

A Treasure Trove of Jazz and Soul Concert Videos on Quincy Jones's Streaming Site

[Richard Brod](#) December 18, 2020

In a concert film now available on Qwest TV, Nina Simone performs live at the Olympia, in Paris, in 1970.

Watching a video recording of a concert is never quite the same as being there, yet at its best a filmed show can amplify the music with a cinematic dimension, creating revelatory images and foregrounding charismatic presences. That's what an extraordinary new trove of sixty-six concert films, sourced from France's national audiovisual archive and released on the [Qwest TV](#) Web site, offers. (Qwest is a streaming site and TV channel, founded in 2017 by [Quincy Jones](#) and the music producer Reza Ackbaraly.) The performances, ranging from the nineteen-fifties through the nineteen-eighties, feature many of the twentieth-century heroes of Black music, from [Duke Ellington](#) and Ella Fitzgerald to [Aretha Franklin](#) and [James Brown](#), but the rediscoveries of rarely seen artists (in particular, jazz artists) are as significant as the spotlighting of celebrated ones. The Qwest collection is perhaps the most significant treasure chest of archival jazz concerts to emerge in years.

Earlier this year, an enriching but minor [Thelonious Monk discovery](#), "Palo Alto," from 1968, emerged, but the Monk concert that has surfaced on Qwest—"Thelonious Monk Quartet: Live in Amiens, France," from 1966—is major. (Like many of the concerts in the collection, it's divided into two parts.) Monk performs in his regular quartet of the time—the tenor saxophonist Charlie Rouse, the bassist Larry Gales, and the drummer Ben Riley—and they play many of his best-known compositions (including "Blue Monk" and "Rhythm-a-Ning"), but they do so with a collective inspiration that's fuelled by Monk's energetic enthusiasm. This is on view from the start, in his fierce accompaniment to Rouse, and continues in his solos—which are seen from a camera perched overhead, displaying his command of the entire keyboard and revealing, in his darting reach along its length, the process of musical thought in action.

"Duke Ellington and His Orchestra: Live at the Pleyel Concert Hall, Paris," from 1958, features the bandleader in expansive form, both at the piano and in his conversational interludes with the audience. The concert spotlights his great soloists from the time—notably, Johnny Hodges on "M. C. Blue" and Paul Gonsalves on several numbers, particularly "Take the A Train," the band's theme song. In the latter piece, after Ray Nance's exuberant scat singing, Ellington pulls the vigorous tune down-tempo, and the tenor saxophonist Gonsalves solos, in a slow and sinuous slide that he ornaments with

filigreed intimacies before bursting into an ardent rush to the finish.

["Nina Simone: Live at the Olympia, Paris,"](#) from 1970, presents her with a sextet (four other musicians and two backing singers) and finds her radiant and reflective; she's energetic and rhapsodic at the piano, and when, in the middle of "My Eyes Can Only Look at You," she gets up to dance, it's as if she's both casting a spell and bestowing a benediction.

In "James Brown and the Famous Flames: Live at the Olympia, Paris," from 1966, the camerawork is part of the story. Brown is, as ever, in exhilarating overdrive, and very long and very extreme closeups of him, from the side, singing "Prisoner of Love" and "Maybe the Last Time," find him on the verge of a frame-shattering frenzy—one that's realized sonically in "Please, Please, Please" when he drops to his knees and keens into the mike to create a bone-splintering sound akin to natural-voiced feedback. (Also, at the end, the camera fixes its attention on a notable member of the audience, Serge Gainsbourg.)

The pianist Ahmad Jamal, a key influence on [Miles Davis](#) in the fifties, arranged, in effect, orchestrally for his piano trio; the group, in "Ahmad Jamal Trio: Live in Paris," from 1971, showcases the teeming orchestral power of Jamal's own pianism through two extended pieces in which his solos display an overwhelming yet unfailingly lyrical virtuosity, an outpouring of imagination along with sheer

sonic majesty.

There are three performances by Miles Davis in the archive, all of them recommended. The earliest, "Miles Davis Quintet: Live at Antibes Jazz Festival," from July of 1969, features his great "Lost Quintet" (including [Wayne Shorter](#), Chick Corea, Dave Holland, and Jack DeJohnette), so called because the group never recorded in the studio. The heat of this concert is palpable in the tension between Davis and Shorter—Davis plays with a tautly focussed intensity, but Shorter plays with a fury that tends toward free jazz, and the rhythm section is all too happy to follow along into the vortex. (It's also among Davis's last recordings of his longtime standards "Milestones" and "'Round Midnight.") Later in 1969, "Miles Davis Quintet: Live at Newport Jazz Festival, Paris," features the same group in shifting repertory and with a different tone—tighter, fiercer, more rock-oriented. The contrast of Davis's work with Shorter's and the rest of the group's is all the more conspicuous here, and presages the break that was about to occur: this is the quintet's last recorded performance. Meanwhile, the misnamed video "Miles Davis Quintet: Live at Newport Jazz Festival, Paris," from 1973, doesn't feature a quintet; it features the trumpeter with a new band (a septet) and a new style—an electric trumpet, as the announcer explains, with a wah-wah pedal; a new funkified and percussion-heavy sound that also includes two electric guitars (as well as an electric organ that Davis himself

plays); and a new group concept, in which his leadership becomes a kind of conducting through long, freely flowing performances that morph from one into another at a nod of his head. Davis's own solos are radically fragmented into blasts and runs that both mesh with the hefty beat and burst through it.

"Aretha Franklin: Live at Antibes Jazz Festival," from 1970, finds her as a jazz singer, backed by a jazz band. She opens the show with pliable and breezy renditions of "There's No Business Like Show Business" and "Come Back to Me," before launching jubilantly into her regular repertory—"(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction," "Respect," "(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman," and "I Say a Little Prayer"—and then sitting down at the piano to accompany herself, thrillingly, in "Eleanor Rigby," "(Sweet Sweet Baby) Since You've Been Gone," and "Dr. Feelgood (Love Is a Serious Business)," in which her gospel-inspired piano playing launches her singing with a special fervor.

The four parts of "Jazz at the Philharmonic: Live at the Pleyel Concert Hall, Paris," from 1960, feature a variety of groups, ranging from the taut and bluesy ferocity of the Cannonball Adderley Quintet to an octet of (nearly) all-stars, including the founding artist of jazz tenor saxophone, Coleman Hawkins, and the drummer Jo Jones (who more or less invented the modern concept of swing, with Count Basie, in the thirties). In Part 2, Jones cuts loose with one of the most imaginative and

entertaining drum solos I've ever observed—he starts with the percussive whisper of brushes, switches to sticks, and then drums with his hands, delighting in the power of the drums themselves and in the hold that they exert over his amazed audience.

The trumpeter Charles Tolliver formed an unusual group, Music Inc., in 1969—it featured him with piano, bass, and drums, but no other horn, placing an extraordinary physical demand on him. He meets it, excitingly, in two different concerts. In “Charles Tolliver’s Music Inc.: Live in Paris, Part 1,” from 1971, he’s with his longtime associate, the pianist Stanley Cowell (who died on December 17th, at the age of seventy-nine), and the band, which plays hard-rhythmic, complex post-bop with a tinge of the heaven-storming clamor of free jazz. In the last two numbers, when Cowell switches to electric piano, the energy overflows into Tolliver’s blazing trumpet fanfares. In the second concert, “Charles Tolliver Quartet: Live in Paris,” from 1973, the rhythm trio is different, and Tolliver stands out in front of it, energetically carrying the bulk of solo space (and seemingly pushing himself to the edge of exhaustion) with some harrowingly long and spectacularly high-energy cadenzas.

The trumpeter Don Cherry—a founding member of [Ornette Coleman](#)’s revolutionary quartet from the late fifties and early sixties—does a two-part set, “Don Cherry Trio: Live in Paris,” from 1971, that distills a kaleidoscopic and comprehensive sensibility into his

tightly meshed interactions with the bassist Johnny Dyani and the drummer Okay Temiz. Cherry starts out on the wood flute and then moves to the piano, where he plays jauntily rhythmic and catchy melodies, which he also sings, in a breathy chant that's reminiscent of [Pharoah Sanders](#)'s world-music cosmos of the late sixties. Then he brings out his pocket trumpet (it has a very short bell) for some darting, Cubistic improvisations, before returning to the rocking, songful groove.

I'm saving the best—and the biggest surprise—for last. The great Bud Powell, the onetime associate and pianistic peer of [Charlie Parker](#), appears with the bassist Pierre Michelot and the American drummer Kenny Clarke (the seminal bebop drummer) to exhilarating effect in a pair of videos, "1959: A Night at the Club Saint-Germain" and "Live from the Blue Note Paris," from 1960, with appearances by other musicians. In the latter, they're joined by the saxophonist Lucky Thompson (also an associate of both Parker and Davis on historic recordings) and, more surprisingly, by another pianist, who's billed in the credits as Alice McCloud but whose name was actually Alice McLeod—and who's better known by her married name, [Alice Coltrane](#). She was about twenty-three at the time of the recording, and her profound originality—in evidence from the very start, when she accompanies the singer Billie Poole—is matched by her precocity. She's part of a trio, a quartet, and a quintet, and throughout she delivers rich and

complex chords, scintillating dissonances, and irregularly shaped melodic phrases that resound with spiritual yearning; her uniquely oceanic, questing sound is suggested in the distinctive position of her hands at the keyboard. She's already playing in a way that links her, from across the ocean, to what [John Coltrane](#) (whom she hadn't yet met) was doing; this performance makes clear that their eventual encounter was a musical, artistic, and intellectual partnership even before it happened.

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