



Vibrations in the Village: Live at the Village Gate
Seek & Listen: Live at the Penthouse
Rahsaan Roland Kirk (Resonance)
by Stuart Broomer

By any measure, Rahsaan Roland Kirk (who died just over 45 years ago at the age of 42) was an extraordinary musician. Blind and a master of the broad woodwinds category, he also managed to play his tenor simultaneously with a pair of obscure single reeds, a manzello (in the soprano range) and stritch (in the alto range), playing three-note harmony on theme statements, stretching his hands across keys that were sometimes modified to facilitate his remarkable goals. He could solo fluently on any and all of those horns and further augmented his collection of instruments with a standard flute, nose flute (a modified recorder), oboe and whistles. As fine as his studio records were, Kirk's live performances were more striking, his ebullient personality coming through his spontaneous commentaries and vocals as powerfully as through his winds, a fact strongly apparent in these two unearthed, archival, live recordings.

Vibrations in the Village: Live at the Village Gate comes from a particularly dark moment in history, taking place just days after the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Even under those circumstances, one hears the full range of Kirk's rich musical personality. Recorded over two nights, he is joined by stand-out bassist Henry Grimes, drummer Sonny Brown and three different pianists: Horace Parlan (who gets the bulk of the work), Mel Rhyne and Jane Getz. Kirk is happily stretching out from the beginning here, pushing his opening "Jump Up and Down" to fifteen joyous minutes, alternating three-horn theme statements with solo forays on each of his principal horns. Charles Mingus' "Ecclusiastics" includes a comic rap on prominent Southern segregationist governors, George Wallace and Orval Faubus, and there's a surfeit of blues on "Oboe Blues", with fine tenor expositions on the theme bracketing his oboe solo.

Seek & Listen: Live at the Penthouse comes from four years later (September 1967), and presents Kirk in Seattle with solid support from his working band of Rahn Burton (piano), Steve Novosel (bass) and Jimmy Hopps (drums). Recorded a week apart, the two discs represent different approaches, familiar material predominating on the first and Kirk originals on the second. The first emphasizes tuneful medleys, one beginning with Cole Porter's "Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye" on flute then continuing with an Ellington sequence of "I've Got It Bad (And That Ain't Good)", then "Sophisticated Lady" and "Satin Doll", the last with a three-horn theme followed by solos on tenor, manzello and flute. Another medley adds Kirk's own "Blues for C & T" to raucous versions of "Happy Days Are Here Again" and "Down by the Riverside". The second disc is more characteristic Kirk. The contemporary suicide ballad, Bobbie Gentry's "Ode to Billy Joe" becomes solid funk, while Ellington's "Prelude to a Kiss" is propelled by playful dissonance. The rest consists of originals, from the blues-drenched funk of "Flute Underground" and "Making Love After Hours" to the modal flight of "Lovellevelliloqui" and Kirk's most enduring composition, "Now Please Don't You Cry, Beautiful Edith".

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UNEARTHED GEM



Bremen 1965
Thelonious Monk (Sunnyside)
by Duck Baker

Thelonious Monk's years with Columbia Records, from 1962-68, marked the high point of his career in terms of work, record sales and visibility. This stretch enabled him to employ a stable working band throughout the period. Charlie Rouse was his tenor saxophonist for the duration, and Monk (who passed away 44 years ago this month at the age of 64) only changed drummers once and bass players twice. This was also the most heavily documented period of the pianist's career, so the question for listeners is how *Bremen 1965* compares with the dozens of recordings by the Monk-Rouse quartet we already have before us. For starters, the recording quality is excellent, but Rouse is low in the mix. And the program of Monk standards such as "Well You Needn't", "Epistrophy" and "Rhythm-a-ning" contains no surprises, reflecting the fact that Monk's focus was no longer

on new compositions or pushing boundaries, but rather on exploring in depth the territories he had discovered in the '40s and '50s. Some find fault with this, but is this fair? Miles Davis in concert worked with an even smaller repertoire, and one that many would say was less interesting. Some listeners might also consider the inclusion of some lengthy solos here by Larry Gales (bass) and Ben Riley (drums) a negative.

The most serious of these caveats would be the balance issue, the more so because Rouse is in interesting form here. Like most jazz musicians, he works out of a personal vocabulary, and it's no slight on him to admit that his vocabulary never seemed as limitless as that of the tenor geniuses who preceded him with Monk: Sonny Rollins, John Coltrane and Johnny Griffin. We can also admit that Monk fans are well acquainted with Rouse's vocabulary, so it's nice to hear him on nights when he's pushing beyond the familiar. But there is an unexpected benefit to this. With Monk's piano crowding in on the saxophone, the frankly outrageous nature of his accompaniment is impossible to miss. For this reason *Bremen 1965* can be strongly recommended to real Monk fans. His soloing is great too, of course. Nor are those bass and drum solos actually without interest—far from it. Riley especially is a most musical soloist.

For more info visit sunnysiderecords.com. "Brilliant Corners: A Tribute to Thelonious Monk" (featuring Helen Sung) is at Dizzy's Club Feb. 4. See Calendar.

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