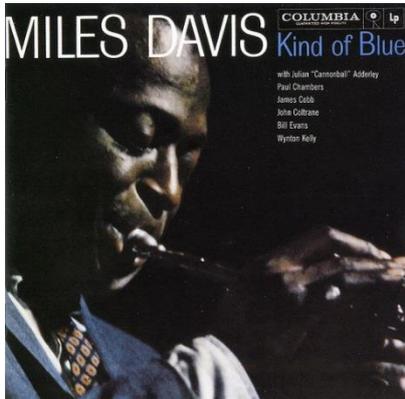


Quartile harmony:
Chords
constructed using
consecutive 4ths

Miles Davis 4

'So What' (1959)



“ Bill had this quiet fire that I loved on piano. The way he approached it, the sound he got was like crystal notes or sparkling water cascading down from some clear waterfall. I had to change the way the band sounded again for Bill's style by playing different tunes, softer ones at first.

Miles Davis

Key Features of Cool Jazz/Modal Jazz:

Slower tempos, use of modes, quartile harmony, increased emphasis on melody, use of space,

So What is the first track on Miles Davis' 1959, multi-platinum selling, iconic album *Kind of Blue*. This album is often cited as the greatest Jazz record of all time. It hailed a transition in recorded Jazz from 78 singles to LP albums with musically related content throughout.

Davis' experimentations with modality began as early as 1948. Following his three-year stint with Charlie Parker, Davis collaborated with pioneering composer and arranger Gil Evans on a series of nonet recordings. Many of these groundbreaking pieces sought to fuse Classical and Jazz, featuring unusual timbres, unusual instrumentation and explored the use of modality. Davis and Gil Evans would collaborate on a range of projects right into the 1960s. They were both key players of the **Third Stream** movement that sought to combine classical and Jazz. This movement also saw interracial racial collaboration which had been rare up to that point.

In 1958 Davis expanded his quintet to a sextet with the addition of Julian 'Cannonball' Adderley on alto sax. With this lineup, Davis was to explore modality with his ensemble with his 1958 Album *Milestones*.

It wasn't until a year later in 1959 with the addition of bespectacled, classically trained, understated pianist **Bill Evans** that Davis' would champion modal jazz with *Kind of Blue*. Evans would go on to become one of the most influential musicians of the 1960s. Evans had in fact left the band after a frenetic 7 months of touring, and perhaps drained by racial issues being the only white person in the band, but was recalled by Miles to record the album. He was the perfect complement for Davis' understated playing to explore this new direction. Experts often credit Evans with writing *Blue in Green* and *Flamenco Sketches* on the Album.

With Davis never having the technical bebop proficiency of **Dizzy Gillespie** and **Parker**, Davis would exemplify his true **genius** through **Modal jazz**, exemplifying his unrivalled ability for melodic inventiveness. The trumpet solo of *So what* is one of Davis' finest.

Analysis-‘So What’

Instrumentation/Orchestration:

Miles expanded his quintet in 1958 with the addition of alto sax. He also replaced his pianist and drummer with much more understated players than their predecessors. Perhaps a deliberate choice for this album.

Miles Davis	<i>Trumpet</i>	
Julian ‘Cannonball’ Adderley	<i>Alto Sax</i>	Joined in 1958-Third front line player allowed more arranging possibilities
John Coltrane	<i>Tenor Sax</i>	
Bill Evans	<i>Piano</i>	Replaced Red Garland
Paul Chambers	<i>Double Bass</i>	
Jimmy Cobb	<i>Drums</i>	Replace Philly Joe Jones

Structure:

So What begins with a quasi-classical **piano and bass introduction**. This was composed by Pioneering **Third Stream** composer and **Gil Evans**.

The rest of the piece is a simple 32 bar **AABA** structure based on 2 Dorian modes, the B section simply being a semi-tone higher:

D Dorian (8bars)	D Dorian (8bars)	Eb Dorian (8bars)	D Dorian (8bars)
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The track is over 9 minutes long and features 4 double solos (2 Choruses). Modal Jazz was very much about exploration of modes:

Bass and Piano introduction	Rubato
Head 32 Bars	Call and response bass and horns, drums with brushes
Trumpet solo x2 Choruses	Drums played with sticks
Tenor solo x2 Choruses	
Alto solo x2 Choruses	
Piano solo x2 Chorus	Horns play a displaced version of the ‘So what’ Chords
Head recapped, fade to end	

Texture:

With 3 front line players, this allowed more scope for orchestration. *So What* features **call and response** in the head. The head opens with a short **monophonic bass melody** using the

Dorian mode. This is answered by the horns and piano performing a **homophonic** two chord response. This descends by a tone on beats 3 and the *and* of 4 respectively. It uses a **quartile voicing**, synonymous with modal jazz. Quartile voicing simply mean constructing chords using **consecutive 4ths** e.g. E, A, D, G. Evans uses such voicing throughout the piece.

The image shows a musical score for 'So What' by Miles Davis, labeled 'C VERSION' and 'MEDIUM SWING'. It features two staves: 'MELODY' (treble clef) and 'RHYTHM' (bass clef). The piano part is written in the right hand of the bass clef. Annotations include:

- A yellow box labeled "'So what' chords" pointing to the piano chords in the first two bars.
- A box labeled "Horns harmonise with a 3rd below, then a 4th below that" pointing to the horn entries in the second and third bars.
- A box labeled "Quartile piano voicing: E, A, D, G" pointing to the piano chords in the first bar.
- A box labeled "Quartile piano voicing: D, G, G, F" pointing to the piano chords in the second bar.

Harmony and Tonality:

Miles deliberately simplified the harmony and the harmonic rate (the speed at which the chords changed) on this album. This was a reaction to the rapid chord changes, rapid tempos and complexity of Bebop; never Miles' forte. This forced the musicians to have to think more melodically. The piece is essentially just 2 chords Dm7 and Ebm7. Whilst Miles was a master of melodic inventiveness, Coltrane and Adderley found the absence of chord changes challenging!

Melody:

The piano and bass introduction was pre-composed. It features melodic fragments in the bass with homophonic chords drifting in no particular key. There are points the bass and piano play together before a low rumble in the bass to end.

The bass then performs the opening melody strongly accenting the tonic and dominant (D and A) answered by the homophonic 'So what' chords in the horns. This two bar question and answer melody is repeated 4 times (8 Bars) with slight variation in the bass each time. In the B section, this is simply repeated a semitone up.

Miles' solo on this piece was considered such a master piece compositions and arrangements have even been made of it! Whilst relatively simple, using mainly diatonic notes from the Dorian mode, Miles superbly flicks between using tonic and dominant heavy passages to other using the upper intervals of the chords to create a more ethereal sound. Miles also uses occasional chromatic embellishments for added colour.

Rhythm and Metre:

After the **rubato** introduction, the piece maintains a moderate 4/4 tempo with **swung quavers**. The drums play brushes in the head, going to sticks on the ride cymbal in the solos in a very simple but effective style.

Dynamics:

In keeping with the 'cool' nature of the music, dynamics are kept relatively soft with a slight increase on the solos where the drums go to sticks.

Exam Style Questions:

1. Describe the structure of this piece:

2. How is the melody constructed in this piece?

3. Describe the tonality of this piece and how it is used?

4. What elements of this piece define it a piece of cool jazz or Modal Jazz?

5. *Dodgy exam question*-How is the 'cool temperature created in this piece?

