putting things out. This is really thought out, from a blueprint."

Many of the releases in recent years, including Monday's, seem aimed at completists and other longtime fans. The bigger test is the casual listener, especially a new generation that may be only vaguely aware of Davis.

"Lots of young people have heard of Miles Davis and make some association with his name, even if it's just 'Oh, he's cool,'" said Adam Block, the president of Sony's Legacy label, which handles the reissues. "Our job is to find ways to tell stories that validate those feelings and educate those with some interest in his music."

He added: "There's a need not just to refresh memories, but a desire to create new ones."

In recent years, Davis's heirs have stepped up their efforts to take his music to audiences at events like the indie-oriented CMJ Music Marathon in New York. At last year's SXSW music festival in Austin, Tex., they even sponsored the Miles Davis House, described as a "genre-bending odyssey" featuring rock and pop bands that professed an affinity to his music.

"I always want the next generation to know about Miles," Erin Davis said. "Some people figure it out for themselves. But with others, you have to show them something, and they come to it."

The museum exhibition, called "We Want Miles," is an expression of the same impulse. Though it has not yet toured the United States, it has been shown in France, Canada and Brazil. Cheryl Davis described the multimedia retrospective as a "comprehensive walk through his life, with trumpets, pictures, people speaking about him, and original manuscripts and sheet music."

As part of their outreach to a younger audience, the Davis heirs have also been pursuing collaborations with hip-hop artists. Mr. Wilburn mentioned overtures to Questlove of the Roots, Pharcyde and Nas, but also said that "it's got to be tastefully done, because people have played the samples for us, and if it's derogatory towards women or people of color, we're not about that.

"We know we'll catch flak from the purists for doing the hip-hop thing at all," he added. "But you know, hey, I was with my uncle, so I know what he believed in, and that was moving forward."

Erin Davis said he is also interested in testing the various forms of electronic dance music and has already approached Thievery Corporation. In 1998 and 1999, Sony released CDs of fusion-era Miles Davis tracks remixed in ambient style by the producer Bill Laswell, and Mr. Davis said he would like to update that approach.

"The Laswell record has some of my favorite stuff," because it was both "in keeping with the Miles tradition and ahead of its time," he said. "There are some really good

producers and D.J.'s out there, especially a lot of great European D.J.'s that I'd like to work with on that front."

As films about Ray Charles and Johnny Cash have shown, a hit movie can help elevate a musician's visibility and goose record sales, so the heirs are exploring that direction, too. Ms. Davis said that they have been in discussions with the actor and producer Don Cheadle about a biopic — Mr. Cheadle would star and direct — but that "some questions remain."

Among the heirs, a clear if informal division of labor is apparent. "They know more about music than I do," Ms. Davis said of her brother and cousin. "They know the record keeping, the catalog and all of that," so on strictly musical questions, she defers to them.

But on everything else, "we'll say, 'Let's call Cheryl,'" Mr. Wilburn said. "When we get a signoff from Cheryl, then we know we're doing something right."

Ms. Davis was deeply involved, for example, in the new book "Miles Davis: The Collected Artwork," for which she wrote an afterword; exhibitions of his paintings in California this year; and in the "We Want Miles" exhibition. "Cheryl has ideas for clothes, ties, scarves, QVC, and Erin and I are like, 'Yeah, that's beautiful,'" Mr. Wilburn added.

Some musical estates have foundered, because quarrels among the heirs have impeded a comprehensive strategy to market the artist's work after his death. (Miles Davis excluded two of Cheryl's brothers, Gregory and Miles IV, from his will.) But the Davis heirs said they have avoided that pitfall by operating with a consensus approach: If one of them doesn't like something, it doesn't get done.

"Thank goodness, we all get along, that we're on the same page, so that there can be movement," Mr. Wilburn said. "You can't get locked into one thing. You've got to keep it fresh. Hey, this is global, this is Miles Davis."