

MILES DAVIS

Early life (1926–44)

Miles Dewey Davis III was born on May 26, 1926, to an affluent [African American](#) family in [Alton, Illinois](#). His father, [Miles Dewey Davis, Jr.](#), was a dentist. In 1927 the family moved to [East St. Louis, Illinois](#). They also owned a substantial ranch in the Delta region of [Arkansas](#) near the city of [Pine Bluff](#), Arkansas, where Davis's father and grandfather were from. It was in both East St. Louis, Illinois and near [Pine Bluff, Arkansas](#) that young Davis developed his earliest appreciation for music listening to the gospel music of the black church.

Davis' mother, Cleota Mae Davis (née Henry), wanted her son to learn the piano; she was a capable blues pianist but kept this fact hidden from her son. His musical studies began at 13, when his father gave him a trumpet and arranged lessons with local musician [Elwood Buchanan](#). Davis later suggested that his father's instrument choice was made largely to irk his wife, who disliked the trumpet's sound. Against the fashion of the time, Buchanan stressed the importance of playing without [vibrato](#); he was reported to have slapped Davis' knuckles every time he started using heavy [vibrato](#).^[5] Davis would carry his clear signature tone throughout his career. He once remarked on its importance to him, saying, "I prefer a round sound with no attitude in it, like a round voice with not too much [tremolo](#) and not too much bass. Just right in the middle. If I can't get that sound I can't play anything."^[6] [Clark Terry](#) was another important early influence.

By age 16, Davis was a member of the music society and, when not at school, playing professionally first at the local [Elks Club](#).^[7] At 17, he spent a year playing in Eddie Randle's band, the Blue Devils. During this time, [Sonny Stitt](#) tried to persuade him to join the Tiny Bradshaw band, then passing through town, but Davis' mother insisted that he finish his final year of high school. He graduated from East St. Louis Lincoln High School in 1944.

In 1944, the [Billy Eckstine](#) band visited East St. Louis. [Dizzy Gillespie](#) and [Charlie Parker](#) were members of the band, and Davis was brought in on third trumpet for a couple of weeks because the regular player, Buddy Anderson, was out sick. Even after this experience, once Eckstine's band left town, Davis' parents were still keen for him to continue formal academic studies.

New York and the bebop years (1944–48)

In the fall of 1944, following graduation from high school, Davis moved to New York City to study at the [Juilliard School](#) of Music. Upon arriving in New York, he spent most of his first weeks in town trying to get in contact with [Charlie Parker](#), despite being advised against doing so by several people he met during his quest, including [saxophonist Coleman Hawkins](#).^[5]

Finally locating his idol, Davis became one of the cadre of musicians who held nightly [jam sessions](#) at two of [Harlem's](#) nightclubs, [Minton's Playhouse](#) and [Monroe's](#). The group included many of the future leaders of the [bebop](#) revolution: young players such as [Fats Navarro](#), [Freddie Webster](#), and [J. J. Johnson](#). Established musicians including [Thelonious Monk](#) and [Kenny Clarke](#) were also regular participants.

Davis dropped out of Juilliard after asking permission from his father. In his autobiography, Davis criticized the Juilliard classes for centering too much on the classical European and "white" repertoire. However, he also acknowledged that, in addition to greatly improving his trumpet playing technique, Juilliard helped give him a grounding in music theory that would prove valuable in later years.

Davis began playing professionally, performing in several [52nd Street](#) clubs with Coleman Hawkins and [Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis](#). In 1945, he entered a recording studio for the first time, as a member of [Herbie Fields's](#) group. This was the first of many recordings Davis contributed to in this period, mostly as a [sideman](#). He finally got the chance to record as a leader in 1946, with an occasional group called the Miles Davis Sextet plus Earl Coleman and Ann Hathaway—one of the rare occasions when Davis, by then a member of the groundbreaking Charlie Parker Quintet, can be heard accompanying singers.^[8] In these early years, recording sessions where Davis was the leader were the exception rather than the rule; his next date as leader would not come until 1947.

Around 1945, [Dizzy Gillespie](#) parted ways with Parker, and Davis was hired as Gillespie's replacement in his quintet, which also featured [Max Roach](#) on drums, [Al Haig](#) (replaced later by [Sir Charles Thompson](#) and [Duke Jordan](#)) on piano, and [Curley Russell](#) (later replaced by [Tommy Potter](#) and [Leonard Gaskin](#)) on bass.

With Parker's quintet, Davis went into the studio several times, already showing hints of the style he would become known for. On an oft-quoted take of Parker's signature song, "Now's the Time", Davis takes a melodic solo, whose unbop-like quality anticipates the "[cool jazz](#)" period that followed. The Parker quintet also toured widely. During a stop in Los Angeles, Parker had a [nervous breakdown](#) that landed him in the [Camarillo State Mental Hospital](#) for several months, and Davis found himself stranded. He roomed and collaborated for some time with bassist [Charles Mingus](#), before getting a job on [Billy Eckstine's](#) California tour, which eventually brought him back to New York.^[9] In 1948, Parker returned to New York, and Davis rejoined his group.

Miles Davis on piano with [Howard McGhee](#) (trumpet), Joe Albany (pianist, standing) and [Brick Fleagle](#) (guitarist, smoking), September 1947

However, the relationships within the quintet were growing tense. Parker was behaving erratically due to his well-known drug addiction. Davis and Roach caused friction in the group by objecting to having Duke Jordan as a pianist^[5] and would have preferred [Bud Powell](#). By December of 1948, Davis' claims that he was not being paid began to strain the relationship even further. Davis finally left the group following a confrontation with Parker at the [Royal Roost](#).

For Davis, his departure from Parker's group marked the beginning of a period when he worked mainly as a freelancer and sideman in some of the most important combos on the New York jazz scene.

Birth of the Cool (1948–49)

In 1948 Davis grew close to the Canadian composer and arranger [Gil Evans](#). Evans' basement apartment had become the meeting place for several young musicians and composers such as Davis, Roach, pianist [John Lewis](#), and baritone sax player [Gerry Mulligan](#) who were unhappy with the increasingly virtuoso instrumental techniques that dominated the bebop scene. Evans had been the arranger for the [Claude](#)

[Thornhill](#) orchestra, and it was the sound of this group, as well as [Duke Ellington](#)'s example, that suggested the creation of an unusual line-up: a [nonet](#) including a [French horn](#) and a [tuba](#) (this accounts for the "tuba band" moniker that became associated with the combo).

Davis took an active role in the project,^[10] so much so that it soon became "his project". The objective was to achieve a sound similar to the human voice, through carefully arranged compositions and by emphasizing a relaxed, melodic approach to the improvisations.

The nonet debuted in the summer of 1948, with a two-week engagement at the Royal Roost. The sign announcing the performance gave a surprising prominence to the role of the arrangers: "Miles Davis Nonet. Arrangements by Gil Evans, John Lewis and Gerry Mulligan." It was, in fact, so unusual that Davis had to persuade the Roost's manager, Ralph Watkins, to word the sign this way. He prevailed only with the help of [Monte Kay](#), the club's artistic director.

The nonet was active until the end of 1949, along the way undergoing several changes in personnel: Roach and Davis were constantly featured, along with Mulligan, tuba player [Bill Barber](#), and alto saxophonist [Lee Konitz](#), who had been preferred to [Sonny Stitt](#) (whose playing was considered too bop-oriented). Over the months, John Lewis alternated with Al Haig on piano, [Mike Zwerin](#) with [Kai Winding](#) on trombone (Johnson was touring at the time), [Junior Collins](#) with Sandy Siegelstein and [Gunther Schuller](#) on [French horn](#), and [Al McKibbin](#) with [Joe Shulman](#) on bass. Singer [Kenny Hagood](#) was added for one track during the recording.

The presence of white musicians in the group angered some black jazz players, many of whom were unemployed at the time, but Davis rebuffed their criticisms.^[11]

A contract with [Capitol Records](#) granted the nonet several recording sessions between January 1949 and April 1950. The material they recorded was released in 1956 on an album whose title, *Birth of the Cool*, gave its name to the "[cool jazz](#)" movement that developed at the same time and partly shared the musical direction begun by Davis' group.

For his part, Davis was fully aware of the importance of the project, which he pursued to the point of turning down a job with [Duke Ellington](#)'s orchestra.^[5]

The importance of the nonet experience would become clear to critics and the larger public only in later years, but, at least commercially, the nonet was not a success. The [liner notes](#) of the first recordings of the Davis Quintet for [Columbia Records](#) call it one of the most spectacular failures of the jazz club scene. This was bitterly noted by Davis, who claimed the invention of the cool style and resented the success that was later enjoyed—in large part because of the media's attention—by white "cool jazz" musicians (Mulligan and [Dave Brubeck](#) in particular).

This experience also marked the beginning of the lifelong friendship between Davis and Gil Evans, an alliance that would bear important results in the years to follow.

Hard bop and the "Blue Period" (1950–54)

The first half of the 1950s was, for Davis, a period of great personal difficulty. At the end of 1949, he went on tour in Paris with a group including [Tadd Dameron](#), [Kenny Clarke](#) (who remained in Europe after the tour), and [James Moody](#). Davis was fascinated by Paris and its cultural environment, where black jazz musicians, and African Americans in general, often felt better respected than they did in their homeland. While in Paris, Davis began a relationship with French actress and singer [Juliette Gréco](#).

Although many of his new and old friends (Davis, in his autobiography, mentions Clarke) tried to persuade him to stay in France, Davis decided to return to New York. Back in the States, he began to feel deeply depressed. He attributed the depression to his separation from Gréco, his feeling under-appreciated by the critics (who hailed his former collaborators as leaders of the cool jazz movement)—and to the unraveling of his liaison with a former St. Louis schoolmate who lived with him in New York, with whom he had two children.

Davis blamed these factors for the [heroin](#) habit that deeply affected him for the next four years. During this period, Davis supported his habit partly with his music and partly by living the life of a hustler.^[12] By 1953, his drug addiction began to impair his playing ability. Heroin had killed some of his friends (Navarro and Freddie Webster). He had been arrested for drug possession while on tour in Los Angeles, and his drug habit became public in a *Down Beat* interview of [Cab Calloway](#).^[13]

Realizing his precarious condition, Davis tried several times to end his drug addiction, finally succeeding in 1954 after returning to his father's home in St. Louis for several months and locking himself in a room until he had gone through a painful withdrawal. During this period, he avoided New York and played mostly in Detroit and other Midwestern towns, where drugs were then harder to come by. A widely related story, attributed to Richard (Prophet) Jennings^{[14][15]} was that Davis -- while in Detroit playing at the [Blue Bird](#) club as a guest soloist in [Billy Mitchell](#)'s house band along with [Tommy Flanagan](#), [Elvin Jones](#), [Betty Carter](#), [Yusef Lateef](#), [Barry Harris](#), [Thad Jones](#), [Curtis Fuller](#) and [Donald Byrd](#) -- stumbled into [Baker's Keyboard Lounge](#) out of the rain, soaking wet and carrying his trumpet in a paper bag under his coat, walked to the bandstand and interrupted [Max Roach](#) and [Clifford Brown](#) in the midst of performing "[Sweet Georgia Brown](#)" by beginning to play "[My Funny Valentine](#)", and then, after finishing the song, stumbled back into the rainy night. Davis was supposedly embarrassed into getting clean by this incident. In his autobiography, Davis disputed this account, stating that Roach had requested that Davis play with him that night, and that the details of the incident, such as carrying his horn in a paper bag and interrupting Roach and Brown, were fictional and that his decision to quit heroin was unrelated to the incident.^[16]

Despite all the personal turmoil, the 1950–54 period proved to be a fruitful for Davis artistically. He made quite a number of recordings and had several collaborations with other important musicians. He got to know the music of Chicago pianist [Ahmad Jamal](#), whose elegant approach and use of space influenced him deeply. He also definitively severed his stylistic ties with bebop.^[17]

In 1951, Davis met [Bob Weinstock](#), the owner of [Prestige Records](#), and signed a contract with the label. Between 1951 and 1954, he released many records on Prestige, with several different combos. While the personnel of the recordings varied, the lineup often featured [Sonny Rollins](#) and [Art Blakey](#). Davis was particularly fond of Rollins and tried several times, in the years that preceded his meeting with [John Coltrane](#), to recruit him for a regular group. He never succeeded, however, mostly because Rollins was prone to make himself unavailable for months at a time. In spite of the casual occasions that generated these recordings, their quality is almost always quite high, and they document the evolution of Davis' style and sound. During this time he began using the [Harmon mute](#), held close to the [microphone](#), in a way that became his

signature, and his phrasing, especially in [ballads](#), became spacious, melodic, and relaxed. This sound became so characteristic that the use of the Harmon mute by any jazz trumpet player since immediately conjures up Miles Davis.

The most important Prestige recordings of this period ([Dig](#), [Blue Haze](#), [Bags' Groove](#), [Miles Davis and the Modern Jazz Giants](#), and [Walkin'](#)) originated mostly from recording sessions in 1951 and 1954, after Davis' recovery from his addiction. Also of importance are his five [Blue Note](#) recordings, collected in the [Miles Davis Volume 1](#) album.

With these recordings, Davis assumed a central position in what is known as [hard bop](#). In contrast with bebop, hard bop used slower tempos and a less radical approach to harmony and melody, often adopting popular tunes and standards from the American songbook as starting points for improvisation. Hard bop also distanced itself from cool jazz by virtue of a harder beat and by its constant reference to the [blues](#), both in its traditional form and in the form made popular by [rhythm and blues](#).^[18] A few critics^[6] go as far as to call *Walkin'* the album that created hard bop, but the point is debatable, given the number of musicians who were working along similar lines at the same time (many of whom recorded or played with Davis).

In this period, Davis gained a reputation for being distant, cold, and withdrawn, and for having a quick temper. Factors that contributed to this reputation included his contempt for the critics and specialized press, and some well-publicized confrontations with the public and with fellow musicians.

A near fight with [Thelonious Monk](#) during the recording of *Bags' Groove*, received wide exposure in the specialized press.^[19]

Davis had an operation to remove polyps from his larynx in October 1955.^[20] Even though he was not supposed to speak at all for ten days, he had an argument with somebody and raised his voice. This outburst damaged his vocal cords forever, giving him the characteristic raspy voice that came to be associated with him. "[...] in February or March 1956, that I had my first throat operation and had to disband the group while recovering. During the course of the conversation I raised my voice to make a point and fucked up my voice. I wasn't even supposed to talk for at least ten days, and here I was not only talking, but talking loudly. After that incident my voice had this whisper that has been with me ever since."^[5]

The "nocturnal" quality of Davis' playing and his somber reputation, along with his whispering voice,^[21] earned him the lasting moniker of "prince of darkness", adding a patina of mystery to his public persona.^[22]

First great quintet and sextet (1955–58)

Back in New York and in better health, in 1955 Davis attended the [Newport Jazz Festival](#), where his performance (and especially his solo on "[Round Midnight](#)") was greatly admired and prompted the critics to hail the "return of Miles Davis". At the same time, Davis recruited the players for a formation that became known as his "first great quintet": [John Coltrane](#) on tenor saxophone, [Red Garland](#) on piano, [Paul Chambers](#) on bass, and [Philly Joe Jones](#) on drums.

None of these musicians, with the exception of Davis, had received a great deal of exposure before that time; Chambers, in particular, was very young (19 at the time), a Detroit player who had been on the New York scene for only about a year, working with the bands of [Bernie Green](#), [Paul Quinichette](#), [George Wallington](#), [J. J. Johnson](#), and [Kai Winding](#). Coltrane was little known at the time, in spite of earlier collaborations with [Dizzy Gillespie](#), [Earl Bostic](#), and [Johnny Hodges](#). Davis hired Coltrane as a replacement for Sonny Rollins, after unsuccessfully trying to recruit alto saxophonist [Julian "Cannonball" Adderley](#).

The repertoire included many bebop mainstays, [standards](#) from the [Great American Songbook](#) and the pre-bop era, and some traditional tunes.^[23] The prevailing style of the group was a development of the Davis experience in the previous years—Davis playing long, [legato](#), and essentially melodic lines, while Coltrane, who during these years emerged as a leading figure on the musical scene, contrasted by playing high-energy solos.

With the new formation also came a new recording contract. In [Newport, Rhode Island](#), Davis had met [Columbia Records](#) producer [George Avakian](#), who persuaded him to sign with his label. The quintet made its debut on record with the extremely well received *'Round About Midnight*. Before leaving Prestige, however, Davis had to fulfill his obligations during two days of recording sessions in 1956. Prestige released these recordings in the following years as four albums: *Relaxin' with the Miles Davis Quintet*, *Steamin' with the Miles Davis Quintet*, *Workin' with the Miles Davis Quintet*, and *Cookin' with the Miles Davis Quintet*. While the recording took place in a studio, each record of this series has the structure and feel of a live performance, with several first takes on each album. The records became almost instant classics and were instrumental in establishing Davis' quintet as one of the best on the jazz scene.

The quintet was disbanded for the first time in 1957, following a series of personal problems that Davis blames on the drug addiction of the other musicians.^[24] Davis played some gigs at the *Café Bohemia* with a short-lived formation that included Sonny Rollins and drummer [Art Taylor](#), and then traveled to France, where he recorded the score to [Louis Malle](#)'s film *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud*. With the aid of French session musicians [Barney Wilen](#), [Pierre Michelot](#), and [René Urtreger](#), and expatriate American drummer [Kenny Clarke](#), he recorded the entire soundtrack with an innovative procedure, without relying on written material: starting from sparse indication of the harmony and a general feel of a given piece, the group played by watching the movie on a screen in front of them and improvising.

A performance of the Ballets Africains from Guinea in 1958 sparked Davis's interest in modal music. This music, featuring the [kalimba](#), stayed for long periods of time on a single chord, weaving in and out of consonance and dissonance.^[25] It was a very new concept in jazz at the time, then dominated by the chord-change based music of bebop.

Returning to New York in 1958, Davis successfully recruited Cannonball Adderley for his standing group. Coltrane, who in the meantime had freed himself from his drug habits, was available after a highly fruitful experience with Thelonious Monk and was hired back, as was Philly Joe Jones. With the quintet re-formed as a sextet, Davis recorded *Milestones*, an album anticipating the new directions he was preparing to give to his music.

Almost immediately after the recording of *Milestones*, Davis fired Garland and, shortly afterward, Jones, again for behavioral problems; he replaced them with [Bill Evans](#)—a young white pianist with a strong classical background—and drummer [Jimmy Cobb](#). With this revamped formation, Davis began a year during which the sextet performed and toured extensively and produced a record (*1958 Miles*, also known as

58 Sessions). Evans had a unique, impressionistic approach to the piano, and his musical ideas had a strong influence on Davis. But after only eight months on the road with the group, he was burned out and left. He was soon replaced by [Wynton Kelly](#), a player who brought to the sextet a [swinging](#), bluesy approach that contrasted with Evans' more delicate playing.

Recordings with Gil Evans (1957–63)

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Davis recorded a series of albums with [Gil Evans](#), often playing [flugelhorn](#) as well as trumpet. The first, [Miles Ahead](#) (1957), showcased his playing with a jazz [big band](#) and a horn section arranged by Evans. Songs included [Dave Brubeck](#)'s "The Duke," as well as [Léo Delibes](#)'s "The Maids of Cadiz," the first piece of [European classical music](#) Davis had recorded. Another distinctive feature of the album was the orchestral passages that Evans had devised as transitions between the different tracks, which were joined together with the innovative use of [editing](#) in the post-production phase, turning each side of the album into a seamless piece of music.^[26]

In 1958, Davis and Evans were back in the studio to record [Porgy and Bess](#), an arrangement of pieces from [George Gershwin](#)'s [opera of the same name](#). The lineup included three members of the sextet: Paul Chambers, Philly Joe Jones, and Julian "Cannonball" Adderley. Davis called the album one of his favorites.^[citation needed]

Also in 1958, he married his first wife Frances Taylor.^[27] Their marriage lasted 10 years, despite his persistent domestic violence.^[28]

[Sketches of Spain](#) (1959–1960) featured songs by contemporary Spanish composer [Joaquin Rodrigo](#) and also [Manuel de Falla](#), as well as Gil Evans originals with a Spanish flavor. *Miles Davis at Carnegie Hall* (1961) includes Rodrigo's [Concierto de Aranjuez](#), along with other compositions recorded in concert with an orchestra under Evans' direction.

Sessions with Davis and Evans in 1962 resulted in the album [Quiet Nights](#), a short collection of [bossa novas](#) that was released against the wishes of both artists: Evans stated it was only half an album, and blamed the record company; Davis blamed producer Teo Macero, to whom he did not speak for more than two years.^[29] This was the last time Evans and Davis made a full album together; despite the professional separation, Davis noted later that "my best friend is Gil Evans."^[30]

Kind of Blue (1959–64)

In March and April 1959, Davis re-entered the studio with his working sextet to record what is widely considered his *magnum opus*, [Kind of Blue](#). He called back Bill Evans, months away from forming what would become his own [seminal trio](#), for the album sessions, as the music had been planned around Evans' piano style.^[31] Both Davis and Evans were acquainted with the ideas of pianist [George Russell](#) regarding [modal jazz](#); Davis from discussions with Russell and others before the [Birth of the Cool](#) sessions, and Evans from study with Russell in 1956.^[32] Davis, however, had neglected to inform current pianist Kelly of Evans' role in the recordings; Kelly subsequently played only on the track "[Freddie Freeloader](#)" and was not present at the April dates for the album.^[31] "[So What](#)" and "[All Blues](#)" had been played by the sextet at performances prior to the recording sessions, but for the other three compositions, Davis and Evans prepared skeletal harmonic frameworks that the other musicians saw for the first time on the day of recording, to allow a fresher approach to their [improvisations](#). The resulting album has proven both highly popular and enormously influential. According to the [RIAA](#), *Kind of Blue* is the best-selling jazz album of all time, having been certified as quadruple platinum (4 million copies sold).^[3] In December 2009, the US House of Representatives voted 409–0 to pass a resolution honoring the album as a national treasure.^{[4][33]}

The trumpet Davis used on the recording is currently displayed in the music building on the campus of the [University of North Carolina at Greensboro](#). It was donated to the school by Arthur "Buddy" Gist, who met Davis in 1949 and became a close friend. The gift was the reason why the jazz program at UNCG is named the "Miles Davis Jazz Studies Program."^[34]

In August 1959, the [Miles Davis Quintet](#) was appearing at the famous [Birdland](#) nightclub in New York City. After finishing a recording for the [armed services](#), Davis took a break outside the club. As he was escorting an attractive blonde woman across the sidewalk to a taxi, Davis was told by a patrolman to "move on."^[35] Davis explained that he worked at the nightclub and refused to move.^[36] The officer said that he would arrest Davis and grabbed him as Davis protected himself.^[35] Witnesses said that the patrolman punched Davis in the stomach with his nightstick without provocation.^[35] While two detectives held the crowd back, a third detective approached Davis from behind and beat him about the head. Davis was arrested and taken to jail where he was charged with feloniously assaulting an officer. He was then taken to St. Clary Hospital where he received five stitches for a wound on his head.^[35] The following October, he was acquitted of the charge of [disorderly conduct](#) and was likewise acquitted the following January of the charge of third-degree assault.^[37]

Davis tried to pursue the case by bringing a suit against the New York City Police Department, but eventually dropped the proceedings.^[citation needed] in a [plea bargain](#) so he could recover his suspended [cabaret card](#) – entertainers awaiting trial were automatically deprived of their cards^[35] – and return to work in New York clubs. In his autobiography, Davis stated that the incident "changed my whole life and whole attitude again, made me feel bitter and cynical again when I was starting to feel good about the things that had changed in this country."^[37]

Davis persuaded Coltrane to play with the group on one final European tour in the spring of 1960. Coltrane then departed to form his classic quartet, although he returned for some of the tracks on Davis' 1961 album [Someday My Prince Will Come](#). After Coltrane, Davis tried various saxophonists, including [Jimmy Heath](#), [Sonny Stitt](#), and [Hank Mobley](#). The quintet with Hank Mobley was recorded in the studio and on several live engagements at [Carnegie Hall](#) and the [Black Hawk jazz club](#) in San Francisco. Stitt's playing with the group is found on a recording made in [Olympia](#), Paris (where Davis and Coltrane had played a few months before) and the *Live in Stockholm* album.

In 1963, Davis' longtime rhythm section of Kelly, Chambers, and Cobb departed. He quickly got to work putting together a new group, including [tenor saxophonist](#) [George Coleman](#) and bassist [Ron Carter](#). Davis, Coleman, Carter and a few other musicians recorded half the tracks for an album in the spring of 1963. A few weeks later, seventeen-year-old drummer [Tony Williams](#) and pianist [Herbie Hancock](#) joined the group, and soon afterward Davis, Coleman, and the new rhythm section recorded the rest of [Seven Steps to Heaven](#).

The rhythm players melded together quickly as a section and with the horns. The group's rapid evolution can be traced through the [Seven Steps to Heaven](#) album, *In Europe* (July 1963), [My Funny Valentine](#) (February 1964), and *Four and More* (also February 1964). The quintet played essentially the same repertoire of bebop tunes and standards that earlier Davis bands had played, but they tackled them with increasing structural and rhythmic freedom and, in the case of the up-tempo material, breakneck speed.

Coleman left in the spring of 1964, to be replaced by [avant-garde](#) saxophonist [Sam Rivers](#), on the suggestion of Tony Williams. Rivers remained in the group only briefly, but was recorded live with the quintet in Japan; this configuration can be heard on *Miles in Tokyo!* (July 1964).

By the end of the summer, Davis had persuaded [Wayne Shorter](#) to leave [Art Blakey's](#) Jazz Messengers and join the quintet. Shorter became the group's principal composer, and some of his compositions of this era (including "Footprints" and "Nefertiti") have become [standards](#). While on tour in Europe, the group quickly made their first official recording, *Miles in Berlin* (September 1964). On returning to the United States later that year, ever the musical entrepreneur, Davis (at [Jackie DeShannon's](#) urging) was instrumental in getting [the Byrds](#) signed to [Columbia Records](#).^[38]

Second great quintet (1964–68)

By the time of *E.S.P.* (1965), Davis's lineup consisted of [Wayne Shorter](#) (saxophone), [Herbie Hancock](#) (piano), [Ron Carter](#) (bass), and [Tony Williams](#) (drums). The last of his acoustic bands, this group is often referred to as the "[second great quintet](#)".

A two-night Chicago performance in late 1965 is captured on *The Complete Live at the Plugged Nickel 1965*, released in 1995. Unlike their studio albums, the live engagement shows the group still playing primarily standards and bebop tunes. Although some of the titles remain the same as the tunes played by the 1950s quintet, the quick tempos and musical departure from the framework of the tune are dramatic. It could be said that these live performances of standards are as radical as the studio recordings of new compositions on the albums listed below.

The recording of *Live at the Plugged Nickel* was not issued anywhere in the 1960s, first appearing as a Japan-only partial issue in the late 1970s, then as a double-LP in the U.S. and Europe in 1982. It was followed by a series of studio recordings: *Miles Smiles* (1966), *Sorcerer* (1967), *Nefertiti* (1967), *Miles in the Sky* (1968), and *Filles de Kilimanjaro* (1968). The quintet's approach to improvisation came to be known as "time no changes" or "freebop," because they abandoned the more conventional [chord-change](#)-based approach of bebop for a modal approach. Through *Nefertiti*, the studio recordings consisted primarily of originals composed by Shorter, with occasional compositions by the other sidemen. In 1967, the group began to play their live concerts in continuous sets, each tune flowing into the next, with only the melody indicating any sort of demarcation. Davis's bands would continue to perform in this way until his retirement in 1975.

Miles in the Sky and *Filles de Kilimanjaro*,—which tentatively introduced electric bass, electric piano, and electric guitar on some tracks—pointed the way to the subsequent [fusion](#) phase of Davis's career. Davis also began experimenting with more rock-oriented rhythms on these records. By the time the second half of *Filles de Kilimanjaro* was recorded, bassist [Dave Holland](#) and pianist [Chick Corea](#) had replaced Carter and Hancock in the working band, though both Carter and Hancock occasionally contributed to future recording sessions. Davis soon began to take over the compositional duties of his sidemen.

Electric Miles (1968–75)

The guru-manipulator shifted gears at will in his early-'70s music, orchestrating moods and settings to subjugate the individual musical inspirations of his young close-enough-for-funk subgeniuses to the life of a single palpating organism that would have perished without them—no arrangements, little composition, and not many solos either, although at any moment a player could find himself left to fly off on his own.

— [Robert Christgau](#), review of *Dark Maqus* (1977)^[40]

Davis's influences included 1960s [rock](#) and [funk](#) artists such as [Sly and the Family Stone](#) and [Parliament/Funkadelic](#),^[2] many of whom he met through [Betty Mabry](#) (later Betty Davis), a young model and songwriter Davis married in September 1968 and divorced a year later. The musical transition required that Davis and his band adapt to [electric instruments](#) in both live performances and the studio. By the time *In a Silent Way* had been recorded in February 1969, Davis had augmented his quintet with additional players. At various times Hancock or [Joe Zawinul](#) was brought in to join Corea on [electric keyboards](#), and guitarist [John McLaughlin](#) made the first of his many appearances with Davis. By this point, Shorter was also doubling on soprano saxophone. After recording this album, Williams left to form his group [Lifetime](#) and was replaced by [Jack DeJohnette](#).

Six months later, an even larger group of musicians, including [Jack DeJohnette](#), [Airtó Moreira](#), and [Bennie Maupin](#), recorded the double LP *Bitches Brew*, which became a huge seller, reaching [gold](#) status by 1976. This album and *In a Silent Way* were among the first fusions of jazz and rock that were commercially successful, building on the groundwork laid by [Charles Lloyd](#), [Larry Coryell](#), and others who pioneered a genre that would become known as [jazz fusion](#). Throughout 1969, Davis' touring band included Shorter, Corea, Holland, and DeJohnette; as the group never completed a studio recording, it has been subsequently characterized as the "lost quintet" by many critics.^{[41][42]} The quintet's repertoire included material from *Bitches Brew*, *In a Silent Way*, and the 1960s quintet albums, along with an occasional standard.^[citation needed]

Both *Bitches Brew* and *In a Silent Way* feature "extended" (more than 20 minutes each) compositions that were never actually "played straight through" by the musicians in the studio.^[citation needed] Instead, Davis and producer [Teo Macero](#) selected musical [motifs](#) of various lengths from recorded extended improvisations and edited them together into a musical whole that exists only in the recorded version. *Bitches Brew* made use of such electronic effects as [multi-tracking](#), [tape loops](#), and other editing techniques.^[43] Both records, especially *Bitches Brew*, were big sellers. Starting with *Bitches Brew*, Davis's albums began to often feature [cover art](#) much more in line with [psychedelic art](#) or [black power](#) movements than that of his earlier albums. He took significant cuts in his usual performing fees in order to open for rock groups like the [Steve Miller Band](#), [Grateful Dead](#), [Neil Young](#), and [Santana](#).^[citation needed] Several live albums (with a transitional sextet/septet including Corea, DeJohnette, Holland, percussionist [Airtó Moreira](#), and saxophonist Steve Grossman that expanded to encompass [Keith Jarrett](#) on electronic organ by June 1970) were recorded at these performances: *Live at the Fillmore East, March 7, 1970: It's About That Time* (March 1970), *Black Beauty* (April 1970), and *Miles Davis at Fillmore: Live at the Fillmore East* (June 1970).^[2]

By the time of *Live-Evil* in December 1970, Davis's ensemble—though retaining the exploratory imperative of *Bitches Brew*—had transformed into a much more [funk](#)-oriented group. Davis began experimenting with [wah-wah](#) effects on his horn. A new sextet including DeJohnette, Jarrett, Moreira, [Gary Bartz](#) and erstwhile [Stevie Wonder](#) bassist [Michael Henderson](#)—often referred to as the "Cellar Door band" (the live portions of *Live-Evil* were recorded at a Washington, DC, [club by that name](#))—is documented in the six-CD box set *The Cellar Door Sessions*, which was recorded over four nights in December 1970; however, the ensemble disbanded before recording a studio album.^[citation needed] Earlier in 1970, Davis contributed extensively to the soundtrack of a [documentary](#) about the African-American boxer heavyweight champion [Jack Johnson](#). Himself a devotee of boxing, Davis drew parallels between Johnson, whose career had been defined by the fruitless search for a

Great White Hope to dethrone him, and Davis's own career, in which he felt the musical establishment of the time had prevented him from receiving the acclaim and rewards that were due him.^{[[citation needed](#)]} The resulting album, 1971's *Jack Johnson*, contained two long pieces that featured musicians (some of whom were not credited on the record) including guitarists [John McLaughlin](#) and [Sonny Sharrock](#), [Herbie Hancock](#) on a [Farfisa](#) organ, and drummer [Billy Cobham](#). McLaughlin and Cobham went on to become founding members of the [Mahavishnu Orchestra](#) in 1971. In 1972, Davis was introduced to the music of [Karlheinz Stockhausen](#) by [Paul Buckmaster](#), leading to a period of new creative exploration. Biographer J. K. Chambers wrote that "the effect of Davis' study of Stockhausen could not be repressed for long... Davis' own 'space music' shows Stockhausen's influence compositionally."^[44] His recordings and performances during this period were described as "space music" by fans, by music critic [Leonard Feather](#), and by Buckmaster, who described it as "a lot of mood changes—heavy, dark, intense—definitely space music."^{[45][46]}

During this period, Davis was committed to making music for the young African-American audience drawn to the more commercial, groove-oriented idioms of popular music that dominated the epoch; by November 1971, DeJohnette and Moreira had been replaced in the touring ensemble by drummer [Leon "Ndugu" Chancler](#) and percussionists [James Mtume](#) & [Don Alias](#).^[47] *On the Corner* (1972) blended the incipient influence of Stockhausen with funk elements in a trenchantly improvisatory milieu. The album was highlighted by the appearance of saxophonist [Carlos Garnett](#). Critics were not kind to the album; in his autobiography, Davis stated that critics could not figure out how to categorize it, and he complained that the album was not promoted to the right crowd. Columbia tried selling the album to the old jazz generation who didn't really understand it instead of the younger crowd that Miles intended the album for.^{[[citation needed](#)]} After recording *On the Corner*, Davis put together a new group, with only Henderson and Mtume returning from the Jarrett-era band. It included Garnett, guitarist [Reggie Lucas](#), organist [Lonnie Liston Smith](#), tabla player [Badal Roy](#), sitarist Khalil Balakrishna, and drummer [Al Foster](#). It was unusual in that only Smith was a major jazz instrumentalist; as a result, the music emphasized rhythmic density and shifting textures instead of individual solos. This group, which recorded in [Philharmonic Hall](#) for the album *In Concert* (1972), was unsatisfactory to Davis. Through the first half of 1973, he dropped the [tabla](#) and [sitar](#), took over keyboard duties, and added guitarist [Pete Cosey](#). The Davis/Cosey/Lucas/Henderson/Mtume/Foster ensemble would remain virtually intact over the next two years. Initially, [Dave Liebman](#) played saxophones and flute with the band; in 1974, he was replaced by [Sonny Fortune](#), who was eventually supplanted by [Sam Morrison](#) during the band's final American engagements in 1975.

Big Fun (1974) was a double album containing four long improvisations, recorded between 1969 and 1972. Similarly, *Get Up With It* (1974) collected recordings from May 1970 to October 1974. Notably, the album included "He Loved Him Madly", a tribute to Duke Ellington, as well as one of Davis's most lauded pieces from this era, "Calypso Frelimo". It was his last studio album of the 1970s. In 1974 and 1975, Columbia recorded three double-LP live Davis albums: *Dark Magus*, *Agharta*, and *Pangaea*. *Dark Magus* captures a 1974 New York concert; the latter two are recordings of consecutive concerts from the same February 1975 day in [Osaka](#). At the time, only *Agharta* was available in the US; *Pangaea* and *Dark Magus* were initially released only by CBS/Sony Japan. All three feature at least two electric guitarists (Reggie Lucas and Pete Cosey, deploying an array of Hendrix-inspired electronic distortion devices; [Dominique Gaumont](#) is a third guitarist on *Dark Magus*), electric bass, drums, reeds, and Davis on electric trumpet and organ. These albums were the last he recorded for five years. Davis was troubled by osteoarthritis (which led to a hip replacement operation in 1976, the first of several), [sickle-cell anemia](#), depression, [bursitis](#), [ulcers](#), and a renewed dependence on alcohol and drugs (primarily cocaine), and his performances were routinely panned by critics throughout late 1974 and early 1975. By the time the group reached Japan in February 1975, Davis was nearing a physical breakdown and required copious amounts of alcohol and narcotics to make it through his engagements. Nonetheless, as noted by Richard Cook and Brian Morton, during these concerts his trumpet playing "is of the highest and most adventurous order."^{[[citation needed](#)]}

This was music that polarized audiences, provoking boos and walk-outs amid the ecstasy of others. The length, density, and unforgiving nature of it mocked those who said that Miles was interested only in being trendy and popular. Some have heard in this music the feel and shape of a musician's late work, an egoless music that precedes its creator's death. As [Theodor Adorno](#) said of the late [Beethoven](#), the disappearance of the musician into the work is a bow to mortality. It was as if Miles were testifying to all that he had been witness to for the past thirty years, both terrifying and joyful.

— [John Szwed](#), on *Agharta* (1975) and *Pangaea* (1976)^[50]

Although the Japanese performances have been lauded as the apogee of Davis' experimental period, Pete Cosey would later assert that "the band really advanced after the Japanese tour."^[51] Davis undertook an arduous tour of the American Midwest (opening for Herbie Hancock) following his return from Japan, culminating in a series of club performances at [the Bottom Line](#) in New York and Pall's Mall in Boston throughout the spring and summer. However, his precarious health was compounded by an ulcer-related hospitalization in March 1975 and the diagnosis of a [hernia](#) in August 1975. After a hometown performance at New York's [Schaefer Music Festival](#) on September 5, 1975, Davis withdrew almost completely from the public eye for six years, enabled by an unprecedented special retainer issued by Columbia Records.^[52] As Gil Evans said, "His organism is tired. And after all the music he's contributed for 35 years, he needs a rest."^{[[citation needed](#)]} In his memoirs, Davis is characteristically candid about his wayward mental state during this period, describing himself as a hermit, his [Upper West Side](#) apartment as a wreck, and detailing his drug and sex addictions.^[5] In 1976, *Rolling Stone* reported rumors of his imminent demise. Although he stopped practicing trumpet on a regular basis, Davis continued to compose intermittently and made three attempts at recording during his self-imposed exile from performing; these sessions (one with the assistance of Paul Buckmaster and Gil Evans, who left after not receiving promised compensation) bore little fruit and remain unreleased. In 1979, he placed in the yearly top-ten trumpeter poll of *Down Beat*. Columbia continued to issue [compilation albums](#) and records of unreleased vault material to fulfill contractual obligations. During his period of inactivity, Davis saw the fusion music that he had spearheaded over the past decade enter into the mainstream. When he emerged from retirement, Davis's musical descendants—most notably [Prince](#)—would be in the realm of [new wave](#) rock.

Later years and death

By 1979, Davis had rekindled his relationship with actress [Cicely Tyson](#), with whom he overcame his cocaine addiction and regained his enthusiasm for music. As he had not played trumpet for the better part of three years, regaining his famed [embouchure](#) proved particularly arduous. While recording *The Man with the Horn* at a leisurely pace throughout 1980–1981, Davis played mostly [wahwah](#) with a younger, larger band.

Miles Davis at the [North Sea Jazz Festival](#) in 1991

The initial large band was eventually abandoned in favor of a smaller combo featuring saxophonist [Bill Evans](#) (not to be confused with pianist Bill Evans of the 1958–59 sextet), and bass player [Marcus Miller](#), both of whom would be among Davis's most regular collaborators throughout the decade. He married Tyson in 1981; they would divorce in 1988. *The Man with the Horn* was finally released in 1981 and

received a poor critical reception despite selling fairly well. In May, the new band played two dates as part of the Newport Jazz Festival. The concerts, as well as the live recording [We Want Miles](#) from the ensuing tour, received positive reviews.

By late 1982, Davis's band included French percussionist [Mino Cinelu](#) and guitarist [John Scofield](#), with whom he worked closely on the album [Star People](#). In mid-1983, while working on the tracks for [Decoy](#), an album mixing [soul music](#) and [electronica](#) that was released in 1984, Davis brought in producer, composer and keyboardist [Robert Irving III](#), who had earlier collaborated with him on *The Man with the Horn*. With a seven-piece band, including Scofield, Evans, keyboardist and music director Irving, drummer [Al Foster](#) and bassist [Darryl Jones](#) (later of [the Rolling Stones](#)), Davis played a series of European gigs to positive receptions. While in Europe, he took part in the recording of [Aura](#), an orchestral tribute to Davis composed by Danish trumpeter [Palle Mikkelborg](#).

[You're Under Arrest](#), Davis' next album, was released in 1985 and included another brief stylistic detour. Included on the album were his interpretations of [Cyndi Lauper](#)'s ballad "[Time After Time](#)", and [Michael Jackson](#)'s pop hit "[Human Nature](#)". Davis considered releasing an entire album of pop songs and recorded dozens of them, but the idea was scrapped. Davis noted that many of today's accepted jazz standards were in fact pop songs from [Broadway theater](#), and that he was simply updating the "standards" repertoire with new material. 1985 also saw Davis guest-star on the TV show [Miami Vice](#) as pimp and minor criminal Ivory Jones in the episode titled "Junk Love" (first aired November 8, 1985).^[53]

You're Under Arrest was Davis' final album for Columbia. Trumpeter [Wynton Marsalis](#) publicly dismissed Davis' more recent fusion recordings as not being "'true' jazz," comments Davis initially shrugged off, calling Marsalis "a nice young man, only confused." This changed after Marsalis appeared, unannounced, onstage in the midst of Davis' performance at the inaugural [Vancouver International Jazz Festival](#) in 1986. Marsalis whispered into Davis' ear that "someone" had told him to do so. Davis responded by ordering him off the stage.^[54]

Davis grew irritated at Columbia's delay releasing *Aura*. The breaking point in the label-artist relationship appears to have come when a Columbia jazz producer requested Davis place a goodwill birthday call to Marsalis. Davis signed with [Warner Bros. Records](#) shortly thereafter.

Davis collaborated with a number of figures from the British [post-punk](#) and [new wave](#) movements during this period, including [Scritti Politti](#).^[55] At the invitation of producer [Bill Laswell](#), Davis recorded some trumpet parts during sessions for [Public Image Ltd.](#)'s *Album*, according to Public Image's [John Lydon](#) in the liner notes of their [Plastic Box](#) box set. In Lydon's words, however, "strangely enough, we didn't use [his contributions]." According to Lydon in the *Plastic Box* notes, Davis favorably compared Lydon's singing voice to his trumpet sound during these sessions.^[56]

Having first taken part in the [Artists United Against Apartheid](#) recording, Davis signed with [Warner Brothers](#) records and reunited with [Marcus Miller](#). The resulting record, [Tutu](#) (1986), was his first to use modern studio tools—programmed synthesizers, [samples](#) and drum loops—to create an entirely new setting for his playing. The album was described as the modern counterpart of *Sketches of Spain* and won a [Grammy](#) in 1987. He was featured on the instrumental [Toto](#) track *Don't Stop Me Now* from their [Fahrenheit](#) album (1986).

The westernmost part of 77th Street in [New York City](#) has been named "Miles Davis Way". He once lived on the block.

He followed *Tutu* with [Amandla](#), another collaboration with Miller and [George Duke](#), plus the soundtracks to four movies: [Street Smart](#), [Siesta](#), [The Hot Spot](#) (with bluesman [John Lee Hooker](#)), and [Dingo](#). He continued to tour with a band of constantly rotating personnel and a critical stock at a level higher than it had been for 15 years. His last recordings, both released posthumously, were the [hip hop](#)-influenced studio album [Doo-Bop](#) and [Miles & Quincy Live at Montreux](#), a collaboration with [Quincy Jones](#) for the 1991 [Montreux Jazz Festival](#). For the first time in three decades, Davis returned to the songs arranged by [Gil Evans](#) on such 1950s albums as [Miles Ahead](#), [Porgy and Bess](#) and [Sketches of Spain](#). This album was also the last album recorded by Davis. It left a lot of people who had been disappointed with his newer, more experimental works happy that he had ended his career in such a way.^{[57][58][59]}

In 1988 he had a small part as a street musician in the film [Scrooged](#), starring [Bill Murray](#). In 1989, Davis was interviewed on [60 Minutes](#) by [Harry Reasoner](#). Davis received the [Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award](#) in 1990.

In early 1991, he appeared in the [Rolf de Heer](#) film [Dingo](#) as a jazz musician. In the film's opening sequence, Davis and his band unexpectedly land on a remote airstrip in the [Australian outback](#) and proceed to perform for the surprised locals. The performance was one of Davis's last on film and one of the first released after his death in September.

During the last years of Miles Davis's life, there were rumors that he had [AIDS](#), something that he and his manager Peter Shukat vehemently denied.^{[51][60]} According to [Quincy Troupe](#) by that time Davis was taking [azidothymidine](#) (AZT), a type of [antiretroviral drug](#) used for the treatment of HIV/AIDS.^{[20][61]}

Davis died on September 28, 1991, from the combined effects of a stroke, [pneumonia](#) and [respiratory failure](#) in [Santa Monica, California](#), at the age of 65.^[4] He is buried in [Woodlawn Cemetery](#) in The Bronx.^[62]