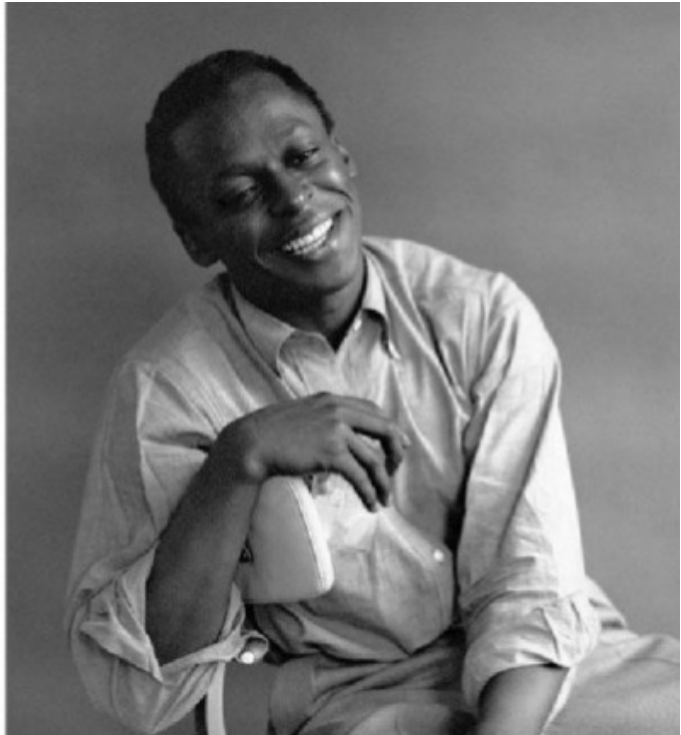


More jazz than Mozart

Our chief executive, Simon Roberts, on musical analogies for tackling the climate challenge. March 2020



Mozart and Miles Davis. “Jazz is the big brother of revolution. Revolution follows it around.” (Miles Davis)

Now Bristol has published its highly ambitious new [One City Climate Strategy](#), underpinned by [CSE’s analysis](#) (click here to open the project page) it raises questions of how the city needs to organise itself to make the radical changes the strategy sets out.

What do I need to do? When do I need to act?

Whose permission do I need? Who gets to decide? Who else needs to be involved? When does it all start?

Many people expect specific answers to these questions, as if, along with the strategy, there can be a very detailed and co-ordinated plan, with each player allocated a role and being told when to act. Like an orchestra performing a great Mozart symphony.

Indeed, strategies are often presented – and nearly always engaged with – as if they were the score for an orchestra to perform. And the more complicated the issue, the more



intricate the orchestration and the bigger the ensemble. Each instrument has all its own part written out, from overture to finale. Everyone from first violin to second bassoon knows when to come in, what notes to play and when to stop. And with a flick of a baton, the conductor cues in the players, sets the tempo and establishes the mood.

It's a satisfying analogy, not least because it suggests certainty and harmony and managed activity with someone in charge.

But tackling the climate emergency and getting to net zero in ten years (or even 30) isn't a symphony anyone has written yet. Or ever could. It's too complex with too many uncertainties to be scored in detail – and far too much for a single conductor to manage.

The Bristol One City Climate Strategy doesn't even begin to pretend to be that symphonic score.

Time to improvise

So if it's not a symphony, what is it? I find it helpful to think of it as more like jazz than Mozart, and here's why.

In jazz, we know roughly what it needs to sound like. There's a structure and an underlying chord sequence that guides the musicians and provides harmonic shape to the performance. But there's no written score and no conductor. The One City Climate Strategy does something similar. It sets out a broad approach and the chord sequence (replacing gas boilers, phasing out petrol and diesel cars, reducing waste, cutting back on meat and flying etc), but leaves the detail (the notes and the timing) to the commitment and creativity of each member of the band.

It's jazz because everyone, having got their heads round that chord sequence, can make a contribution, from a single bass note to the most sophisticated and soaring refrains.

It's jazz because it works best when people listen to what others are playing and respond and build on each other's contribution.

It's jazz because there isn't actually anyone in charge who gives permission to join in and tells you what to play – so we have to improvise, and each take responsibility for what we play and when we start.

In Bristol, it's a jazz session that started some time ago. Many people and organisations are already in the groove with more picking up their instruments and joining in by the day. Now the chord sequence is laid out in the strategy, it's up to everyone to add their own contribution.

As jazz legend Miles Davis once said “Jazz is the big brother of revolution. Revolution follows it around.” Given the scale of transformation required to get Bristol to net zero by 2030, let's hope so.



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