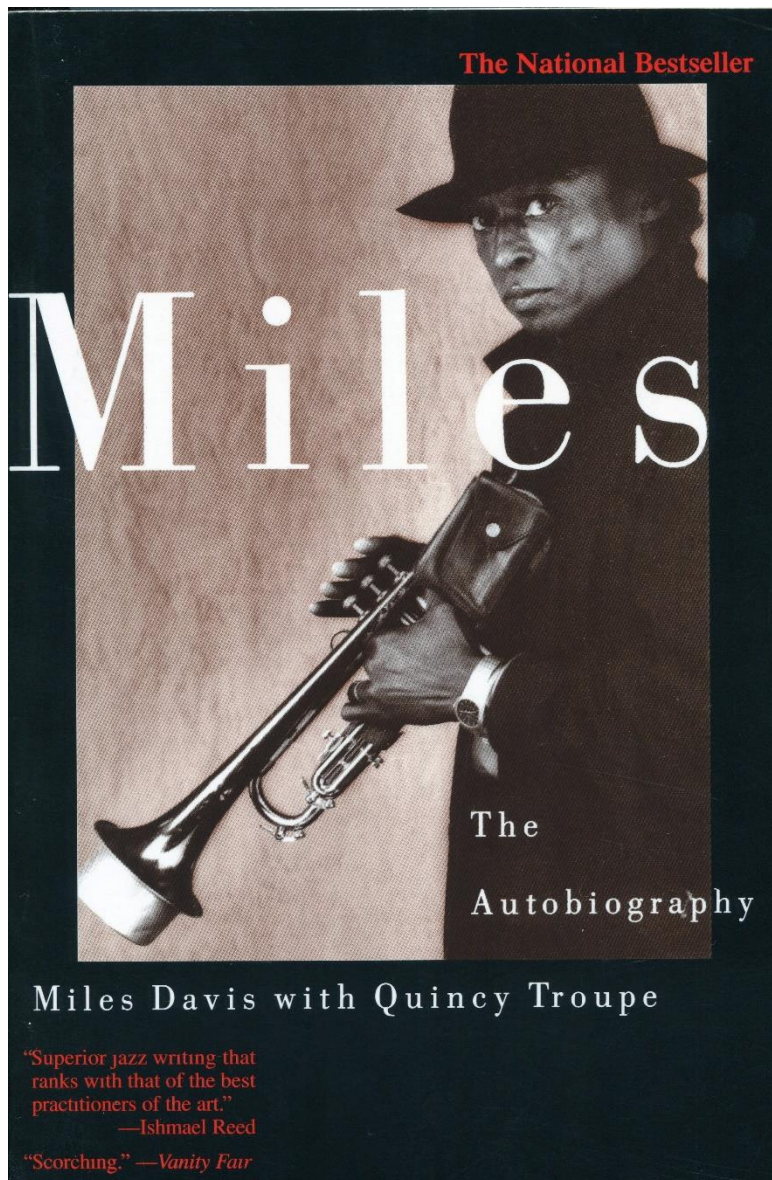


## PROLOGUE TO MILES THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY

by Miles Davis

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*“Miles The Autobiography” by Miles Davis with Quincy Troupe was published in 1989.*



**L**isten. The greatest feeling I ever had in my life—with my clothes on—was when I first heard Diz and Bird together in St Louis, Missouri, back in 1944. I was 18 years old and had just graduated from Lincoln High School. It was just across the Mississippi River in East St Louis, Illinois.

When I heard Diz and Bird in B's band, I said, "What? What is this!?" Man, that shit was so terrible it was scary. I mean, Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie "Yardbird" Parker, Buddy Anderson, Gene Ammons, Lucky Thompson, and Art Blakey all together in one band and not to mention Billy Eckstine himself. It was a motherfucker. Man, that shit was all up in my body. Music all up in my body, and that's what I wanted to hear. The way that band was playing music—that was all I wanted to hear. It was something. And me up there playing with them.



*L-R, Lucky Thompson, Dizzy Gillespie Charlie Parker, Billy Eckstine on stage in Pittsburgh in 1944... PHOTO CREDIT TEENIE HARRIS*

I had already heard about Diz and Bird, was already into their music—especially Dizzy's, with me being a trumpet player and all. But I was also into Bird. See, I had one record of Dizzy's called *Woody 'n You* and a record of Jay McShann's with Bird on it called *Hootie Blues*. That's where I first heard Diz and Bird, and I couldn't believe what they were playing. They were so terrible. Besides them I had one record of Coleman Hawkins, one record of Lester Young, and one of Duke Ellington with Jimmy Blanton on bass that was a motherfucker, too. That was it. Those were all the records I had. Dizzy was my idol then. I used to try to play every solo Diz played on that one album I had by him. But I liked Clark Terry, Buck Clayton, Harold Baker,

Harry James, Bobby Hackett, and Roy Eldridge a lot, too. Roy was my idol on trumpet later. But in 1944 it was Diz.



*B didn't take no shit off nobody. He would cuss and knock a motherfucker out at the drop of a hat...  
PHOTOGRAPHER  
UNKNOWN*

Billy Eckstine's band had come to St Louis to play at a place called the Plantation Club, which was owned by some white gangsters. St Louis was a big gangster town back then. When they told B that he had to go around to the back door like all the other black folks, he just ignored the motherfuckers and brought the whole band through the front door. Anyway, B didn't take no shit off nobody. He would cuss and knock a motherfucker out at the drop of a hat. That's right. Forget about the playboy look and air he had about himself. B was tough. So was Benny Carter. They both would drop anybody they thought was disrespecting them in a minute. But as tough as Benny was—and he was—B was tougher. So these gangsters right there on the spot

fired B and brought in George Hudson, who had Clark Terry in his band. Then B took his band across town to Jordan Chambers' Riviera Club, an all-black club in St Louis, located on Delmar and Taylor—in a black part of St Louis. Jordan Chambers, who was the most powerful black politician back in them days in St Louis, just told B to bring the band on over.

So when word got around that they were going to play the Riviera rather than the Plantation, I just picked up my trumpet and went on over to see if I could catch something, maybe sit in with the band. So me and a friend of mine named Bobby Danzig, who was also a trumpet player, got to the Riviera and went on in to try and catch the rehearsals. See, I already had a reputation around St Louis for being able to play by that time, so the guards knew me and let me and Bobby on in. The first thing I see when I got, inside was this man running up to me, asking if I was a trumpet player. I said, "Yeah, I'm a trumpet player." Then, he asked if I got a union card. I said, "Yeah, I got a union card, too." So the guy said, "Come on, we need a trumpet player. Our trumpet got sick." This guy takes me up on the bandstand and puts the music in front of me. I could read music, but I had trouble reading what he put in front of me because I was listening to what everybody else was playing.

That guy who ran up to me was Dizzy. I didn't recognize him at first. But soon as he started playing, I knew who he was. And like I said, I couldn't even read the music—don't even talk about playing—for listening to Bird and Diz.



*Here's another shot of Diz and Bird with Billy Eckstine: Miles couldn't even read the music—don't even talk about playing—for listening to Bird and Diz...*



But shit, I wasn't alone in listening to them like that, because the whole band would just like have an orgasm every time Diz or Bird played—especially Bird. I mean Bird was unbelievable. Sarah Vaughan was there also, and she's a motherfucker too. Then and now. Sarah sounding like Bird and Diz and them two playing everything! I mean they would look at Sarah like she was just another horn. You know what I mean? She'd be singing *You Are My First Love* and Bird would be soloing. Man, I wish everybody could have heard that shit!



*Billy Eckstine & Sarah Vaughan performing together in 1947...*

Back then Bird would play solos for eight bars. But the things he used to do in them eight bars was something else. He would just leave everybody else in the dust with his playing. Talk about me forgetting to play, I remember sometimes the other musicians would forget to come in on time because they was listening to Bird so much. They'd be standing up there on the stage with their mouths wide open. Goddamn, Bird was playing some shit back then.

When Dizzy would play the same thing would happen. And also when Buddy Anderson would play. He had that thing, that style that was close to the style that I

liked. So I heard all that shit back in 1944 all at once. Goddamn, them motherfuckers was terrible. Talk about cooking! And you know how they were playing for them black folks at the Riviera. Because black people in St Louis love their music, but they want their music right. So you know what they were doing at the Riviera. You know they were getting all the way down.

B's band changed my life. I decided right then and there that I had to leave St Louis and live in New York City where all these bad musicians were.

As much as I loved Bird back then, if it hadn't been for Dizzy I wouldn't be where I am today. I tell him that all the time and he just laughs. Because when I first came to New York he took me everywhere with him. Diz was funny back in those days. He's still funny now. But back then he was something else. Like, he'd be sticking his tongue out at women on the streets and shit—at white women. I mean, I'm from St Louis and he's doing that to a white person, a white woman. I said to myself, "Diz must be crazy." But he wasn't, you know? Not really. Different, but not crazy.



*Miles Davis (left) with Dizzy Gillespie: Diz used to love to ride elevators and make fun at everyone, act crazy, scare white people to death. Man, he was something...*

The first time in my life I went on an elevator was with Diz. He took me up on this elevator on Broadway somewhere in midtown Manhattan. He used to love to ride elevators and make fun at everyone, act crazy, scare white people to death. Man, he was something. I'd go over to his house, and Lorraine, his wife, wouldn't let nobody stay there too long but me. She would offer me dinner all the time. Sometimes I'd eat and sometimes I wouldn't. I've always been funny about what and where I eat. Anyway, Lorraine used to put up these signs that said, "Don't Sit Here!" And then she'd be saying to Diz, "What you doing with all them motherfuckers in my house?"

Get them out of here and I mean right now!" So I would get up to leave, too, and she'd say, "Not you, Miles, you can stay, but all the rest of them motherfuckers got to go." I don't know what it was she liked about me, but she did.



*Dizzy Gillespie with his wife Lorraine, who would order everyone to leave her apartment but say "Not you, Miles, you can stay, but all the rest of them motherfuckers got to go" ... PHOTO COURTESY PINTEREST*

It seems people loved Dizzy so much they used to just want to be with him, you know? But no matter who was around, Dizzy always took me every place he went. He would say, "Come on, go with me, Miles." And we'd go down to his booking office, or someplace else, or like I said, maybe ride in elevators, just for the hell of it. He'd do all kinds of funny shit. Like his favorite thing was to go by where they first started broad-casting the *Today* show, when Dave Garroway was the host. It was in a studio on the street level, so people could watch the show from the sidewalk, looking through this big plate glass window. Dizzy would go up to the window while the show was on the air—they shot it live, you know—and stick out his tongue and make faces at the chimpanzee on the show. Man, he would fuck with that chimpanzee, J Fred

Muggs, so much, he would drive him crazy. The chimpanzee would be screaming, jumping up and down and showing his teeth, and everybody on the show would be wondering what the fuck got into him. Every time that chimpanzee laid eyes on Dizzy, he'd go crazy. But Dizzy was also very, very beautiful and I loved him and still do today.



*Dave Garroway on the Today Show with the chimpanzee J Fred Muggs in 1954...*

Anyway, I've come close to matching the feeling of that night in 1944 in music, when I first heard Diz and Bird, but I've never quite got there. I've gotten close, but not all the way there. I'm always looking for it, listening and feeling for it, though, trying to always feel it in and through the music I play every day. I still remember when I was just a kid, still wet behind the ears, hanging out with all these great musicians, my idols even until this day. Sucking in everything. Man, it was something.