

Miles Davis - On The Corner (1972)

Written by bluesever

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1. *On the Corner* 2. *New York Girl* 3. *Thinkin' One Thing And Doin' Another* 4. *Vote For Miles* 5. *Black Satin* 6. *One And One* 7. *Helen Butte* 8. *Mr. Freedom X* Personnel: Miles Davis – electric trumpet with wah-wah Dave Liebman – soprano saxophone Carlos Garnett – soprano and tenor saxophone Chick Corea – electric piano Herbie Hancock – electric piano, synthesizer Harold I. Williams – organ, synthesizer Lonnie Liston Smith – organ David Creamer, John McLaughlin – electric guitar Michael Henderson – electric bass with Wah Wah Collin Walcott, Khalil Balakrishna - electric sitar Bennie Maupin – bass clarinet Badal Roy – tabla Jack DeJohnette, Al Foster – drums Jabali Billy Hart – drums, bongos James "Mtume" Foreman, Don Alias – percussion Paul Buckmaster – cello, arrangements

Could there be any more confrontational sound in Miles Davis' vast catalog than the distorted guitars and tinny double-timing drums reacting to a two-note bass riff funkifying it up on the first track from *On the Corner*? Before the trumpet even enters the picture, the story has been broken off somewhere in the middle, with deep street music melding with a secret language held within the band and those who can actually hear this music -- certainly not the majority of Miles' fan base built up over the past 25 years. They heard this as a huge "f*ck you." Miles just shrugged and told them it wasn't personal, but they could take it that way if they wanted to, and he blew on his trumpet. Here are killer groove riffs that barely hold on as bleating trumpet and soprano sax lines (courtesy of Dave Liebman on track one) interact with John McLaughlin's distortion-box frenzy. Michael Henderson's bass keeps the basic so basic it hypnotizes; keyboards slowly enter the picture, a pair of them handled by Herbie Hancock and Chick Corea, as well as Ivory Williams' synthesizer. Finally, Colin Walcott jumps in with an electric sitar and there are no less than five drummers -- three kits (Al Foster, Billy Hart, and Jack DeJohnette), a tabla player, and Mtume. It's a four-tune suite, "*On the Corner*" is, but the separations hardly matter, just the shifts in groove that alter the time/space continuum. After 20 minutes, the set feels over and a form of Miles' strange lyricism returns in "*Black Satin*." Though a tabla kicks the tune off, there's a recognizable eight-note melody that runs throughout. Carlos Garnett and Bennie Maupin replace Liebman, Dave Creamer replaces McLaughlin, and the groove rides a bit easier -- except for those hand bells shimmering in the background off the beat just enough

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to make the squares crazy. The respite is short-lived, however. Davis and band move the music way over to the funk side of the street -- though the street funkies thought these cats were too weird with their stranded time signatures and modal fugues that begin and end nowhere and live for the way the riff breaks down into emptiness. "One and One" begins the new tale, so jazz breaks down and gets polished off and resurrected as a far blacker, deeper-than-blue character in the form of "Helen Butte/Mr. Freedom X," where guitars and horns careen off Henderson's cracking bass and Foster's skittering hi-hats. It may sound weird even today, but On the Corner is the most street record ever recorded by a jazz musician. And it still kicks. ---Thom Jurek, Rovi

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