

What the press has said about:

HENRY KAISER & WADADA LEO SMITH: YO MILES!

SKY GARDEN

Cuneiform Rune 191/192

2004

Lineup: Wadada Leo Smith (trumpet), Henry Kaiser (guitar), Tom Coster (keyboards), Mike Keneally (guitar), Michael Manring (bass), Chris Muir (guitar), Greg Osby (alto sax), Karl Perazzo (percussion), Steve Smith (drums), John Tchicai (tenor & soprano sax). Guests: Dave Creamer (guitar), Zaki Hussain (tabla & percussion), ROVA Saxophone Quartet,

“...Wadada Leo Smith was easily the most compelling of the post-Davis trumpeters until Dave Douglas came along, and he still hasn't given up his place. Harmonically subtler than Davis and with a broader repertoire of attacks and tones, he adds to the language of Davis's electric period rather than merely writing into it. ... Davis's electric albums were conceived in such a muddle of emotions and market ambitions that most of their creative energy was dissipated in a critical debate. ... Smith and Kaiser have recovered some of their radical energy and reapplied it in the context of a new technology that gives this music clarity as well as thudding power. Yes, carry on wading through the Jack Johnson sessions if you want some insight into how Miles worked, but if you want to see where his example leads us, this is the way to go.”
– Brian Morton, *The Wire*, #128, Oct. 2004

“On June 1, 2004, the Pulitzer Prize Board released a statement outlining new criterion for awarding the annual Pulitzer Prize in Music. ... the Prize Board has decided to no longer make it mandatory that a notated score be included with an entry. Also, a work need not receive a public performance; studio recordings can now be considered for the Pulitzer. ... Here, guitarist Henry Kaiser and trumpeter Wadada Leo Smith combine staples from fusion-era Miles Davis along with original compositions to create a musical homage to his great electric groups. Fortunately for potential Pulitzer jurors, a single composition from this sprawling double-album set could be submitted for consideration. Having to consider just Smith's “Shinjuku” would simplify considerably questions of ... compositional identity, while its varied twenty-two minute duration provides a substantial work. ... It is also an exceedingly effective piece of music, combining evocative solos from Smith with thrilling ensemble passages laden with heavy rock-style drums, frequency guitar riffs and Fender Rhodes textures. Smith is one of the most exciting trumpeters active today; we are fortunate that he is appearing with greater frequency on recent recordings.”

– Christian Carey, *Splendid* 7/26/04, , www.splendidezine.com/departments/fileunder/fileunder72604.html

“Smith meets the challenge of playing Davis' part in this music. Resurrecting the electric trumpet, he's a commanding presence, invoking Davis but preserving his own identity. Kaiser plays a less conspicuous, mutable role, adapting to fit the music without explicit reference to Davis' guitarists. ... In all, Yo Miles! makes a convincing case for the continuing vitality of Davis' electric grooves. Recorded in a hybrid Super Audio CD format, the disc's sound quality is superior. 3 1/2 stars.”
– Jon Andrews, *DownBeat*, Sept. 2004

“Tribute bands don't come much heavier than Henry Kaiser and Wadada Leo Smith's Yo Miles! Their album *Sky Garden*... a double album, with a big, hard-hitting line-up, includes some of the most enduring pieces... from the electric Miles Davis bands of 1969-75. ... Leo Smith, whose trumpet playing is consistently good and idiomatic without copying Miles, contributes several new tunes. And they largely succeed in making this curiously misunderstood form of improvised music work for a new era. ... Kaiser, Smith and Co. make a good noise that is beautifully recorded...”

– John L. Waters, “On the Edge: The Great Pretenders,” *The Guardian*, Friday August 13, 2004, www.guardian.co.uk/arts/

“... Henry Kaiser and Wadada Leo Smith deciphered Miles' original strain, and in '98 recorded *Yo Miles!*... Now Kaiser and Smith convene a new ritual from the grimoire of the Black Magus, *Sky Garden*. Another two disc set, the formula remains performing neglected masterwords alongside new compositions that expand the language created by Miles. ... Kaiser and Smith's knowing explorations through Miles' complex electro-funk realm revisits the dread while expanding the beauty. Loaded with creative originals, *Sky Garden* suggests a creative vein with more to come.”

– Rex Butters, *All About Jazz Los Angeles*, Aug. 2004, v. 2, #6

“Yo Miles! has gone beyond the fundamental with songs that breathe the spirit of Davis to create an atmosphere that resonates with a fire and an essence of their very own. Led by Wadada Leo Smith and Henry Kaiser, the band sees a shift in personnel... meant to give the selections the vision called for, and it's all to the good, right from the opening salvo that sees Smith on a slight, funky edge, then opening the perimeter with a sudden long lunge and countering that surprise with melodic deliberations. ... Hussain's conversations with Smith on “Great Expectations” not only create unusual and interesting motifs, they breathe fresh life into the art of dialogue.”

– Jerry D'Souza, *All About Jazz*, www.allaboutjazz.com

“The 2004 Surround Music Award winners are...”

Best Hi-Res Stereo-Only Program = Yo Miles! Sky Garden/ Henry Kaiser & Wadada Leo Smith / [Cuneiform]

– “News: 2004 Surround Music Award Winners,” Sep 3, 2004, *SurroundPro.com* , http://www.surroundpro.com/articles/publish/printer_224.shtml

“With Miles Davis' electric period finally gaining the credit it deserves, the number of groups recording everything from “music-informed-by” to flat-out tributes is almost too large to count. ... But when guitarist Henry Kaiser and trumpeter Wadada Leo Smith released *Yo Miles!* back in '98, it was clear that the bar had been raised. Without losing sight of their own distinctive voices, they managed to create a tribute that completely captured the spirit of that controversial period, demonstrating how it has so strongly influenced what was to come. ... *Sky Garden* is at once a continuation of the concept and an evolution. Other than bassist Michael Manring, guitarist Chris Muir and the ROVA Saxophone quartet... it's an entirely new cast of characters... The emphasis, this time around, seems more on interpretations of space. There is a richer ambience that is more textural, less intense. ... *Sky Garden* is also less dense. ... the music breathes more. The emphasis seems more on exploring the ambient side of Miles' electric work that set precedence for much of the trance music heard today. There is also a greater emphasis on original material; Smith contributes four extended pieces that are so *right* as to be virtually indistinguishable from their source. The final track, “Cozy Pete,” is a group improvisation that is reverential yet completely modern... The most notable difference between Miles' recordings and *Sky Garden* is the more pleasing sonic clarity and more spacious aural landscape. But recording quality aside, Kaiser and Smith have, once again, demonstrated that Miles' electric explorations were truly ahead of their time; they sound contemporary in ways that few other, if any, fusion recordings of the time do.”

– John Kelman, *All About Jazz*, , www.allaboutjazz.com

“...this is not only a tribute two-disc set. A good part of the songs are new compositions in the same style leading to an interesting new/old comparison. Truth is, there is nothing old about the music of Miles Davis. A quick listen to any of this tracks shows a root in tradition and extension to the future of modern electronic jazz music. ... there is some good material on here worth checking out. Audio performance of this disc is as good as or slightly better than the best CDs. 4 stars”

– Brian Bloom, *Audiophile Audition*, Sept 2004, www.audaud.com

““A number of bands have explored Miles Davis' late-period electric innovation. The Yo Miles! project of guitarist Kaiser and trumpeter Smith is the best yet. This is the group's second excursion into Davis' electric dream world. There's floating head-tri music of the sort Davis perfected in 1969's “Bitches Brew.” There's also the sort of bruising, guitar-and rhythm-heavy stuff... when “Agharta” came out in 1975. But Kaiser, Smith and friends don't merely revisit the Davis revolution; they see “new directions,” as Davis always put it. ... This is a band Davis would have enjoyed, filled with players from the outer edges of jazz and rock... The “Yo Miles” crew has figured out a way to take new chances with music that was always beyond category. Factor in the crystal-clear recording on this two-disc set, and you've got a slam-dunk.”

– Richard Scheinin, *Mercury News*, June 25, 2004, www.mercurynews.com

Sky Garden” (Cuneiform) is a sprawling blowout that should convert open minds on a quest for freeform funk with a pulse as well as brains. ... The covers of the Davis riffs are at once dangerous and respectful, but the standout tracks are the new compositions, including Smith’s atmospheric “Miles Star” and the reckless, expansive “Shinjuku.”

-Bret Saunders, *Denver Post*, June 6, 2004

“...much of the Davis output after *Bitches Brew* was recorded live, and often none too well. And everything that found its way to vinyl, beginning with *In A Silent Way* (or earlier), was also cut and spliced half to death... In contrast, this second Yo Miles! collaboration was recorded live in the studio, with no overdubs or splices, using Direct Stream Digital (DSD) technology. Even on an ordinary CD player, the music has extraordinary presence and clarity, plus the momentum and logic of a true live performance. But the real strength of this... is the quality of the playing. ...the post-Miles, post-fusion musicians assembled by Kaiser and Smith are seasoned pros who know the core Davis fusion sound inside and out and aren’t burdened with the task of blazing the trail (and occasionally losing the way). Nor are they, from the sound of it, victims of conflicting agendas and dueling egos. ... As for the two leaders, Kaiser is an almost infinitely adaptable guitarist who can channel Hendrix, Pete Cosey or even John McLaughlin with consummate ease. ...Wadada Smith is the real surprise. ...Davis’ own playing...was often described as fragile and introverted, if not cerebral or experimental, so Davis and Smith have that much in common. And Smith can also be forceful and dynamic, with even more tonal exploration (smears, harmonics, growls, etc.) than was typical of Davis, but with experimental tendencies always subordinated to the music’s flow. Smith isn’t Davis (nor is he trying to be), but he’s a great trumpet player who seems very much at ease in the electric fusion bag. ...The music is alternately spacious and intricate, lyrical and fiery, but always as natural and unforced as breathing. ...it’s well worth picking up; a fine extended homage to Davis and joyous, powerful and poignant music in its own right.”

-Bill Tilland, *BBCi*, Sept. 9, 2004, http://www.bbc.co.uk/music/jazz/reviews/kaisersmith_sky.shtml

“...Smith, solos like...a young gun with something to prove. Smith... uses Miles’ inspiration to showcase a different but fitting style of his own.”

-David Dacks, *Exclaim!*, Sept. 2, 2004, www.exclaim.ca

“One of the unique things about this release is that it was recorded...live and direct to a Stereo Direct Stream Digital (DSD) recorder. ... David Glasser at Airshow Mastering ... told me that “... In my opinion, it’s one of the best stereo SACD projects I’d had the opportunity to work on musically and sonically.” I gave the Stereo SACD layer of the album a listen and I was impressed as well. The definitions of the instruments was excellent and the clarity of the bells and percussion were also standouts... Fusion and Miles Davis fans will want to give this one a listen.”

- Brian Moura, “Miles Davis Tribute Album Issued as 2-Disc Stereo SACD Set,” *High Fidelity Review* 5/19/04, HighFidelityReview.com

“...both guitarist Henry Kaiser and trumpet player Wadada Leo Smith, the collection’s creators, hold a particularly comprehensive understanding of Miles Davis’ music as well as his creative process. ...they do such a masterful job at exploring the extemporaneous regions of the material that instead of merely covering the songs, they manage to encapsulate the brilliance that brewed them in the first place. From this, they are also able to orchestrate several new pieces that serve as a visceral aggrandizements of Davis’ remarkably variegated legacy.

Indeed, the basic premise behind *Yo Miles! Sky Garden* (as well as its predecessor *Yo Miles!*) was to utilize Davis’ compositions as a touchstone, thereby retaining the general ambience of the inaugural recordings, but otherwise, Kaiser and Smith jettisoned virtually everything else in order to rebuild the tracks from scratch. What’s particularly astounding – and what allows the endeavor to succeed – is that the chemistry of their assembled entourage mirrors that of Davis’ own alchemical ensembles. As a result, the collective is able to submerge itself within the primordial ooze that seeps through every nook and cranny of the chord progressions and bend each tune to its will as a means of formulating a pair of musical suites that not only waltz between the breathtakingly beautiful and the absolutely ominous, but are also equally bold, unparalleled, and full of organic luster. Simply put: *Yo Miles! Sky Garden* frequently feels as if the manifestation of Davis himself had a hand in crafting its contents. 4 1/2 stars out of 5 (4 Stars: Excellent; 5 Stars: Can’t Live Without It!)”

-John Metzger, *The Music Box*, July 2004, Vol. 11, #7; www.musicbox-online.com

“What could have been merely an interesting footnote or tribute jam band became much more due to his [Kaiser’s] inspired choice of Wadada Leo Smith to fill the trumpet chair. While Smith conjures up Miles’ sound, he does so in a deeply personal manner, infused with an individual with an individual sense of compositional and improvisational form. Like Davis, Smith knows about building forms out of small kernels and the careful placement of notes. Their debut release on Shanachie let a core group and a passel of guests loose on *Big Fun!* *Jack Johnson* era compositions for a series of shimmering jams... This two-CD release starts from the same basic idea as their debut, but takes a bit of a different tact. Rather than sticking almost exclusively to Davis pieces, of the 11 cuts, four are by Smith, and one is a collective improvisation. ...there are a number of standouts... Missing are the constantly morphing played striations that Miles goaded his band with. That said, this is still worth checking out, particularly for Smith’s striking voice and the chance to hear Osby and Tchicai run the voodoo down.”

- Michael Rosenstein, *One Final Note*, Aug. 3, 2004, www.onefinalnote.com

“If there’s such a thing as systematic intuition, trumpeter Wadada Leo Smith has it. He plays the right note at the right time so often, it can’t be accidental. His methodically intuitive powers are featured on three recent releases showcasing the trumpeter/ composer in radically different settings. On *Sky Garden* (Cuneiform), by Yo Miles!, a band he leads with guitarist Henry Kaiser, Smith pays tribute to the jazz funk of Miles Davis. ...Smith’s idiosyncratic feel for rhythm and silence dominates *Sky Garden*... Half the disc is dedicated to Smith’s own compositions... Don’t mistake this album for a re-creation - it’s too personal and too focused on exploring the possibilities of Davis’s jazz-funk forms.”

-Ed Hazell, “Hat Trick: A trio of triumphs for Wadada Leo Smith,” *The Boston Phoenix*, July 23-29, 2004

“Even more than the two recent tribute bands made up of Miles alumni (excluding the still-amazing Pet Cosey), Yo Miles! was probably the best celebration/tribute of that still-strange musical voodoo. Smith himself uses the right amount of phrasing and silence to imitate the master while producer Kaiser provides the right amount of mystery with the keyboard/ percussion washes. Smith’s own original compositions fit in well also ... Looking back, Miles only spent about six years in this territory but he effectively created a musical universe that’s well-served and well-traveled here.”

- Jason Gross & David Manning, *Perfect Sound Forever*, July 2004, www.furious.com/perfect/digitaljukejointbox

“Listeners will hear how this music pushes the edges of live improvisation and anticipated acid jazz, ambient music and hip hop.”

-*Behind the Beat*, www.behindthebeat.net

“As the name of Henry Kaiser and Wadada Leo Smith’s band unambiguously proclaims, the work of Yo Miles! is a straight-up tribute to the work of Mr. Davis (ca. 1968-75), and the music – most of it by Miles – is beautifully played by great musicians... it’s fabulously recorded (Kaiser waxes so lyrical about Super Audio CD technology that I’m half included to invest in the stuff itself)... The album trucks along irresistibly like the world’s number one jam band, and I’d just love to sit in...”

-Dan Warburton, *Paris Transatlantic Magazine*, Aug 2004