

Book Review

The Studio Recordings of the Miles Davis Quintet, 1965–68. By Keith Waters. Oxford Studies in Recorded Jazz. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. ISBN-13: 978-0-19-539384-2 (paperback). 320 pp. 63 musical examples. \$18.95.

This book provides a detailed analytical perspective on Miles Davis's second quintet, perhaps the most influential jazz ensemble of the past five decades. For that reason alone, *The Studio Recordings of the Miles Davis Quintet* should be read by anyone involved in contemporary jazz, whether as a performer, educator, or researcher. Keith Waters, the book's author, is all of these, possessing a rare and valuable combination of attributes for someone undertaking such work. His background as a jazz pianist and teacher of music theory informs his discussions of the quintet's approach to harmony, which is one of the book's two principal topics (the other being musical form). While reading, I found myself gravitating to the piano so I could play his examples: transcriptions of Herbie Hancock's slash chords, Wayne Shorter's innovative voicings, and Ron Carter's chromatic bass lines. Waters's performance experience is also evident in his thorough examinations of Hancock's piano style.¹ As a researcher, Waters specializes in musical analysis, and fittingly the book's analytical depth is its most remarkable feature. He analyzes each one of the 35 tracks from the quintet's six studio LPs, as well as a few of the alternate takes included on compact-disc reissues of these albums.

The book, however, is much more than a series of analyses. Waters identifies the group's characteristic compositional devices, interpretive practices, and improvisational strategies; he traces each of these to the music made by the individual group members prior to the quintet's formation; and he shows how these devices, practices, and strategies evolved from one album to another—in some instances, from one take to the next. Put another way, Waters offers his readers a unified theory of the group's music, along with a detailed longitudinal study of its origins and development from *E.S.P.* (1965) to *Filles de Kilimanjaro* (1969).²

Waters begins with an engaging preface in which he outlines a pluralistic view of jazz scholarship. He acknowledges the contributions of the “new jazz studies,” a movement that emerged when Waters was publishing his first analyses of jazz in the mid-1990s.³ The new jazz studies, according to the editors of a landmark volume that helped define

¹Keith Waters, *The Studio Recordings of the Miles Davis Quintet, 1965–68*. Oxford Studies in Recorded Jazz (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 18–23, 112–119, 159–162.

²Miles Davis, *E.S.P.*, Columbia CS 9150, 1965, LP; Miles Davis, *Miles Smiles*, Columbia CS 9401, 1966, LP; Miles Davis, *Sorcerer*, Columbia CS 9532, 1967, LP; Miles Davis, *Nefertiti*, Columbia CS 9594, 1968, LP; Miles Davis, *Miles in the Sky*, Columbia CS 9628, 1968, LP; Miles Davis, *Filles de Kilimanjaro*, Columbia CS 9750, 1969, LP.

³Robert O'Meally, Brent Hayes Edwards, and Farah Jasmine Griffin, eds., *Uptown Conversation: The New Jazz Studies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004). One of Keith Waters's first publications on jazz is “Blurring

the field, “assert[ed] that jazz is not only a music to define, it is a *culture*.”⁴ This stance was both a necessary intervention and a major rupture in jazz scholarship; it welcomed interdisciplinary perspectives and dismissed formalist approaches, in the process sidelining music theorists whose analytical work did not fit the new paradigm.⁵ Waters makes a compelling case for the continuing relevance of analysis in jazz research, arguing against critics who consider musical analysis to be reductionist or disconnected from the cultural meaning jazz holds for its practitioners and audiences. As Waters stresses, jazz musicians have always highly valued the knowledge acquired through intensive listening, transcription, and analysis. The best evidence for this point may be the wide circulation of jazz fake books, such as the *Real Book* volumes produced at the Berklee College of Music beginning in the 1970s.⁶ For Waters, fake books constitute an important part of jazz’s reception, particularly for the Davis quintet, whose repertoire is heavily represented in the *Real Book*. Furthermore, the ambiguities and errors in *Real Book* transcriptions of the second quintet’s compositions, according to Waters, illustrate the extent to which the Davis group challenged then-standard jazz practices, notably in the domain of harmony.

Another more significant research source for Waters is the Library of Congress collection of Shorter’s manuscripts. The second quintet’s distinctive harmonic language drew heavily on Shorter’s discoveries, but it was also decisively shaped by the synergistic, collaborative atmosphere cultivated by Davis and his bandmates, as Waters’s analyses demonstrate. A similar story could be told about Tony Williams’s influence on the group’s approaches to rhythm and meter, texture, and form. Williams, however, plays a much smaller role in Waters’s book than he did in the quintet. Waters attributes this diminished status to his having produced “limited drum transcriptions,”⁷ an incomplete explanation. One does not need to transcribe something, after all, in order to analyze it. Williams’s rather low profile in the book more likely reflects the author’s analytical priorities. Waters, that is to say, focuses first on the group’s compositions, especially their form and harmonic content, and second on the musicians’ transformation of these pieces into frameworks for inventive solo and ensemble improvisation. From this perspective, it is understandable that Shorter and Hancock, the quintet’s primary composers, are more central to the analytical narrative than Williams. That said, drummers (and rhythm-section playing in general) surely deserve greater attention from jazz researchers, as Ingrid Monson argued some years ago.⁸ Perhaps

the Barline: Metric Displacement in the Piano Solos of Herbie Hancock,” *Annual Review of Jazz Studies* 8 (1996): 19–37.

⁴O’Meally, Edwards, and Griffin, eds., *Uptown Conversation*, 2.

⁵For more on the relationship between music theory and the new jazz studies, see Benjamin Givan, review of *Analyzing Jazz: A Schenkerian Approach*, by Steve Larson, *Journal of Music Theory* 55, no.1 (Spring 2011): 155; and Paul Steinbeck, review of *A Power Stronger Than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music*, by George E. Lewis, *Journal of Music Theory* 51, no.2 (Fall 2007): 334–336.

⁶The history of the *Real Book* and its reception in the jazz community is examined in the seventh chapter of Barry Kernfeld, *The Story of Fake Books: Bootlegging Songs to Musicians* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2006).

⁷Waters, *Studio*, xi.

⁸Ingrid T. Monson, *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 26–72.

another scholar will build a new analytical project around Williams's performances, complementing Waters's work.⁹ Meanwhile, researchers who wish to avoid the complexities of drum transcription can devote themselves to an equally urgent problem in jazz studies and improvisation studies: developing analytical methods that are not dependent on standard notation.

The book is organized into eight chapters. In Chapter 1, Waters presents capsule biographies of the quintet members and describes the group's working methods, contrasting live performances with studio settings, where the musicians would revise each other's compositions and experiment with different solo-section forms. Chapter 2, entitled "Analytical Strategies," is the core of the book. Here Waters explores the key theoretical issues that underlie his study as well as the wide range of methods he employs: analyses of motivic development, metric conflict, hypermetric formation, and group interaction. Music theorists and many others might be particularly interested in his perceptive investigation of the many meanings of "modal jazz"¹⁰ and his discussion of the influence of free jazz on the quintet's approaches to phrasing and form.¹¹ Chapters 3 through 7 are devoted to analyses of the group's studio albums (one LP per chapter, except in the seventh, where both *Miles in the Sky* [1968] and *Filles de Kilimanjaro* are addressed).

The analyses are uniformly insightful and illuminating, yet no two are alike. Waters insists on treating each piece on its own terms, even when it shares a signal feature with other compositions in the quintet's repertoire. His analyses of "Circle," "Vonetta," and "Nefertiti,"¹² for instance, reveal that they each exhibit "circular form" but achieve it in different ways. In "Circle," the head is built from six-, four-, and eight-bar sections, and successive solo choruses are of different lengths. Irregular hypermeter and interpolated sections, as Waters explains, defy listeners' attempts to identify where one chorus ends and another begins. "Vonetta" expands on these formal strategies. A measure-long shift into 5/4 (from 4/4) creates metric and hypermetric ambiguity, and the C minor harmony in the last bar continues into the first bar when the musicians repeat the form, further obscuring the boundary between choruses. In contrast, "Nefertiti" owes its circularity not to its straightforward 16-bar form but to its melody. The three phrases that make up the melody begin with C, G[#]/A[b], and B[b], respectively. During Davis and Shorter's repetitions of the theme, the first phrase seems to function as an arrival, the culmination of a melodic contour reaching from A[b] through B[b] up to C, rather than as the beginning of the form. Waters's analyses, moreover, are hardly restricted to form, harmony, and other "compositional" matters. He also closely examines the pieces' performative dimensions, from the musicians' improvised solos to the

⁹On p. 32, Waters cites an earlier research effort focused on Williams. See Craig DeVere Woodson, "Solo Jazz Drumming: An Analytic Study of the Improvisation Techniques of Anthony Williams" (master's thesis, University of California-Los Angeles, 1973). For a historical and cultural study of Lifetime, the band Williams founded after departing the Davis quintet, see the fourth chapter of Kevin Fellezs, *Birds of Fire: Jazz, Rock, Funk, and the Creation of Fusion* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011).

¹⁰Water, *Studio*, 41–52.

¹¹Ibid., 74–81.

¹²Ibid., 153–162, 175–182, and 216–219.

real-time interactions between the group members. All of these concerns come together in his analysis of “Dolores,”¹³ one of the book’s highlights. Scholars have disagreed about the piece’s form, and for good reason: Waters shows that the musicians themselves are sometimes “out of phase”¹⁴ with each other. Davis, during his solo, articulates a looser version of the form than Carter does, and when Shorter begins his solo he is misaligned with Carter’s accompaniment. They finally reach a resolution some 20 measures later. Shorter briefly pauses between phrases, Carter outlines a “sign-post” harmony,¹⁵ and within two bars the musicians are again in sync.

There are many more outstanding analyses in *The Studio Recordings of the Miles Davis Quintet*—indeed, enough to fill the better part of a semester in a university course on jazz analysis. The entire book merits a close read, start to finish, ideally with a stack of the second quintet’s records and one’s instrument of choice close at hand.

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¹³Ibid., 127–142.

¹⁴Ibid., 131.

¹⁵Ibid., 140.