

Miles Davis - Seven Steps To Heaven (1963)

Written by bluesever

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01. *Basin Street Blues* (Spencer Williams) [07:25] 02. *Seven Steps to Heaven* (Victor Feldman, Miles Davis) [05:16] 03. *I Fall in Love Too Easily* (Jule Styne) [04:37] 04. *So Near, So Far* (Tony Crombie, Bennie Green) [05:19] 05. *Baby Won't You Please Come Home* (Clarence Williams, Charles Warfield) [06:29] 06. *Joshua* (Victor Feldman) [06:56] Bass – Ron Carter Drums – Anthony Williams (tracks: 2, 4, 6), Frank Butler (tracks: 1, 3, 5) Piano – Herbie Hancock (tracks: 2, 4, 6), Victor Feldman (tracks: 1, 3, 5) Tenor Saxophone – George Coleman Trumpet – Miles Davis

It's easy to pigeonhole this '63 Miles Davis recording as a "transition" period between his classic quintets, but one thing is quite clear: Miles was always in transition. Each Davis band was going through a musical or personnel metamorphosis, so we might as well simply take the music on its own terms and forget about the historical context. On that standard alone, *Seven Steps to Heaven* is an absolute gem.

Recorded in two locations, Miles, Ron Carter, and George Coleman hooked up with the "Los Angeles" quintet, featuring Victor Feldman (piano) and Frank Butler (drums), for a set of dreamy, moody and ultra hip versions of songs not usually associated with '60s modal music. On "*Basin Street Blues*" and "*Baby Won't You Please Come Home*," Miles, armed with his mute, is spellbinding as he squeezes notes for all of their glorious agony. His interpretation of "*I Fall in Love Too Easily*" makes Chet Baker's version seem insouciant by comparison.

Relocating three thousand miles to New York with Herbie Hancock (piano) and Tony Williams (drums) taking over, the quintet was on its way to become the standard by which all subsequent bands would be measured. Introducing two future classics, Miles and company tear through "*Joshua*" and "*Seven Steps to Heaven*" and set the world on notice: life in the music world would never be the same again.

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If you've only heard of Miles because of Kind of Blue, this would be a great next step. ---George Harris, allaboutjazz.com

Seven Steps to Heaven finds Miles Davis standing yet again on the fault line between stylistic epochs. In early 1963, pianist Wynton Kelly, bassist Paul Chambers, and drummer Jimmy Cobb left to form their own trio, and Davis was forced to form a new band, which included Memphis tenor player George Coleman and bassist Ron Carter. When Davis next entered the studio in Hollywood, he added local drummer Frank Butler and British studio ace Victor Feldman, who ultimately decided not to go on the road with Davis. It's easy to see why Davis liked Feldman, who contributed the dancing title tune and "Joshua" to the session. On three mellifluous standards -- particularly a cerebral "Basin Street Blues" and a broken-hearted "I Fall in Love Too Easily" -- the pianist plays with an elegant, refined touch, and the kind of rarefied voicings that suggest Ahmad Jamal. Davis responds with some of his most introspective, romantic ballad playing. When Davis returned to New York he finally succeeded in spirited away a brilliantly gifted 17-year-old drummer from Jackie McLean: Tony Williams. On the title tune you can already hear the difference, as his crisp, driving cymbal beat and jittery, aggressive syncopations propel Davis into the upper reaches of his horn. On "So Near, So Far" the drummer combines with Carter and new pianist Herbie Hancock to expand on a light Afro-Cuban beat with a series of telepathic changes in tempo, texture, and dynamics. Meanwhile, Feldman's "Joshua" (with its overtones of "So What" and "All Blues") portends the kind of expressive variations on the basic 4/4 pulse that would become the band's trademark, as Davis and Coleman ascend into bebop heaven. ---allmusic.com

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