

**A Listening Eye: The Films of Mike Dibb  
Part Two: The Arts of Improvisation**

**Week Three**

**Available to view 12 - 18 February 2021**

For the sixth week of *A Listening Eye*, we continue our focus on Mike Dibb's music films, here with entirely fresh insights into the life and work of acclaimed jazz trumpeter Miles Davis and the brilliant improvising pianist Keith Jarrett, in two award-winning feature-length documentaries.

These films celebrate unusual lives and exceptional talent, with beautifully filmed performances.

Find out more on the 18<sup>th</sup> February when Mike is in conversation with writer Geoff Dyer, free to view globally at 7pm GMT.

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*The Miles Davis Story, 2001, 124'*

*Keith Jarrett: The Art of Improvisation, 2005, 86'*

**The Miles Davis Story** interweaves rare interviews with Miles himself with the insights and memories of his family, friends and many of the great musicians who played with him during his long career. Despite his death in 1991, the legendary trumpeter remains the best-known and most influential jazz musician of the last 50 years. *The Miles Davis Story* explores the music and the man behind the public image, from Miles's middle class upbringing in racially segregated East St. Louis to the last years when he travelled the world like a rock star. Miles Davis's career intersected with every major development in jazz since the 1940s, and this critically-acclaimed film covers each and every key event: Miles teaming up with Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie when he was a 19-year-old student at the Juilliard School of Music; his influential *Birth Of The Cool* recordings in 1949; *Kind of Blue* and his classic collaborations with Gil Evans; his landmark 1950s quintet featuring John Coltrane and his '60s quintet featuring Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter; the making of *Bitches Brew* and the ground-breaking development of fusion and funk.

**Keith Jarrett – The Art of Improvisation**

In this in-depth portrait of one of the world's superstars of jazz, pianist Keith Jarrett talks about the range of his music, the importance of improvisation, the great artists he has worked with, and about the highs and lows of his life. Incorporating recordings and rare archive footage of concerts dating back to the 1960s and including such greats as Miles Davis and Charles Lloyd,

this first-ever major documentary has been made with the full cooperation of Keith Jarrett himself; with, in order of appearance, Keith Jarrett, Manfred Eicher, Gary Peacock, Jack DeJohnette, Steve Cloud, Scott Jarrett, George Avakian, Gary Burton, Toshinari Koinuma, Chick Corea, Charlie Haden, Dewey Redman, Rose Anne Jarrett, Jan Garbarek, Jon Christensen and Palle Danielsson.

In a way, the genesis of the film *Keith Jarrett- The Art of Improvisation* goes back thirty years to the moment when Ian Carr, Keith's British biographer as well as a fine jazz musician himself, first heard Keith's *Belonging* album, featuring Jan Garbarek and the European Quartet. Although Ian was aware of Keith's earlier works, it was *Belonging* that had a direct impact on him. As he says, "*Belonging* was amazing. It was so groovy but had an incredible authority and was very, very haunting, a mixture of vital, strong - even arresting - music and these beautiful ballads. It knocked me out."

In 1977, Keith came to London to do a solo concert and Ian jumped at the chance to interview him for the UK journal *Melody Maker*. Ian was warned that Keith might be a difficult interviewee but found him to be "sweetness and light. In fact, we must have talked for over an hour. He kept everyone else waiting." The only issue on which interviewer and interviewee differed was on the use of electric instruments. "Keith had played an electric piano whilst working with Miles Davis and hated the instrument. So we quickly dropped that subject!" In Ian's view, "Keith knew I was a musician and I think that's why we got on so well- we were speaking the same language."

In 1988 the relationship developed further. Ian and BBC radio producer Derek Drescher visited Keith's home in New Jersey to record a sound interview for a radio documentary about Miles Davis, following the publication of Ian's acclaimed Miles Davis biography in 1982. Keith was very friendly. It was during this interview that Ian realised how much he wanted to write Keith's biography, but only with his full co-operation. He broached the subject with Keith, who suggested he talk to Manfred Eicher, his producer in Germany, with whom he had a unique collaboration. Both of them agreed. Ian returned to the States, and interviewed Keith and members of his family intensively over a period of three weeks. No one had ever written a biography of Keith before.

When I asked Ian what it was about Keith Jarrett that attracted him, Ian answered: "I realised that he was an incredible force. I appreciated that. It gave me the courage to write a biography. I know genius when I see it. And he is a genius. I say that with all my strength." The interviews went well. "I was always honest with him," Ian told me, "because Keith himself is pathologically honest. I really liked him and Rose Anne, so it was a pleasure to be there." Between interviews they all sat on the porch and laughed a lot. "Keith can be very funny." *Keith Jarrett, The Man and His Music*, was published in 1991 by Grafton Books.

During the course of Keith's career many people (and that includes Ian and me) had approached him with the idea of making a film, and he had invariably turned down every offer. It was not until 2001 that he changed his mind and decided to put his trust in Ian (and through Ian, in me), if we could manage to raise the money. "It's OK, you can trust Mike Dibb," Ian told him, "That I will find out for myself!" was Keith's reply.

The UK TV company Channel 4, which had backed Ian's and my two-hour documentary feature *The Miles Davis Story*, agreed to fund a long initial interview with Keith, which would then serve as a basis for future funding. So it was with some nervousness that Ian and I, along with a two-man US film crew, turned up to Keith's house, deep in the New Jersey woods, in the winter of 2002. But, after our Laurel and Hardy attempts to park in the snow, when the filming van skidded and slid into a ditch and had to be hauled up by a neighbour's pick-up truck, Keith relaxed into a remarkably expansive and detailed conversation, spread across two days, on every topic and subject we raised. We were immediately aware that we had the basis for a fascinating film. Keith had suggested we begin in a way that was more improvised than planned. In fact, the word "improvisation", which subsequently became part of the title, cropped up as we discussed the possible form of the film. Keith was empathetically not interested in a conventional biopic. Neither were we. As with *The Miles Davis Story*, we did not want to begin from a written script. Rather we would explore, through a collage of interviews and performance, the complete range of Keith's life and work, not necessarily in a linear way. We would allow the form and structure of the documentary to emerge through the editing - great musical improvisers talking about improvisation in a film that would reflect that process as it unfolded.

That first long conversation became the core of the film, from which we could move back and forth to interviews which both illuminated the core and were illuminating in themselves - with many of the great musicians who had played with Keith over the years, with his wife Rose Anne, his manager Steve Cloud and with Manfred Eicher, who, though his German company ECM, has been one of Keith's closest creative partners, beginning with *Facing You*, Keith's first solo album in 1971. Since then they have collaborated on a further 60 ambitious and adventurous recordings exploring Keith's many and diverse musical interests.

But, of course, interviews alone do not make a film.

Fortunately, Keith Jarrett's performance archive is very extensive, encompassing not only a huge variety of recordings but also filmed material that goes back decades. For the last 25 years, most of his filmed concerts, both jazz and classical, have taken place in Japan and been made available to the world through VideoArts, which, together with EuroArts, agreed to join Channel 4 UK as co-producers of this documentary. From other sources we tracked down every foot of archive that might help us and used as much as we could afford.

The result is what you have on this enhanced DVD, but enriched with more than 30 minutes of extra interview material we couldn't find room for in the edited film. In the past, everything that was not included in the final cut remained mute and invisible in cans on the cutting-room floor, to be thrown away once the film was completed. It's one of the great pleasures of making films today that so much of this material can now find an afterlife on a DVD. Unfortunately we couldn't find a place for the reel-to-reel tape of Ian Carr's first sound interview with Keith in 1977. It's still sitting in a box in Ian's London apartment. But I like to think it's really because of that interview, almost thirty years ago, that this film *Keith Jarrett- The Art of Improvisation* has come into being. – *Mike Dibb, essay for the dvd release.*