

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.

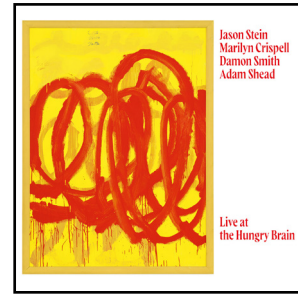
The title of the boxed set, however, is a bit deceptive: it reflects the years the six albums were released, not when they were made. Five of the discs were recorded between May 1959 and October 1960, while *Olé Coltrane* (the one non-quartet album in this set) was recorded May 25, 1961. And all were 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 queesting "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 Irvin 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 implosive 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

name from the architectural practice of reinforcing a beam with parallel timbers to repair or strengthen it, a fitting metaphor, given the quartet reflects on life, loss, resilience and renewal: they fortify one another. Across the album, jazz phrasing merges seamlessly with gospel, folk and ballad traditions, with two originals from each singer, plus two collaborations and one jazz standard. The project is additionally grounded by its excellent rhythm section: Miki Hayama (piano, organ), Keith Ganz (guitar), John Brown (bass) and Kobie Watkins (drums). The arrangements are notably generous, keeping the lyrics central while allowing the instrumentalists ample space to shine.

Album opener, "River Song" sets a luminous tone. Hayama's piano introduction paves the way for the four singers to enter in unhurried succession. While each voice retains its distinct color, the ensemble eventually falls into a single, shimmering texture, mirroring the lyrics' theme of shining in each other's love. Another album highlight is Zenzalai Helm's "Combat Boots and Glass Slippers", which balances intricate harmonies with a buoyant, infectious groove. The collectively composed "Origins" creates a spacious, multiverse-like choral texture, punctuated by atmospheric, instrumental interludes. Freelon's evocative contribution, "A Brother Just Like You", is deepened by the soulful alto saxophone playing of Dexter Moses and the warm trombone lines of Robert Trowers. A haunting centerpiece, "Dying Season" features Deloatch's rich contralto. Its somber, faded closing leaves a resonance that lingers long after its final note. The ensemble's spirited, swinging take on the standard "It Had to Be You" (Isham Jones, Gus Kahn) proves that even within a traditional framework, the collective finds a fresh, invigorated voice.

This synergy was brought to life at the group's recent appearance at Carnegie Hall's Stern Auditorium (Apr. 1), where they performed four tracks from the album, followed by a newly-composed, intoning hymn, titled "1000 Grandmothers". Accompanied by The Tribe Jazz Orchestra and several university vocal jazz ensembles, the quartet translated the album's intimate "sistering" into a massive, orchestral celebration, met with a rapturous response from the NYC audience.

For more info visit sisteringproject.com



Flying High: Still Soaring (A Tribute to the Voices
That Taught the World to Swing)
Various (Jazz at the Ballroom/Songbook Ink)
by Marilyn Lester

In 2024, *Flying High: Big Band Canaries Who Soared*, a project birthed at the nonprofit San Francisco venue, Jazz at the Ballroom, honored the legacy of "canaries"—the female vocalists who gained prominence singing with major big bands during the '40s. This year, the follow-up, *Flying High: Still Soaring* put the focus on the livelihoods these "canaries" developed after leaving the big band spotlight for solo careers. Produced by Jazz at the Ballroom's Executive Director, Suzanne Waldowski, with music director-pianist-vocalist, Champion Fulton, the final product features ten tracks with a lineup of Bria Skonberg, Tahira Clayton, Carmen Bradford and Nicole Zuraitis, supported instrumentally by Klas Lindquist (alto, clarinet), Buster Williams and Neal Miner (basses), and Fukushi Tainaka and Charles Ruggiero (drums).

While the playing is consistently top-notch, the vocal outcome is a mixed bag.

Fulton, always in excellent form, deserves special credit for including "Just For a Thrill" (Lil Hardin Armstrong, Don Raye), a torchy blues in which she amps up the been-done-wrong factor and rolls out some creative piano ideas in a feature that marks out the story arc. And why special credit? Because Lil Hardin (1898-1971), whose musical significance is now mostly sidelined, was a major artist, composer and leader in her day; she was also Louis Armstrong's second wife, who launched his career. On "If Dreams Come True" (Edgar Sampson, Benny Goodman), Fulton supports Lindquist in a swinging instrumental rendition replete with crisp alto voicings. Another under-appreciated standard is the torcher, "Goodmorning Heartache" (Irene Higginbotham, Ervin Drake), but sung by Clayton without emotional depth. Likewise, Bradford interprets Bernice Petkere, Joe Young's "Lullaby of the Leaves" from a lament into a swinger with jarring vocal tricks. Trumpeter-vocalist Skonberg sings and plays neatly on "It's Been a Long, Long Time" (Jule Styne, Sammy Cahn), featuring a magnificent, melodic bass feature by Williams. Ending the album is "Sentimental Journey" (Les Brown, Ben Homer, Bud Green) via a quirky yet powerful swing-blues by Zuraitis.

The project has been touring, led by Fulton and Lindquist, appearing at Birdland Theater for three nights last month with Miner (bass) and Ruggiero (drums). On their opening night (Mar. 27), the ensemble book-ended two young vocalists—Laura Anglade and Imani Rousselle—with a collection of jazz favorites, including many from the album. Anglade offered a credible "Secret Love" (Sammy Fain, Paul Francis Webster) and tried her hand at scat on "Manhattan" (Richard Rodgers, Lorenz Hart). More confident in her presentation, if overly enthusiastic, Rousselle was too chirpy with "Good Morning Heartache", but fell into a more effective groove with "Social Call" (Gigi Gryce, Jon Hendricks). A highlight came with Lindquist's feature of a gorgeous, melodic tune written by fellow Swede Alice Babs for husband Nils Ivar Sjöblom. Hugely talented, Lindquist's alto saxophone tone will surely make fans of Johnny Hodges sit up and take notice. Closing out the Birdland set was a full cast swinger of Duke Ellington's "It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)".

For more info visit jazzattheballroom.com/flying-high-2026



Keep Telling Yourself That
Goal Weight (Maggie Cox/Jennifer Gersten)
(Relative Pitch)
by Ariella Stok

Goal Weight, the duo of Maggie Cox (bass) and Jennifer Gersten (violin), works close to the seam where instrumental identity begins to fray. Both are classically trained with experience playing in orchestral contexts—they met as fellows at Tanglewood in 2021—but on *Keep Telling Yourself That*, their debut, that virtuosity functions towards bending, breaking and pushing towards the formation of a new shared language, proceeding as a study in contact.

In the album opener "Candy Doll Bluff", what reads at first as rhythm—rattling figures, clipped pulses—turns out to be the sound of impact: strings struck, surfaces activated, the instrument treated

as a small percussion kit. Pitch is there, but arrives as residue. On the album's two 10+ minute tracks, "Brian 1" and "Your New Uncle", the duo extends this logic, worrying at the materials, winding and unwinding tension, until the music settles into a kind of suspended attention. Midway through "Your New Uncle", the sound thins to a breath: bow noise, near-silence, the sense of air moving across something fragile. Elsewhere, as on "Who's Who When the Alarm Sounds", a low drone gathers mass and menace, approaching the timbral blur of a wind instrument before breaking under percussive blows. The final pair, "Pyrex Messiah" and "Good Things Come to Those Who Wait", admit more conventional tone—melodic fragments, a softening of attack—as if to remind the listener what has been withheld.

Heard live at Lower East Side boîte Tawny, those same concerns register as visible, physical acts. In their first set, as a duo, Cox and Gersten played at the edge of audibility. The bass produced groans and low, patient drones, while the violin moved in quick, skittering lines on top, before easing into a loose, almost rhythmic exchange. Their sounds met, forming a small weather system of sighs and swells. Extended techniques that read as mysterious abstraction on record came to life—bowing below the bridge, pressing into the string until it splintered into tremolo, harmonic slides. For the second set they were joined by Webb Crawford, whose guitar introduced a third current—buzzing, scraping, slightly abrasive—opening the music outward and suggesting its elasticity by how easily it absorbed another presence. What the album proposes in detail, the performance tested in air: a music of surfaces, where sound is not given but made, and remade, under the hand.

For more info visit relativepitchrecords.bandcamp.com



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