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# Master Cornetist Ron Miles Releases *I Am A Man*

Featuring an Expanded Lineup and Social Justice Themes

Ron Miles (cornet), Brian Blade (drums), Bill Frisell (guitar),  
Jason Moran (piano), Thomas Morgan (bass),

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With *I Am A Man*, Ron Miles, “one of the finest trumpeters in jazz today” (*Jazz Times*), makes his most powerful artistic statement to date. For this special project Miles grew his trio with guitarist **Bill Frisell** and drummer **Brian Blade**—which released *Quiver* in 2012 and *Circuit Rider* in 2014—into a quintet, adding pianist **Jason Moran** and bassist **Thomas Morgan**. The group’s virtuosic camaraderie animates *I Am A Man*’s expansive themes, building an album of and for today from the spiritual foundations of black American music.

For Miles, being in the jazz tradition means making music that speaks to his time. “From the beginnings of black American music, there’s been a sense of triumph over adversity,” Miles says. “We’re in some trying times in 2017, that’s for sure. But we’ve seen this before. Black folks have had to do this over and over again, fighting injustice and finding a positive solution.” As they did in 1968, when a malfunctioning garbage truck killed two employees in Memphis. Sanitation workers took to the streets with “*I Am A Man*” signs, asserting the fundamental dignity and humanity of workers of every profession. Today, “*I Am A Man*” carries that specific civil rights history for Miles, but has also taken on broader significance. “It’s a claim that we are of a human body,” he says, “a human person, and there are all kinds of ways that we express ourselves.”

To suit the “*I Am A Man*” theme, Miles wrote this music with a definitive blues sensibility, he says, though a Miles blues sensibility is all his own: Here, as always, he remains a “natural melodist with an openhearted style” and a “knack for pairing strong melodies with stealth convolutions of form.” (*New York Times*). Miles believes in transcending traditional instrumental roles, so he gives each musician not individual parts but the full score. “When Ron hands out a piece of music,” Jason Moran says, “he gives you the world. Visually, it tells me everything I need to know about where my part lines up with another line. It gives us the freedom to compose in real time, to shift between foreground and background as we like.”

Miles makes the most of the expansion into a quintet with the episodic “Darken My Door,” which comes from a dream involving his late mother-in-law. “She wasn’t very happy when my wife and I first got together,” he says. “I had this dream where she said, ‘He will never darken our door again, that guy over there,’ pointing at me. And then in the dream my wife stood up for me, she championed me.” In the opening, a piano trio pulls off some drama big and vivid enough for a silent film score, and then the music resolves what Miles calls a “chewy pop center.” The composition finally cycles back to the original drama, this time with a touch of wry humor that *de-stresses* it.

For Miles, the song “Revolutionary Congregation” is about “religion at its essence being revolutionary.” He counts as his religious heroes political figures like Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr., and Gandhi, “these powerful folks who didn’t sit back and accept the old traditions. Their tradition is standing up and fighting for others, social change and fighting social injustice as a holy cause.” If the deepest spirituality for Miles is a commitment to social change, he also finds sources for racial pride in religion. The song “Jasper” is named after the vibrant red-brown gemstone that shows up in the Book of Revelation “as part of a multi-hued message.”

Miles calls the ballad “Mother Juggler” a “love song” for his Mom, and for mothers in general. “My Mom got a college degree by going to night school. My three siblings and I—none of us older than 10—would all get on a bus with her at night and go to college, sitting in the back of the classroom doing homework during her classes. She had to make everything happen in a magical way.”

Throughout the album, that 1968 declaration by sanitation workers accrues other meanings and rhythms and forms, so that ***I Am A Man*** ultimately sings out as a modernist jazz gospel. With its deep reserves of beauty, faith, and humor, this music is a place where we can bring our own conflicts and doubts, while letting the consummate artistry wash off the dust of everyday life. In Ron Miles’s music, it’s safe for us to be nothing more, and nothing less, than fully human. And that’s plenty.

### **About RON MILES**

Ron Miles is a songwriter and cornet player based in Denver, Colorado. Ron was born in Indianapolis, Indiana in 1963 and moved to Denver with his family in 1974. Ron Miles has previously recorded as a leader for the Prolific, Capri, Gramavision, and Sterling Circle labels. He is one of the finest improvisers and composers of his generation and has been called one of the greatest melodists by clarinetist Ben Goldberg. In addition to leading his own bands, Ron Miles has performed in the ensembles of Joshua Redman, Bill Frisell, Mercer Ellington, Don Byron, Myra Melford, Joe Henry, Madeleine Peyroux, Jason Moran, Matt Wilson, the Bad Plus, Harriet Tubman, Ginger Baker, and Goldberg.

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