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Ken Kessler reviews Miles Davis UHQR Acoustic Sounds UHQR 0004 331/3rd rpm clear vinyl LP

Let's get something straight from the outset: *Kind of Blue* is one of those albums, like *Abbey Road* or *Blonde On Blonde*, that is simply beyond criticism. Said to be the best-selling jazz album of all time, its influence is incalculable. Yes, it achieved that level of cultural and artistic importance, while sales exceeded 5m copies by 2019 – astounding for a jazz album.

Because of its perennial popularity, now lasting over 60 years, *Kind of Blue* has been re-released so many times that even Discogs can't list them all. It is probably available in every format offered since 1959, even on the

short-lived Minidisc. All I know is that I have at least four copies on vinyl, of which one is a conventional pressing and three that we would call 'audiophile'.

With content beyond analysis, this review deals solely with sound quality, the physical package's presentation and whether or not any LP can be worth what is being asked for this edition. As one who remembers the UHQRs of nearly 40 years ago (I drove through a New England blizzard for five hours for a copy of the UHQR *Sgt Pepper*) and who has enjoyed One-Step titles from MoFi, various Japanese pressings, etc, my expectations are high.

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But the content is message, so, if you need a list of reasons why this pressing might be the definitive, let's start with one of the most controversial elements. Not a few potential purchasers have asked online if this is the 'speed-corrected version'. As I am not a musician nor do I have perfect pitch, I probably couldn't tell the two apart, but that quarter-tone difference has fuelled debate and driven Miles devotees nuts for decades. Blessedly, as the extensive liner notes tell you, this one is speed-corrected, so you can think of it as the one to own. That said, there are expanded multi-CD versions with false starts, outtakes, etc, for listeners who just can't get enough.

Did I say extensive liner notes? The booklet that accompanies this edition is so comprehensive that, should you have the patience, you might want to read it from cover to cover before letting your stylus settle into the groove. It just might prepare you for what you are about to hear, which is – to my ears – so far above reproach that it has joined a minuscule list of albums I would have to classify as 'perfect'.

That admirable booklet is only part of the sublime packaging created for this 'special occasion' LP. It starts with a slipcase so

lavish, it even has a solid wooden spine. You slide it open and there's a separate gatefold sleeve for the LP, while the actual clear vinyl record itself, in order to address obsessive types, is in its own separate audiophile-grade inner sleeve, which is then placed in another plastic bag. Also in the box are a catalogue and a technical sheet.

And the sound? As even the mono and cassette copies I've heard transcend the norm, as do just about all of the 'regular' LPs, I was not surprised to hear more air and greater detail to the textures, such that I found myself digging out the Nimbus and Mofi (2x45rpm) editions. You will not be surprised to learn that there are subtle differences, in the way that you might detect variances between two interconnects.

Which is right and which is wrong? Only Miles and his crew can say. But to my ears? I have never heard *any* jazz LP with such presence, while the chills created by Coltrane's tenor sax in particular are unlikely to be matched. As an audio experience, right down to hearing Miles' saliva on his mouthpiece, this is simply peerless. And if I need to sum it up in a single word, there's only this one: 'classy'. Like Miles himself.

-- Ken Kessler



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