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Wes Montgomery's *A Day In The Life*: The Anatomy of a Jazz-Pop Crossover Album

Brian Felix

> "I want to tell people—this is those who write about it as well as the public– not to worry about what it's called; worry about whether it pleases people. That's what it's all about anyway, people are the final judges … .I have changed my way of playing, just as many others have, to fit with the times. Lee Morgan, Horace Silver, and many others could have had the same doors opened for them that have opened for people like Jimmy Smith and Ramsey Lewis—it seems to me that they just decided against it … Those who criticize me for playing jazz too simply and such are missing the point. When I first came up big on the Billboard charts they couldn't decide whether to call me a jazz or a pop artist. I think I originated a new category, something like 'Jazz-Pop' artist. There is a different direction on my records these days; there is a jazz concept to what I'm doing, but I'm playing popular music and it should be regarded as such."
>
> —Wes Montgomery[1]

During the mid-1960s, guitarist Wes Montgomery did what most jazz instrumentalists were unable to do: he created records that sold well in the popular marketplace. The commercial relevance of jazz, on the decline since the rise of bebop in the mid-1940s, was further diminished by the shifting mainstream of the 1950s, which was moving beyond swing era conventions of solo singers, big bands and Tin Pan Alley style popular songs to include the disparate sounds of country, folk, gospel, rhythm & blues and rock & roll.[2] As Albin Zak notes, the realm of popular music changed markedly during the 1950s as records became increasingly detached from faithful reproductions of "real world acoustic experience" and moved toward studio experimentation, driven mightily by record producers like Mitch Miller and Gordon Jenkins. This sound featured "new levels of artifice as it became common to manipulate sound using various electronic techniques, to invent ad hoc instrumental ensembles and outlandish arrangements, to record songs that, by Tin Pan Alley standards, fell

[1]Montgomery quoted in Bill Quinn, "The Thumb's Up Or What The View Is Like From the Top," *Downbeat,* June 27, 1968, 18.

[2]Albin Zak's definition of "mainstream" is useful here: "The so-called mainstream of American popular music describes a broad nexus of entertainment and commerce, each reinforcing the other in an unending process of large-scale cultural production, dissemination, acquisition, and use. The designation 'mainstream' reflects, first of all, market dominance from coast to coast." Albin J. Zak III, *I Don't Sound Like Nobody* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 45.

in the category of novelty—trashy, throwaway amusement."[3] As the 1950s progressed, the pop charts were increasingly dominated by rock and roll, which many traditionally minded observers steeped in the jazz aesthetics of yesteryear persistently touted as being in permanent decline. The public disappearance of many rock and roll stars by 1960 seemed to support this notion.[4] By the mid-1960s, however, rock and roll's continued dominance of the mainstream compelled many jazz musicians to adapt to changing American musical tastes or risk fading further into popular irrelevance and dire financial straits. As jazz historian Mark Tucker notes, "for many in the jazz world, the main challenge posed by the 1960s was professional and economic survival."[5] In response, many jazz artists included contemporary popular repertoire on their albums. Veteran bandleaders such as Duke Ellington and Count Basie recorded albums during this era that included versions of tunes by the Beatles and other pop artists, but their embrace of rock was largely limited to repertoire selection.[6]

By contrast, Montgomery's approach was more holistic and consistent with the approach taken by many popular singers—not only did he use contemporary popular repertoire, but he also adapted the overall *sound* of his recordings and embraced the influence of a commercially minded producer that molded each record for maximum impact in the mainstream popular marketplace.[7] Indeed, producer Creed Taylor's influence on the guitarist's output during this period was monumental—he had his hand in all aspects of record creation. On his approach to production, Taylor noted that he "put the pieces together like a chess game" and was "very actively involved in the arrangements, the order of solos, the length of solos, the material in general and, of course, the actual recording and mixing."[8] His philosophy was based on a keen awareness of market trends. In the same interview, Taylor recalled this philosophy in creating Wes Montgomery's records:

> I think his recordings for Riverside had been, to say the least, loosely produced. The producer would call the artist, the artist would put a rhythm section together and then they would play for a while. But there comes a point with those jamming albums, with interminable solos, when you have to acknowledge that they are not reaching many people, and they would never get the artists played on radio stations, which is mandatory for record sales in the United States. I decided that if people were

[3]Ibid., 4–6.

[4]By 1960, Elvis Presley had entered the Army, Jerry Lee Lewis was facing controversy over marrying his thirteen-year-old second cousin, Chuck Berry had legal trouble that ultimately ended in a prison term, Little Richard had entered the ministry and Buddy Holly had died. The common narrative is that, with the decline of these key figures, rock and roll disappeared from the mainstream until the Beatles' U.S. arrival in February 1964. Zak argues that this supposed decline of rock and roll was based on a narrow definition of the music, and that the genre continued its mainstream dominance through the early 60s. Ibid., 206–209.

[5]Mark Tucker, CD liner notes for *Duke Ellington: The Reprise Studio Recordings*, Warner Bros. 47464, 1999, CD.

[6]For examples of this phenomenon see Duke Ellington's recording *Ellington '66* and Count Basie's album *Basie's Beatle Bag*.

[7]As mentioned above, Zak notes that the mainstream of American popular music in the late 1950s and early 1960s was a disparate sounding collection of music. It is notable, though, that instrumental jazz was not a genre that typically produced mainstream hits during this era.

[8]Creed Taylor quoted in Mike Hennessey, "Crossover Crusader: A Rare Interview With Creed Taylor," *Jazz Journal International*, November 1979, 21.

> going to hear Wes Montgomery, I would have to record him in a culturally acceptable context. Now I wasn't particularly enamored of the idea of surrounding Wes with strings, but if that was a way of getting him known to more people, then that was the way it had to be.[9]

Taylor's approach has often drawn the ire of jazz critics who write about this period of Montgomery's output. In a 1976 article entitled "Jazz Musicians Consider Wes Montgomery," Gary Giddins specifically criticized this portion of the guitarist's career and the role that record company producers play in the creation of jazz albums. Giddins believes that "The Montgomery-Taylor relationship … proceeded inexorably from Taylor's cost-accountancy approach to producing music … The material was occasionally good but more frequently not."[10] Comparing the role of the producer in jazz and popular music recording, Giddins suggests, "The myth has grown that the producer is the key to a good recording. This may apply to some areas of pop music, but in jazz, where individuality is everything, this kind of arrogance amounts to an extension of the 'invisible man' syndrome." Giddins then dramatically extends this idea to apply to the jazz record business as a whole: "If there's anything to be learned from Montgomery's story, it is that musicians must accept their relationship with the record industry as a basically adversary [*sic*] one, an analogue to the relationship film directors have with studio moguls … .Too many artists of rich ability, however, have been reduced to quaking whores reporting to cost-accountant pimps."[11]

Though not unusual, Giddins's view of jazz as diametrically opposed to commercialism is not universal. In his seminal book *The Birth of Bebop*, Scott DeVeaux argues that it is most useful to consider jazz musicians as agents functioning *within* the marketplace rather than occupying a separate non-commercial sphere. For bebop musicians in the 1930s and 40s, "mass-market capitalism was not a prison from which the true artist is duty-bound to escape. It was a system of transactions that defined music as a profession and thereby made their achievements possible."[12] Reframed this way, this body of work locates Montgomery within a lineage of musicians who embraced, rather than eschewed, commercial considerations. Moreover, even as I seek to reframe Montgomery as part of an established lineage, this framing is complicated by albums like *A Day In The Life*,[13] which represents an artistic approach that goes beyond the embracing of jazz-as-commercial music and self-consciously courts a non-jazz audience.

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[9]Ibid., 20.

[10]Gary Giddins, *Riding on a Blue Note: Jazz and American Pop* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 260.

[11]Ibid., 263–264. The critical reaction to Wes Montgomery's recorded output from the mid-1960s was, in general, a negative one. As an example, take Harvey Pekar's comment: "Now that Montgomery has attained some measure of commercial success, I wonder if he'll ever make another good album … maybe he'll record serious music again under a pseudonym." For this and other examples see Adrian Ingram, *Wes Montgomery* (Gateshead, England: Ashley Mark Publishing Co., 1985), 33–34.

[12]Scott DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 16. Furthermore, DeVeaux suggests that the commonly held notion among critics that jazz musicians operate in a sphere that is separate from commercial concerns has been used in an attempt to elevate jazz's status as art music. He argues that, ironically, this anti-commercial stance is useful for fund-raising (16).

[13]Wes Montgomery, *A Day in the Life,* A&M SP-3001, 1967, LP. Note that references to the album are in italics, while references to the song of the same name are in quotation marks.

There was already a precedent for jazz musicians attempting to reach a wider record-buying public that began decades before the Wes Montgomery albums at hand. Only in recent years have historians such as Charles Carson and Albin Zak begun to examine these crossover artists and their music. As Carson observes, "The crossover impulse … can be traced back to the rhythm-and-blues work of artists like Louis Jordan and 'Big Jay' McNeely—and perhaps even further back to the music of James P. Johnson and the like—artists whose works often went to great pains to exploit the points of contact between blues, jazz, and popular music. It is telling that these artists were similarly criticized—by critics and musicians alike—for their decidedly commercial take on the jazz and blues idioms."[14,15] Zak highlights Louis Armstrong's 1949 collaborations with Gordon Jenkins on "That Lucky Old Sun" and "Blueberry Hill" as early examples of a jazz artist's embrace of a popular producer and experimental studio techniques. On these recordings, Armstrong's voice is backed by a large choir, which, when combined with contemporary popular repertoire, leads Zak to conclude that "Jenkins repackaged Armstrong in an alien stylistic milieu in which Armstrong's iconic jazz persona was only part of a larger set piece, his elastic phrasing clearly arising from some other musical place than Jenkins's scripted orchestra and chorus."[16] These records, along with commercially successful 1950s studio efforts by singers like Tony Bennett, provided what maybe the most relevant template for Wes Montgomery's work with Creed Taylor: jazz-trained soloists whose voices are surrounded, on record, by the unfamiliar stylistic tendencies of mid-century studio experimentation.[17] For a more contemporary example of this phenomenon, one can look to the "Brill Building" model of record production that was at its peak during the early 1960s. Producers like Jerry Lieber and Mike Stoller took black rhythm and blues performers and "smoothed the rough edges … to help them appeal to a white audience."[18] My contention is that Creed Taylor did for Wes Montgomery what Leiber and Stoller did for Ben E. King and the like: he packaged the guitarist's records as if they were pop, with one important caveat. Since 1960s pop music is almost entirely vocal music and Montgomery is an instrumentalist, the guitarist's output from this period should not be considered simply "pop." His work represents a new amalgam—a "jazz-pop"—that calls upon successful trends in 1960s popular music while highlighting key elements of Montgomery's improvisatorial gifts.

This article is aimed at contributing to the recent body of scholarship working to broaden the scope of jazz historiography to include more commercialized forms.[19]

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[14]Charles Carson, "'Bridging the Gap': Creed Taylor, Grover Washington Jr., and the Crossover Roots of Smooth Jazz," *Black Music Research Journal* 28, no. 1 (2008): 3.

[15]For a detailed discussion of Louis Jordan and his conspicuous absence from standard jazz historical narratives, see David Ake's chapter "Jazz Historiography and the Problem of Louis Jordan" in David Ake, *Jazz Cultures* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 42–61.

[16]Zak, *I Don't Sound Like Nobody*, 62.

[17]Ibid., 59.

[18]Ken Emerson, *There's Always Magic In The Air* (New York: Penguin, 2005), xiv.

[19]The article by Charles Carson cited above and Aaron West's dissertation "Caught Between Jazz and Pop: The Contested Origins, Criticism, Performance Practice, and Reception of Smooth Jazz" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Texas, 2008) both include specific commentary on the relevance of Wes Montgomery's mid-1960s

I will examine, in detail, the formula employed by Montgomery and Taylor during the mid-1960s and parse the reasons for its success. I will consider his most commercially successful release, the 1967 album *A Day In The Life,* focusing specifically on components of this jazz-pop crossover effort: lavish orchestral production, contemporary popular repertoire, straight-eighth grooves and streamlined improvisations. In order to contextualize these observations, however, it is important to review Montgomery's background and suggest why he may have embraced this approach.

Background

Wes Montgomery received his first guitar (a tenor) as a gift from his brother Monk at the age of twelve, but he only got serious about learning to play in his early twenties after hearing a Charlie Christian record.[20] Christian's "hornlike approach" to the instrument inspired him to purchase his first six-string guitar.[21] Through rigorous practice, he became adept at emulating Christian's style and began gigging at the 440 Club in his hometown of Indianapolis.[22] Montgomery soon began performing regionally in a variety of contexts, supplementing his nighttime income with a day job at Pope's Milk Company in order to support his growing family. In 1948, he auditioned for vibraphonist Lionel Hampton and was hired on the spot to join his group. Montgomery would spend the next two years touring, until his distaste for life on the road caused him to quit and return home to Indianapolis.

Upon his return, the guitarist slowly resumed his regimen of local gigs, undertaking an intensive schedule that combined nighttime work as a musician and a daytime job in a factory. As biographer Adrian Ingram relates, "By 1959 Wes was the proud father of six children. His day-job at P. R. Mallory's, where he was employed as a welder working on batteries and heavy-duty radios, hardly paid enough for the management of such a large family. Once more Wes was forced to supplement his income with whatever playing gigs he could find. As a result he committed himself to an unbelievably grueling schedule; he worked at Mallory's factory from 7 am to 3 pm, played a gig at the Turf Bar from 9 pm to 2 am, and then rushed across Indianapolis to the after-hours Missile Room to play another gig from 2:30 to 5 am!"[23] In September 1959, saxophonist Cannonball Adderley, who was in town performing at the Indiana Theatre, heard

output and 1960s crossover jazz in general. For examples of scholars calling for a broader jazz historiography that includes commercial and popular leanings, see Scott DeVeaux, "Constructing the Jazz Tradition," in *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture,* ed. Robert G. O'Meally, et. al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 505, and Christopher Washburne, "Does Kenny G. Play Bad Jazz? A Case Study," in *Bad Music: The Music We Love to Hate,* ed. Christopher J. Washburne and Maiken Derno (Routledge: New York, 2004), 143.

[20]William Howard "Monk" Montgomery went on to become a highly regarded acoustic and electric bassist. Monk and Wes performed together in a variety of contexts, including the Mastersounds and Montgomery Brothers, often with vibraphonist brother Buddy Montgomery. See Barry Kernfeld and Lewis Porter, "Montgomery," *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, 2nd ed. *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online.* Oxford University Press. Accessed June 29, 2015. http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wncln.wncln.org/subscriber/article/grove/music/J307900pg1.

[21]Ingram, *Wes Montgomery*, 11–12.

[22]It should be noted that Montgomery was a self-taught musician, utilizing his ear to learn new techniques. He never learned to read music. See ibid., 45.

[23]Ibid., 22.

Montgomery at the Missile Room. Upon returning to New York, Adderley implored producer Orrin Keepnews of Riverside records to sign the guitarist to the label. Five days after his meeting with Adderley, Keepnews traveled to Indianapolis to hear Montgomery and was duly impressed; he offered him a contract, thus beginning the guitarist's "Riverside period," which most critics believe to be his best work in a traditional jazz setting.[24]

Indeed, albums such as *The Incredible Jazz Guitar of Wes Montgomery* (1960) and *Full House* (1962)[25] established Montgomery as one of the premier jazz guitarists of his generation. In 1964, however, Riverside was on the verge of bankruptcy after the sudden death of its president Bill Grauer, and Montgomery moved to the Verve label, where Creed Taylor acted as chief executive and main record producer. At that point, Taylor was already known for "firm organization, daring ideas and a willingness to promote younger jazz artists—often towards a more commercial acceptance"[26]. In his previous tenure with record labels ABC-Paramount, Impulse! and Verve, Taylor presided over several commercially and artistically successful recordings including Oliver Nelson's *Blues and the Abstract Truth* (1961), Stan Getz and Charlie Byrd's *Jazz Samba* (1962), Bill Evans' *Conversations With Myself* (1963), and Stan Getz and João Gilberto's *Getz/Gilberto*, which won the 1965 Grammy award for Album of the Year.[27]

Now under Taylor's tutelage at Verve, Montgomery released *Movin' Wes* and *Bumpin'*,[28] two albums with a "brass-laden orchestra," the latter of which garnered considerable commercial success for a jazz release, rising to #116 on the *Billboard 200* chart, which tracks sales for all genres.[29,30] At this point Taylor "realized something about Montgomery's talent: it was his octave technique and lyrical sound, not his audaciously legato eighth-note improvisations with their dramatic architectural designs, that appealed to middle-of-the-road ears. So he set Montgomery on a course of

[24]Even though I am referring to his music as "traditional jazz," it could also easily be categorized as hard bop or soul jazz, in confluence with much mainstream jazz of the late 1950s and early 1960s. It is difficult to distinguish the difference between these genres during this time period. Barry Kernfeld notes that the "differences between soul jazz and hard bop … are negligible, and the stylistic labels connote feeling and atmosphere rather than distinctive musical characteristics." Barry Kernfeld, "Soul jazz," *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, 2nd ed., *Grove Music Online*, *Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press. Accessed July 10, 2014. http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wncln.wncln.org/subscriber/article/grove/music/J422000. For further discussion on the musical traits of hard bop and soul jazz, see West, "Caught," 11–18 and David H. Rosenthal, *Hard Bop: Jazz and Black Music 1955–1965* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

[25]Wes Montgomery, *The Incredible Jazz Guitar of Wes Montgomery*, Riverside RLP 1169, 1960, LP; *Full House*, Riverside RLP 434, 1962, LP.

[26]Raymond Horricks, *Profiles in Jazz: From Sidney Bechet to John Coltrane* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1991), 178.

[27]Despite the fact that critics of Taylor's techniques tend to focus on his commodification of jazz artists and their work, it should be remembered that, up through this point in his career, he had produced many acclaimed jazz releases. In addition to those mentioned above, Quincy Jones' *This Is How I Feel About Jazz* (1957), Gil Evans's *Out Of The Cool* (1960), Oscar Peterson's *Very Tall* (1961), Stan Getz's *Focus* (1962) and Count Basie's *Lil' Ol' Groovemaker … Basie* (1963) are worth mentioning, among others. See Horricks, *Profiles*, 178–179.

[28]Wes Montgomery, *Movin' Wes*, Verve V6-8610, 1964, LP; *Bumpin'*, Verve V6-8625, 1965, LP.

[29]Giddins, *Riding*, 259.

[30]All information regarding *Billboard* charts comes from Joel Whitburn's *Top Pop Albums* (Menomonee Falls, WI: Record Research Inc., 2010) and *Top Pop Singles* (Menomonee Falls, WI: Record Research Inc., 2011).

decreasing improvisation and increasingly busy overdubbed arrangements, while the octaves, once used so judiciously, became the focus of his new 'style.'"[31,32] These trends continued on the 1966 release *Goin' Out Of My Head*[33] alongside a new thrust to incorporate contemporary popular repertoire. Taylor's recounts:

> I had taken a 45 rpm copy of Little Anthony and the Imperials' hit to give to Wes at The Half Note Club on Hudson Street in New York City. Wes was appearing there with Wynton Kelly. I quietly explained to Wes that I thought that 'Goin' Out of My Head' might work for his upcoming record date. Wes (not so quietly) exclaimed 'You must be out of yours!' But Wes, being as ever the reasonable gentleman, agreed to come by my office at Verve for a meeting with Oliver Nelson. Wes was very aware of Oliver's Blues and the Abstract Truth that I had produced. This helped lead us into the issue of the improbable wisdom of including ' … Out of My Head' in Wes' next date. The ever-articulate Oliver proceeded to outline the musical and philosophical reasons why he thought the song would work as an instrumental vehicle for Wes. Three weeks later we had finished recording.[34,35]

Taylor's choice of "Goin' Out Of My Head" for Montgomery's album proved to be commercially savvy—the record received a Grammy award in 1966 for Best Instrumental Jazz Performance, Group or Soloist with Group, but the critical reception was decidedly mixed. While critic Chris Albertson claimed that the guitarist's new sound was "tantamount to hearing Horowitz play 'Chopsticks,'"[36] Gilbert M. Erskine of *Downbeat* noted that "the music is remarkably successful" and that the album was a "reminder of the vital role the jazz arranger can play when he is able to collaborate with a first-rate instrumentalist."[37]

After the Grammy-winning success of "Goin' Out Of My Head," Montgomery evidently became further convinced of the value in Taylor's ideas; the guitarist employed the same style frequently on his subsequent albums. Even though Montgomery's playing on these recordings was vastly simplified when compared with his earlier output, his musicianship allowed him to transcend any perceived limitations; biographer Adrian Ingram opines that Montgomery's "unfailing ability to play the right notes in the right places," had much to do with his success.[38] Despite his streamlined improvisations on certain recordings, Montgomery continued to play "good swinging-jazz" on his live dates.[39] Gary Giddins proclaimed that a Montgomery live set from this

[31]Giddins, *Riding*, 259.

[32]Montgomery's "octave technique," in which melodic lines are played in octaves, is a signature trait of his performance style. This technique is made possible, in part, by Montgomery's use of his right thumb in place of a pick. For more on his development of this style, see Ingram, *Wes Montgomery*, 46.

[33]Wes Montgomery, *Goin' Out of My Head*, Verve V6-8642, 1966, LP.

[34]Creed Taylor, "Producer's Note," *CTIJazz.com*. Accessed February 21, 2010. http://www.ctijazz.com/montgomery-goin_out_of_my_head. It is noteworthy that Taylor's agency was limited: he required the assistance of Oliver Nelson in order to convince Montgomery to record a tune that the guitarist considered sub-standard.

[35]This dynamic in which a producer must convince an artist to record a work that he/she considers to be sub-standard is echoed in Zak's account of Mitch Miller's convincing of Frankie Laine to record "Mule Train" in the early 1950s. Laine protested "You can't expect me to do a *cowboy song!* I'll lose all my jazz fans." Laine recorded the tune, which became a hit. See Zak, *I Don't Sound*, 52.

[36]Ingram, *Wes Montgomery*, 33.

[37]Gilbert M. Erskine, "Wes Montgomery: Goin'' Out of My Head," *Downbeat*, April 21, 1966, 37.

[38]Ingram, *Wes Montgomery*, 37.

[39]Ibid., 35.

period was "the most fiery, exquisite set of guitar music I've ever heard."[40] Indeed, during the mid 1960s, he released a few critically acclaimed albums comprised of more traditional jazz: *Smokin' At the Half Note* (1965), *The Dynamic Duo* and *Further Adventures of Jimmy and Wes* (both from 1966).[41]

Montgomery's next commercially oriented albums, *Tequila* (1966) and *California Dreaming* (1967),[42] were his last for Verve before moving (with Taylor) to Herb Alpert and Jerry Moss's A&M label.[43] *Tequila* is comprised of renditions of contemporary popular tunes that feature string arrangements by Claus Ogerman and Montgomery's streamlined guitar style. There are selections, however, that feature some substantive improvisational activity: the rhythm section of Montgomery, Ron Carter (bass), Grady Tate (drums) and Ray Barretto (percussion) interact nicely on "The Thumb," and "What The World Needs Now" features the guitarist playing an extended solo that includes single-note lines and the octave technique. By contrast, *California Dreaming* displays only brief moments of Montgomery's virtuosic ability as a guitarist, but is mostly dedicated to showcasing his new streamlined style alongside the orchestral arrangements of Don Sebesky. *California Dreaming* drew much criticism—the usually sympathetic Adrian Ingram refers to the record as "a pastiche of the worst elements of Wes' previous commercial records."[44]

The Anatomy of a Jazz-Pop Crossover Album: *A Day in the Life*

Taylor and Montgomery's first release for the A&M label, *A Day in the Life*, would prove to be the guitarist's most commercially successful album. In 1967–68, the album spent 26 weeks as #1 on *Billboard's* "Best Selling Jazz LPs" chart and even rose to #13 on the *Billboard 200* chart (see Table 1). Montgomery's recording of The Association's hit "Windy" rose to #44 and spent 11 weeks on the *Billboard Hot 100* chart (his highest charting single) and the album was certified gold by the Record Industry Association of America (RIAA) for selling 500,000 copies. A close examination of *A Day In The Life* reveals a detailed and deliberate formula that was geared specifically toward creating an album that would "hit."

Lavish Orchestral Production

The mixing of jazz with orchestral music has been controversial since George Gershwin and Paul Whiteman's 1924 collaboration on the premiere of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*. In this case, criticism was primarily directed at the "elevation" of jazz to the

[40]Giddins, *Riding*, 261.
[41]Wynton Kelly Trio with Wes Montgomery, *Smokin' at the Half Note*, Verve V6-8633, 1965, LP; Jimmy Smith and Wes Montgomery, *Jimmy and Wes – The Dynamic Duo*, Verve V6-8678, 1966, LP; Jimmy Smith and Wes Montgomery, *Futher Adventures of Jimmy Smith and Wes Montgomery*, Verve V6-8766 , 1966, LP.
[42]Wes Montgomery, *Tequila*, Verve V-8653, 1966, LP; *California Dreaming,* Verve V-8672, 1967, LP.
[43]The original song by the Mamas and the Papas is titled "California Dreamin'." Montgomery's album and rendition of the same song is titled "California Dreaming."
[44]Ingram, *Wes Montgomery*, 38.

Table 1. Wes Montgomery's Commercially Successful Albums (1965–1968).
Chronological list of Wes Montgomery's non-greatest-hits releases that appeared on the *Billboard 200 Albums* chart. Please note that jazz albums typically do not sell well enough to appear on this chart.

Album	*Billboard* Peak	*Billboard* Debut
Bumpin'	#116	12/11/65
Tequila	#51	9/3/66
California Dreaming	#65	3/25/67
Jimmy & Wes – The Dynamic Duo	#129	5/20/67
A Day In The Life	#13	10/7/67
Down Here On The Ground	#38	11/16/68
Road Song	#94	4/4/70

Notes: *All information regarding *Billboard* album charts comes from Joel Whitburn's *Top Pop Albums* (Menomonee Falls, WI: Record Research Inc., 2010). Note that *Goin'Out Of My Head* did not appear on the *Billboard 200* chart but did peak at #7 on the *Billboard R&B Album* chart, reflecting modest commercial success.

level of classical music.[45] In the 1930s, however, discourses concerning the relationship of jazz to orchestral music centered on the question of jazz authenticity: "real" jazz was driven by expression and improvisation whereas "sweet" jazz was more reliant on arrangement and orchestration. Sweet jazz, represented most prominently by Whiteman (as well as later groups such as that led by Guy Lombardo), often drew criticism from proponents and performers of other styles of jazz, who accused those musicians of performing watered-down and commercially driven versions of the music.[46] Although these sweet dance bands faded from prominence with the relative decline of the big bands during the 1940s, small combos led by virtuosic soloists often turned to large-scale orchestral arrangements in the recording studio. These artists have been commonly maligned for such a "commercial" approach—Charlie Parker biographer Carl Woideck criticizes *Charlie Parker With Strings* for having "commissioned arrangements of popular songs [that] resembled common Hollywood movie music"—but the albums were typically (relatively) commercially successful.[47]

During the late 1950s and 1960s, orchestral background arrangements were featured on many popular tunes; the aforementioned Brill Building producers created chart-topping hits that featured large orchestras and, at times, choirs.[48] Producers and

[45]See Hugh C. Ernst's program notes for the *Rhapsody in Blue* premiere concert at Aeolian Hall in which he defends Whiteman's bringing of jazz into the concert hall. Hugh C. Ernst, "The Man Who Made A Lady Out of Jazz" in *Keeping Time,* ed. Robert Walser (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 45–46.

[46]See Louis Armstrong, "What Is Swing?" in *Keeping Time*, ed. Robert Walser (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 73–76.

[47]Carl Woideck, *Charlie Parker* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 180. *Clifford Brown With Strings* and *Music for Loving: Ben Webster With Strings* are further examples of jazz instrumentalists on record with orchestral backing. For further information, see Andrew Gilbert, "Strings Attached: Five Orchestral Jazz Classics," *JazzTimes,* June 2013, http://jazztimes.com/articles/94310-strings-attached-five-orchestral-jazz-classics.

[48]"Brill Building," *Encyclopedia of Popular Music*, 4th ed., *Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Accessed June 30, 2014. http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wncln.wncln.org/subscriber/article/epm/49112. The Drifters' "There Goes My Baby" and The Shirelles' "Will You Love Me Tomorrow" are examples of hits from this time period that include substantial orchestral backing. This was also the heyday of the "Nashville Sound," a style employed by country music artists and producers that featured orchestras. The style was most famously used on the albums of Chet Atkins. Cf. Bill C. Malone, "Nashville Cound," *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music*

record executives took note of the potential for creating hit records through this type of production, and began recording established rhythm & blues artists with orchestral backings in order to increase record sales in the mainstream marketplace. Ray Charles, for example, achieved success on the rhythm and blues charts throughout the 1950s, but it wasn't until the string-laden "Georgia On My Mind" was released in 1960 that he achieved a #1 hit on the *Billboard Hot 100* chart; that his heavily produced 1962 release *Modern Sounds In Country and Western Music* reached #1 on the *Billboard 200 Albums* chart further supports this notion. David Brackett notes that the same is true for Dinah Washington, who achieved substantial crossover success after embracing lavish production techniques.[49] Even though he was a jazz instrumentalist, Montgomery's work in the mid-1960s can be viewed as part of this wider trend of black artists recording with orchestral backing in order to reach a wider listening public.

On *A Day In the Life,* the quintet of Montgomery, Herbie Hancock (piano), Ron Carter (bass), Grady Tate (drums) and Ray Barretto (latin percussion) is augmented by twelve violins, two violas, two cellos, one harp, four bass flutes, two "woodwinds," one French horn and two classical percussionists. The orchestral parts are arranged by Don Sebesky and are used liberally throughout the album, often dominating the musical landscape.[50] Despite this elaborate production, there are several instances when the quintet plays without the orchestral backdrop, particularly during the first 20–30 seconds of Montgomery's improvised sections.

Critical reviews of *A Day In The Life* typically mention the orchestration (or orchestrator) in a disparaging way. Scott Yanow notes that Montgomery is "backed by muzaky strings"[51] while Gary Giddins opines that Sebesky is a "hack arranger with a talent for blending received ideas into an eclectic goulash."[52] Interestingly, and perhaps not surprisingly, Sebesky distances himself from his work on Montgomery's albums. In hindsight, the arranger noted, "I was a hired gun. I was asked to do an album within a specific frame of reference, and that was my job. My job was to accommodate and to amplify and to clarify Creed's intentions and his vision. He was the producer … More often than not, it was a marketing way of looking at things. Left to my own devices, I probably would have done a lot of things differently. It was a time when he found a formula that worked for him."[53] Regardless of who is to credit or blame for

Online, Oxford University Press. Accessed July 10, 2014. http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wncln.wncln.org/subscriber/article/grove/music/19589.

[49]David Brackett, ed., *The Pop, Rock, and Soul Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 169.

[50]There are several moments where an orchestral accompaniment seems to swallow the guitarist's lines. At other times, the orchestra takes over entirely and Montgomery drops out.

[51]Scott Yanow, "Wes Montgomery: A Day In The Life," *All Music Guide.* Accessed July 15, 2014. http://www.allmusic.com/album/a-day-in-the-life-mw0000199509.

[52]Giddins, *Riding*, 260.

[53]Sebesky quoted in Josef Woodard, "Wes Montgomery: The Softer Side of Genius," *JazzTimes,* July/August 2005. Accessed July 15, 2014. http://jazztimes.com/articles/15844-wes-montgomery-the-softer-side-of-genius. Sebesky was, at the time, a much sought-after arranger with stellar jazz credentials. With the possible exception of *Bumpin'*, his work on Wes Montgomery's albums from the mid-1960s is typically not considered a highlight moment of his career. See "Sebesky, Don," *Encyclopedia of Popular Music*, 4th ed., *Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press. Accessed July 15, 2014. http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.wncln.wncln.org/subscriber/article/epm/25168.

the orchestral arrangements on *A Day In The Life*, they are a prominent feature of the overall sonic landscape, suggesting that they were deemed a key component of the album's commercial appeal.[54]

Contemporary Popular Repertoire

As with Taylor and Montgomery's previous collaborative efforts, the repertoire selected for *A Day In The Life* was largely drawn from contemporary popular music. In a sense, this practice is not unusual—the very nature of jazz had always been to interpret popular music of the day—yet the decreased prominence of Broadway show tunes during the late 1950s and 1960s led to a diminished transference between the two genres. In 1965, critic Gene Lees noted that "The 1950s brought to American popular music a severe depression of standards. Product of an unrestrained commercialism, rock-and-roll and other simplistic forms of music dominated the American scene, driving better music into a corner, very much on the defensive." He continues with a lukewarm endorsement of the "pops" field, stating that "one of the most amazing success stories in modern light music is … that of the Beatles" and that as of late "they also won the respect of musicians, who noted with pleased surprise that John Lennon and Paul McCartney wrote good songs."[55] Critic Martin Williams similarly decried the decline of Broadway: "Well then, what sort of leadership does Broadway currently provide? To be entirely blunt about it, none at all. Lerner and Lowe's *My Fair Lady* may be the last Broadway musical to give the American people a collection of tunes it wants to hear on the air, sing in the shower, and try out on the parlor upright."[56] Like Lees, he looks to the Beatles to fill the void, because "at least two of the Beatles are talented musically … Paul McCartney is a rare popular composer, and a great deal of the Beatles' repertory consists of ditties that might have been researched in Elizabethan song books or in collections of English and Irish airs."[57] Both Lees's and Williams's endorsements of the Beatles, while tepid, suggest one possible reason for the prevalence of that band's material on recordings from this era by Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Gerry Mulligan, Carmen McCrae and others: in the wake of Broadway's heyday, Lennon and McCartney were providing a body of contemporary material to interpret.[58] Perhaps most importantly, the Beatles and their music were ubiquitous in American popular culture from early 1964 through the end of

[54]Even though Creed Taylor received much of the critical ire for backing Montgomery with a large ensemble, he wasn't the first to do so—producer Orrin Keepnews utilized a large ensemble on the guitarist's 1963 Riverside release, *Fusion*. West, "Caught," 53.

[55]Gene Lees, liner notes for *If You Can't Beat 'Em, Join 'Em* by Gerry Mulligan, Limelight LS-86021, 1965, LP. Available at "If You Can't Beat'em Join 'em," *gerrymulligan.info*. Accessed 21, 2010. http://www.gerrymulligan.info/recordings/ifyoucant.html.

[56]Martin Williams, "One Cheer For Rock and Roll," *Downbeat*, October 7, 1965, 39. While Williams is correct that the heyday of Broadway was over, *My Fair Lady*, which premiered in 1956, is only the last great musical if one discounts titans of the canon such as *The Sound of Music* and *West Side Story* (1957).

[57]Ibid., 39.

[58]Zak also supports this notion, stating that Tin Pan Alley standards were "increasingly replaced by a simpler, more straightforward kind of song—unambiguous and instantly hummable." Zak, *I Don't Sound*, 47.

the decade, which could create an "in" for jazz artists with the burgeoning youth audience.[59]

Interviews conducted during the time period reveal that jazz musicians had widely diverging opinions of the Beatles: bandleader Stan Kenton offered that "most of their music is still children's music,"[60] while vocalist Leon Thomas "refused" to record a Beatles tune because he does not like the music, for the "same reason I don't like vaccinations, same reason I don't like nose drops or have sweet oil put in my ear, you dig? It ain't necessary."[61] Artie Shaw made it clear that his opinion was not personal, but stated, "I don't care very much about people getting up and telling me 'Hold My Hand and I'll understand.' I don't care who it is. If that sounds terrible, I'm sorry. I mean, I have nothing against the Beatles. They created a way of living. They were also the product of a mass medium."[62] Pianist Randy Weston's objection was based on race: "I don't listen to the Beatles because I don't like what happened to the music called blues when the white artists got involved in it. I just sort of cut myself off from the whole rock-'n'-roll scene. I've been told by people that the Beatles have produced some very beautiful things, but when the white man starts singing the blues, I just cut him out. Because I know that all he can do is imitate."[63]

Many jazz musicians had a more positive outlook toward the Beatles. Pianist Erroll Garner stated that he liked "some of the Beatles stuff,"[64] while Freddie Hubbard admitted that their music is "creative, for what they do."[65] Count Basie noted that The Beatles have "done some fine things,"[66] yet vocalist Carmen McRae offered the most glowing review: 'I'm very happy about contemporary developments in music … I love what I'm doing now. I do Beatles tunes. Incidentally, I think they are excellent songwriters. I don't think they are so great singing or doing their thing, but their songs are fantastic." Not only was McRae proud of the fact that she covered Beatles tunes, but it is also clear from the rest of the interview that she viewed this choice as a sign of her own modernity.[67] For our purposes the most relevant opinion is from Wes Montgomery himself, who took an utterly pragmatic approach: "While some cats turned up their noses at Elvis Presley and the Beatles, I tried to find out what was best about what they were doing and incorporate it into my thing—without duplicating their stuff."[68]

It is against this backdrop that Taylor selected two Beatles tunes for *A Day In The Life* (the title track and "Eleanor Rigby"). Lennon/McCartney songs were obvious choices

[59]Mark Tucker notes that if artists such as Duke Ellington and Count Basie "wished to remain successful recording artists, they had to respond to changing tastes and trends." See Tucker, liner notes for *Duke Ellington*, 2.
[60]George Thomas Simon, *The Big Bands* (New York: Macmillan, 1981), 540.
[61]Thomas quoted in Arthur Taylor, *Notes and Tones* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1993), 103–104.
[62]Shaw quoted in ibid., 549.
[63]Weston quoted in ibid., 31.
[64]Garner quoted in ibid., 97.
[65]Hubbard quoted in ibid., 205.
[66]Basie quoted in Simon, *Big Bands*, 522.
[67]McCrae quoted in Taylor, *Notes*, 38.
[68]Quinn, "Thumb's," 44. For further information on jazz musicians and their opinions regarding the Beatles, see Brian Felix, "Rock Becomes Jazz: Interpretations of Popular Music by Improvising Artists in the 1960s" (DMA Thesis, University of Illinois at Urbana/Champaign, 2010).

Table 2. Wes Montgomery's *A Day In The Life*: Repertoire selection with corresponding *Billboard Hot 100* or *Bubbling Under the Hot 100* peak position and debut date.

Song	Composer(s)	Artist With Peak Version	*Billboard* Peak	*Billboard* Peak Date
"A Day In The Life"	Lennon/McCartney	The Beatles	N/A	N/A
"Watch What Happens"	Michel Legrand	Lena Horne	#119	5/30/70
"When A Man Loves A Woman"	Lewis/Wright	Percy Sledge	#1	4/9/66
"California Nights"	Hamlisch/Liebling	Lesley Gore	#16	2/4/67
"Angel"	Wes Montgomery	Wes Montgomery	N/A	N/A
"Eleanor Rigby"	Lennon/McCartney	The Beatles	#11	8/27/66
"Willow Weep For Me"	Ann Ronell	Chad and Jeremy	#15	11/14/64
"Windy"	Ruth Friedman	The Association	#1	5/27/67
"Trust in Me"	Ager/Schwartz/ Schwartz/Wever	Etta James	#30	3/13/61
"The Joker"	Bricusse/Newley	Sammy Davis, Jr./ Bobby Rydell	N/A	N/A

Note: *All information regarding the *Billboard Hot 100* and *Bubbling Under the Hot 100* charts comes from Joel Whitburn's *Top Pop Singles* (Menomonee Falls, WI: Record Research Inc., 2011).

due to their popularity, but were also controversial considering the diversity of opinions jazz musicians held concerning the group. The remainder of the repertoire on *A Day In The Life* comes from a wide variety of composers, but is unified by the fact that the tunes were primarily *current hits*—ones that were either currently or recently on the *Billboard* charts. As detailed in Table 2**,** out of the ten tracks on the album, six of them ("When A Man Loves A Woman," "California Nights," "Eleanor Rigby," "Willow Weep For Me," "Windy," and "Trust In Me") had recently been on the *Billboard Hot 100* chart, with "When A Man Loves A Woman" and "Windy" rising to #1. "A Day In The Life," the closing track from the Beatles 1967 classic *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, wasn't a charting single by itself, but the immense popularity of all things Beatle during this time period guaranteed that many listeners would be familiar with the tune. Taylor's foresight in choosing repertoire that would have wide appeal is exemplified in several ways by this track and other selections for *A Day In The Life*.

Sgt. Pepper's was released to the American public on June 1, 1967 to almost universal acclaim. According to Mark Wallgren, "Never in the history of popular music has one single album had such an immediate and total impact on the entire music industry."[69] Anticipation for this album was high, as the Beatles hadn't released a full length LP since *Revolver* in August 1966.[70] Even so, the selection of a tune that was released within weeks of the recording dates of June 6, 7 & 26, 1967, shows that Taylor

[69]Mark Wallgren, *The Beatles on Record* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 66.

[70]In 1964 and 1965, the Beatles released at least two full length LPs per year. The almost ten months that passed between the release of *Revolver* and *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* was strikingly long for the Beatles at this time.

sought to keep the repertoire current *ad extremum*. The trajectory of "Windy" also serves to underline this point; The Association's version peaked at #1 *after* Montgomery recorded it in June. This guaranteed that, when Montgomery's version of "Windy" was released later that year, the tune would still be fresh in the public's mind. The contemporaneous nature of the two versions is certainly a reason that "Windy" became Montgomery's highest charting single. The selection of Ann Ronell's "Willow Weep For Me," the only jazz standard in the set, also reflects consideration for maximum impact with the record buying public. While the tune had been around since 1932, it had recently been recorded and released as a single by Chad and Jeremy, rising to #15 on the *Billboard Hot 100 chart* in 1964–65.

Of the remaining three tracks on the album, "Angel" is a Montgomery original (it was customary practice, at that point, for Taylor to include one or two Montgomery originals on these records), and two ("Watch What Happens" and "The Joker") were contemporary tunes that were not hits at the time.[71] Regardless of this, Taylor's overall intent was clear: populate the album with contemporary music that the general public would recognize. This practice was not lost on the critics—jazz historian Ted Gioia notes that, "By the time of his final projects with the A & M label, Montgomery was relegated to playing 'cover' versions of Beatles songs and other pop/rock tunes."[72]

"Just Play It In Octaves" – Streamlined Improvisation

Montgomery's improvisations on *A Day In The Life* are streamlined compared to his earlier work in traditional jazz settings—seven of the solos are under one minute in length, with two others clocking in at barely over a minute; by comparison, his solos in straight-ahead smaller groups that tend to last several minutes.[73] The only outlier (in terms of length) is Montgomery's solo on "A Day In The Life," which, at two minutes and ten seconds, is almost twice the length of the next longest solo (see Table 3). On Montgomery's more straight-ahead outings, he typically plays single note melodic lines until switching to his "octave" technique. On Montgomery's jazz-pop oriented albums, the guitarist often cuts to the chase; the single note lines are largely (though not entirely) eliminated, with the guitarist choosing to heed Taylor's apparent call to "just play it in octaves."[74] Indeed, on *A Day In The Life,* eight of the ten solos are comprised *entirely* of the octave technique; only "Angel" and "Trust in

[71]"Watch What Happens" eventually became a minor hit as recorded by Lena Horne in 1970, rising to #119 on the *Billboard* Hot 100 chart in 1970.

[72]Ted Gioia, *The History of Jazz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 324. Gioia's pejorative use of the word "cover" here is interesting, as jazz musicians typically perform "versions" of standard tunes, yet "covers" are typically within the purveyance of rock music and musicians. Gioia insinuates that the "covering" of a Beatles tune is beneath the artistry of Montgomery, yet the distinction between this other jazz versioning practices is unclear. For a detailed discussion of cover tunes and their role in rock music, see Gabriel Solis, "I Did It My Way: Rock and the Logic of Covers," *Popular Music and Society* 33, no.3 (2010), 297–318.

[73]Even a casual listen to one of Montgomery's straight-ahead albums like *Full House* or *Smokin' At The Half Note* will make this point abundantly clear.

[74]Ingram, *Wes Montgomery*, 37.

Table 3. Wes Montgomery's solos on *A Day In The Life*: approach and overall length.

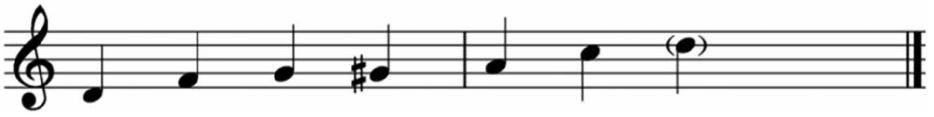
Song	Approach – Octaves or Single Note Lines?	Length (min:sec)
"A Day In The Life"	Octaves – whole solo	2:10
"Watch What Happens"	Single Note Lines – whole solo	0:44
"When A Man Loves A Woman"	Octaves – whole solo	0:26
"California Nights"	Octaves – whole solo	1:06
"Angel"	Single Note Lines – whole solo	0:50
"Eleanor Rigby"	Octaves – whole solo	0:42
"Willow Weep For Me"	Octaves – whole solo	0:52
"Windy"	Octaves – whole solo	0:28
"Trust in Me"	Single Note Lines – whole solo	0:56
"The Joker"	Octaves – whole solo	1:03

Me" feature Montgomery playing single note lines.[75] Overall, the short solos dominated by the octave technique suggests the curtailing of improvisation in order to appeal to mainstream pop listeners who may have had less experience with lengthy and overly complex jazz extemporizations.

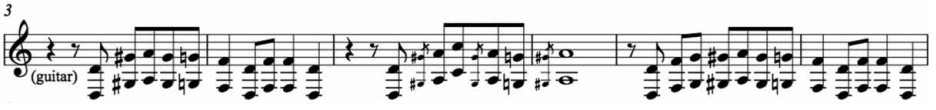
Another streamlining practice can be found in the area of melodic complexity: during many of his improvisations on *A Day In The Life,* Montgomery focuses heavily on the pentatonic and blues scales, oftentimes at the expense of 9ths, 11ths, 13ths, and chromaticism. In his solo on "A Day In The Life," (which, as previously mentioned, is his longest solo on the album) he veers from the D minor blues scale only three occasions: the "E" notes in bars 34, 46 and 48. It is noteworthy that in bars 46 and 48 the guitarist repeats the "E" several times in order to highlight the departure from D blues. (see Examples 1.1 and 1.5). Within this limited pitch collection Montgomery manages to weave an intricate and captivating solo, utilizing what Aaron West refers to as "focused lyricism."[76] One example is in the opening of the solo, where the guitarist constructs a passage of antecedent and consequent phrases that display Montgomery's refined mastery as an improviser (Example 1.2). This type of invention pervades the solo: themes are stated and developed, at times altered via diminution (Example 1.3) or octave displacement (Example 1.4), but throughout a clear melody remains of paramount importance. It is this approach that made Montgomery ideal as a crossover artist—he weaved together solos that were succinct and satisfying examples of jazz improvisation while also resisting overly complex or dissonant passages that may turn off mainstream listeners.

This streamlining of Montgomery's improvisational activity may suggest a compromised art that leans towards crass commercialism. But, the practice of playing simple, direct bluesy phrases was not foreign to Montgomery—it is a crucial part of hard bop and soul jazz, genres with which Montgomery is closely associated. Indeed, West has documented that structuring an entire solo around a single blues scale was a crucial

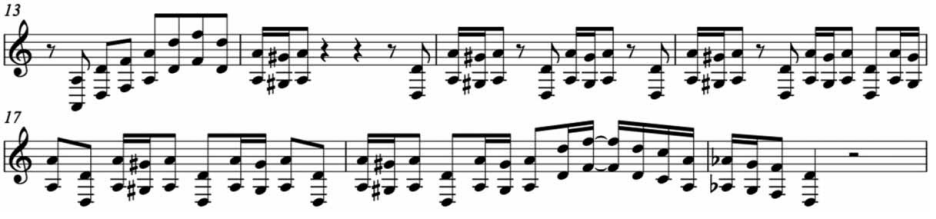
[75]Interestingly, these solos are comprised of *only* single note lines. In no solo on this album does he move from single note lines to the octave technique or vice versa.
[76]West, "Caught," 64–65.



Example 1.1 The "D" blues scale.



Example 1.2 Opening section of Wes Montgomery's guitar solo on "A Day In The Life".



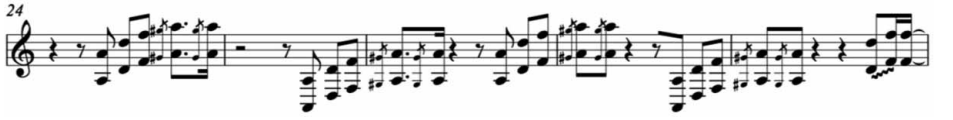
Example 1.3 Bars 13–19 of Wes Montgomery's guitar solo on "A Day In The Life".

component of hard bop practice.[77] Thus, in streamlining his solos to create bluesy melodic statements, Montgomery is calling upon his experience in hard bop and soul jazz, a background that emboldens him to execute these "focused" solos with conviction.[78] Ted Gioia notes that Montgomery's style was well suited to this sort of crossover appeal: "Of this generation of guitarists, Wes Montgomery stood out as the most skillful in combining commercial appeal with mature artistry. An incisive soloist with a [*sic*] unsurpassed gift for melodic improvisation, Montgomery was an ideal candidate for 'crossover' success as a pop jazz star. His recordings cover a wide gamut—from straight-ahead to soul jazz to mood music—but his singular talent gave even the most blatantly commercial efforts a stamp of artistry."[79]

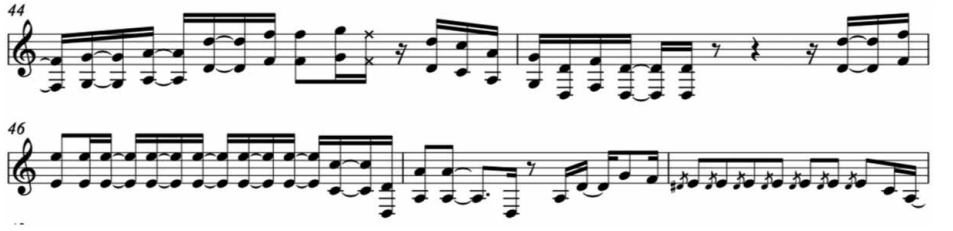
[77]West analyzes Lee Morgan's solo on "The Sidewinder" to illustrate this point ("Caught," 14-15). Other hard bop and soul jazz artists employed this technique, at times to the tune of commercial success. Jimmy Smith and Ramsey Lewis are examples of soul jazz artists who appeared on the Billboard charts in the 1960s. Even though these artists had crossover success in the years preceding Montgomery's own, the musical attributes of their albums are decidedly different than the jazz-pop formula being presented here. For more information on soul jazz as a crossover genre, see ibid., 11–18.

[78]While it is true that hard bop and soul jazz are commonly considered squarely within the jazz tradition, there are some that consider these genres to be corrupted versions of earlier forms of jazz. Cf. Leroi Jones, *Blues People* (New York: Morrow Quill Paperbacks, 1963), 217.

[79]Gioia, *History*, 323. Gioia's praise here is ironic when juxtaposed with his comment regarding Montgomery's relegation to playing "cover" tunes as discussed above.



Example 1.4 Bars 24–28 of Wes Montgomery's guitar solo on "A Day In The Life".



Example 1.5 Bars 44–48 of Wes Montgomery's guitar solo on "A Day In The Life".

Straight-Eighth Grooves

Another distinctive characteristic of *A Day In The Life* is the ubiquity of straight-eighth grooves. Seven out the ten tracks have a straight-eighth beat: the only tunes featuring swung-eighths are "Willow Weep For Me" and "Trust In Me," both of which are ballads, and "When A Man Loves A Woman," which features a 6/8 groove reminiscent of the chart-topping version performed by Percy Sledge. By incorporating a majority of tunes with straight-eighths, Taylor shifts the overall feel of the album away from traditional jazz swing and towards the sound of other styles that had yielded more recent success in the popular marketplace, such as pop and bossa nova. Montgomery's use of straight-eighth grooves is less surprising considering that this rhythmic setting was common in hard bop and soul jazz. The crossover appeal of those genres has been attributed, in part, to the funky straight-eighth feel. As West states,

> Soul jazz was not based entirely on the typical jazz swing pattern. The "even eighth" pattern was an integral part of popular music in the 1960s and was adopted by many soul jazz artists. Songs such as Herbie Hancock's "Watermelon Man," Lee Morgan's "The Sidewinder," and Ramsey Lewis's "The 'In' Crowd" utilize a non-swing drum pattern. Swing is an important characteristic of mainstream jazz, but this pattern, used prominently in soul jazz, is an antecedent to the prominent backbeat feel of crossover jazz in the early 1970s.[80]

Although setting a Wes Montgomery performance with a straight-eighth groove was not completely radical, the majority of such tunes on *A Day In The Life* are bossa novas, not hard bop or soul jazz. Of the seven tunes with a straight-eighth beat, six feature a feel that is akin to bossa nova.[81] Creed Taylor was no stranger to the Brazilian

[80]West, "Caught," 17.

[81]The six tunes that feature grooves that are akin to bossa nova are "Watch What Happens," "California Nights," "Angel," "Eleanor Rigby," "Windy" and "The Joker."

sound—earlier in the 1960s he had substantial success producing crossover bossa nova records: *Jazz Samba,* featuring Stan Getz and Charlie Byrd, was released in 1962 and rose to the *Billboard 200* #1 position; *Getz/Gilberto* peaked at #2 on the *Billboard 200* chart and won several Grammy awards, including Album of the Year, in 1965. The tunes featured on *A Day In The Life* could not be mistaken for traditional bossa novas, as the composers of these tunes are not of Brazilian origin, yet it is clear that Taylor was aiming to capitalize on this trend in popular music in addition to nodding to current rock/pop which was dominated by straight-eighth grooves.[82]

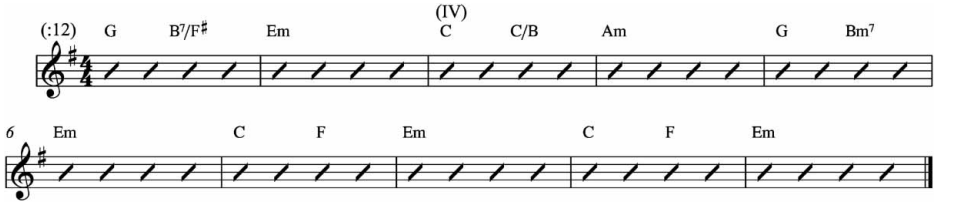
In contrast, the beat selected for "A Day In The Life" is a laid-back funky groove, one that is far removed from the Beatles version. Indeed, it is clear from Herbie Hancock's opening bluesy piano fill that this particular groove owes a great deal more to soul jazz than to bossa nova. Furthermore, that Taylor selected "A Day In The Life" as the album's opening track reflects the relative importance of the soul jazz aesthetic: on an album that is comprised primarily of bossas and ballads, an arrangement that features a soul jazz-esque version of a Beatles tune is the first thing that the listener hears.

Bringing the (Soul) Jazz to the Pop

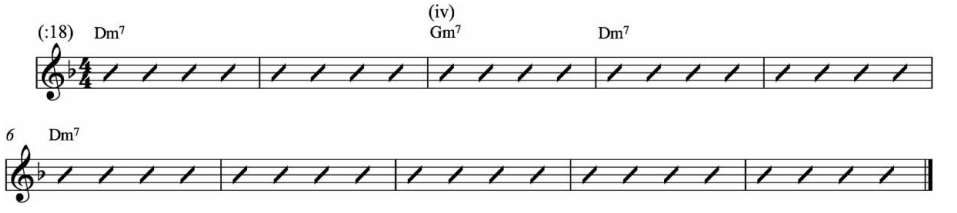
In addition to the variation in groove, "A Day In The Life" is also drastically reworked in the areas of harmony and form. From the outset, it is clear that arranger Don Sebesky is content to dispose of certain aspects of the original tune—for example, the chord progression during the introduction of the Beatles' version is ignored in favor of a static vamp on D minor. The only harmonic motion Montgomery's version retains from the original is the movement up a fourth in the third bar, although in this case it is a minor iv chord instead of the Beatles' major IV (see Examples 2.1 and 2.2). The form of Montgomery's version displays some of the same idiosyncrasies of the version by the Beatles, albeit with some rounding out. The first three verses of the Beatles' version, which come out to 10, 9 and 9½ bars (one bar of 2/4 is included at the end of the phrase) are slightly altered to 10, 9 and 9 in the Montgomery version. The 27-bar bridge in the Beatles' version is drastically shortened, with Sebesky opting for a short four-bar section which functions as the pre-solo send-off.

On the one hand, these formal and harmonic alterations can be read via the process of streamlining: a musical arrangement that, in its simplicity, might better resemble mainstream popular music. This argument, while straightforward, doesn't account for the full picture: why make a drastic alteration to a tune intended to be familiar to a mass audience? As mentioned earlier, "A Day In The Life" contains two elements—simplified soloing based on the blues scale and a funky straight-eighth groove—that reflect soul jazz aesthetics rather than contemporary pop. This is once again the case regarding the harmonic progression. In the opening portion of "A Day In The Life," one can see two relevant musical techniques. First, an open,

[82]These tunes are certainly not "rock," as they lack the characteristic aggressiveness associated with the genre, but the overall feel resulting from the bossa nova groove along with the other aspects of the production could be categorized as "light rock."



Example 2.1 Harmonic progression during the first verse of the Beatles' "A Day In The Life".



Example 2.2 Harmonic progression during the first verse of Wes Montgomery's version of "A Day In The Life".

bluesy vamp is characteristic of soul jazz.[83] Second, the harmonic motion of i–iv–i is a defining characteristic of blues progressions and a slight variant on the plagal motion common to soul jazz that connects the genre to gospel music.[84] Indeed, the majority of the tune is set on the harmonic structure of a single-chord vamp (on D minor), or on the motion from i-iv-i, creating a harmonic palate that is more akin to soul jazz than to the Beatles' original.

Another interpolation of the soul jazz aesthetic can be seen in "Windy." From the beginning of the tune through the end of the first chorus, the form proceeds according to the composers' original plan—an intro, two verses and a chorus, following which Montgomery's version takes an unexpected but significant turn. In the Association's well-known version, the next passage features an instrumental statement of the melody over a I–♭VII–IV–V chord progression. Montgomery's version also includes an instrumental section, but instead incorporates a I–♭VII–♭VI–V structure, a close variant on the "Hit The Road Jack" progression.[85] The guitarist takes a brief solo

[83]See Ramsey Lewis' 1965 crossover hit "The 'In' Crowd" which features an extended one-chord vamp. The fact that this tune rose to #5 on the *Billboard* Hot 100 chart was certainly not lost on Taylor or Montgomery.

[84]For an elaboration on the connection between soul jazz, gospel music and the plagal cadence, see West, "Caught," 15–16. I stipulate here that the iv–i motion is a "variant" because a conventional plagal cadence would be in the major mode (i.e. IV–I).

[85]"Hit the Road Jack" was written by Percy Mayfield but made famous by Ray Charles in 1961. Many subsequent artists covered the song and the chord progression is iconic of soul jazz and rhythm and blues. I say that Montgomery's "Windy" includes a "variant" on the "Hit The Road Jack" progression because the Ray Charles version includes a minor i chord in contrast to Montgomery's major I. Considering Creed Taylor's penchant for choosing repertoire that had previously charted on the *Billboard Hot* 100, it is worthy to note that Ray Charles's version was a *Billboard* #1 hit.

over this section, with a subsequent orchestral sweep that leaves no doubt that the chorus has returned and we have returned to the original program. When considering this use of the "Hit The Road Jack" progression, the juxtaposition is striking and the intent is clear—once again there is an interpolation of a bluesy soul jazz aesthetic within what might seem, on the surface, to be a relatively innocuous instrumental version of a pop tune. That "Windy" ended up being Montgomery's highest charting single suggests that this combination of soul jazz with 1960s pop was a winning combination that resonated with contemporary audiences.

Though Montgomery, Taylor, and Sebesky are often maligned for their aesthetic choices on *A Day In The Life*, those criticisms are typically based on the surface reading that the music has been watered-down and that the guitarist's artistry has been compromised. What I suggest is that there is more at work here—the inclusion of a soul jazz aesthetic in "A Day In The Life" and "Windy" supports the notion that there was a concerted effort to utilize aspects of Montgomery's African American musical heritage within a contemporary pop framework. Rather than strip the music of all of its "blackness," Taylor and Montgomery found a way to merge genres, in the process articulating a kind of jazz-pop. The prominent nature of these two tunes—"A Day In The Life" as the album opener and "Windy" as the single—suggest that Taylor was convinced that these tunes were distinctive and would yield commercial success. More so, this merging of pop with distinctly African American styles is reminiscent of the Brill Building formula—smoothing out the so-called "rough edges" in order to package a black artist for a predominantly white audience.

Conclusion

After *A Day In The Life*, Montgomery recorded two more albums on A & M before his untimely death on June 15, 1968. *Down Here On The Ground* follows a formula similar to that of its predecessor.[86] It features octave-laden guitar playing and orchestral accompaniments, though the size of the ensemble is scaled back and Montgomery is afforded slightly more improvisational space, especially on his original composition "The Other Man's Grass Is Always Greener." Most of the material was contemporary and the album was successful in the popular marketplace, reaching #38 on the *Billboard 200* chart. ("Georgia On My Mind" also crossed over as a single into the pop mainstream to reach #91 on the *Billboard Hot 100* chart.) The posthumously released *Road Song* continued in the same vein, albeit this time accompanied by a Baroque ensemble that creates a slightly different feel from the previous albums.[87] Predictably, the album claimed mainstream success, reaching #94 on the *Billboard 200* chart.

Wes Montgomery is a prime example of the contradictory pressures facing many jazz musicians: By the mid-1960s, he was regarded by the jazz cognoscenti as the one of the greatest guitarists of his generation, while still struggling to support his wife and six children. It is understandable that an individual in this situation would

[86]Wes Montgomery, *Down Here On The Ground*, A&M 3006, 1968, LP.
[87]Wes Montgomery, *Road Song*, A&M 3012, 1968, LP.

find the notion of crossing over into a wider marketplace to be agreeable. Montgomery notes with a characteristically pragmatic approach: "My a & r men and arrangers usually work with me on the recordings. I accept their suggestions in numerous cases, sometimes even when I'm doubtful myself. So far, though, things have worked out better than I thought."[88] As a result of his crossover efforts, Wes Montgomery became one of the most famous jazz musicians in the popular marketplace. Toward the end of his life, he was featured in *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines and received the *Record World* award for "1967 Jazz Man of the Year." This kind of success brought much-needed financial security: "Montgomery, in his early forties, the father of six, was earning the kind of money he had long deserved … in a period when jazz was supposed to be dead or dying."[89]

Although it is tempting to define this success strictly in terms of simplistic commercialism, my argument is that there is more at play in the case of Montgomery's crossover albums during the mid-1960s. The guitarist's "artistry," as mentioned by Gioia above, is certainly a factor; he was able to deliver the streamlined content with taste and melodic invention that proved to be a winning combination. I have also demonstrated a concerted effort on the part of Taylor and Montgomery to incorporate a soul jazz aesthetic into an otherwise deliberately commercialized pop sound. While Taylor was trying to free Montgomery's records from some "jazz" limitations, the music retains enough jazz elements that I still consider it a form of jazz, albeit a new kind. The formula I have detailed above —contemporary popular repertoire, streamlined improvisations, lavish production and straight-eighth grooves with a nod toward the African American styles of hard bop and soul jazz—came to form the template for the smooth jazz movement that continues to have mass commercial appeal to the current day. [90,91]

Through a detailed analysis of Montgomery's most commercially successful release, *A Day In The Life*, we can see the emergence of a type of jazz-pop that was viable in the

[88]Quinn, "Thumb's,"18.

[89]Giddins, *Riding*, 260. Although many popular black artists in the early 1960s did not reap the financial rewards from the hits on which they performed, it seems that Montgomery did establish financial security through his more commercial records. In addition to Giddins's comment above, guitarist Barney Kessell noted that Montgomery was "able to, as a result of the success of his recordings, provide for his family, many things that not only did they need, but had not received in a long time, because he had not really done well, financially until he came into his own. So it was a joy to him to be able to provide for them when they really needed it" (Ingram, *Wes Montgomery*, 39). For more information on the exploitation of popular black artists during the early–mid 1960s see Emerson, *There's Always Magic*, 233–234.

[90]Carson defines smooth jazz as a music that "blends jazz instrumentation, pop production techniques, and an R&B aesthetic into a style that foregrounds the instrumental soloist similar to the manner in which the vocalist is featured in popular music," a definition that supports this point. Carson, "Bridging," 3. The formula described here was subsequently used to great commercial success on recordings produced by Taylor for his own CTI (Creed Taylor International) label with George Benson, Grover Washington, Stanley Turrentine and others. Although Carson makes a strong case for the inclusion smooth jazz in the scholarly discourse, his contention that the style was made "critically and economically viable as a result of Taylor's work with … Grover Washington Jr.," is problematic considering Montgomery codified the same formula several years earlier. See ibid., 5. Regardless, Taylor's subsequent work for CTI shows how this formula was developed in the 1970s and beyond. For more information on CTI see West, "Caught," 68.

[91]Even though commentators typically link the origins of smooth jazz to the jazz fusion era of the late 1960s and early–mid 1970s, West notes that smooth jazz has a more in common with soul jazz and "early crossover artists like Ramsey Lewis and Wes Montgomery" ("Caught," 7–10).

mainstream marketplace at a time when most jazz was marginalized. Creed Taylor played a vital role in this endeavor—through keen awareness of market tastes, he was able to mold Montgomery's releases for a wider audience. The Taylor–Montgomery formula was prefigured by other commercially successful producer–artist relationships from the previous two decades that produced crossover hits, the primary difference being that Montgomery was a jazz instrumentalist, not a vocalist. In this way, it was a truly innovative adaptation of pop production techniques in a jazz context. Montgomery was not the only jazz instrumentalist in the 1960s to achieve success—Ramsey Lewis and Jimmy Smith released commercially successful albums earlier in the decade—but he was the first to embrace this producer–artist formula that has continued to prove so enduring.

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Abstract

Wes Montgomery was one of the few jazz musicians in the mid-1960s to achieve crossover success in the popular marketplace. Like other jazz artists at the time, the guitarist chose to pack his albums with interpretations of current pop hits. Unlike most of his contemporaries, however, Montgomery embraced a savvy producer, Creed Taylor, who molded the overall *sound* of his recordings for maximum impact in the pop marketplace. Their partnership did indeed yield several commercially successful albums during this time period, the most popular of which was the 1967 release *A Day In The Life*. The primary purpose of this article is to examine this album and parse the reasons for its commercial success. Through detailed musical analysis of *A Day In The Life*, we can see the creation of the new genre of "jazz-pop," one that was viable in the popular marketplace at a time when traditional jazz was marginalized. Furthermore, Wes Montgomery's *A Day In The Life* represents a seminal example of modern crossover jazz, making detailed understanding of this work crucial to a jazz historiography that has, in recent years, been expanded to include more commercialized forms.