



Liner notes for *The Bootleg Series, Volume 2: Live in Europe 1969* (Columbia, Legacy), 2013
By Josef Woodard

Field Recordings from a Future-Leaning Past

In the summer of 2012, I was speaking with Jack DeJohnette about this new, livewire and revelatory set of live Miles Davis recordings from the summer and fall of 1969. Here we were, 42 years on from this stirring body of work made on two nights in Antibes, one in Stockholm and another in Berlin, with the powerhouse but vastly under-documented quintet involving DeJohnette, Wayne Shorter, Chick Corea and Dave Holland. Here we were, 20 years after Miles' passing. And DeJohnette made the ripe comment that "Miles just keeps growing and growing and growing."

It's an odd but apt notion. We may think we know what there is to know about the mercurial and mystery-laden artistic mind and epic poem that is Miles' musical life, but his history is an enigma still in the process of revealing and at least nominally explaining itself. It's a growing thing.

Part of this posthumous growth pattern has to do with the natural accretion of artistic influence and legerdemain of one of the few jazz figures with bragging rights as a visionary. Part of the unfolding and slowly expanding saga is aided by the series of Columbia Records boxed sets, through which we gain deeper understanding of how the ever-morphing Miles Davis evolution took place. These important and ambitious sets do historical diligence and nurture artistic fruits in different ways, burrowing into vaults, examining the extended studio source materials edited into place to create classic LPs including those that bookend this very set – *In a Silent Way* and *Bitches Brew*.

From the archeological digs of live archives, as with this newly released 1969 material – some previously available in slipshod bootleg traces but now neatly culled and sonically buffed – we are afforded chances to connect dots of different phases of the larger Miles story. With *Live in Europe 1967, The Bootleg Series Vol. 1*, the invention and intensity of Miles' "second great quintet" of the mid-60s was given a living, live validity. Two years on, a different story, or sub-story, is fleshed out. This later quintet, with only Shorter present from the earlier incarnation, qualifies as a missing link, at least in terms of being duly officially recorded for posterity.

Miles himself recognized that this special group was plugged into a rare inspiration. In his autobiography published in 1989, Miles looked back with longing and fondness for this "working" band: "Man, I wish this band had been recorded live because it was really a bad motherfucker. I think Chick Corea and a few other people recorded some of our live performances, but Columbia missed out on the whole fucking thing." Until now.

Preserved thanks to the European tradition of recording and documenting live shows through state-owned media, this second bootleg also gains considerable intrigue by virtue of its window on a man with a horn, very much in transition. The scorching musical electric storm of the '70 recording *Live at the Fillmore East (March 7, 1970): It's About that Time*, released by

Columbia in 2001 (Columbia 85191), captured the band in fiery form, with the addition of percussionist Airto Moreira, just at the end of the band's history, and in the midst of Miles' "electric voodoo" revolution. Yet this new, older, set that you're holding reveals the same band, minus Moreira, in its tender early stages, and serves the valuable function of showing a Miles chapter very much in transition, as Corea's electric piano sound revamps the former keyboard input of Herbie Hancock, with DeJohnette changing up the rhythmic dynamics of Tony Williams, and young wunderkind British acoustic bassist Dave Holland juicing up the more minimalist touch of Ron Carter.

Set list-wise, as well, these recordings – especially the July Antibes tapes – unveil a musical mission, a musical identity in transition. The record-buying public was in a lurch period, relative to what Miles had been cooking up in the studio: *In a Silent Way* wasn't released until July 30, 1969, after the Antibes sets, and the game-changing *Bitches Brew* not until April of 1970, several months after the November Stockholm date. On these live dates, Miles laid out suite-like sets, without breaks between tunes, and slalomed between older favorites like "Round Midnight," "I Fall in Love Too Easily" and "No Blues" and the seeds of his "new way" shortly to come, on more open-ended tunes like "Directions," "Sanctuary," "Spanish Key" and "Miles Runs the Voodoo Down." Soon, Miles would abandon the standards book altogether, but here, the tapestry includes past, then-present and soon-to-be-future, in what plays out like a startling continuum for those of us accustomed to considering Miles with one vibe or another, one wardrobe or another.

DeJohnette, for one, is happy to find this band getting more overdue credit. As he says, "there has been this attitude about the period when I was with Miles, with Dave and Chick, as not being a very important period. [But] there was a whole lot of innovation going on then. It may have leaned a little more toward the so-called avant-garde, but we incorporated both things. We did the funk thing, we did free playing. It was a great period, a really high point of creativity for Miles in that period. He wasn't doing any drugs. He was straight into macrobiotic foods, and we all were. He was playing long, strong solos and hitting high notes, really nailing them."

And the structures were open?

"Yeah, and they flowed in and out of one another. He never would announce anything so he'd go from one thing to another."

Corea asserts that he's "glad these shows are being made available to the public. They document an important step in Miles' artistic development, which take us from the famous suit-and-tie-wearing quintet with Herbie, Tony, Ron and Wayne through to this quintet, which definitely leaned more towards the rock and beat generation. This certainly was a transitional band and music, resulting in *Bitches Brew* and Miles' later steady beat music, with Miles' lyrical voice remaining always the touchstone. For me, it was an ultra exciting time playing with the man whose music I literally grew up on."

In some way, this short-lived and underrated Miles quintet was the trumpeter's adieu to a regular working band in the old jazz mode of empathetic team players and commanding soloists. Miles was searching for new sounds, new concepts of what it meant to have a jazz band. He had already begun sneaking in electric piano on his studio recordings, and was leaning strongly in that direction. As he explains in his autobiography, "I had heard Joe Zawinul playing electric piano on 'Mercy, Mercy, Mercy' with Cannonball Adderley, and I really liked the sound of the instrument and wanted it in my band. Chick Corea began playing the electric Fender Rhodes piano when he started playing with me, and so did Herbie Hancock... Chick wasn't sure about playing it when he first came with me, but I *made* him play it. He didn't like me telling him what

instrument to play until he really got into it and then he really liked it, too, and made his reputation playing it.”

As for Holland, Miles said, “I had seen and heard Dave in June 1968, when I played a concert over in England, and he knocked me out. Since I knew Ron was going to be leaving soon I talked with Dave about joining my band.” DeJohnette was a drummer Miles had a keen interest in, after hearing him in Charles Lloyd’s band (along with future Miles bandmate Keith Jarrett).

From Holland’s vantage as a Miles colleague, he reveals, “this is something that I learned from Miles: you listen to the guys you play with. He would listen to the band. He’d play his thing and then go offstage very often, but he’d sit at the side of the stage and listen to the band. While he was listening, he was thinking about something. The next thing you’d know, he’d write something that would incorporate what he had heard. He’d say ‘you know that thing you did at so and so? I liked that...’

“That’s what this music is about. It’s not just about one musician having a single idea and having everybody do it, pulling the strings. It’s about taking a group and thinking about what its strengths are and what its direction and tendencies are, and using that. You don’t try to change the course of the river. You just try and go with the flow of it and use that flow in a way that will carry the music along.” That collective consciousness and flexibility Holland speaks of is very much in play in this particular group.

I spent an afternoon at Miles’ house in Malibu, in May of 1989, as he was about to release his fine, and final, album, *Amandla*. A stone’s throw from the Pacific Ocean, in an airy beachfront house where he liked to paint in his “Memphis” style, he was in a backwards-glancing mood, no doubt partly because he had been working on his autobiography with Quincy Troupe at the time.

Even in an interview mostly centered on his then-current musical activities, his thoughts would go back, in sideways gestures, to echoes of his past. I asked him about his unique rapport with Shorter, his ability to gauge his sound against the saxophonist’s. “You could tell what part of the note,” he said, “what part of his sound you could play off of. Wayne had some different, each run had...we used to play ‘Footprints’ and, the way we were playing it, nobody else could play it like that except for me and Wayne.

“We knew the rhythm wasn’t going to drop, so we could delay it, and pull on it. Tony never dropped time. Tony and Jack DeJohnette had that. They never did accent the first beat... *sometimes*. When that comes around again and you’re singing the melody, you can attack it differently. You can set it up. *Plop, bang!* It goes because the drums have a certain pattern that they play.”

In the clarity of 20/20 hindsight, these highly intense shows could be viewed as transitional between major and well-known moments on studio albums. The Antibes shows came less than a month before Miles ventured into the studio and into a new expressive world for the *Bitches Brew* sessions, but what we hear in Stockholm is informed by his newfound approach.

On these recordings, Miles does play strongly, with a captivating ferocity and focus – as well as his signature searching character – of his pre-electric persona, and tilting into his more measured and minimalist colorations of the ‘70s adventure (and eventual deconstruction). Throughout, Shorter, as soloist, burns with an intensity not often heard on studio recordings, and his left-of-center compositional inspiration still sets the stage for much of the musical attitude and landscape, especially the classic “Footprints,” the cryptic jazz tone poem “Nefertiti” (the

memorable title tune of Miles' 1968 acoustic album) and "Sanctuary," soon to be made famous on *Bitches Brew*.

Shorter told me in 1986, in his angular logic fashion, how "someone said that 'Nefertiti' was a seed planted for *Bitches Brew*...that's how Miles started thinking about 'when you get an idea, don't start the idea at the beginning of the recording.' If the cut is going to be five or six minutes long, you start with 'once upon a time' and you keep on going, rambling and playing and everything, then when you end, it doesn't have to end with 'happily ever after.'

"We did that also with another song called 'Sanctuary.' I wrote that a few years before *Bitches Brew*. I had it and took it out. Miles really liked that. I have another half of 'Sanctuary,' which I have to really look at. This was only one half of it."

On these recordings, compact, solo-less versions of the cryptic "Sanctuary" cap off both sets at Antibes, leading into Miles' habit of ending sets with the traditional show biz wink of "The Theme." On both nights, what comes between those exit strategies and the splashy, DeJohnette energized openers of "Directions" are eccentric suite-like marvels of contradictions, engaging mixed signals and morphing musical gestures from the arc of Miles' evolution. On the July 25th recording, "Footprints" eases into "'Round Midnight," with Miles' piercing, lyrical but never sentimental, rubato reflections backed only by Corea's electric piano, before leaping into the new, nervy turf of "It's About that Time."

On the next and generally fierier night of playing, Miles suavely guides the band out of "Spanish Key" into "I Fall in Love Too Easily," with his unique pitiless romanticism intact. The band's restless collective roar is soon to come, in versions of "Masquelero" and "Miles Runs the Voodoo Down" with Corea tilting towards expressionist abstraction, coaxing artistic advantage out of his piano's distortion and out-of-tune keys. An unhinged, free-range duet with Holland on arco bass hints at those musicians' improvisational abandon to come in their careers.

On more controlled, virtuosic turf, Holland offers up a bravado bass solo on "No Blues," and Miles seizes the sonic spotlight with a mute, suddenly killing with kindness, as could be his wont. With the wave of a melodic motif, Miles brings the musical pitch down to earth (and/or into the cosmos?) with a mercurial version of "Nefertiti," from atmospheric musings to hard swinging intensity, in a band approach here which is decidedly distinct from the textures of the earlier quintet's collective palette.

Fast forward to November '69, post-*Bitches Brew* recording, and the shows convey a band ethos markedly changed from just a few months prior. Live, Miles could exude chill, palpable charisma, and the filmed Berlin set offers valuable visual evidence from the concert front. A sartorial shift has taken place, partly inspired by the associative hip-ification of Miles' new muse, his young wife Betty Mabry. The dress code has morphed from suits to a flamboyant wardrobe of scarves, vests of many colors (check out Holland's Jersey cow pattern), and Miles' frilled, black leather jacket framing bursting red scarf action.

Onstage, the players interact, with intense listening. Even on the sidelines, Miles senses his band's flow, keying and cueing changes as it goes. Shorter is, by now, an experienced Miles ally and foil, but the newcomers are extra attentive to subtle shifts in mood. Unlike the later, groove-driven band model or the previous quintet, a sense of exploration is in this band and house, with an implicit guidance system emanating from the lean man with the horn.

That same week, at the Stockholm show recorded by Sveriges Radio at the Folkets Hus, after George Wein's soberly enunciated introduction, the black magic begins with rumbling piano bass tolling kicks in the quixotic energy of "Bitches Brew," but here with a rattling "loose wire" noise on the electric piano reminding us of the live nature of this musical beast. The

crackle is a distraction and technical difficulty, in one way, but also seems like a prophetic sign of experimental jazz's edginess. Corea lays out while others solo, and returns, on acoustic piano for the rest of the set, but somehow approached with an electric attitude.

Corea's electric piano touch returns, in full force, in this disc's "bonus track." Most of the tunes from Stockholm were recorded in the first set, but the final track, a sizzling, fit-to-burst version of Corea's tune "This," was taken from the second set, and has that warmed-up, second set abandon that the jazz muse often sanctions from her willing, able, and open players. Here, DeJohnette offers some of his boldest and freest playing on the entire set, at one point laying down the sole rhythm section support for incendiary soloing from Shorter and Miles. Meanwhile, the restless and tonally unhinged ambling of Corea and Holland hint at the free jazz spirit which they would soon enough follow into creating the band Circle with saxophonist Anthony Braxton. "This" is something else.

DeJohnette, though himself no stranger to the impulse to go free in certain situations, remembers, "when Chick and Dave were in the band, that's what would happen when Miles stopped playing. The groove would stop and then we'd go into a more abstract place, and Wayne would go with us. Miles enjoyed some of that, but he would come to me and say 'can't you make them play some time?' Chick and Dave would be off into abstract things.

"So they were moving in that direction. But I stayed a little longer, because Keith was in the band and I really enjoyed that – and Michael (Henderson), too, and Gary (Bartz). Michael really laid down the groove nicely.

"Then I left to freelance and form my own group. I wanted to play some freer things, too. Miles was moving more into the drummer's role as just keeping time. I don't have a problem with that. I just didn't want to be there. I didn't want to be the one doing that."

Shorter ended his long stint with Miles to join Zawinul in Weather Report, and this chapter of the Miles adventure became something for the history books, and archival live releases such as this valuable contribution to the available Miles Davis recorded music trove. Soon after these gigs, he was forging ahead with his '70s legacy, more electric, more open in structure and more locked into a groove he was actively rethinking as he went.

In Malibu in 1989, Miles, the great twentieth musical seer and iconoclast, stood in his kitchen as we checked out his recently completed paintings and gave an implicit shrug, sizing up his musical contribution. "It's not that serious," he figured, with epic modesty. "Social music, social sound. It's not that serious. It's not even that serious to be reviewed. There's always gonna' be something like that. They get mad at me for playing like I do, but I don't care, because someone always does (laughs).

"When I got Sonny Rollins in the band, the record company said 'who is that player, what kind of saxophone is that?' I said 'shut up.' When I got 'Trane – he had one tooth out – they said 'who is that guy?' When I had Art Blakey, they said 'let's take this quilt and put it over the drums.' I said 'man, don't do that. You don't see no African covering up the drums, playing the message.'"

In the summer of 1969, and the next fall, Miles' life as an evolutionary chameleon was going through yet another transformation, with one era and attitude morphing into another, with critics mixed on the change-up and the future in flux. To play the speculation game, had Miles' muse led him in another direction this year, if he hadn't become seduced by groove conceptualism and the music of Jimi Hendrix and Sly Stone and by the prospect of a larger,

younger audience, this particular adventurous “really bad motherfucker” might not have gotten away, or not at least not as quickly as it did.

And so this important “field recording,” from a mysterious past and unfolding future, takes us to a place and a time between the cracks of the Miles Davis story as it is commonly understood. For that alone, never mind the rattling, exploratory poetry of this band’s sound, this is a significant cultural document for the ears and the ages, not just the archives.

--*Josef Woodard*, August 11, 2012