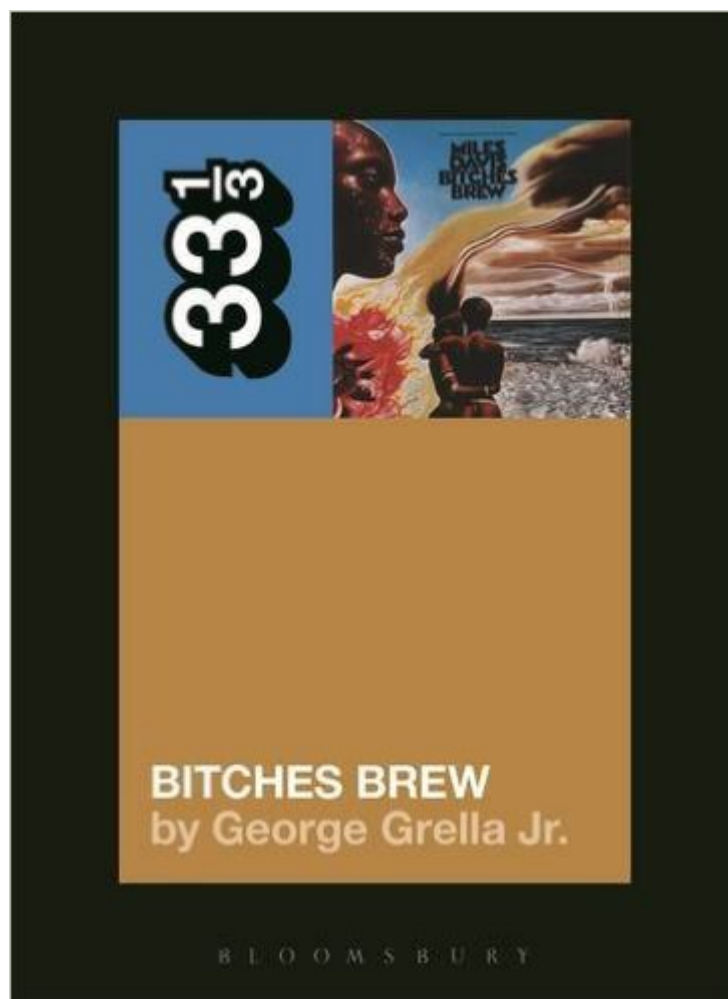


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Miles Davis' Bitches Brew (33 1/3)



Synopsis

It was 1969, and Miles Davis, prince of cool, was on the edge of being left behind by a dynamic generation of young musicians, an important handful of whom had been in his band. Rock music was flying off in every direction, just as America itself seemed about to split at its seams. Following the circumscribed grooves and ambiance of *In A Silent Way*; coming off a tour with a burning new quintet-called 'The Lost Band'-with Wayne Shorter, Chick Corea, Dave Holland and Jack DeJohnette; he went into the studio with musicians like frighteningly talented guitarist John McLaughlin, and soulful Austrian keyboardist Joe Zawinul. Working with his essential producer, Teo Macero, Miles set a cauldron of ideas loose while the tapes rolled. At the end, there was the newly minted Prince of Darkness, a completely new way forward for jazz and rock, and the endless brilliance and depth of *Bitches Brew*. *Bitches Brew* is still one of the most astonishing albums ever made in either jazz or rock. Seeming to fuse the two, it actually does something entirely more revolutionary and open-ended: blending the most avant-garde aspects of Western music with deep grooves, the album rejects both jazz and rock for an entirely different idea of how music can be made.

Book Information

Series: 33 1/3

Paperback: 144 pages

Publisher: Bloomsbury Academic (October 22, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 162892943X

ISBN-13: 978-1628929430

Product Dimensions: 4.7 x 0.4 x 6.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.9 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (12 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #40,102 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #19 in [Books > Arts & Photography](#)

[> Music > Musical Genres > Jazz](#) #27 in [Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Instruments >](#)

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Customer Reviews

This is one of the finest books in the 33 1/3 series to date. Grella has the ability to write engagingly about a challenging, ground-breaking recording and discuss it with musical precision, without resorting to jargon. Not only does he discuss the provenance of *Bitches Brew*, he places the album

in a wider context of pop culture and shows how its influence has extended far beyond the realm of jazz. A musician and a respected critic covering New York's new music scene, Grella has an ideal perspective from which to consider this important recording. I've loved this music for a long time. Grella helps me hear it anew.

BITCHES BREW is called a fusion record, but a fusion of what? It's played by top-drawer jazz musicians who aren't even trying to swing; it's full of electric instruments, but without anything resembling a rock beat. Author George Grella calls it a funk record, albeit a funk record informed by the avant-garde music of such European composers as Edgard Varèse and Krzysztof Penderecki. It's deep, danceable grooves layered with ear-stretching improvisations, an in-the-moment ritual music blatantly subjected to studio manipulation like any other pop record. No wonder so many listeners just didn't get it; there was no shortage of reactionaries content to label it anti-jazz and call it a day. Grella asserts that the album's influence is "everywhere and nowhere," a hazy nod at the John Zorn-Talking Heads-Sonic Youth Downtown art scene, but what can you say about an album that doesn't sound like any other musical recording, and was a clear and unambiguous influence on only one band, Weather Report? This is an outstanding book in the 33 1/3 series: Grella packs an amazing amount of cultural, historical, and technical analysis into a little over a hundred pages, and will make you eager to listen to these six demanding, unsettling, and deeply funky musical collages all over again.

This is excellent. The writing is really engaging, not academic and plodding, and it's about a fascinating album. I recommend it highly whether you know anything about jazz and Miles Davis or not. You get some real insight to the time and the culture of the time, and there's plenty for a fan of rock and soul and other types of music that was popular at the time. If you do know a lot about fusion jazz and Miles Davis, then I would say this is a must-read.

Grella's outstanding history of Davis's legendary album brilliantly captures the musical and extra-musical qualities of this landmark album. He demonstrates how far from being a sell-out to rock sensibility, "Bitches Brew" was an enormous expansion of Davis's be-bop background into thrilling new dimensions. Grella's insights are deep, his command of jazz history is broad, and his writing style is luminous.

George Grella's terrific take on "Bitches Brew" • brilliantly weaves together a constellation of

musical, social, and psychological forces that coalesced to produce one of music's most revolutionary works. Grella combines his love for the album with a laser-sharp analysis of the multiple elements that led to the production of and reaction to Davis's masterwork. George Grella writes with uncommon elegance and perceptiveness. Few authors have said as much so well in so few words.

There are plenty of details to accompany the analysis of this iconic recording, and G. Grella is an attentive listener who will guide you through them with rigor and precision. But this is mainly a book about the art of jazz in America and its power of transformation written in splendid prose by someone that has the ability and the knowledge to look at, and express, the many facets of this cultural phenomenon.

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