Italian Jazz: In the Footsteps of Miles Davis

Enzo Capua (March 26, 2014)

If you think about it, in every group of friends there's usually one who's a little taciturn, even, occasionally, a little cranky, yet who has the most origi- nal ideas and undeniable personal magnetism. He's the one running the show, often changing gears—sometimes to the surprise and chagrin of the others—who sees where the group is headed. He's the one with charisma

In the world of art, and jazz in particular, there are many examples of such people. I'd go so far as to say that the presence of a magnetic personality is indispensable to the development of art.

Without a doubt, a musician like Miles Davis [2] possessed all of these quali- ties (and their corresponding defects). "Divine" Miles, as many called him, was not only a trumpeter of extraordinary bravura. He was also a versatile, protean artist who redefined the language of jazz.

From the 1950s to the 1990s—i.e., up until his death—Davis dominated the jazz scene like no other. Just when everyone said he was peerless, he changed styles.

Just when his musicians were beginning to feel at home with him, he changed bands. He spawned countless imitators who continue to revere him to this day and will surely continue to in the future.

He even revolutionized his look and the look of jazz musicians in general. He cycled through women and cars faster than a daredevil, only remaining faithful to one: his beauti- ful blue Lamborghini [3]. At least until the calamitous car crash that left him with two broken legs and would dog him for years.

Davis was one of a kind. He didn't lead an especially long life (from 1926 to 1991) but he enjoyed a prestige like no other in the twentieth century. Many people wonder whether there's a Miles among us in today's jazz world, whether there's someone who bears a resemblance to the sublime artist who pointed the way forward in music.

The answer is almost always a resounding and speedy "No." But there are many talented followers of the "Divine" Davis, exceptionally gifted trumpet players and bandlead- ers who convey a strong personality, creativity and technical bravura, even if they don't have the same mad genius, that "curse" to reinvent oneself no matter the cost, as Davis himself liked to describe his attitude toward music.

In Italy we have been very fortunate; we have many extraordinary trumpet players who, in one way or another, while having learned from Davis, are their own artists. Without intending to offend anyone, I'll name just three: Fabrizio Bosso [4], Paolo Fresu and Enrico Rava. These three artists have few rivals in the jazz world, including the American scene.

All three have an uncanny quality that makes them extremely alluring on stage. And their music, obviously, is extraordinary. They also have charisma. They may not change partners every year, they may not race Lamborghinis or indulge in particular substances, yet still, as I said before, while there was only one Miles Davis, we can at least claim three major artists of our own.

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