

ALL BLUES - MILES DAVIS

All Blues is a member of pieces from 'Kind of Blue'. There are five pieces, entitled All Blues, Blue in Green, So What, Freddy Freeloader and Flamenco Sketches. The recording features Miles Davis on trumpet, Julian 'Cannonball' Adderley on alto sax, John Coltrane on tenor sax, and a rhythm section made up from Paul Chambers, James Con, Bill Evans and Wynton Kelly. This piece comes from the era of 'cool' jazz, around the mid 1930s to 1940s.

This piece is written in G major, in 6/8, but sometimes has the feel of 3/4. The piece starts with a 4 bar piano introduction trill. This then leads on to the head, which is 4 bars of sax and then 12 bars of trumpet over the top. The head is played twice, and then there is a trumpet solo for 48 bars, with a 4 bar turnaround. Next is a tenor sax solo for 12 bars and then alto sax for 36 bars. A 4 bar piano turnaround and then a 48 bar tenor sax solo follow this. There is another turnaround and then a 24 bar piano solo. Turnaround, and then the head comes in again. The ostinato continues at the end of the final chorus, with a muted trumpet repeated phrase, dominant to tonic, with the tonic repeated, each note softer than the last, giving an echo effect. There is a fade out to finish.

Although this is a 12 bar blues, the chord progression is somewhat different to the traditional I I I V V I I V I V I I, with a Tonic minor replacing the Subdominant 7 chord in bars 5/6. The sequence also uses quite distorted chords with sharpened ninths as well as other variations and distortions. There are few modal changes, which shows Miles Davis' free melodic conception.

The basis of this piece is improvisation over a chordal/ riff backing. The rhythm section Piano plays tremolando chords or the original riff, adding to the harmony and rhythms of the other parts, the bass has a swing riff, and the drum part is a ride cymbal and snare drum.

Unlike players such as Louis Armstrong and Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davies' style is relaxed, and slow. He removes the mute for his solo. Motifs are short and simple. He incorporates the extended harmony in his phrases, especially the altered ninths in bars 9/10 of each chorus. There is much contrast between Adderley's solo and Davis'. Adderley makes use of regular swing quaver phrases, with fast bebop runs and heavily syncopated rhythms. He covers much of the range of the instrument, contrasting with Davis' solos small range. His sound is warm and flexible with a slow vibrato. Coltrane spends much time in the upper register of the instrument. He was responsible for greatly extending the technique of the tenor sax, reflected in his repetitions and fast runs. The piano reflects Davis' simple style, in contrast to the building of complexity in the saxophone solos. Evans uses simple motives, and uses spaces in the solo. He also develops the accompanying part into a soloistic idea. The last four bars wind down gently, quoting the theme to introduce its return.

KO-KO - DUKE ELLINGTON

Duke Ellington was without doubt the greatest musician to emerge during the inter-war years, and jazz men and classical musicians alike admired him. He established himself during his band's residency at New York's famous Cotton Club in the years 1927-31.

The set up of the band would have been:

Brass – 3 trumpets, 2 trombones

Reed – clarinet, 2 alto sax, 2 tenor sax, baritone sax

Rhythm – piano, guitar, string bass and drums

This is again a 12-bar blues. Ko-ko starts off with an 8 bar introduction baritone sax playing a pedal tonic Eb, with the trombones answering with chromatically descending triads on a syncopated rhythm. The Valve Trombone, rather than the standard Slide Trombone, with its trumpet-like valves instead of a slide is used. It has a thinner tone, but is capable of fast passagework. The theme derives from the rhythm of the Baritone Sax in the introduction and is based on the Aeolian mode (like the harmonic minor scale, but without the accidental sharpened seventh.) Next, there is a muted trombone solo, and the backings consist of a three-part call-and-response arrangement, with the reeds playing a variant of the theme, the brass answering on off-beat chords, with plunger mutes, and Ellington himself using percussive effects of piano chords. The trombone solo also makes use of a plunger mute, and the solo is based more on variation of tone than of pitch. There is continued writing for saxes after this, using the same motif, and the trombones have more off-beat chords, but are higher and less frequent- as they have a shorter rhythmic pattern. Ellington makes use of bitonality on his piano solo, which has an emphasis on lack of control! After this, the trumpets are in unison, and trombones answer the reeds. Ellington continues his progression with crescendo form, this time with the trumpets breaking off from the rest of the band, still using the same motif, but now there is more counterpoint. There is now a rise in dynamic level, and instruments are using more extreme parts of their range to create greater tension. Reeds and Brass are answered by a solo bass, which becomes a form of a bridge passage, with a slight relief to the tension that has been built up. The dynamics are less, and the texture is a lot thinner, including a solo bass fill in response to the reeds and brass playing a variation on the original theme. It also builds up the tension again with pyramid chords. The coda of the piece is an extended version of the introduction. This starts exactly as the introduction, dying away with a diminuendo in the 7th and 8th bars. In the final four bars, the trombones continuing the melody are drowned out by the rising pyramid chords from the trumpets and saxes. The rhythm section becomes far more prominent here as well.

