

# fission

## Miles back

by Bill Milkowski

During the past decade a plethora of bands have resurrected, on record and in concert, the music of Miles Davis' most provocative electric period — roughly from 1969's *Bitches Brew* through 1975's *Agharta* and *Pangaia*, notorious twin documents of two particularly incendiary gigs in Japan. Savage, distortion-laced, Hendrix-influenced guitar playing — by John McLaughlin, Pete Cosey, and Reggie Lucas — figured prominently on these kaleidoscopic recordings that mixed jazz, rock, and funk in Miles' inimitable fashion.

Subsequent bands that have tried to express the essence of this volatile music and capture the true cathartic spirit of these recordings have been obliged to incorporate this kind of guitar playing into the mix, some more successfully than others. Drummer Bobby Previte did it well with his *Voodoo Down Orchestra* by showcasing the slash-and-burn guitar of Pete McCann. Trumpeter Mark Isham relied on the twin guitars of Peter Manau and Steve Cardenas for *The Silent Way Project*, while guitarist Dave Stryker reserved some of his most aggressive playing for his *Shades of Miles* group.

But the band that comes closest to conveying the full throttle, over-the-top fury of early-'70s Miles bands — particularly the Cosey-fueled *Agharta/Pangaia* band — is the West Coast based **Yo Miles!** project.

Formed six years ago by innovators Wadada Leo Smith, trumpet, and Henry Kaiser, guitar, the band's 1998 self-titled debut for Shanachie Records summoned the searing intensity and reckless abandon of electric Miles in re-creating themes from *A Tribute to Jack Johnson* as well as tunes from *The Corner*, *Big Fun*, *Dark Magus*, *Get Up With It*, *Agharta*, and *Pangaia*.

On their long-awaited follow-up, *Sky Garden* (Cuneiform), Smith and Kaiser explore more explosive Miles themes like "It's About That Time," "Great Expectations," "Sivad," "Jabali," "Directions," and "Little Church," while mixing in originals like drummer Steve Smith's "Miles Star," "Who's Targeted?" and "Shinjuku," as well as the slyly named group-improv piece "Cozy Pete." Featured on this two-CD set are charter Yo Miles! members Michael Manring on electric bass and Chris



Muir on guitar, as well as drummer Steve Smith, keyboardist Tom Coster, saxophonists Greg Osby and John Tchicai, guitarist Mike Kenelly, and percussionist Karl Perazzo. Tabla master Zakir Hussain figures prominently on a sprawling 35-minute version of "Great Expectations," which is book-ended by extended duets with trumpeter Smith. Other guests include the Rova Sax Quartet (on a medley of "Sivad/Gemini Double Image/Little Church") and former Miles Davis guitarist David Creamer (he appeared on 1974's *On The Corner*) playing on "Miles Star."

"It's strictly live in the studio, just guys playing in a room," says Kaiser of *Sky Garden*. "But I also try to follow the Teo Macero method of editing a lot of this stuff in post-production. So while it was recorded live in the studio and there are no overdubs at all, it's heavily edited like *Jack Johnson* was — cut and pasted after the fact. And it's all just two-track edits. There's no moving instruments around or replacing solos. So it still is what we played together in the moment."

Yo Miles! captures the sense of menace routinely summoned in concert by Davis' most fiery bands.

"That's what Miles intended," Kaiser maintains. "Other bands are imitating the surface of the music, rather than following the process. They're not using the tools; they're just imitating the result of the tools and trying to recreate the past. We don't think of it as a nostalgia thing. We think of it as a really interesting method for improvisation that Miles developed and that people didn't really take

## personal taste

Bill Milkowski

- ▲ **William Galison & Madeleine Peyroux** *Got You On My Mind* (Waking Up Music) — Toots Thielemans-inspired harmonica ace meets Billie Holiday-inspired singer in a soulful, swinging encounter.
- ▲ **Astral Project** *The Legend of Cowboy Bill* (APR Records)
- ▲ **3 Now & Time** *Ebbing* (3 Now & Music)
- ▲ **Bill O'Connell** *Latin Jazz Fantasy* (Random Chance)
- ▲ **Saxophone Summit** *Gathering of Spirits* (Telarc)
- ▲ **Junior Brown** *Down Home Chrome* (Telarc)
- ▲ **Jerry Gonzalez** *Y los Piratas del Flamenco* (Sunnyside)
- ▲ **Muddy Waters** *Hard Again* (Epic/Legacy/Blue Sky)
- ▲ **Sonny Sharrock** *Ask the Ages* (Axiom)
- ▲ **McCoy Tyner** *Extensions* (Blue Note)

## out now

- ▲ **Terry Silverlight** *Wild!* ([www.terrysilverlight.com](http://www.terrysilverlight.com))
- ▲ **Gutbucket** *Dry Humping the American Dream* (Cantaloupe Music)
- ▲ **Pip Pyle's Bash!** *Belle Illusion* (Cuneiform)
- ▲ **Joe Deninzon & Stratospherius** *Live Wires* (D-Zone)

"Other bands are imitating the surface of the music, rather than following the process. They're not using the tools; they're just imitating the result of the tools and trying to recreate the past." —Henry Kaiser

up that much. Over the years people would do surface imitations of the textures of the music that was created as a result of his method but they really wouldn't employ the method itself. We're just trying to employ the method and get to something deeper with the music we're playing."

While Smith, a highly regarded trumpeter on the avant-garde scene, employs electric trumpet and wah-wah pedal on *Sky Garden*, he arrives at a unique approach that distinguishes him from Miles' wah-wah sound of the '70s.

As Kaiser says of the highly innovative Smith, "He's not into imitating Miles, but Miles was an elder before him that he learned from. Miles' thing was to be yourself, and so he's just naturally following that lesson of Miles. And it's been really interesting to see him just fly with the electric-trumpet stuff. Nobody plays electric trumpet anymore. It's like a forgotten instrument. So it's been really fun to see him work with the colors and shadings of that."

A short tour of Europe is in the works. Meanwhile, Yo Miles! has limited its Stateside

live performances to the Bay Area, specifically the Fillmore West. "It's a fun thing to do, and nobody else is doing it," says Kaiser of playing with this raucous Miles-inspired ensemble.

"We all grew up with that music and still like listening to that music, so it seemed like something to do. And one thing that keeps it going is that it's just such fun to let loose like that onstage. It's like riding this giant wave that goes on forever. We play for four or five hours in concert. It takes no effort and it feels like it's over in 10 minutes."

### Heavy chops

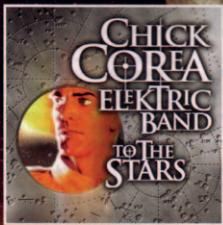
Speaking of chops, consider Israeli-born, New York-based **Oz Noy**, who performs in various power-trio settings on *Oz Live* (available on [www.oznoy.com](http://www.oznoy.com)). A monster player who combines the ability of Darzy Gattou with the imagination of Jeff Beck, Noy is also a master of effects (wah-wah, octaver, tremolo) that radically change the tones and textures of his guitar attack from track to track. The CD documents four nights at the Bitter End, in the heart of New York City's Greenwich Village.

*Late Show With David Letterman* regulars Anton Fig on drums and bassist Will Lee contribute a super-funky rendition of The Meters' "Cissy Strut." And check out Noy's original track on Thelonious Monk's "Misterioso." This amazingly accomplished guitarist has an unbound sense of creativity, adventure, and fun.

Another phenomenally talented musician is Chris Poland, who fronts California-based **Ohm** (self-titled debut on Black Note Records). Former lead guitarist for the heavy-metal band Megadeth, Poland's astoundingly fluid technique and uncanny speed place him in the hallowed realm of such revered fusion-guitar gods as Al Di Meola, Frank Gambale, and Allan Holdsworth. Whereas Oz Noy frames his remarkable chops in the context of looser funky fare, Poland chooses progressive rock that echoes of King Crimson and Yes, as well as material that suggests Return To Forever, Bruford, and Brand X. The trio of Poland, fretless electric bassist Robertino Pagliari, and drummer David Eagle tightly execute this original material. (available at [www.blacknoterecords.com](http://www.blacknoterecords.com)) ▲

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