

Keyon Harrold: The Vital Sound Behind Don Cheadle in Miles Davis Biopic, *Miles Ahead*

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To genuinely emulate and articulate the writing and performance style of **Miles Davis**—a musical icon, one of the most prolific and recognized musicians of the last century—is a daunting task, one that becomes vital to the entire sonic aesthetic of a film responsible for depicting this true innovator's message. Cue modern luminary **Keyon Harrold**: the GRAMMY® Award-winning platinum trumpeter/writer/producer who proved a natural fit for critically acclaimed actor **Don Cheadle** who wrote, directed, and starred in the legendary trumpeter's biopic, in collaboration with **Robert Glasper** who scored the film's soundtrack. A powerful turning point for the Ferguson-native, Harrold has surpassed his already stellar career highlights - collaborating with dozens of the world's greatest musical pioneers and revolutionaries by channeling one of his greatest musical heroes, Miles Davis: a welcomed landmark to preface the imminent release of Harrold's next project as a leader.

For the new ***Miles Ahead*** film, Cheadle appears to be performing so in sync with these provocative compositions that it's hard to believe he didn't play them himself. Harrold is actually the sound behind all of those passionate on-screen performances, except, of course, for the vintage Davis recordings used in the biopic.

Having an actor learn to play a composition well enough to portray it on screen is the industry standard, however in this instance, Cheadle—who had been taking trumpet lessons for four years before shooting—improvised his own fingerings on film, to which Harrold then composed in post-production and sometimes simultaneously on set. But composing music in sync with an actor's fingering isn't the only obstacle Harrold faced; the music had to authentically convey the signature Miles Davis sound.

"It's impossible what he did. Often what we do as actors is, after we film the movie, we go into a recording studio and overdub anything that needs to be made clear," explains Cheadle, speaking on a panel with Harrold and Glasper at SXSW. "This is tricky enough when using your own voice. But what Keyon had to do was watch what we are doing and what I was playing as a trumpeter and sync over that. They had to play over action scenes where they would improvise over our improv, which isn't really possible; but he did it."

It takes a special talent to not only write to what you see someone performing, but it's a rare skill—and a true testament to Harrold's exceptional talent—to write not only to match what's on screen, but to parallel the unmistakable sound of Miles Davis. "I had been planning for this opportunity all of my life in many ways. Coming from St. Louis, my mother first bought me Miles's records when I was very young just so I could learn the horn. He was, in many ways, one of my first teachers," says Harrold. "I first learned his sound so that I could then discover my own. But my life also prepared me in ways I didn't expect. Some of the defining moments that shaped Miles's career as captured in the plot of the movie have also happened to me and, just as I hear how his sound is influenced by those experiences, I too find myself pouring the emotions of those trying moments into my own music."

Lesser known is how Harrold's own life and his contribution to music exemplify many parallels to Davis himself, not the least of which is their shared passion to create "social music" rather than be pigeon-holed by the jazz improvisational virtuosity for which they are both famed. Miles Davis is one of the greatest of all time; and Harrold is often noted by contemporaries and critics as one of the greatest trumpeters of his generation today. Harrold's vision enriches the trumpet, songwriting, and contemporary music with a fresh voice for these complicated times. His music resists conformity, re-imagines genres without boxes or

boundaries, and represents the spirit of the social movements that also inspire his sound—just as Davis did in his own career. With this latest film release, he is now connected forever to the legacy of one of the leading music innovators of the modern era.

Harrold's own voice was added to the film as well as an integral part of the movie's plot: Davis has to take notice of the fierce talent of a young successor: Junior. "For Junior's portrayal, Don asked for something that was like Freddie Hubbard, pyrotechnic, and fast and just in your face," explains Glasper. "So I told Keyon to play like himself." While Junior was of Davis' time, Harrold's music skillfully showcases the lineage of current artists who are inspired and informed by Davis and serves as a tribute to what has evolved from Harrold's own body of music.

For Keyon Harrold the goal is, as it was for Miles Davis, simply to innovate the continuum of music, fusing various genres to tell the stories of our time. No stranger (nor prisoner) to the worlds of hip-hop, R&B, jazz, gospel, pop, soul, all music in fact. Harrold, like Davis, is never bound by the distinctions of genre categories, but rather inspired by how they inform each other.

While Harrold has been noted by publications such as JazzTimes as one of the best new artists of 2015, he has served as a coveted secret weapon crucial to the sounds of artists ranging from Gregory Porter, Will Calhoun, and Dr. Lonnie Smith, to Jay Z, Kanye West, Beyoncé, Common, Lauryn Hill, Mary J Blige, Erykah Badu, LL Cool J, 50 Cent, and Mobb Deep, including touring stints with artists like D'Angelo, Eminem, and Rihanna. The trumpeter also served as an integral part of R&B star Maxwell's two-time GRAMMY® Award-winning album *Black Summer's Night*. Harrold released his debut album, *Introducing Keyon Harrold*, in 2009; the highly anticipated follow up release is coming later in 2016 and will capture his journey through these many styles of music to where he has now arrived as one of the most distinct musical voices to emerge on the scene.

Harrold appears on four tracks of *MILES AHEAD - Original Motion Picture Soundtrack*, available now via Columbia/Legacy. For inquiries regarding the soundtrack, please contact Maria Malta or Gabby Gibb at Sony Music.

Upcoming Keyon Harrold Performances:

- April 6** / Brooklyn Bowl (w/ Dr. Lonnie Smith) / **Brooklyn, NY**
- April 8** / Paramount Theatre – Asbury Park Film & Music Festival / **Asbury Park, NJ**
- April 9** / Annenberg Center (w/ Dr. Lonnie Smith) / **Philadelphia, PA**
- April 15** / National Sawdust (w/ Terrace Martin) / **Brooklyn, NY**
- April 19** / Le Poisson Rouge (as part of Revive Music's 10th Anniversary) / **New York, NY**
- April 26** / Refugee International Gala / **Washington, DC**
- May 13 – 16** / Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola / **New York, NY**
- June 3** / Party for a Purpose at Trinity Church / **Chicago, IL**
- June 4** / Four Star Scholarship Music Festival / **Chicago, IL**

For more information on Keyon Harrold, visit: KeyonHarrold.com

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