

Modal jazz

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A style of jazz, developed in the late 1950s, in which modal scales (or their general characteristics) dictate the melodic and harmonic content. The leading exponents were Miles Davis and John Coltrane. Modal jazz rarely adheres strictly to the classical modes (Dorian, Phrygian, etc.), but it creates their flavour, or in some cases that of other non-diatonic scales, such as those of Spanish or Indian music. The term 'modal jazz' has also been applied, somewhat misleadingly, to performances based on the major or minor modes. The style has attracted musicians partly because it is relatively undemanding by comparison with those based on chord progressions. Because it is free of frequent harmonic interruption it can more easily create an unhurried and meditative feeling. Many performances are based on a two-chord sequence or a drone. The absence of frequent chord changes alone is sometimes regarded as defining modal jazz.

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