

Near the end of 1958, a young man, not yet thirteen years of age, walks into a local record store in Boston, the town he has lived in since his family moved there from Chicago when he was two years old. Within a few months he will play drums with Johnny “Hammond” Smith, a local organ player, and those who hear him will recognize something quite special indeed in this boy who’s not yet old enough to shave (well, maybe there’s a little peach fuzz, but he surely wears that as a badge, and wouldn’t think of taking a razor to it). He has been around music since he was born, his father plays tenor saxophone. This boy is a prodigy, and one wonders if he knows it yet, for soon he surely will. In the next couple of years, he will go on to play with Sam Rivers, and will get a steady gig as the house drummer at Connelly’s, backing headlining jazz artists as they pass through the Boston area. Among those headliners will be Jackie McLean, who will be amazed by the sixteen-year-old drummer’s skill.

Yet those gigs are in the future. At this time, recalls the man who was the boy, there is but one thought occupying his head— learning the art of jazz drums. “I used to practice eight hours a day, every day! From about 1956 to about 1962. It was a whole thing, a whole period in my life where nothing else was happening.”³

On this particularly windy night, the young man is about to purchase an album that will have a lasting effect on him. It is the latest from Miles Davis and is entitled *Milestones*. The band is a sextet; the already established Miles Davis Quintet with the addition of relative newcomer Jullian “Cannonball” Adderley.

When he gets home, he will listen, and he will become intoxicated by the music. The strength of the performance will strike him from the opening notes. When the first drum break comes, his “auditory camera” will zoom in and his admiration for Davis’

master drummer, Philly Joe Jones—already firmly in place—will reach new heights. The songs will mean something to him; their significance will be felt deeply. He probably turns it right back over to side one after the last song. He listens. The next morning, he will begin another day of woodshedding, and he will draw inspiration from this new source in a most meaningful way. Day after day, it will have more and more impact on him.

The boy is Tony Williams and in just about four years, as his seventeenth birthday approaches, he will join Miles Davis' group, and become part of the trumpeter's second classic quintet.

But for now, he listens...

Okay, so maybe it wasn't *that* dramatic. Perhaps that night wasn't particularly windy...or maybe Tony Williams gets the album *Milestones* as a Christmas gift that year. What is known for sure is that Williams was living in Boston at the time, had worked with both Smith and Rivers, did back Jackie McLean at age sixteen, and was quickly gaining a reputation as a child prodigy.⁴ Nor is the impact the album had on the young Williams in any way fictional. Tony Williams has been quoted as describing *Milestones* as "the perfect jazz recording."⁵ Depending on exactly what one means by "jazz," he just may be right. If there is an album that is perfectly representative of the harmonically and rhythmically advanced, hard driving jazz of the middle to late fifties, often referred to as post bop or hard bop—a music which requires virtuosity and musicality in great abundance—*Milestones* is it.

Miles Davis and his band managed, with the recording of *Milestones*, to do a great deal with very little. Both harmonically and structurally, simplicity abounds. Four twelve bar blues forms, a modal piece consisting of two harmonies or tonal centers, and an AABA, folk tune. That's it. The beauty, of course, lies in what the band did with this material. The blues as it relates to bebop is taken to quite a high level indeed on the album. The modal concept is fully embraced by the band as the new style it was becoming, not played simply like "bebop without changes." The rhythm section burns on the folk tune. Throughout the album, the concepts of organization within simple forms and interactive soloist support are both dominating forces. This creates a highly unified band sound, while at the same time providing variety.

Less is more. Perhaps one of the more overused clichés, but one that has relevance to this album, on more than one level: the lack of complex or diverse compositional material, the fact that Miles takes no solo on one track and appears not at all on another...even Philly Joe's drum setup. Photos from the session reveal that Philly Joe recorded on a scaled down drum set which included no high tom, normally mounted above the snare drum. The entire album was recorded with four distinct drum timbres—snare, bass, floor tom, cymbals (hi hats and one ride cymbal). The setup works nicely on the album, which is clearly more concerned with the organization and coordination of materials than with the complexity of those materials.

The recording sessions, which took place on February 4 and March 4, 1958, were far from Philly Joe's first with Miles Davis, or as a member of this rhythm section. He had been one of Miles' favorite drummers for years and had recorded with him as early

as 1952. Most of the band was already a cohesive unit which would come to be known as the first classic Davis quintet.

The classic quintet's recordings, perhaps most notably the albums *Workin'*, *Steamin'*, *Relaxin'* and *Cookin' with the Miles Davis Quintet*, were known for laid back "cool jazz" sensibilities, balanced with high energy bebop. The arrangements the quintet used were rather involved, and over the years the rhythm section developed a style of supporting soloists in a highly organized way, sometimes accentuating transitions with intricate interludes. While *Milestones* saw a departure from the "cool" element, the band's organizational capabilities were at their peak. The recording comes across in no way as a "blowing session" with quickly thrown together "head arrangements"—a trend in many jazz recordings of the time. While Miles was certainly concerned with the prowess of his band as soloists, he was also clearly aware of the overall presentation of the album, which sometimes meant absenting himself— as in the trio tune, "Billy Boy."

Davis was also clearly aware that because he was dealing with a limited set of material, there had to be great variety in how the material was treated, requiring of his sidemen a chameleon-like sensibility. No one had to deal with these requirements more than the man largely responsible for the dynamic tone of the band—Philly Joe Jones. Over the course of six tunes, Philly Joe had to lay a strong rhythmic foundation for the front line of Davis, Adderley and John Coltrane, play sensitively behind bassist Paul Chambers' solos and play in a trio setting with Chambers and pianist Red Garland. He had to play up and down the tempo spectrum...with brushes and sticks...laid back and subdued...burning and intense. Philly Joe met each challenge, serving the band while allowing his unique identity to shine as well. His performance is masterful.

LEGEND

SNARE	STICK ON STICK	GHOST NOTE	RIM CLICK	RISE CYMBAL	HI HAT
HI HAT OPEN	HALF OPEN	FLOOR TOM	BASS DRUM	HI HAT (FOOT)	HI HAT SPLASH

DRUM RUDIMENTS

DRAG 	FLAMS 	PRESS ROLL 	BUTT (ONE HAND)
LL R	L R R L		
PARADIDDLES 	4 STROKE RUFF 	6 STROKE ROLL 	
R L R R L R L L	L R L R	R L L R R L	