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He Fell from a Star
Part Two

Gil often recommended his arranger friends to Claude Thornhill, among them Gerry Mulligan, Johnny Carisi, and Gene Roland. Sidemen in that band included Roland, Lee Konitz, Red Rodney, Lou Mucci (who would be on many of Gil's later record dates), and Rusty Dedrick. Gil told Nat Hentoff:

"My final leaving was friendly. The sound had become too somber for my taste, generally speaking, a little too bleak in character. It began to have a hypnotic effect at times. The band would put you to sleep."

Gerry Mulligan took Gil up on his offer and moved in with him, and there began the series of informal sessions — perhaps they should be called Gil's seminars — that led to the Birth of the Cool band.

Gerry said: "I wound up sharing the room with him. We took turns using the piano, we took turns using the bed, and there was always a succession of guys in and out. We'd be working on charts, and there were conversations going on. Davie Lambert was a regular. He was scuffling around, doing odd jobs. He supported himself doing whatever kind of work came up. He always had his little daughter in tow. John Benson Brooks was a regular. John Lewis used to come by, when he was in town. Then the guys from Claude's band when they were in town, Danny Polo and Billy Exiner.

"When Billy and Danny got there, things took an even more philosophical turn than usual. They were always into very mystical things, which I think shows up in Gil's music too."

In 1959, when Miles Davis and Gil were planning *Sketches of Spain*, I commissioned journalist Marc Crawford to write an article for me at *Down Beat* on the relationship between Gil and Miles. We called the piece *Portrait of a Friendship*. Miles was in Chicago, visiting his then-inlaws. He told Crawford on the telephone, "I don't like discussing Gil. I got too much respect for him to do that. It's almost like asking a man to discuss his wife." But then he relented, and when he and Crawford sat down to talk, Miles said:

"I first met Gil when I was with Bird, and he was asking for a release on my tune *Donna Lee*. He wanted to make an arrangement (of it). I told him he could have it and asked him to teach me some chords and let me study some of the scores he was doing for Claude Thornhill.

"He really flipped me on the arrangement for *Robbins' Nest* he did for Claude. Gil had this cluster of chords and superimposed another cluster over it. Now the chord ends, and now these three notes of the remaining cluster are gone. The overtone of the remaining two produced a note way up here. I was puzzled. I had studied the score for days trying to find the note he heard. But it didn't even exist — at least, on paper it didn't. That's Gil for you.

"We've been friends since that first meeting. I got stranded once in St. Louis, and he sent me seventy-five dollars. I'll bet he's forgotten it.

"He's my favorite arranger, yet he's never really made money out of the business."

Crawford wrote that Gil's "income seems to wind up some $500 a year under what his needs require."

In a 1979 interview, Gil said, "I got here (to New York) in Christmas of '46, intending to stay a couple of years, and stayed over thirty."

Gil remembered that he got off the train, left his bags in a check room, and went, as so many others did, directly to 52nd Street where, with its lineup of jazz clubs, on the first night he met such of his heroes as Ben Webster, Erroll Garner, and Bud Powell.

Of that time in his life, he said, "People pour into New York City — right? — for their careers, to seek their fortune. Everybody comes here and you put yourself in an area where you figure you're gonna meet some other people that do the same thing. I came here from California, which had been my home for a long time, after I got out of the army, because I wanted to pick up on my trade, what I did and what I like, to get into jazz more. I wanted to make all kind of connections.

"It's like the butterfly. The butterflies all meet out in the redwoods in Big Sur in October. They come flying in from everywhere. I just happened to be there one time, and I never did see anything in my life like it. They must have been in the billions. Some of them meet and some of them don't, right? That's the way it happened here. (Miles and I) happened to have the same kind of an ear for sound, a certain sound. I could appreciate his sound, and he could appreciate my sound in the orchestra. There was a certain emotional connection.

"The thing about him is that he can play from the lowest note on the trumpet to the highest and it all has the same sound. It all belongs to him, even though you go up through different registers. Naturally you sound different below middle C than you do above on account of the intensity. But it's all in the same family, so that you never get a break. You especially notice it when he's playing a solo and he's 'way up high and he decides to come down. He never falls down. Some people can be 'way up there and they can't get back down again — gracefully, I mean. But he has a way of just stepping, tripping, all the way back down again.

"When he first started out he didn't have the sound he had eventually. You fill it in. You breathe harder into it. You fill the horn up, soon as you know how you want it to sound. But that thing has to come along. You can't just wake up one day and say, I've been struck by a new sound, and you do it. He had to gradually get that thing. It was like it needed to have more flesh and blood to it. It was very stark at the beginning. It's a developmental thing. You watch it as an interested bystander. Later he had more of the melancholy cry that he wanted to get."

And he said, "I feel very tight, very close with Miles. I'm very happy that we met. It was a great thing. A big thing in my life. I

mean, the *biggest* thing in my musical life and my career. The biggest thing that ever happened to me."

Gerry Mulligan was twenty when he wrote for the Claude Thornhill band and first came under Gil's influence. Soon thereafter, Mulligan, Johnny Carisi — who also had been writing for the Thornhill band — John Lewis, Lee Konitz, Max Roach, and Miles Davis were part of the ongoing seminar conducted, if that's the word, by Gil in his apartment on 55th Street in New York. Curiously, according to Ira Gitler, Claude Thornhill had rented the same apartment prior to forming his 1940 band.

These conjunctions occur in all the arts, as for example the actors trained by Uta Hagen, Lee Strasberg, Stella and Luther Adler, or Jeff Corey, or the writers who hung out together in Paris in the 1920s, including Morley Callaghan, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, and Gertrude Stein.

"Gil's place wasn't really an apartment," Mulligan said. "It was a big basement room. To get into it, you go down five steps of an entry-way. To the left is a Chinese laundry. You go behind the laundry and make a dog-leg turn and go into the giant room with pipes running through the ceiling. There were a few steps up to a little back courtyard, which was an air space more than anything, and a fence. It looked like it was out of *My Sister Eileen*, only no curtains on the window. There was a sink on the right and a little compartment where the toilet was. As you went in the door, the bed was in front of you, the piano was to the right."

Gil, in an interview with Ben Sidran (Jazzletter, June 1988), described life and the conversations in that basement pad. "I left the door open for two years," he said. "Just left it open . . . When I went out, I never locked it. So sometimes I'd come home and I'd meet strangers. And most of the time I met people like Miles and John Lewis. George Russell.

"We talked a lot about harmony. How to get a 'sound' out of harmony. Because the harmony has a lot to do with what the music is going to 'sound' like. The instruments have their wave form and all that, but the harmony means that you're putting together a group of instruments, and they're going to get their own independent wave form, right? You can't get it any other way except as an ensemble playing together.

"So Miles and I talked about that lots of times. And played chords on the piano."

Mulligan said, "It was a special time, to be part of a scene like that where a whole bunch of young people gravitate together by some kind of mutual interests. Even as diverse as our individual approaches were to it, our main interest was focused around music and ways to improve it and improve ourselves."

"Johnny Carisi and I were always at each other's throats. It was very intense."

Carisi said, "We used to fall by. And between Gil and Mulligan, I think they conceived that (nonet) instrumentation, which is kind of logical from a very practical instrumental viewpoint. It's six horns which are more or less octave arrangements of each other. Certainly the trumpet and trombone, it's the same pitch an octave apart. The alto and baritone, the same thing. The French horn and tuba, because the tuba is, in a sense, although not exactly, if you want to really go deep into it, a big French horn . . . .

"Gerry wrote more than anybody. Gil wrote a couple of tunes, either his own or he mostly did arrangements of other people's things. John Lewis did a couple. Gerry did some of his own and (George Wallington's *Godchild*). And I wrote . . . about three things, two of which never got on because . . . they never had enough rehearsal time to ever actually work them out, but *Israel* was the one that really got a good shot at it."

The instrumentation of that nonet, six horns in three groupings in the same families, is parallel to that of Stravinsky's *L'Histoire du Soldat*, which also is built around six instruments in three groupings, in that case clarinet and bassoon, cornet and trombone, and violin and bass.

Pianist and arranger Gene DiNovi was a regular at Gil's pad. In the August 1988 Jazzletter, he wrote of his early encounters with Gil:

"I used to hang around in front of Nola's Studios on Broadway, to see if enough guys could be assembled to hire some space and blow. On a gobd night guys like Tiny Kahn, Red Mitchell, and Al Cohn would show.

"One summer evening I stood there for a long time, but no one showed up. So I went to the second floor of Nola's and opened the door of one of the long studios. And there I found a rhythm section, doing nothing but playing time. The players were Barry Galbraith on guitar, Joe Shulman on bass, Gil Evans on piano, and Billy Exiner on drums. It was the Claude Thornhill rhythm section plus Gil, the band's chief arranger whose influence on American music we all know. Or maybe we don't all know. In any case, there were no horns. Just those four people playing time, perfecting that rhythm section.

"And they were playing so closely that you got the feeling that if one of them died, the rest would commit suicide. Gil graciously asked me to play. Being your basic nervy kid from Brooklyn, I said, 'Sure. What do you want to play?' As I recall, somebody said, "*All the Things You Are*." We started. Not until long afterward did it occur to me that that was the first time I was truly *accompanied*. They were listening to me and expected me to listen to them — what Gil called inter-related playing. It was also the first time I had the unique pleasure of playing with Billy Exiner. I've never forgotten it.

"They apparently liked what I did. But my most vivid memory of the incident is seeing Gil with his ear *in the piano*. A lesson in listening.

"On other nights Miles Davis, Stan Getz, Brew Moore, Tony Fruscella, John Carisi, and other young Turks would show up. If the Thornhill band was in town, that rhythm section would be at Nola's in the evening. Afterwards we'd go back to Gil's apartment

on 55th Street and listen to more music. The conversations — particularly the exchanges between Gil and Billy Exiner — expanded a lot of minds. And it was in that apartment, of course, that what became known as 'the cool' was born. We never used the term, indeed never even heard it.

"You might see Bud Powell at the piano, playing a Bach invention in his own way. One night Charlie Parker came to the door and asked for five dollars for his cab fare. He listened to Prokofiev's *Scythian Suite* on the phonograph and said, 'I don't even scratch the surface.'

"Or Dave Lambert would be there, writing an arrangement. Gerry Mulligan and I would go out for something to eat, continuing the conversation begun in the apartment. Wonderful tenacious Johnny Carisi would keep everybody's minds alert.

"And Billy Exiner, somehow, was the father of all of us, though Gil's was the mind we minded. It was a beautiful time."

Gerry said, "Gil was a man with a vision. He was a gentle person. And we all looked up to him as a source of strength and insight. And he was that, to all of us."

"It was collective," John Lewis said. "Me and a lot of others, we used to go to Gil's place between sets. A lot of the people, Gerry Mulligan and Lee Konitz, had already been friends and worked together in Claude Thornhill's band. It was through them I met Gil and became friends with Joe Shulman and Billy Exiner and Barry Galbraith. Gil was the inspiring influence. He was doing things we had heard with Claude Thornhill. And it seemed to be possible to translate them to a smaller group too, taking just the essentials. And we were young, things were much different then economically. It was cheap to rent studios. And we all just wrote music, 'cause we just enjoyed doing it. It had nothing to do with any commercial business. Whoever had some money paid for the rehearsal or whatever. It was a co-operative.

"Gil was a catalyst. He was a wonderful, wonderful human being."

"Perfect," Gerry Mulligan said of John's description of Gil. "And he was a catalyst. We had a relationship to each other, insights into each other, and we learned from each other in ways that we wouldn't have done if hadn't have been for Gil as a catalyst and a focal point. Young guys today have no place to turn for direction. The only place they've got to turn is to the business itself. And that's a great place to turn for some kind of philosophical and idealistic direction in your music — to the record companies! It's good luck Charlie! That's what it's devolved into. There's no Jim and Andy's, there's no Charlie's Tavern. The only place they come across it is in schools, which of course today there are lots of. That is subtracted from the reality of having to get out in the work place.

"What you learn as an arranger writing for a band is quite different from what you learn writing in school. Writing as a professional for a leader, you've got to please that leader. And you've got to please that audience that the band is going to play for. And you've got to be able to do things that allow the guys in the band to channel what they can do through this form that you lay out. One of the things I always tried to do, in the midst of these requirements, was to please myself. It's a hell of a challenge.

"John Lewis is absolutely right. Gil was our catalyst."

Jimmy Maxwell too remembered fondly those Bohemian days in Gil's pad: "Charlie Parker hung out there all the time. I'd come over there some mornings to see Gil and Charlie would be sleeping, maybe on the bed, maybe on the floor. Sometimes there'd be a couple of guys sleeping on the bed. It didn't sound then like it does now. There was no implication. When I used to come up to Stockton and stay overnight, I'd go stay with Gil and sleep in the same bed. Nothing was thought of it. In fact I'd never heard of such a thing as homosexuality."

Of Gil's unceasing self-doubt, Jimmy said, "He couldn't finish his arrangements because he thought they just weren't good enough."

I asked Gerry, "How did Miles get to to be the leader on those recordings?"

"He made the phone calls," Gerry said. "He made the phone calls for the rehearsals. He made everybody get in and play. When the band went out and played in front of an audience, it started to run into problems.

"Some of the tensions that would build in the group! You had a bunch of strong guys, each with his own ideas. So as leader, Miles should have turned around to the band, and said, 'Do it this way.' But he didn't do that. John Lewis would keep trying to tell him, 'Miles, you went out and got the gig for this. This is not a rehearsal band any more. If you want to be the leader, then you've got to be the leader.' Miles would say, 'Bullshit, man. Problems have got to take care of themselves.'

"John said, 'But it doesn't happen like that.' John also used to give him hell because we never got paid for any of those charts. None of them. John said, 'We wrote the stuff for ourselves, this was a rehearsal band, and that was great. Now you've recorded this stuff and we're supposed to get paid.' We never did. I never got a penny."

In his autobiography, Miles said that it was Gerry who recommended Lee Konitz for the group. Miles had wanted Sonny Stitt. Gerry felt that Konitz would give it a different sound, and Miles agreed. Miles said:

"Then a lot of black musicians came down on my case about their not having work, and here I was hiring white guys in my band. So I just told them that if a guy could play as good as Lee Konitz played — that's who they were mad about most, because there were a lot of black alto players around — I would hire him every time, and I wouldn't give a damn if he was green with red breath . . . .

"Anyway, Monte Kay — " the late Monte Kay would later manage the Modern Jazz Quartet " — booked us into the Royal Roost for two weeks. When we opened up at the Roost, I had the club put up a sign outside that said, 'Miles Davis's Nonet;

Arrangements by Gerry Mulligan, Gil Evans, and John Lewis.' I had to fight like hell with Ralph Watkins, the owner of the Roost, to get him to do this. He didn't want to do the shit in the first place, because he felt it was too much for him to be paying nine motherfuckers when he could have paid five . . . . We played the Royal Roost for two weeks in late August and September of 1948, taking second billing to Count Basie's orchestra.

"A lot of people thought the shit we were playing was strange. I remember Barry Ulanov of *Metronome* magazine being a little confused about the music we played. Count Basie used to listen every night that we were there opposite him, and he liked it. He told me that it was 'slow and strange, but good, real good.' A lot of the other musicians who used to come to hear the band liked it also, including Bird. But Pete Rugolo of Capitol Records really liked what he heard and he asked me if he could record us for Capitol after the recording ban was over."

The reference was to the second recording ban called by James Caesar Petrillo, president of the American Federation of Musicians. Both bans are now seen to have caused tremendous damage to music, particularly jazz. Most of Gerry Mulligan's writing for Thornhill, for example, went unrecorded and is lost.

Saxophonist-composer-arranger-author Bill Kirchner, who teaches jazz composition at the New School, wrote in a paper delivered at a conference on Miles Davis held April 8, 1995, at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, that the group that grew out of those sessions in Gil's pad was an anomaly: "It recorded only a dozen pieces for Capitol and played in public for a total of two weeks in a nightclub, but its recordings and their influence have been compared to the Louis Armstrong Hot Fives and Sevens, and to other classics by Duke Ellington, Count Basie, and Charlie Parker. Though its personnel changed frequently, many of the nonet's members and composer-arrangers became jazz musicians of major stature. Most notable were Davis, trombonists J.J. Johnson and Kai Winding, alto saxophonist Lee Konitz, baritone saxophonist and arranger Gerry Mulligan, pianist and arranger John Lewis, pianist Al Haig, drummers Max Roach, Kenny Clarke, and Art Blakey, and arrangers Gil Evans and John Carisi . . . .

"The *Birth of the Cool* sides were recorded in three sessions on January 21 and April 22, 1949, and March 9, 1950. Issued initially as single 78s and eventually in various LP collections, these recordings had an enormous impact on musicians and the jazz public. Principally, they have been credited — or blamed, depending on one's point of view — for the subsequent popularity of "cool" or "west coast" jazz. Indeed, composer-arrangers such as Mulligan, Shorty Rogers, Marty Paich, and Duane Tatro *were* inspired by the *Birth of the Cool* instrumentation and approach.

"A good deal of their music, though, was more aggressive and rhythmic than some critics would lead us to believe — the frequent presence of such impeccably swinging drummers as Shelly Manne and Mel Lewis alone insured that.

"But the *Birth of the Cool* influence extended far beyond west coast jazz, and frequently appeared in all sorts of unexpected places. In the '50s, east coast composer-arrangers such as Gigi Gryce, Quincy Jones, and Benny Golson produced recordings using this approach, as did traditionalist Dick Cary, who used the style in orchestrating a set of Dixieland warhorses. Thelonious Monk, with arranger Hall Overton, used an almost identical *Birth of the Cool* instrumentation for his famed 1959 Town Hall concert. The format was proving to have all sorts of possibilities for creative jazz writing.

"Gil Evans spent much of the rest of his career expanding on the innovations of his Thornhill and *Birth of the Cool* scores."

What is generally overlooked is a point made by Max Harrison: that the "cool" did not begin with those nonet sessions. "There has always been cool jazz," Harrison wrote in his essay on Evans. "Far from being a new development of the 1950s, this vein of expression, wherein the improviser 'distances' himself from the musical material, goes back almost to the beginning. The clarinetists Leon Roppolo of the New Orleans Rhythm Kings and Johnny O'Donnell of the Georgians, two bands that recorded in 1922, both avoided the conventions of 'hot' playing, as did other prominent jazzmen of that decade like Bix Beiderbecke and his associate Frank Trumbauer, and this is true of several prominent figures of the 1930s such as Benny Carter, Teddy Wilson, and particularly Lester Young."

Lester Young himself attested to the influence of Beiderbecke and Trumbauer on his work, and Miles acknowledged that of Bix not directly on him but indirectly through Bobby Hackett, one of two white trumpeters who helped shape him. The other was one of the hottest of the players to come out of Louis Armstrong, Harry James, a striking jazz soloist when he was not playing the lugubrious ballads on which his later fame rested.

It is also well to remember that Miles much admired Benny Carter, and had played with Carter's big band and small group in the mid-1940s.

Miles was not doing well in the early 1950s. He had a heroin habit by now. He recorded with Charlie Parker, Sonny Rollins, J.J. Johnson, and others, and played in clubs, but his career seemed to be going nowhere. Gil, I'm sure, would argue that Miles was still developing his own highly individual sound and approach to playing.

For a while Gil did club-date work and wrote arrangements for singers' nightclub work. He told Ben Sidran (Jazzletter, June 1988), "There was a vocal coach named Sid Shaw, and he had me and a piano player named Jimmy Lyons, and we would go around to these different people's houses, and Sid would pick out the songs that he felt they should sing in their act, and we would write the music for them. So I did quite a bit of that."

And, although he had never been trained as a pianist, he did a lot of piano jobs. "I went out and played weddings and beer parties, and I played downtown at a place called the Nut Club . .

. . One Sheridan Square . . . So I worked there for a year, just to get the practice of playing. And we had drums and tenor, so I would play the bass part. It was good experience for me. Seventy-six dollars a week. Incredible."

Gil remained unmarried, and it was probably a good thing. It would be hard to imagine any woman living in a one-room dump with musicians wandering in and out at all hours, lying around in groups sleeping, endlessly talking and listening to records and plunking on the piano in the process of writing charts.

He finally married at the age of thirty-eight. The year of that marriage, then, was 1950, a year after the "cool" had been born.

One of the habitues of Nola's studio was singer Helen Merrill. Given a chance to record an album for the Emarcy label, she asked for Gil Evans as her arranger. Such albums, with large orchestras, are rarely made today, except by the best-selling "superstar" performers. But they were common then, even in the case of a neophyte such as Merrill. Producer Bobby Shad immediately said "No!" He told Merrill that Gil had no sense of time in the studio and always ran over budget. How this reputation had come to be is unknown: Gil hadn't recorded much and Miles, not he, had been in charge of the nonet sessions.

Merrill says, in her liner notes for the 1992 CD reissue of the material, recorded in three sessions toward the end of June, 1956, "Bob was right . . . the album took a long time in the studio and there was no way of rushing it." What, three sessions for twelve tracks? That's not a long time, and certainly not in comparison with rock-and-roll practices. "In those days," she continued, we recorded live (as I still do) and getting a balance of the orchestra took a long time . . . and then Gil would do his rehearsals on studio time . . . . "

But that's standard practice. The American Federation of Musicians allows no rehearsal scale. Music is rehearsed in the studio with the clock running at full recording scale.

"Gil was a self-taught musician," Merrill says. So is Robert Farnon, and Gerry Mulligan, and Gene Puerling, and many more. There is something about that term that suggests inferiority or ignorance or wrong practice; but some people are so brilliant they don't even need teaching. Gil was one of these prodigies. Merrill continued: "And giving direction to the band members often consisted of using poetic phrases that had to be communally deciphered. It was beautiful to behold the adoring faces of his loyal musicians and the love their guru had for them."

The album consists mostly of ballads, particularly the slightly arty songs beloved of girl singers at that period, such as *He Was Too Good To Me*, which is *not* one of Larry Hart's best lyrics. One point of curiosity: this album contains some of the few examples on record of Gil's string writing. He uses them at one point as if they were a sax section.

The one other example of his using strings that I know of is found on two tracks of a single by Al Martino, recorded around 1952. The tunes are *Way Paesano* and *Melancholy Serenade*. This is not, you may be assured, a record you would want in your collection. The former tune, with some unidentifiably Latin beat and a vocal group — probably the Dave Lambert singers — is horrible to the point of the laughable, and how Gil managed to write the chart with, as it were, a straight face is testimony to his fortitude and his understanding of how bad work had to be to make it in the commercial marketplace. *Melancholy Serenade* is not really a bad tune, though not a particularly good one either. Jackie Gleason wrote it; it was the theme of his television show. But it's interesting in that it shows that Gil had a grasp of conventional string writing, if he chose to exercise it. Above all, these two sides prove that Gil could have become a rich man writing trash had he chosen to do so. But he didn't: he went down a much lonelier road. That took courage; or perhaps a simple unconsidered adamance.

Another point of curiosity: Helen Merrill sings *Where Flamingos Fly*, a composition by John Benson Brooks, who had been a member of the group that hung around Gil's pad in the late 1940s. The introduction is interesting — Gil will use it again — for it is a direct quotation of the opening figure of the first movement (and in the same key, E minor) of Prokofiev's *Sinfonia Concertante for Cello and Orchestra*, Opus 125. Referring to those times in Gil's pad in the late 1940s, Gerry Mulligan said: "We were all crazy about Prokofiev."

Of the early '50s, Gil said, "I was really waiting around for Miles, to tell you the truth." He said, "We didn't see each other in any regular way until about 1956. That's when we got together and decided to do an album. We made it in 1957. He got the contract with Columbia to do it."

That seriously understates the matter: the album would be *Miles Ahead*. "I never thought of it in terms of history," Gil told Mark Miller.

Others did, including André Hodeir, who wrote its liner notes, and George Avakian, who produced the album for Columbia Records.

Helen Merrill says in her liner notes to the album she did with Gil: "I also played a part in the resumption of the Miles Davis-Gil Evans albums that followed. Miles and I were on tour together, and I suggested that he think about recording with Gil again. He was very intrigued by the idea and those beautiful albums followed . . . . Miles loved Gil and adopted him as a kind of surrogate father after the death of his dad, whom he adored."

George Avakian told me recently:

"The whole idea for that album grew out of two things.

"I signed Miles to Columbia sixteen months before I could release anything by him. He was with Prestige. I worked out a deal with Bob Weinstock, who owned Prestige, whereby we could record him, then hold the masters back until the Prestige contract expired. Which was fine with Bob, because he knew he would ride on all the publicity Columbia would give Miles.

"I told Miles that we were going to call the first album, which would be with the new quintet, *'Round Midnight*, because that was the tune that knocked everybody out at Newport when Miles played it as a walk-on at the 1955 festival. The second one, I told him, we'll call *Miles Ahead* because the publicity campaign that you're miles ahead of everyone else and that you're moving ahead and all that sort of thing. But it has to be very different from the quintet because Bob Weinstock will be recording the quintet like crazy to finish up the contract.

"About three or four months after I signed Miles, he did a guest spot with Gunther Schuller in an album called *Music for Brass*. Miles plays solos on two compositions, by J.J. Johnson and John Lewis. I said, 'Let's do something similar.' I asked him if he wanted to revive the nine-piece band. And he wasn't too keen about that, and I said, 'You're right, that would just be going back to something you've done. Let's go beyond.' And so I steered the conversation to the size of orchestra Gunther had used. And I suggested there were two arrangers who could handle it. One would be Gil, and the other would be Gunther. Miles said, 'I'll do it with Gil.' I said, 'That's perfect.' And that's just what we did.

"I asked him to save one composition without a title so we could call it *Miles Ahead.*

"The recording went quite slowly because, as you know, Gil was a very slow worker. But it turned out to be quite fabulous.

"The first day of the first session, I saw a new machine in the control room. It was a two-track machine, which in those days was called binaural. The word 'stereo' wasn't used yet. We were told that the engineers were given the machine by Ampex to try out, and they were to report back how they liked it.

"Well we made a balance at the beginning of the first session and just held that all the way through and recorded in two-track as well, with no intention of ever using it. As it turned out, everything couldn't be used in stereo anyway, because Miles wasn't able to execute all the solos live. He overdubbed some of them. Since we had only one two-track, we couldn't make a two-track master. That's why the first edition on CD has a lot of different solos. All the editing notes were gone, the original scores were gone."

That is why there are two versions of the album on CD. Connoisseurs have complained that the solos on the first CD edition were not those of the original album; they were alternate takes and the solos weren't the best Miles played on those sessions. The second CD conforms to the original LP. But if you want to hear Gil's charts spread out in stereo, you need the first CD.

Gil must have had some idea of the album's moment: its ten tracks were edited into a seamless whole, one tune flowing into the next, a technique that Columbia had used in Michel Legrand's *I Love Paris* album, but much more significantly in this case, since it is used to unite the pieces in a kind of long one-movement suite. The orchestra was large, five trumpets, three tenor trombones, one bass trombone, two French horns, tuba, alto saxophone, bass clarinet, and two clarinets doubling flutes. The bassist was Paul Chambers. Lee Konitz, who had been in the nonet, was the alto player, and Johnny Carisi was in the auspicious trumpet section, which also included Taft Jordan, Ernie Royal, Bernie Glow, and Lou Mucci.

Despite its size, however, the band was essentially an expansion of the nonet, and its two French horns and tuba revealed its historic roots in the Claude Thornhill band.

One of the pieces in the suite — André Hodeir called them mini-concertos — was Dave Brubeck's tribute to Ellington, *The Duke*. Dave attended the session. He and Gil had never met. They chatted about California, about growing up not far apart. Then Gil said, "Brubeck. Do you have a brother?"

"Yes," Dave said. "Howard." Howard became a music educator, head of music in the Santa Barbara, California, school system.

"Yes!" Gil said. "He played drums in my band in Stockton."

It was old home week.

By now Miles had fully developed the tone that would make him instantly recognizable — and often imitated — for the rest of his life. At one point, when Miles was playing the Village Vanguard in New York, Gil said to him during an intermission, "Miles, it just occurred to me. I don't know if you ever thought about it or not, but you're the first person to change the tone of the trumpet since Louis Armstrong."

By the time of *Miles Ahead*, the tone was distant, melancholy, and almost devoid of vibrato. What vibrato there was usually came at the end of notes, and it was narrow, rather slow, and very controlled. On *Miles Ahead* he played fluegelhorn, which fattened his sound.

Yet the album got some bad reviews.

But, again, Max Harrison, in his essay on Gil, took the album's true measure. He wrote:

"(The musicians) are treated largely as a body of individual players, and the chords are composed of the most varied tone-colors, which are dealt with according to their natural intensity, some being allowed greater prominence than others. In this respect one is reminded of Schoenberg's *Orchesterstucke* Op. 16 . . . and it indicates the development of Evans's musical language that whereas *Moondreams* is reminiscent of aspects of Richard Strauss, here one thinks of Schoenberg." *Moondreams* and *Boplicity* were Gil's only charts in the *Birth of the Cool* sessions.

Harrison describes the effect of Gil's scoring as "that of light imprisoned in a bright mineral cave, its refinement such that at times the music flickers deliciously between existence and non-existence. No matter how involved the textures, though, it always is possible to discover unifying factors as an altogether remarkable ear is in control, ruthlessly — and almost completely — eliminating clichés. Complaints that these Davis-Evans collaborations produced unrhythmic music were due to faulty hearing, and the widely quoted metaphorical description of the textures as 'port and velvet' is inept. Despite its richness, the orchestral fabric is constantly on the move, horizontally and vertically; it is unfortu-

nate that some listeners cannot hear music's pulse unless it is stated as a series of loud bangs."

Two untrue things were commonly said of Gil. The first was that he was not a composer, he was "only" an arranger. The second was that he could function only at a high level as an accompanist to a soloist, above all Miles Davis but also Cannonball Adderley and Kenny Burrell, around both of whom he built albums.

Three albums in the next two years offer persuasive disproof of both theses. The first of these, *Gil Evans & Ten*, was recorded for Bob Weinstock's Prestige label. Since the first of its two sessions, held September 6, followed by a little over three months the last of the *Miles Ahead* dates, this album tends to disprove yet another of the myths about Gil Evans, that he was a dilatory writer. To be sure, he was no prodigy of speed like Billy Byers or Robert Farnon, but the album verifies what Gil said, that he had more craft and speed than he liked to admit. He could indeed work very slowly, when he chose to. But as his work as far back as the Chesterfield Supper Club show with Paul Weston indicates, he could also turn it in on time when he had to.

Technique is a two-edged sword. It can lead an artist into the trap of casual superficiality. But in the more thoughtful and conscientious practitioner, it is a tool that permits deep exploration. It was commonly said of Miles that he was a great artist but not a great trumpet player. He was a great trumpet player *for what he wanted and intended to do*. To focus this more finely, I would quote a great truth that Charles Aznavour taught me when I was writing with him a lot. Charles said, "We build our styles not out of our abilities but out of our limitations." Miles did that. Gil used his considerable orchestral chops to explore, not to hurry. The album was done in three sessions in the fall of 1957.

The band, as the title indicates, is much smaller on the Prestige sessions (the second was October 10) than the band on *Miles Ahead*, but Gil is still feeling his way deeper into his own musical realities. There are some seemingly unlikely tunes involved, Irving Berlin's *Remember*, the Rodgers and Hart song *Nobody's Heart*, and Cole Porter's *Just One of Those Things*. But these very tunes, familiar as they are, only help to make clear that Gil was a true composer. His arrangements amount to recomposition. No one says that Bartok wasn't a composer because he used Hungarian folk material in his work; or that Rachmaninoff wasn't being a composer when he wrote his *Variations on a Theme of Paganini*. Bach used material by other composers, including Vivaldi, ruthlessly; some of it is remembered only for what he did with it. In Gil's hands, *Nobody's Heart* is completely transformed.

The problem is that the term composer has been so misused in the last few decades, as has the word "concert" — solo standup comics give "concerts" — that it has lost its original significance. In my youth, it meant somebody who did through composition, full-scale and finished works for individual instruments or chamber groups or orchestras. And it applied almost exclusively to classical music. One of the men in jazz whom the term fit accurately was Duke Ellington. But in the aspiration to status that transmogrified janitors into custodians, hairdressers into stylists, and used cars into pre-owned vehicles, even rock-and-rollers began to refer themselves as "composers". What Gil was not was a songwriter. He wasn't a writer of full-scale melodies. But like Beethoven building a massive piece out of a four-note theme of only two tones, in the *Fifth Symphony*, Gil was able to build big structures on simple thematic fragments, as in his *La Nevada* and *Las Vegas Tango*, integrating the improvisations of soloists into these pieces so perfectly that they sound written. (The brilliant Belgian jazz composer Francy Boland does something similar, though he doesn't sound like Gil. Interestingly, he too is a lover of Prokofiev.)

"I left Columbia in early 1958," George Avakian said. "One of the first things I wanted to do was record with Gil again."

Avakian was negotiating with Richard Bock, the owner of the Pacific Jazz label, with a view to becoming a partner in the company. This would not come to pass, but George did produce one Gil Evans album for Pacific: *New Bottle Old Wine*, for which Gil wrote charts on jazz standards ranging from W.C. Handy's *St. Louis Blues* to Dizzy Gillespie's *Manteca*, the Spanish word for butter or lard but in Cuba, the nickname for pot. The orchestra consisted of three trumpets, three trombones, French horn, tuba, and one reed instrument. The drummer on one session was Philly Joe Jones; on all others it was Art Blakey. And nothing reveals how far Gil had progressed from standard big-band arranging than his chart on *King Porter Stomp*, utterly unlike the famous Fletcher Henderson arrangement of it.

"They went more easily than the sessions with Miles," George Avakian said. "For one thing, it had been done once already. There were no jazz recordings of that scale before the *Music for Brass* album. So it was a strange thing for everybody. Gil was much more at ease, having done one album with a large orchestra already. And I think the same thing for Cannonball. He was more relaxed than Miles. Miles was kind of nervous about the whole thing. I don't know whether it was because Cannon was a more relaxed person generally. But those sessions went much more easily." The album was completed on May 26, 1958.

Gil said in a 1979 radio interview, "It's succession rather than growth. I don't feel any taller than I was when I did the arrangements for Cannonball. And yet I'm different now. It's a succession of phases you go through, but they don't necessarily add up to progress or maturity. I don't feel bad when I hear that album that I made with Cannonball. I liked those arrangements and the way he played and everything and the fact that we did the whole album in nine hours with no rehearsal. It came off in a dumb-assed studio that you could hardly hear the bass or anything, it was outrageous. But when I hear it now, I like to hear it, it sounds good to me. It's a good thing, it's *done*, and you go on to the next thing.

"A masterpiece is just a successful experiment. You never hear of the unsuccessful ones."

Gil did a second album for Pacific Jazz, again of older jazz tunes, this one titled *Great Jazz Standards*. Richard Bock produced it. The instrumentation was essentially the same as that of the previous album. Again, Gil wrote charts on standards, but these of more recent vintage, such as Monk's *Straight No Chaser* and *Django* by his old friend from the nonet days, John Lewis. This album also contains the first recorded performance I know of Gil's *La Nevada*, a classic example of way he could build something big on a small fragment, and in this case only one chord, G minor thirteenth.

By now, Gil Evans albums — coming at a rate of approximately one a year — were anticipated events in the jazz community. He was becoming legend, this tall, gangly, soft-spoken, gentle and self-effacing man who, as everyone from Jimmy Maxwell to Maria Schneider observed, didn't take his own music that seriously, for all the conscientiousness, the meticulous care, with which he made it. It was evident to everyone with ears that he was unique.

And then came his next great collaboration with Miles Davis.

Well before the release in 1959 of Otto Preminger's movie version of *Porgy and Bess*, the studio began a publicity campaign as inflated as the picture itself. All sorts of recordings of the opera's music came onto the market, including an all-star band album arranged by Bill Potts for the United Artists label and titled *The Jazz Soul of Porgy and Bess*. But the best remembered is the album that Gil and Miles made for Columbia.

That album is one of the highest mountains in the history of jazz. It is a little hard to grasp that it was every bit as good as musicians thought it was when it came out. It has not dated in the slightest. It is a masterpiece. Roger Kellaway, who is both a classical and jazz composer, with an exhaustive knowledge of twentieth century scores, said, "Certainly Gil was one of the great masters of the twentieth century. And I am *not* limiting that to jazz."

On *Porgy and Bess*, Gil used four trumpets and four trombones, Cannonball Adderley on alto and Danny Bank doubling bass clarinet and alto flute. Phil Bodner and Romeo Penque doubled flute, alto flute, and clarinet. The rest of the band comprised three French horns, tuba, bass, and drums. No piano. And by now one thing is obvious: Gil used slightly different instrumentations on each album. The saxophone section, per se, no longer existed for him. Charles Edward Smith, in his notes for the album, observed that "Gil thinks of the music in its entirety, as a painter thinks of a canvas. Indeed, when he speaks of depth or density of sound, impingement of instrumental tone, the dynamics of structure and the particular requirements of each theme, the resemblance to descriptions of pictorial art is striking. And when one recalls Picasso's dictum that a painting is alive, the parallel is completed."

The final session of *Porgy and Bess* took place on August 18, 1958. Given the weight of *Miles Ahead* and *Porgy*, these collaborations with Miles were now seen as Events, and arrangers (among others) were waiting to see what they would do next. The first of the sessions for *Sketches of Spain* was held fifteen months later, on November 20, 1959. The album was completed in March, 1960. It was widely whispered in the music business that Teo Macero, who produced it, should have won a Grammy award for splicing.

The planning of that album must have begun not long after the release in 1959 of *Porgy and Bess*. Miles described the genesis of the album in his autobiography:

"In 1959 I was in Los Angeles and went to see a friend of mine named Joe Mondragon, a great studio bass player, who lived in the San Fernando Valley. When I got to his house, he played this recording of *Concierto de Aranjuez* by this Spanish composer, Joaquin Rodrigo, and said, 'Miles, listen to this; you can do this.' So I'm sitting there listening and looking at Joe and I'm saying to myself, Goddamn, these melody lines are strong. I knew right there that I had to record it, because they just stayed in my head. When I got back to New York, I called up Gil and discussed it with him and gave him a copy of the record to see what he thought could be done with it. He liked it, too, but said we had to get some more pieces to fill out an album. We got a folklore record of Peruvian Indian music, and took a vamp from that. This was *The Pan Piper*. Then we took the Spanish march *Saeta*, which they do in Spain on Fridays when they march and testify by singing. The trumpet players played the march like it was done in Spain."

According to Nat Hentoff, Miles and Gil listened extensively to Manuel de Falla's 1915 ballet music *El Amor Brujo*, from which Gil adapted *Will o' the Wisp* for the album. Gil read several volumes of books on Spanish music, particularly flamenco, and on the life of Spanish gypsies, and listened intensely to various ethnic recordings. Miles said later, "He made that orchestra sound like one big guitar."

It was about this time that Miles played a gig at the Cloister, a club in the basement of the Maryland hotel in the Rush Street area of Chicago. He stayed with the family of his then wife, and it was there that Marc Crawford, then thirty-one, a journalist who had been a foreign correspondent, a staff writer for *Ebony*, and entertainment editor of *Jet*, interviewed Miles for *Down Beat*. Miles was listening with bursting enthusiasm to Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli's recording of the Ravel G major piano concerto. He'd called Gil in New York and asked him to fly out to Chicago to spend some time with him.

He told Marc, "You know, my ambition has always been to write like Gil. I'd give my right arm to do it — no, my left one, because I'd have to write the notes down."

He continued: "Gil is my idea of a man. Say you had a friend who was half man and half donkey, and suppose he even wore a straw hat and you said, 'Gil, meet George.' Gil would get up and shake his hand and never care what George looked like."

His meaning was clear. Gil was devoid of racism of any nuance. It simply didn't exist in him.

(To be continued)