



So What: The Life of Miles Davis

John Szwed

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More than ten years after his death, Miles Davis seems to be as popular as ever. His music is everywhere. His recording "Kind of Blue" is regarded as a classic. He played with the best that jazz had to offer, from Charlie Parker to Thelonious Monk, and his acolytes -- John Coltrane, Wayne Shorter, Chick Corea, Keith Jarrett, John McLaughlin -- became the stars of the music. His image is as cool, as hip, as fresh as ever. Yet Miles himself remains something of an enigma, and myths proliferate about his life. What caused him to change styles so often? Why was he so difficult, even hostile, to so many people? Why, at the peak of his career, did he withdraw from performing and disappear for years into the darkness of his house? In this, the first new biography since Davis' death, John Szwed has examined Miles' life and music, and he finds them inseparable. In his music and in his life, Miles was compelled to change. As quickly as he established a new mode of music and a new self, he radically altered both. To understand Miles' shifting styles, one has to understand his personality, his demons, his changing identities, his aspirations for jazz as an art. John Szwed has spoken to dozens of people who knew Miles at different points in his life, some of whom had seldom, if ever, been interviewed before. He has examined various archives to fill in the blanks in Davis' life, and to learn about his politics, the role of drugs, how he worked, what relationships he had with musicians, producers, and record executives. The result is the richest and most authoritative biography of Miles Davis to date, and the most persuasive interpretation of the life of a musical genius and cultural icon whose influence is undiminished.

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