

During the late 1950s, Miles Davis, never known as a man given to fulsome praise, absolutely gushed when the subject turned to Ahmad Jamal (b. 1930): "All of my inspiration comes from Ahmad Jamal," Davis was quoted as having said. "I live until he makes another record."

The great trumpeter-bandleader was attracted particularly to several elements of Jamal's highly stylized approach, and drew upon these to help guide his epochal band of 1955-1956, Davis' first "great quintet." In fact, Davis specifically instructed his pianist, Red Garland, to play like Jamal.

What Davis was especially taken by was Jamal's light, crystalline keyboard touch, melodically-based solos (a decided departure from bebop's sometimes frantic orthodoxy), and his hallmark use of rests, or "space," that allowed the music to breathe. And clearly, Davis was also impressed by the Jamal trio's conception, at once seemingly effortless but unflinchingly precise, as well as the pianist's selection of choice material. No less than six of the twenty-one selections herein were recorded by Jamal before Davis' band rendered them for posterity, and two more, "Ahmad's Blues" and "Billy Boy" were features for Red Garland's piano on Davis LPs.

These recordings present Ahmad Jamal at the dawn of his lengthy, brilliant career. Recorded between Oct. 25, 1951 and the same date in 1955, here is the young Jamal, joined by the underrated guitarist Ray Crawford, whose tone is exquisite, and either Eddie Calhoun or Israel Crosby on bass. Each tune is a masterful instance of melodic exposition, dynamics, tight and intricately worked-out arrangement, and democratic, three-way interplay. Of special interest to listeners familiar with Jamal's best-selling 1958 live version of "Poinciana" is the lilting 1955 original contained in this invaluable collection.



1. THE SURREY WITH THE FRINGE ON TOP 2:49
2. WILL YOU STILL BE MINE 2:42
3. AHMAD'S BLUES 2:54
4. A GAL IN CALICO 2:34
5. AKI AND UKTHAY 3:05
6. BILLY BOY 2:38
7. BLACK BEAUTY 3:25
8. LOVE FOR SALE 8:30
9. SOMETHING TO REMEMBER YOU BY 2:47
10. POINCIANA 4:33
11. DON'T BLAME ME 3:20
12. AUTUMN LEAVES 2:41
13. THEY CAN'T TAKE THAT AWAY FROM ME 2:57
14. OLD DEVIL MOON 3:43
15. IT'S EASY TO REMEMBER 2:54
16. SQUEEZE ME 3:49
17. CRAZY HE CALLS ME 4:55
18. PAVANNE 4:24
19. PERFIDIA 3:55
20. RICA PULPA 3:49
21. THE DONKEY SERENADE 3:19

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