
1959, The Year That Changed Jazz

The year 1959 was marked a monumental year in American music history. Many American jazz artists made recordings that influenced society profoundly and left a lasting impact that still is present to this day. Musical experimentation during this year is considered the apogee of American jazz achievement, and jazz reached new heights that were characterized by innovation, creativity, ingenuity, magnificence, groove, and much more. In essence, four major jazz albums were created that changed music forever: Miles Davis' *Kind of Blue*, Dave Brubeck's *Time Out*, Charles Mingus' *Ah Um*, and Ornette Coleman's *The Shape of Jazz to Come*.

Miles Davis' *Kind of Blue* has attracted more people to jazz than any other jazz recording, even after being released more than fifty years ago. The album developed a new, powerful, and grand jazz musical statement. The *Kind of Blue* album typifies a modal jazz style, which is music based on the extensive repetition of one or two chords or music based on modes instead of chord progression. *Kind of Blue*'s "So What" improvised, no time-referenced, and without a clear beat opening with the bass and the piano sets an unclear and cloudy idea in where the song was heading, with a grand riff setting the energy and Jimmy Cobb performing an incredible cymbal crash following the introduction. So what's main characteristic is Miles' hippy and haunting trumpet sound, which was unique and special and was developed from his playing during the bebop era with musicians such as Charlie Parker, the main alto saxophonist of the bebop era. *Kind of Blue* is so important when it comes to American jazz history because it has exerted a prodigious influence on jazz music and on the legacy of its band members. Moreover, it opened up to a new direction in jazz music, along with a more thoughtful viewpoint on creating jazz compositions. Three interesting facts about *Kind of Blue* is that it is the biggest selling jazz album ever made, shifting over five million copies, it regularly tops best jazz album polls and is featured high in lists of greatest albums of any category, and that it took Miles and the group seven hours to record *Kind of Blue*, with all but one of the tracks being first takes. A funny story about Miles Davis and the quartet was that when they are recording *Kind of Blue* the first time, an engineer told Miles Davis and the band that the drums were making a surface noise, and Miles Davis hollered back at him and told him that it was a part of the album while recording.

Dave Brubeck's *Time Out* album is known for the rhythmic experimentation of pianist Dave Brubeck. The style of *Time Out* is cool jazz, in which the music was not as jagged, unpredictable, and sophisticated in comparison to bebop, and was subtler and incorporated classical harmonic devices in composition. *Take Five*, one of the tracks in the *Time Out* album, was composed in 5/4 time, and was written around a drum solo. *Time Out* is so important when it comes to American jazz history because it was so easily accessible to the average citizen

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because it was not too complicated and appealing as the group represented America's middle class. Three interesting facts about Time Out is that each track is written in a different time signature and tempo, it rose up in the pop charts and became one of the bestselling jazz recordings ever released, and that it took Dave Brubeck several years to build the line-up of his quartet that recorded the album Time Out. An interesting story about Dave Brubeck's quartet is that when the quartet added African-American bassist Eugene Wright and were touring universities in the southern states of America, the president of a college the quartet visited was concerned because the students were getting wild and loud and asked Dave Brubeck to place Eugene Wright in the back of the stage to avoid being noticed. However, during the second tune, Dave Brubeck asked Eugene Wright to come play his solo in front of the stage, and Eugene Wright performed in front of the whole audience, unaware before heading to the front of the stage that Dave Brubeck was plotting this move.

Charles Mingus' Ah Um album is known as a grand jazz musical statement that was incredible and influential around America. Charles Mingus, a bass player and composer, believed that time was alive at the same moment and wanted freedom in playing, writing, and encouraging his musicians to improvise in any musical style, and did not view jazz as a development of new styles as the years passed by. The style of Ah Um is post-bop, where it incorporates a variety of styles such as modal jazz, avant-garde, free jazz, and hard bop all together. Several tracks in the Ah Um album include "Better Git It In Your Soul," which is known as the incredible opening track of the Ah Um album and "Self Portrait In Three Colors," which is known as a composed, multi-faceted composition without any solos. While Charles Mingus was known to be a temperamental, aggressive, and demanding musician and composer, he was an extraordinary player and improviser, and used music to express emotions and feelings, such as passion, tenderness, spirituality, and much more. Ah Um is so important when it comes to American jazz history because it expressed socioracial struggles and other political beliefs that served as an influential message against racism in America, which helped create an atmosphere which led people to respect a person beyond the distinctions of color. Three interesting facts about Ah Um is that it was one of four albums Charles Mingus had made that year, Charles Mingus allowed for the other musicians to incorporate different musical elements during improvisation in a colorful and provocative way, and it featured the track "Fables of Faubus," which was based on an event in 1957 in which Arkansas Governor Faubus ordered the National Guard to prevent African-American teenagers from entering Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, and did not want to allow integration, despite a court case being settled on in the Supreme Court. An interesting story about Charles Mingus and the group is that one night in a little club on West 4th Street in New York City, Charles Mingus got furious in an argument with the pianist and yelled "You're not playing yourself, you're playing notes," and put his arm inside the piano and grabbed the strings and pulled them out with one fist.

Ornette Coleman's The Shape of Jazz to Come is known as a spectacular and bold musical

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statement unlike any jazz album ever recorded before. One of The Shape of Jazz to Come's tracks, Lonely Woman, is considered one of the greatest jazz compositions ever written, which blended and brought Ornette Coleman and the quartet together as one. The Shape of Jazz to Come album exemplifies a free-jazz, a classification of the avant-garde style, where the music contains improvised solos which are free of preset chord progressions, and sometimes also free of preset meter. Ornette Coleman's The Shape of Jazz to Come is so important when it comes to American jazz history as it was influential in such that the way that people looked at jazz and interpreted the style and sound of jazz music changed. Three interesting facts about The Shape of Jazz to Come is that Ornette Coleman used his signature plastic saxophone when the quartet recorded the album, the quartet did not feature a chordal instrument such as a piano or guitar while recording the album, and it featured Ornette Coleman's "harmolodic" philosophy, where the group simultaneously improvises around the melodic and rhythmic pattern in a tune, rather than one musician improvising on a underlying harmonic pattern while the other musicians play the accompaniment. An interesting story about Ornette Coleman is that he had trouble finding any musician who was interested in his unorthodox musical technique, and one day he entered a club by MacArthur Park in Los Angeles, and following that night, bassist Charlie Haden tracked Ornette Coleman down, which eventually led to the creation of the quartet that recorded The Shape of Jazz to Come.

In conclusion, the year 1959 was a monumental year for jazz. The influential music played by some of the greatest jazz musicians in America reached all corners of the country and many parts of the global world. Each of the jazz musicians prominently helped shape the American society in many ways: the political statements made through Charles Mingus' playing, the demand for respect by Miles Davis, the tour by Dave Brubeck as part of a program of cultural détente to spread the word of American freedom in countries around the world such as Poland, Turkey, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Iran, and Iraq and how jazz serves as a voice of freedom despite how the chains of segregation had divided the American society, and how Ornette Coleman's playing changed how people viewed and interpreted jazz, despite the paranoia in the nuclear age. Miles Davis' Kind of Blue helped open up the horizon for jazz expression, Dave Brubeck's Time Out was the acme for jazz innovation, Charles Mingus's Ah Um spread his emotions about life and spread a message to always be yourself, and Ornette Coleman's The Shape of Jazz to Come served as the foundation for new forms of jazz music and defied the status quo.

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