

RELAXIN' WITH THE MILES DAVIS QUINTET

PRESTIGE 7129



DESIGN / ESMOND EDWARDS



RELAXIN' WITH THE MILES DAVIS QUINTET

MILES DAVIS trumpet JOHN COLTRANE tenor saxophone
RED GARLAND piano PAUL CHAMBERS bass PHILLY JOE JONES drums

- 1 IF I WERE A BELL 8:13
- 2 YOU'RE MY EVERYTHING 5:15
- 3 I COULD WRITE A BOOK 5:06

- 4 OLEO 6:15
- 5 IT COULD HAPPEN TO YOU 6:34
- 6 WOODY'N YOU 4:59

RELAXIN' WITH THE MILES DAVIS QUINTET is in every way a masterpiece. When the trumpeter (1926-1991) had formed the band in 1955, his colleagues—tenor saxophonist John Coltrane, pianist Red Garland, bassist Paul Chambers, and drummer Philly Joe Jones—were not considered jazz-world A-listers. And before conquering his narcotics addiction earlier in the Fifties, Davis had seen his once-promising career go into eclipse.

By 1956, however, his sound, especially when muted, was an achingly personal counterpart to the vocals of Billie Holiday and Frank Sinatra. *Relaxin'* (plus its Prestige companions, *Miles*, *Cookin'*, *Workin'*, and *Steamin'*) reestablished Davis, and elevated his quintet as the gold standard of small groups.

With its accent on bright tempos, from medium-bounce to crisply up, *Relaxin'* remains one of Davis's sunniest outings, a prime example of one of the outstanding ensembles of the 20th century reaching the summit of their artistry.

*I remember the sessions well, I remember how the musicians wanted to sound, and I remember their reactions to the playbacks.
Today, I feel strongly that I am their messenger. —RUDY VAN GELDER*

Recorded by RUDY VAN GELDER at Van Gelder Studio, Hackensack, NJ; May 11 (#5, 6) and October 26, 1956 (other selections).
Supervision by BOB WEINSTOCK. Remastering, 2005—Rudy Van Gelder (Van Gelder Studio, Englewood Cliffs, NJ). All transfers were made from the
analog master tapes to digital at 24-bit resolution. Notes by IRA GITLER. Total Time 36:00

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RELAXIN' WITH

MILES DAVIS trumpet JOHN COLTRANE tenor saxophone
RED GARLAND piano PAUL CHAMBERS bass PHILLY JOE JONES drums

Those of you who own the album *Cookin' with the Miles Davis Quintet* know, from reading the back liner, that they recorded nineteen other extended tracks at the session which produced the five numbers heard on *Cookin'*.

On that same liner, I stated that the Miles Davis Quintet was, to me and many others, the group in modern jazz but that they had broken up in the spring of 1957.

Since the disbanding, Miles has fronted three different groups. In the summer of 1957, retaining Red Garland and Paul Chambers, he completed the personnel with Sonny Rollins and Arthur Taylor. It was not that each musician was not wonderful, but Rollins was not contributing to the group feeling; he was longing for one of his own where he could express himself the way he wanted to.

In the fall Miles reorganized once more. Bobby Jaspar, on tenor and flute, replaced Rollins, Tommy Flanagan was at the piano bench instead of Garland, and Philly Joe returned in place of Taylor. Again there were better than good performances but not *the Miles Davis Quintet*. Jaspar, a more than capable tenorman, did not fit with the spirit of the group. The flute furthered this difference.

When Miles returned from a concert tour in which Julian Adderley's alto supplanted Jaspar's tenor, he reformed the original quintet for a January 1958 engagement, as Garland and John Coltrane reentered the fold, but swelled the group to sextet size by retaining Adderley. Cannonball is a case of another fine musician, separate from either Rollins or Jaspar, who does not fit the Miles Davis group. Then again, it has not been a long association for him and Coltrane certainly didn't belong with Miles when he

first joined the group. This, however, was due to undeveloped skills rather than lack of coinciding musical temperament. Rollins could have fit easily if he chose; Jaspar, however modern, is in another idiom and Adderley is of yet another persuasion.

How long the sextet, or quintet, if it should revert to that number, will stay intact is purely speculative at this writing. On this depends whether the group will recapture and maintain the consistent brilliance they were radiating during 1956. Coltrane, further enriched by the experience of playing with Thelonious Monk during the summer of 1957, has increased both his immediate importance and his potential; the rhythm section has not lost any of its skill, imagination, or fire; Miles is as before, a probing, sensitive, lyrical musician who doesn't stagnate from month to month.

Miles is a jazzman of many sides. Others imitate him as they do Bird, another fellow who had a couple or three facets to his playing, and in both cases they usually get only one aspect. Miles may be a "man walking on eggshells" but he is also a diamond cutting into opaque glass. He combines, in his astute grasp, all the important elements that make for personal, memorable jazz as expertly as the group's individuals have molded their separate talents into one pulsing whole.

This set is called *Relaxin'* because of the ballad performances in several different tempos—usual-ballad, medium, and up—which flow along in an unimpeded manner. There are also the incisive swingers: Sonny Rollins's "Oleo" (done previously by Miles and Sonny in Prestige 7109, *Miles Davis and the Modern Jazz Giants*) and Dizzy Gillespie's "Woody'n You."

THE MILES DAVIS QUINTET

**IF I WERE A BELL
YOU'RE MY EVERYTHING
I COULD WRITE A BOOK**

**OLEO
IT COULD HAPPEN TO YOU
WOODY'N YOU**

Although this session was recorded in a studio, the tunes were done in the immediate succession of a nightclub-type set and there were no second takes. There is a false start on "You're My Everything" and you will hear Miles's instructions to Red Garland before the complete performance of the tune. In other instances on this record, Miles addresses the group, exchanges communications with engineer Rudy Van Gelder, jokes with Bob Weinstock, etc. These comments make this recording a bit more personal and you-are-thereish.

Before a note is played Miles says to Bob Weinstock, "I'll play it and tell you what it is later." Of course, you know that it is "If I Were a Bell." Red Garland, who introduced it into the group, had done it in a trio version (Prestige 7086). Miles is muted here, as he is throughout the album, excepting "Woody'n You," and extremely eloquent. Coltrane is singing, and, like a bell, swinging. Garland's extended solo is another gem.

"You're My Everything" is done in ballad tempo by Miles and Trane with rich block-chords by Red setting the mood. The nuances by the rhythm section lend a welcome vitality.

For joyous, straight-ahead swinging and melodic improvisation, "I Could Write a Book" speaks several volumes. As in "If I Were a Bell," Miles opens and closes; Trane and Red appear in between.

The three take turns in stating the theme of "Oleo," an original that has become almost *de rigueur* for all Davis in-person appearances. Miles, in his two choruses, is backed by Chambers except on the bridges when the entire rhythm section swings into action. This is observed in Coltrane's first chorus but beginning with the second, the full trio works

behind him until near the end of his final one. With Garland's solo the laying-out patter is invoked again by Jones. Chambers is a rock on this, Philly's brushes are lightning, and Coltrane is at his driving best. Miles's sure-footed tightrope-walking leads back to the platform of the theme.

"It Could Happen to You" returns us to the lilting, swinging groove with Miles stating and embellishing the melody—Trane and Red in extremely exemplary solos on the rise and fall of the rhythm section's tide.

"Woody'n You," one of the most misspelled titles in jazz (it was written by Dizzy for Woody Herman who used to play it behind tap dancers but never recorded it), is one of the great modern jazz standards. The performance here is a high-water mark which combines intense drive with the great harmonic interest that the chord changes generate. Miles is searing and searching—finding. Coltrane, spurred on by the utilitarian absence and presence of Garland plus the general dynamics of the rhythm section, reaches the heights too. There is a storytelling, half-chorus drum solo by Philly Joe, after Miles's second entrance, that precedes the final chorus. Miles's arrangement leading back into the original melody in the last eight bars is simple and beautiful.

At the end we hear Miles say, "Okay?" and Bob Weinstock, in jest, tells him to "do that one over." Miles asks, "Why?" but Coltrane, unconcerned, looks for the beer opener.

—IRA GITLER
original liner notes

I WAS THE ENGINEER on the recording sessions and I also made the masters for the original LP issues of these albums. Since the advent of the CD, other people have been making the masters. Mastering is the final step in the process of creating the sound of the finished product. Now, thanks to the folks at the Concord Music Group who have given me the opportunity to remaster these albums, I can present my versions of the music on CD using modern technology. I remember the sessions well, I remember how the musicians wanted to sound, and I remember their reactions to the playbacks. Today, I feel strongly that I am their messenger. —RUDY VAN GELDER

RELAXIN' REVISITED

IF YOU LOOK at my original notes for *Relaxin'* you'll notice that in the box at the bottom (for a while Prestige used that space for extracurricular comments; and catalog information about the musicians on that particular LP), I took a *New York Times* critic to task for his evaluations of Miles Davis and Charlie Parker. I also stressed that to be wrong in retrospect was even a greater sin.

In the main body of the notes I referred to the Miles Davis Sextet, the successor to the Quintet, and wondered out loud whether Cannonball Adderley would fit in with Miles and Trane. Shortly thereafter I learned that Cannon did much more than just fit in, as he helped the sextet to attain a special niche of its own. I didn't need a whole lot of retrospect to realize that, but as much as I loved the sextet the first quintet had and has a special place in my heart. As Mezz Mezzrow once wrote: "Them first kicks are a killer."

I was there when Miles recorded with the combination of Red Garland and Philly Joe Jones for the first time on June 7, 1955 (Oscar Pettiford was the bassist) and it was a prelude to the formation of the quintet in both the material chosen and Miles's approach. The quintet was formed later that year after Davis's so-called "comeback" at the Newport Jazz Festival. The first Prestige recording was on November 16th. It

was simply titled *Miles*. The back liner proclaimed "The New Miles Davis Quintet." I wrote the notes without having too much information about Coltrane. (No information had been provided to me.) I knew he was from Philadelphia. I had heard him in Jefferson City, Missouri (1949) with Dizzy Gillespie's big band when he and Jimmy Heath were the altos in the sax section, had taken notice that he was on tenor with Dizzy's small group for a minute in 1951 but wasn't aware of his Earl Bostic or Johnny Hodges affiliations.

I think it was all those nights of listening at the Cafe Bohemia on Barrow Street, when the Davis Quintet was in residence for long stretches in 1956, that really embedded the players' individual and collective greatness in my ventricular memory.

The New York jazz club scene has always been constantly in flux. The Vanguard is the only survivor from the Golden Age. The original Birdland, founded on the site of the Clique in December 1949, had a substantial run into 1967. (Now its namesake is located on West 44th Street, just off 8th Avenue.) In the Fifties it was challenged (as far as being the "in" place to be) by the Bohemia. Musicians were in attendance when been sets when they were working in the vicinity. It was a time when the downtown scene was really

burgeoning. The Five Spot and the Half Note were establishing themselves but the Bohemia got hot in a hurry. When Cannonball Adderley, fresh up from Florida, sat in with Oscar Pettiford's combo, that was part of the ignition. The Bohemia lasted from '55 into '57, maybe some of '58.

The guy who ran it was Jimmy Garofalo, a tough neighborhood cookie. (Incidentally, the maître d' was Carl Lee, son of the famed actor Canada Lee.) One night I was there with two friends listening to Allen Eager. It was a Friday evening and one of my buddies had come from a long day at his job. He put his head down on the table to rest. Jimmy came over and yanked him upright. I'm sure he thought he was a junkie (who would have been on the nod rather than on the table) and wasn't having any overt manifestation in his club.

I spent a lot of time at the Bohemia during several of Miles's residences in 1956. He'd often let the rhythm section open the set and they would set an *atmosphère de groove*. Miles and Trane would then join them for the second number, upping the ante. The swing was as deep and multifaceted as it was propulsive. In my notes to the original issue of *Cookin'*, the first of the four albums created from the "marathon" sessions of May 11 and October 26 (*Relaxin'* was the second), I wrote about how the intensity of the quintet cleared my clogged nasal passages during the height of the hay fever season. I wasn't joking. If they could have encased that "rush" in a capsule, Benadryl would have been out of business.

Miles had torn his vocal cords yelling, in the course of an argument, too soon after having been operated on for "singer's nodes." Philly Joe Jones was put in charge of stage announcements. If Miles talked at all during between-the-sets conversations, it was in a whispering rasp. Meanwhile Trane practiced in the club's basement.

In those days the fact that groups were booked into clubs

for long engagements didn't deter people from paying repeat visits over the course of a month, whether it was Miles at the Bohemia, Monk at the Five Spot, or Al Cohn and Zoot Sims at the Half Note. As all of you know, there is nothing like live jazz.

Sometimes record companies tried to re-create the "live" atmosphere in the studio by inviting an audience to come to the taping. The marathon sessions weren't done this way but did achieve the spontaneity of a club performance through the quintet's approach of playing the repertoire as if they were on the Bohemia bandstand. In addition to the rhythm of Garland-Chambers-Jones there was the recording "rhythm" of the whole unit, "in sync" with each other—all first takes excepting one false start.

It occurs on "You're My Everything," which happens to be in this CD, the only "false" thing in it.

At the end of "Woody'n You" Coltrane asks for the "beer opener." We didn't have twist-off caps in those days. There was the Miles Davis Quintet which could put you into a dream state with a ballad and, with something like "Woody'n You," twist your head right around.

—IRA GITLER

June 2005

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1 IF I WERE A BELL
(Frank Loesser) Frank Music-ASCAP 8:13

2 YOU'RE MY EVERYTHING
(Dixon-Young-Warren) Warner Bros.
Music/Warock Corp./Olde Clover Leaf
Music-ASCAP 5:15

3 I COULD WRITE A BOOK
(Rodgers-Hart) Chappell & Co./Williamson
Music-ASCAP 5:06

4 OLEO
(Sonny Rollins) Prestige Music-BMI 6:15

5 IT COULD HAPPEN TO YOU
(Van Heusen-Burke) Famous Music-ASCAP 6:34

6 WOODY'N YOU
(Dizzy Gillespie) Edwin H.
Morris & Co.-ASCAP 4:59

MILES DAVIS trumpet
JOHN COLTRANE tenor saxophone
RED GARLAND piano
PAUL CHAMBERS bass
PHILLY JOE JONES drums

Recorded by RUDY VAN GELDER at Van Gelder Studio,
Hackensack, NJ; May 11 (#5, 6) and October 26,
1956 (other selections).

Supervision by BOB WEINSTOCK

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The image displays a collection of 50 vinyl record covers from the RVG Remasters series. The covers are arranged in a 10x5 grid. In the center of the grid, there is a large, bold, black and white logo that reads "RVG REMASTERS". The covers feature various artists, including Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Sonny Rollins, Thelma Houston, and many others. The covers are in various colors and styles, reflecting the diverse music of the RVG Remasters series.