

Springsville

An appreciation of the music of Miles Davis and Gil Evans

by Roger Aldridge

The autobiography of Miles Davis describes how Gil Evans (the great composer-arranger and best friend of Miles) once called on the phone at 3:00 AM and said, “Miles, if you’re ever depressed listen to “Springsville”,” and then hung up.

Contained within this strange encounter is a nugget of wisdom. Music has a way of bypassing the rational mind to speak directly to our emotions and physical body. “Springsville”, which Gil Evans referred to, is the first track on the *Miles Ahead* album which they recorded together in 1957. This music leaps, soars, and sparkles with joy. Whenever I drag myself home from an intense day at work the opening notes of “Springsville” change everything. The world becomes, once again, a place where flowers blossom and birds sing.

Various studies relating to music therapy have determined that music has uplifting and healing properties. However, like any form of energy, music that is unbalanced can do harm. I have had many powerful experiences with music both as a listener and as a composer. I have found that spiritual/healing aspects of music are uniquely personal. Music that lifts my spirit may not do the same for others. Thus, experiencing music in deeper ways becomes a very individual matter.

Many of my friends who are sensitive to music as a healing agent are drawn to classical music. Mozart, in particular. While I have a deep love for the music of Mozart, the music that truly touches my spirit is jazz. This music cannot be displayed in a museum. It tears the roof off of concert halls. You see, all of *life* is contained in jazz: the joys, the sorrows, the sublime, and the down & out. *Above all, it is the voice of creation.*

Throughout its history, jazz has been a sexy kind of music. The creative act of jazz improvisation through the spontaneous interactions between musicians is, from a certain point of view, similar to making love. When the creative energy of jazz is taken to the highest levels of artistic expression—such as in the music of Miles Davis and Gil Evans—it can lead us to experiences of such transcendent beauty as to reduce words to empty shells.

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The recordings of Miles Davis and Gil Evans (including *Miles Ahead*, *Porgy and Bess*, and *Sketches of Spain*) stand as masterpieces of 20th-century music. The orchestral writing of Gil Evans is like a multifaceted diamond with ever-changing colors and textures. There are seemingly endless levels of subtlety in Gil's writing. I have listened to this music for 35 years and continue to discover new things in it.

And then there is the trumpet of Miles Davis. I recall an interviewer asking Gil if Miles had problems in playing up to the energy level of the orchestra. Gil replied that it was really the opposite: that while Miles' playing was outwardly calm and expressive, it had a core of such focused intensity that the orchestra had to work to play up to him! When I listen to the sound of Miles' trumpet I think of a cloak of elegant lyricism wrapped around a burning ember. It has been said that Miles could put more feeling into one note than others could do in an entire solo.

Trumpet and orchestra... Dancing, flowing —beyond the ordinary—like lovers who have transcended the physical to touch the rainbow.

Springsville!

This is music that must be approached from one's innermost being.

Roger Aldridge, a member of Sandy Spring (MD) Monthly Meeting, is a composer who draws much of his inspiration from jazz.

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