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'all my inspiration comes from ahmad jamal'

1 OCT



And who would disagree with Miles Davis quoted above? It's months off but Ahmad Jamal's return to play a concert in this country is surely as good a reason as any to have at least one reason to be cheerful on this intermittently dank and typically autumnal Monday.

2012 has been pretty good for Jamal watchers even though the great man has been nowhere to be seen in the UK because in February the illustrious French record company and distributor Harmonia Mundi inaugurated a new jazz label Jazz Village partly in his honour with a Jamal album and *Blue Moon* more than lived up to even the highest expectations surrounding its release. Surely one of the greatest piano albums in and of the classic jazz tradition in the last decade it featured a stellar trio at its core specially convened for the session performing Jamal originals and choice standards. The great Pittsburgh-born pianist, who turned 82 on 2 July, along with Frank Sinatra counts as a seminal influence on Davis, with Miles typically going out of his way to catch Jamal's shows when he was passing through Chicago. But besides this historical link Jamal through his Pershing recordings created at the Pershing Lounge from 1958 where the pianist laid down his best known recordings along with bassist Israel Crosby and drummer Vernel Fournier that not just sold in very large numbers but also provided a snapshot of a music that would be changed irrevocably in the years to come by such innovators as Cecil Taylor, the free jazz movement and its socio-political and cultural consequences, and later by the

demands and challenges of jazz-rock. Miles being a scholar of the music from a strictly bandstand point of view would incorporate Jamal's treatments of 'But Not For Me', 'Billy Boy', 'The Surrey With The Fringe On Top' and more besides into his own repertoire, while at the same time realising intuitively that a milestone had been reached, a there-is-no-turning-back moment and above all a realisation that jazz piano would never be the same again. Jamal, as a master of improvising on standards and original song-based material, in performance can take on the mantle of an Erroll Garner at times as a starting point and layers hugely impressive rhapsodies and serenades almost at the drop of a hat. He'll quite often, gaffer-like, stand up by the piano, turn his back to the audience to communicate further with the trio, and then sit down to resume the flow. With an extensive discography since the 1950s, in more recent years with the French Dreyfus label, Jamal has a big public across Europe particularly in France and Germany and although he was a fairly regular visitor to the UK in the past it's now almost five years ago since his last appearances, sadly at an inexplicably poorly attended Ronnie Scott's when he nonetheless played immaculately. Jamal was honoured by the French government becoming an officer of the order of arts in 2007, and has received many more honours over the years in the United States. *Blue Moon* features the elegant bassist Reginald Veal, well known for his work with Wynton Marsalis, and more recently Cassandra Wilson; plus the formidable New Orleansian Herlin Riley on drums. They are also joined by former-Weather Report percussionist Manolo Badrena, who has toured with Jamal extensively in recent years.

Stephen Graham

The Ahmad Jamal concert is on 8 February 2013 at the Barbican [HTTP://WWW.BARBICAN.ORG.UK/MUSIC/EVENT-DETAIL.ASP?ID=13715](http://www.barbican.org.uk/music/event-detail.asp?id=13715)

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