

BOXED SET



1960-1964 Mono
John Coltrane (Atlantic-Rhino High Fidelity)
by George Kanzler

With only 2,000 copies pressed, this highly-sought after, recently-released vinyl boxed set encompasses six albums saxophonist John Coltrane made as a leader for Atlantic (excepting *The Avant-Garde*, the album he made as co-leader with Don Cherry, and *Bags and Trane* with Milt Jackson). To make the set even more of a collector's item, Rhino has reproduced the French, mono LPs, rather than the stereo American versions, while the gatefold LP covers reproduce both the French and American original front and back covers.

The title of the boxed set, however, is a bit deceptive: it reflects the years the six albums were released, not when they were made. Five of the discs were recorded between May 1959 and October 1960, while *Olé Coltrane* (the one non-quartet album in this set) was recorded May 25, 1961. And all were recorded on eight-track tape machines, so both the mono French and American stereo releases were actually mixed from those same sources. The music here, widely available in all formats, including streaming and CDs, represents an extraordinarily fertile period in Coltrane's *oeuvre*. He had recently left Miles Davis (though briefly returned for one final tour in Spring 1960), stepping out as a leader on his own. And he was brimming with ideas and concepts, both for his basic quartet and for larger units. It is remarkable how many of his most well-known compositions were first documented during the two years he recorded for Atlantic. They include the most ubiquitous of all: "Giant Steps", a rite of passage for aspiring saxophonists and a staple of jam sessions. And that same *Giant Steps* album (the first one he ever composed all the tracks for) contains one of his most covered ballads: "Naima".

The follow-up release, *Coltrane Jazz*, gives us a glimpse on one track of what would become the Classic Coltrane Quartet; the other seven feature the Miles Davis rhythm section of 1959: Wynton Kelly (piano), Paul Chambers (bass) and Jimmy Cobb (drums). Three of the six albums in this set, recorded over the course of just three days in October 1960, were with McCoy Tyner (piano), Elvin Jones (drums) and Steve Davis (bass), the latter eventually replaced by Jimmy Garrison, who would complete the classic quartet by 1962. And during those sessions Coltrane doubled, for the first time on record, on soprano, as heard on *My Favorite Things'* titular track, a two-chord modal reworking of the Rodgers and Hammerstein waltz from *The Sound of Music*, which became one of the saxophonist's most popular and requested numbers—and caused an ongoing wave of tenor players to adapt the soprano as a doubling horn. Coltrane also plays the straight saxophone on Cole Porter's "Ev'rytime We Say Goodbye", and he rounds the album out on tenor on Side Two with a pair of Gershwin show tunes: "Summertime", eschewing much of the melody and harmony in favor of a modal exploration, and "But Not for Me".

Also created during those three hyper-productive days in October 1960, was another unique piece of Coltrane's discography: *Coltrane Plays the Blues* (released in 1962), consisting of six very different and distinct blues penned by the leader, including a "Blues to Bechet" trio of soprano with just bass and drums. The third album from those sessions, *Coltrane's Sound*, was not released until 1964, almost three years after he had been recording for the Impulse! label. The album combined four Coltrane originals, ranging from the song-like "Central Park West" to the questing "Equinox", with two standards: "The Night Has a Thousand Eyes" and "Body and Soul". Atlantic released the last, and arguably most ambitious, album Coltrane recorded for the label, *Olé Coltrane*, five months after it was recorded, in November 1961 (only eight months after *My Favorite Things*). It included his frontline reed partner in his working band (a quintet) of the time: Eric Dolphy (listed as George Lane in the credits), plus Freddie Hubbard (trumpet) and Reggie Workman and Art Davis (bass), along with regulars Tyner and Jones. The album was recorded the same week, in May 1961, when Coltrane recorded a significantly larger ensemble for his *Africa/Brass* (Impulse!). The 18-minute title track of *Olé* has the two bassists interacting, creating a flamenco feel, while the soprano intertwines with Dolphy's flute and Hubbard's trumpet playing, creating what is one of Coltrane's most hypnotically arresting and enduring pieces.

The appeal of this boxed set, despite being readily available music, is not only the music itself, but the presentation. The French covers, save one, are photographs of Coltrane; inside the gatefolds are the original Atlantic covers (Martin Israel's semi-abstract, squiggly-colors of a Coltrane portrait on *Coltrane's Sound* is itself a piece of art well worth having). The dozen different covers exemplify the (lost) creative art of album covers from the LP era. Another lost art, available here, is comprehensive liner notes, which are not only informative, but helped flesh out the listener's experience of the music. Original liners from the Atlantic LPs include much biographical information as well as (courtesy of Ralph Gleason) informative interviews with the saxophonist. New notes on each album, by Syd Schwartz, provide the perspective of valuable contemporary insights, such as on the oft-overlooked *Coltrane's Sound*: "He's not concerned with playing the 'right' notes necessarily, he wants to play the real notes... There's no single thesis, but there's a gravitational center: a sense of reaching inward to pull something eternal out. Even when the form is familiar...the feeling is exploratory, reverent, and willing to live dangerously, so long as everyone is keeping it real."

For more info visit store.rhino.com. John Coltrane tributes this month include "Facing East: The Music of John Coltrane" (with José James + guests) at Blue Note May 1-3, "Miles of Trane" (with Michael Cruse, Patience Higgins, et al.) at Jackie Robinson Park May 2 (part of West Harlem Summer Jazz Festival), "Latin Side of Miles and Trane" (with Conrad Herwig) at Dizzy's Club May 21-24, "Miles & Coltrane at 100" (with Peter and Will Anderson) at Symphony Space Leonard Nimoy Thalia May 30, as well as "The World Within: The Global Sounds of John Coltrane" (with Irwin Hall) May 15-17 and Pablo Batista's "The Latin Side of John Coltrane" (with Conrad Herwig and Freddie Hendrix) May 28, both at South Jazz Kitchen (Philadelphia, PA). See *Calendar and 100 Miles Out*.



Live at the Hungry Brain
Jason Stein, Marilyn Crispell, Damon Smith, Adam Shead (Trost)
by Patrick Romanowski

Recorded in June 2023 at the iconic Hungry Brain, Chicago's incubator for emerging talent and a stage for avant garde improvisation, *Live at the Hungry Brain* brings together pianist Marilyn Crispell with Chicago-based bass clarinetist, Jason Stein, who has dedicated his career to exploring the sonic properties of this singular instrument. Joining the two, Damon Smith (bass) and Adam Shead (drums) contribute to a propulsive, fiercely-spirited performance.

The quartet's set is comprised of two intensely concentrated pieces of long-form improvised music, with Crispell at the helm bringing a lifetime of inveterate experience from the world of improvised music to join forces with this group of free jazz trailblazers. Split between two selections with "A Borderless Event" and "Bone Eaten Up by Breathing", the sound is vast and wildly devouring. The pianist plays with lyrical impact and commands a kind of directional wisdom that opens space for the others to enter into the fold as ideas collectively manifest and come into focus.

As the group shifts through a series of tonal pockets, Smith does a superb job of centering and anchoring the music, while Shead drives the rhythm with a wonderful mixture of frenetic brush work and lean dexterous rolls across the surface of his drum kit. The latter of the two titles is an earthy meditation with a beautifully spacious, spiritual aura that gradually builds to an implausible peak. Stein's bass clarinet work is haunting and poetic throughout, as he articulates otherworldly voices on his instrument, to visceral effect.

A near Olympian feat of sheer creation and extended improvisation, this recording perfectly captures the mind-blowing essence of a great and memorable set at the Hungry Brain.

For more info visit trost.at. Jason Stein, Damon Smith and Adam Shead are at The Record Shop May 28 and Prospect Series May 29. See *Calendar*.



The Sistering
Kate McGarry, Lenora Zenzalai Helm, Lois Deloatch, Nnenna Freelon (Zenzalai Music)
by Anna Steegmann

The Sistering arrives less like an eponymous debut and more like an invitation to a fully-realized world, bringing together four formidable, North Carolina-based vocalists: Lois Deloatch, Chicago-born Lenora Zenzalai Helm (also known as Dr. Helm Hammonds) and Massachusetts natives Nnenna Freelon and Kate McGarry. Each member has a distinguished career and an impressive list of honors. The collective draws its