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## INDIE LIFE

### GIL EVANS ORCHESTRA

# SONS REVIVE DAD'S WORK



Miles Evans works on a Gil Evans Orchestra album at Avatar Studios.

CAROL FRIEDMAN

"My father was not just a great musician, he was a great dad," Miles Evans said, speaking before a recent gathering of Gil Evans devotees at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. "I remember him telling me that he never knew his real father, so he was determined to be the best father he could."

Miles and his musician/engineer brother, Noah, have launched a series of new Gil Evans Orchestra recordings that will keep their dad's musical vision alive. The first of the three albums, *Hidden Treasures: Monday Nights* (Bopper Spock Suns Music), was released in December after a crowd-funding campaign through PledgeMusic.

The Canadian-born composer and arranger, who died in 1988 at age 75, was one of the most significant orchestrators in jazz history. The enormously popular albums on which Gil collaborated with Miles Davis embodied a modernist aesthetic based on a synthesis of jazz and 20th-century classical music. *Porgy And Bess* and *Sketches Of Spain* in particular, with their complex harmonies influenced by Ravel and Debussy, and their extended instrumentation—classic big band augmented with French horn, tuba and other woodwinds—are among the most famous jazz albums of all time.

After helping to invent "cool" and "modal" jazz, Evans explored free-jazz and fusion with his orchestra, including a 1975 album devoted to the music of Jimi Hendrix. The orchestra eventually settled into a regular Monday night gig at New York's Sweet Basil beginning in 1983, the year Miles joined the band on trumpet; he took the helm after his father's death.

The Evans brothers recently revived the band after a period of dormancy. At the library, Miles spoke as part of a panel discussion that included Stephanie Crease, author of the biography

*Gil Evans: Out of the Cool*. Although Davis and Evans worked together on only a few projects, Crease said the two remained "friends for life." And, noted Miles, "They both had an amazing ability to find the greatest musicians. And they never wanted to rest on their laurels."

*Monday Nights* captures the churning jazz-funk fusion and electronics-aided experimentalism of the orchestra's work in the late '70s and '80s. The album includes tunes by Gil ("Moonstruck," "Eleven"), Miles ("LL Funk") and longtime orchestra members Pete Levin (keyboards), John Clark (French horn) and Alex Foster (saxophones). Today's orchestra also includes GEO veterans Kenwood Dennard (drums), percussionist Mino Cinelu, trumpeter Shunzo Ohno, trombonist David Taylor and bassist Mark Egan.

Foster, a 29-year veteran of the Saturday Night Live band, said the revival of the Evans orchestra is important to him both musically and personally. "Gil's music is epic," he said. "It's a tremendous honor and a blessing to play anything associated with him."

The next album in the series, *The Classics*, will consist of new recordings of Evans' late-'50s arrangements with Davis, including "My Ship" and "The Meaning Of The Blues." The third volume, *Gil And Anita*, is based on unreleased recordings Evans co-produced in 1984 with his wife. "We've revitalized them with some overdubs featuring the current band," Miles said. The family is looking at possible release dates in 2020 and 2021 on his father's birthday, May 13.

The Evans brothers extol the virtues of producing and releasing independently. "It's nice to own your own master and to be your own record company," Miles said. "You choose the best studios. If you need more time, you have it. You have the artistic freedom to realize your own vision."

—Allen Morrison