

In 1978... what the hell *did* I do in 1978? It's all somewhat of a blur now. I mean, it's like 16 years ago already. I was living on 81st Street and Columbus then. A beautiful one bedroom with a view of the park with the Planetarium and the Museum of Natural History. For \$400 a month I might add. And I'm pretty sure that was the year I met Miles Davis. Or it might have been some months before, in late '77. He was actually my neighbor for a while. From late '74 through '76 I lived on West 76th Street. Between Broadway and West End. His house was on 77th between West End and Riverside. But I never saw him at the local supermarket or anything. Not much chance of that. I met him through Julie Coryell, the wife of the famous guitar player Larry. She had taken a liking to me and brought me over to Miles' house one evening and introduced me to him as the young guitar genius about town.

Miles was going through kind of a bad period at that time. He had not played any gigs in a couple of years. He had broken both of his legs in a car accident, he was in constant pain, and was taking a lot of drugs, both the legal and illegal varieties. One time I went over there and he was wearing just a bathrobe and slippers, sitting on the sofa and holding a gun somewhat menacingly on his lap. He had one of those Advent wide-screen projection TVs - it was state of the art at the time - and had gotten pissed off at its lousy picture quality and shot a few holes in it. I don't think I hung out there too long on that occasion.

A few weeks - or months, I don't know - after that, I got a call from Julie. She was at her (and Larry's) house in Connecticut. But Larry was

out on the road somewhere, and she had invited Miles to come up there to recuperate for a few days. "Barry," she said. "Now's your chance. Miles is here, he's feeling better, but he needs his Percodan. Go to the pharmacy at 78th and Broadway, get his prescription, put your guitar in the car, and come on up!"

How could I say no to that? I went to the drugstore, got the pills, loaded my equipment into my funky little borrowed Volkswagen bug, and headed up the turnpike to Connecticut. I had my Guitorganizer at that time, the same axe I had played on the Heavy Metal Bebop tour. It was a Les Paul Black Beauty reissue that you could play as a normal electric guitar, but also had frets that were wired to make a Hammond organ sound when you touched the string to the fret - *without* picking it! It was put together by the guy down in Texas that invented the Guitorgan. And I had also had him interface it with a monophonic Arp Odyssey synthesizer. High tech 70's style, baby! Three separate sounds out of one instrument! Miles would *have* to dig this!

We hung out up there for a couple of days. Miles had a girl with him, I can't remember her name. Honestly I was in awe just to be in his presence. But it was evident that he was thinking about playing again after such a long layoff. He had his horn there and took it out a few times and played some notes. Gently. Tentatively. Long tones. A few short riffs. The sound that legends are made of.

That was when I got my first taste of the Miles sense of humor. He was a

pretty funny guy. One night after dinner we were sitting at the table and he said to Julie, "Get me a cigarette!" Julie was a bit indignant. "Miles," she said. "Would it hurt you so much to just say 'please'? I mean, when you order me around like that it's just so disrespectful and goes against all my feminist instincts."

"Awright, awright," Miles grudgingly complied, in that trademark hoarse soulful whisper of his. "*PLEASE* get me a cigarette..... *BITCH!*"

## RIFF SIX

It was the last day that we were going to spend up in Connecticut. Miles' girl had split, and he was planning to go back to town that evening. I finally set up my gear in the living room and started playing around with it. The Arp Odyssey synth had a feature called "sample and hold". You could play one note and different overtones and frequencies of that note would repeat in a rhythmic pattern until you hit a different note. Then it would do the same thing in the other key. But it was a random sampling of the frequencies, so the effect would be a little different every time. And the eq filter sweep was working on it as well, so the notes would go from bass-y to treble-y and back again. In no particular order. It sounded kind of like the intro to the Who's song "Who Are You?", but funkier.

Miles came in. "Damn, Barry," he whispered. "What is that shit?"

"My new set-up," I said. "Pretty cool, huh? Check it out." I hit a low E on the Arp.

***BomPimBomPimBomBomBomPINGBomPimBomBomBomBIPBomPim  
BomBomPINGBomBombipbip  
BipBipBIPBIPBIP..***

I picked up my guitar and started playing a few bits along with the electronic groove that was going on. Simple, funky stuff. A couple of Jimi Hendrix 7#9 chords. An E minor 11th, 3rd on top, with some chromatic 4ths moving under it. Then, since naturally I *did* want to try to impress him - he had never heard me play before - I started throwing in a few hot licks. My 26 year old self, seeking praise from the master, no doubt.

Miles definitely seemed intrigued. But then he said something to me that I have never forgotten.

"Barry," he told me emphatically. "Don't *finish* anything!"

"What?" I was confused. "What do you mean?"

"*Don't - finish - anything!*" he repeated.

Now, I really didn't understand what he meant by that at the moment. I

was just guessing. But I started to play some shorter melodic fragments. Bluesy pentatonic scale stuff. Mixed in with some chromatic bits. A little bit irregular. Disjointed.

"Yeah.... yeah.." he said in response. "That's it..."

Encouraged by his approval, I played a longer phrase that resolved out of the short random phrases I was doing and ended up on the tonic, on the first beat of the bar... I think.

"*Aaaahhh*," he groaned with frustration. "*You FINISHED it!*"

"I'm sorry," I said meekly. "I won't do it again."

I have had a long time to think about that since then. Miles was a man of few words. But what he did say often had many layers of meaning. And it was up to *you* to figure it out. I realize now that when he told me "Don't finish anything" in that living room on that cold winter day in Connecticut, he was imparting to me some musical knowledge that is very deep and profound.

The art of improvised music - jazz - does not exist in a vacuum. Like any art form, it requires two basic components: the artist to create it, and the audience to absorb and digest it. And hopefully appreciate it. But their appreciation of this uniquely spontaneous form of musical creation might just be dramatically enhanced if, when creating it, the artist can

leave something to *their* imagination. It can be like a game - in constant motion - between the notes actually being played by the artist, and the expectations of the ear of the listener.

For example, if you were to play (I hate solfege but I can't think of a better way to describe this) "do-re-mi-fa-", in quarter notes, the listener would naturally expect "so-la-ti-do". But if you played some of those ordinary scale notes as a *phrase*, developing a *thematic idea*, and then just *stopped*... and left the silence hanging there in the void... then the listener's imagination could continue the melodic development in any number of different directions. Their mind would be engaged, imagining that blank space filled with musical possibilities that your phrase *hinted* at. And when that happens, that's when you feel that momentum, that inspiration to create more out of that particular moment! It's an abstract two-way connection that takes place in the higher unspoken realms of consciousness that music uniquely occupies. So when you are playing, if you don't *finish* anything, it might just bring your audience in - a bit closer - to the music as it is being played. And maybe even give them a subconscious understanding of what it *feels like* to play it.

Anyway, I *think* that's what Miles was trying to tell me that day.

But it didn't end there. To my great delight he pulled out his trumpet and started riffing along with the sample and hold groove and the chords I was playing. We messed around with the thing for a couple of hours as I honed and tweaked my guitar part and experimented with switching to

different bass notes on the synthesizer as the funky beat of the electronica oscillated onward.

Finally we had something that we were satisfied sounded pretty hip. Far from a finished product, but it was definitely *something*. We made a cassette tape - live, of what we had done so far - to take back to the city. It was decided that I would have the honor of driving him back in my beat-up Volkswagen. Miles seemed happy during the trip. As we cruised down the West Side Highway he suggested that we stop in at the place of a friend of his... a very good bass player who had a studio on 86th Street and was also known to have a good supply of a certain (SNIFF!) substance on hand at all times.

We stopped at a phone booth. Miles called the guy. We went up to his place, copped, hung out, and listened to our little cassette tape over and over and over again as we snorted lines long into the night. That was when Miles first said to me: "Let's get a band." I was in heaven. My life was perfect. All my dreams were destined to come true.

## RIFF SEVEN

AARRGGHH! All this reminiscing is bringing me down. It really is too depressing to think about. I got to take a break. What time is it? A quarter to 12? I step to the window, open it, stick my head out, cast a

gaze up the block. Still muggy as hell out there. And Jesus! Is it possible it's gotten hotter than it was earlier? Ninth Avenue looks like it's still bumper to bumper. Close the window. Whew! Thank god for air conditioning. Hmm. I'm getting some serious dry mouth here. I wonder what could be the (sniff... sniff...) reason for *that*? Guess I better make a run to the bank. I think I still got a couple of hundred in there. I'll stop by Ahmood's on the way back and get me a forty.

Out the door. Into that hot thick summer air. I have a theory: that all the molecules of soot and pollution and piss and garbage that get frozen into the pavements of New York City every winter, get liberated by the sweltering heat every summer. They float up into the air - only about 20 feet or so - and create this dense low-level atmosphere of soupy humid nastiness. You can almost feel it sticking to your skin... I do, as I amble up the block to Ninth Avenue. The only way to feel normal here at this time of the year is to take at least 5 showers a day. Either that, or wear an air-conditioned space suit at all times. Hey, that's an idea! Do you think anyone has got a patent on that?

I turn right on 9th and head down toward 42nd Street where the bank is. The vitality is palpable. Cars. Lights. People. The restaurants are still hopping. Hot town, summer in the city. I pass Smiler's deli where the spaghetti with ground beef in the window looks about 8 hours past its prime. Past Rudy's bar off the corner of West 44th. I always wondered if this place was the same Rudy's in the Steely Dan song "Black Cow". On their great "Aja" album. Where they sang "*In the corner of my eye - I*

*saw you at Rudy's - You were very high - You... were high..."*

Well I guess I was so there's no way of knowing. The bartender is a friend of mine and he didn't know anything about it either. Two more blocks. I get to the bank at the corner of 42nd. Slip my card in the slot, open the door. Uncomfortable fluorescent lighting. Can those little video cameras see how *tweaked* I am? Are they plugged directly into the FBI surveillance feed? Nah, I'm just being paranoid. Shake it off. Step up to one of the machines. Card in the slot again. PIN number. Aahh, shit! 53 dollars? I could have sworn I had a couple hundred left in there! Well, I guess I better take \$40 out. That'll at least get me to my gig tomorrow night and back. And I should be getting a few checks on Friday.