

Mercy, Mercy, Mercy

Written by bluesever

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By the early 1960s hard bop was proudly displaying its affinity with R&B. At the forefront of the "soul jazz" movement was Cannonball Adderley, a dynamic alto saxophonist who made his reputation playing alongside John Coltrane in Miles Davis's extraordinary bands of the late 1950s. He played with Miles Davis as a sideman, including the 'Kind of Blue' album. After he left Miles Davis, Cannonball started his own successful quintet. Cannonball viewed himself as a jazz educator, always trying to teach people about jazz and bringing younger players in his band.

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One of those young players was Joe Zawinul, who later headed one of the greatest fusion bands ever, Weather Report. While in Cannonball's band, Joe wrote "Mercy, Mercy, Mercy."



Cannonball Adderley

Cannonball formed his own quintet with brother Nat in 1959 and subsequently won over

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audiences with such successful soul-jazz crossover recordings as 1960's 'Dem Dirty Blues' and 1961's 'Nancy Wilson and Cannonball Adderley.' The Adderley brothers (Cannonball on alto and Nat on cornet) were real pioneers in developing soul jazz; their quintet was incorporating soul sounds into its style back in the 1950s. Joining the Adderleys are Zawinul alternately on piano and electric piano, Victor Gaskin on bass, and Roy McCurdy on drums.



Cannonball & Nat Adderley

The tune "Mercy, Mercy, Mercy," was written by Joe Zawinul in 1966, and was recorded on Cannonball Adderley's album "Mercy, Mercy, Mercy! 'Live at The Club'." "The Club" was the former Club DeLisa on the South Side of Chicago, whose owner, E. Rodney Jones, was a friend of Adderley's and got Adderley to go along with a clever bit of marketing for his venue. Jones wrote the liner notes to the album and spun a nice tale about how Capitol Records set up its equipment in his club one night and it just happened to be the night when Adderley's band was in such incredible form that they decided to make an album out of it. In reality, the album was recorded at Capitol's studio in Hollywood with an audience invited in to provide the "live" feel. Legend has it that the electric piano Zawinul used to record "Mercy, Mercy, Mercy" was previously used by Ray Charles.



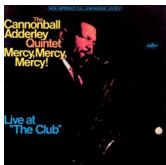
Chicago, Club De Lisa, 1954

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The song was a surprise commercial success, reaching No.2 on the Soul chart and No. 11 on the Billboard Hot 100 charts in 1967. "Mercy, Mercy, Mercy" is not a blues, although it is given that sense by Zawinul's particularly inventive chord progression. Harmony of the tune has a strong Blues and Gospel sound. The chord progression oscillates between Bb and Eb, which is the four chord in the key of Bb, for the first 15 bars. The lack of much harmonic change, allows the soloist to explore a wide array of scale choices. Initially, try improvising on the tones of the major pentatonic scale (1-2-3-5-6); these are the tones of the melody in a different order. The next area to explore is the Blues scale (Bb-Db-Eb-E-F-Ab). Using a combination of these two choices will work well. The previously mentioned scales are just two of many choices. The final 5 bars start by going up to the five chord (similar to a Blues), then travels to the two chord, the three chord and lastly six to five, before returning to the top of the form. All the chords in the last five bars are contained within the key of Bb.



Mercy, Mercy, Mercy! 'Live at The Club'

"Mercy Mercy Mercy" is a great tune. In February of 1967, Johnny "Guitar" Watson & Larry Williams wrote lyrics to "Mercy, Mercy, Mercy," scoring a hit on the R & B charts. The Buckingham's recorded the tune in August of 1967, which climbed to #5 on the pop charts. The Mauds also recorded the song the same year with lyrics by Curtis Mayfield, but the release of this version was somewhat overshadowed by the success of The Buckingham's' cover.

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The Buckinghams single, 23 June 1967, is the jazz fusion of a jazz rock band



Cannonball Adderley Quintet