The biggest superstar of modern jazz was trumpeter Miles Davis (1926-1991), the great “innovator of style.” Miles changed the direction of jazz several times during his career of nearly fifty years. He either pioneered or was at the forefront of almost every modern jazz style including bebop, cool, hard bop, modal jazz, and free jazz, and was the pathfinder for contemporary fusion jazz styles such as jazz-rock, jazz-funk, techno-jazz, and jazz-hip/hop. Miles Davis’s career is well documented by the numerous albums he made as a leader. A potent recording artist, the Miles Davis-led recordings practically document the evolution of modern jazz styles.

Miles Davis had a “sixth sense” about selecting and organizing musicians, and he led some of the greatest bands in jazz history. Many of his ensembles contained players with very diverse individual approaches and styles, but Miles was always able to blend them into a unified whole. Miles’s various groups provided exposure for many outstanding jazz innovators and inspired these musicians to seek out new paths. John Coltrane, Wayne Shorter, Chick Corea, Joe Zawinul, and Herbie Hancock are a few of the many that discovered their own personal creative voices while in Miles’s company.

Davis created an original and influential style of modern jazz trumpet playing. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, Miles displayed a softer and darker tone quality than most of his contemporaries. Never considered a technical virtuoso on the line of a Louis Armstrong or Clifford Brown, Miles instead focused on a more “cool” and melodic approach to improvisation, often using an effective use of silence and space. He tended to play more in the mid-to-low range of the trumpet and employed colorful and subtle alterations of pitch and timbre. Miles is
also attributed for devising the use of the Harmon mute without its stem, a sound that became identified with Miles Davis. During the 1960s, Miles played in a more vivacious manner due to the more energetic style of his music at the time. His tone became slightly brighter and he improvised with more intensity.

Trumpet with a Harmon mute (without its stem) which creates a sound associated with Miles.

Although not considered a great composer, he did write numerous tunes which have become jazz standards. Miles’s music was always fresh. Davis wanted spontaneity and honesty in his music and rarely did his bands practice. Instead, he developed a group sound and approach during live performances or in the recording studio. Never satisfied in any one style for long, the uncompromising Miles Davis always looked forward and rarely ever rehashed or played anything he or his groups had played before.

Charlie Parker and Miles Davis
In 1956, Miles formed one of the greatest jazz groups of all time, what many call his “classic quintet” with tenor saxophonist John Coltrane, pianist Red Garland, bassist Paul Chambers, and drummer Philly Joe Jones. The group performed throughout the world and recorded several albums including the landmark ‘Round About Midnight in 1957. ‘Round About Midnight has since been regarded by critics as a masterpiece of the hard bop genre and one of the greatest jazz albums of all time. This was also Miles’ first recording for Columbia Records, which began the longest major recording contract of any music artist in American music history (from 1956-1986). The band did not do anything extraordinarily musically pioneering, playing primarily popular tunes and jazz standards. Instead, the group emphasized mainstream modern jazz methods and codified the basic approaches to jazz performance in the 1950s: Cool and Hard Bop. Bottom line—just great straight-ahead playing!

MILES DAVIS SEXTET
"All of You" (Cole Porter)
Recorded in December, 1956.

Davis (trumpet); John Coltrane (tenor sax); Red Garland (piano);
Paul Chambers (bass); Philly Joe Jones (drums).

Meter: 4/4 meter
Tempo: Fast; 168 beats per minute
Form: 32-bar ABAC song form; Head--Solos--Head

In 1959, Miles Davis embarked on a recording project which was to change the course of current jazz. Kind of Blue is considered by almost every jazz musician, critic, and fan as “the greatest jazz album of all-time” and a milestone in all of music history. The sextet Miles organized for the recording included the greatest jazz icons of the time: Miles, saxophonist John Coltrane, alto saxophonist Julian “Cannonball” Adderley, pianist Bill Evans, bassist Paul Chambers, and drummer Jimmy Cobb. Four of the five tunes on the album have become jazz standards: “So What,” “Freddie Freeloader,” “All Blues,” and “Blue in Green.”
"Kind of Blue" introduced modal concepts (or modality) to jazz performance: tunes and improvisations based on a few slowly changing scales rather than a series of fast changing complex chords—the usual harmonic foundation of jazz. The idea of having few harmonic changes gave the players more freedom to develop improvisational ideas. Much of the concept of the album came to Miles from the innovative and influential pianist Bill Evans, and with his collaborations with composer/arranger Gil Evans.

From the "Kind of Blue" recording session on March 2, 1959. L-R: John Coltrane, Cannonball Adderley, Miles Davis, and Bill Evans.

Let’s watch a recent documentary about the landmark Kind of Blue sessions and Miles Davis featuring numerous interviews by Davis sideman such as Herbie Hancock, Jimmy Cobb, Ron Carter, and Dave Liebman, in addition to singer/pianist Shirley Horn, actor Bill Cosby, and journalist Ed Bradley.
“So What,” the most recognized composition on the album, is a simple tune constructed of just two Dorian modes. Davis’s concise and lyrical solo, one of the most celebrated in jazz, is followed by a rhythmically intense solo by Coltrane and a more soulful solo by Cannonball Adderley. Bill Evans’ solo statement of one chorus is full of varying dynamics and textural changes.

MILES DAVIS SEXTET
"So What" (Davis)
Recorded on March 2, 1959.

Davis (trumpet); Julian "Cannonball" Adderley (alto saxophone); John Coltrane (tenor sax); Bill Evans (piano); Paul Chambers (bass); Jimmy Cobb (drums).

Meter: 4/4 meter
Tempo: Medium; 140 beats per minute
Form: 32-bar AABA song form; Head--Solos--Head

0:00    Intro  piano and bass; rubato
0:33    A    8   Head
         bass plays the melody
         piano responds with the “So What” motif
         D dorian mode

0:48    A    8   repeat; horns enter with “So What” motif
1:02    B    8   same as pervious A section but now 1/2-step higher on
                the Eb dorian mode
1:17    A    8   back down to the D dorian mode
1:31    AABA 32  Miles Davis trumpet solo
2:27    AABA 32  trumpet solo continues (2nd chorus)
3:25    AABA 32  John Coltrane tenor sax solo
4:20    AABA 32  tenor sax solo continues (2nd chorus)
5:15    AABA 32  Cannonball Adderley alto sax solo
6:10    AABA 32  alto sax solo continues (2nd chorus)
7:05    AABA 32  Bill Evans piano solo
         horns play "So What" motif softly in the background
8:02    AABA 8  Head
From 1957 to 1962, Miles collaborated with arranger Gil Evans on three albums that are considered 20th century musical classics: *Miles Ahead* (1957), *Porgy and Bess* (1958), and *Sketches of Spain* (1960). These albums joined together Evans’s colorful big band orchestrations with Davis’s poetic improvisations.

Miles Davis organized a new quintet in 1963 that pushed the bounds of bebop-based playing. The nucleus of the group is an adventurous rhythm section of young players that featured the fiery and loose rhythmic style of drummer Tony Williams, the brilliant harmonic sense of pianist Herbie Hancock, and the emphatic bass playing of Ron Carter. The truly original tenor saxophonist/composer Wayne Shorter joins the group in 1964. Shorter became an important force in the band, not only as a saxophonist, but as a composer. The music is a mixture of bop, advanced modal concepts, and free jazz.
Feeling that bop-based playing was at its pinnacle, in the late 1960s, Miles begins experiments with fusing jazz with rock music and begins to utilize electronic instruments. Two albums featuring large ensembles lead the way for the jazz-rock/fusion movement: *In a Silent Way* and *Bitches Brew*. The personnel on these albums become leading innovators in fusion of the 1970s.

During the 1970s Miles delved deeper into a very free jazz-rock style. Miles hired musicians with rock backgrounds playing alongside jazz players. The results had mixed reviews with listeners and critics. By 1975, Miles was beginning to feel his music had nowhere to go and took a hiatus from public life. Miles made no recordings or gave live performances for seven years.

In 1982, Miles made a comeback playing new fusion styles including jazz-rock, pop-jazz, and techno-jazz forming several bands with young players representing various jazz fusion approaches. Three albums during this time won Grammy awards for Best Instrumental Jazz Performance: *We Want Miles* (1982), *Tutu* (1986), and *Aura* (1989).

In 1991, Miles appeared at the Montreux Jazz Festival in Switzerland with arranger/conductor Quincy Jones recreating some of the classic Gil Evans collaborations. He also recorded his last album, *Doo-Bop*, with hip-hop rapper Easy Mo Bee. On September 21, 1991, Miles Davis died at his home in Malibu, CA.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>KEY TERMS for Unit IX</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>HARMON MUTE</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>A particular type of brass mute (used mostly on the trumpet) that is made of aluminum and includes a removable stem; It creates a delicate, “buzzy,” metallic sound; It is named after its inventor.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>DORIAN MODE</strong></td>
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<td>The most commonly used mode that forms the basis of much modal jazz and jazz-rock styles; (A specific scale built on the 2nd degree of a major scale sharing the same key signature as the (parent) major scale)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>MODALITY</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Music that is based on MODES (scales) rather than on chord progressions</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>MODE</strong></td>
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<td>Literally “a scale”; It is used as a “set of notes“ with a tonal center; Most MODAL music is very harmonically static where a mode may last over many bars or over an entire piece; Common in jazz of the 1960s, early jazz-rock, and in many non-Western music styles; The most commonly used modes are DORIAN and MIXOLYDIAN: MODALITY</td>
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