

BOXED SET



The Complete Columbia Recordings 1955-1961 Miles Davis & John Coltrane (Columbia-Legacy) by Duck Baker

This spectacular collection was released for the first time in 2000 by way of an arrangement between Columbia and Mosaic Records. Mosaic put out a 9-LP limited edition boxed set that was a standout even by their superlative production standards, and Columbia simultaneously released a 6-CD set. The Mosaic set went out of print fairly quickly, and while the CD version has been reissued before, the current release—in conjunction with 2026 being both the centennial of Miles Davis and John Coltrane—marks the first time since the original issue that it has been repressed on vinyl.

There are probably millions of people who have never even looked at a jazz publication but nonetheless are familiar with or own at least one of the records that tenor saxophonist John Coltrane made with trumpeter and jazz icon Miles Davis—and that would likely be *Kind of Blue*. And it's a safe bet that anyone with pretensions to being a modern jazz fan might also own *'Round About Midnight*. But the chaotic way much of the material here was made available (or not) before this set's release was one of the things that caused it to be so joyously received. Of course, there were lots of other reasons, starting with the fact that the music was spectacular, the remastered sound brilliant, and Bob Blumenthal's liner notes fully deserving of the awarded GRAMMY. Michael Cuscuna and George Avakian also contributed excellent, shorter notes.

Coltrane's first tenure with Davis was in what we now call the first classic quintet, which also featured

Red Garland (piano), Paul Chambers (bass) and Philly Joe Jones (drums). Given how significant this group was, and how much they recorded, it's easy to forget that they were only together for about a year and a half and were in the process of breaking up when *'Round About Midnight* was released. Davis was at the height of his powers when he formed this group in 1955. He had kicked the heroin habit that had made him too undependable for bookers to trust, and he had taken the art of melodic improvisation as far as anyone in jazz history, Lester Young included. His big problem was finding the right tenor player, owing to the fact that Sonny Rollins refused to join the band on a permanent basis. Coltrane was one of several notable tenors that auditioned, and it took a little while for him to find a comfort level. The fact that he also was an addict had something to do with it, and he was unsure at first what the leader wanted of him. But that he was the right tenor player for Davis was soon apparent.

In early 1957, Coltrane took a forced leave of absence to deal with his addiction, as well as to work for about six months with Thelonious Monk. By the end of the year, Davis had re-formed his group with the addition of Julian "Cannonball" Adderley on alto, and the sextet was getting ready to record another classic LP, *Milestones*. This was one of the hardest-hitting modern jazz bands of that or any time, and a program weighted towards bop-era standards gave everyone plenty of chances to show their stuff. Adderley and Coltrane pushed each other in the best of ways, and Davis' own playing reflects how much his group was inspiring him. The most important piece was not a jazz standard, however, at least not yet. That was the title track, which introduced the basic modal approach that would be used on *Kind of Blue* and thousands of other jazz records to follow.

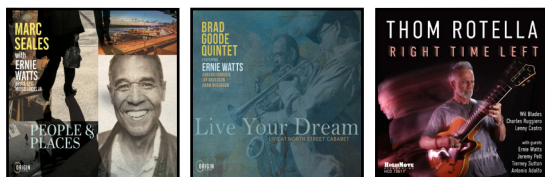
Soon after *Milestones* was completed in early 1958, the sextet returned to the studio to record the B-side of a lesser-appreciated record called *Jazz Track*, the A-side of which featured Davis with mostly French musicians playing the soundtrack for the film *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud* (released as *Elevator to the Gallows* in the US and *Lift to the Scaffold* in the UK). It was at this point that Garland and Jones were replaced by Bill Evans

and Jimmy Cobb. This made it, if you like, the "classic sextet," and they certainly sound classic on the four tunes recorded at that session. There was only one way for this group to improve on that, and that was with *Kind of Blue*, as close to a perfect record as any lineup is ever likely to produce. There was also a live record by the sextet called *Jazz at the Plaza*, as well as on one side of *Miles & Monk at Newport*. Live recordings often don't capture groups at their very best owing to difficult acoustics, and these are no exceptions. But given what really great musicians are involved here, there is a lot of stunning improvising that no jazz fan would want to miss.

In 1961, Davis asked Coltrane to return to the studio one last time and record two long tracks for *Someday My Prince Will Come*, including the modal "Teo". Appropriately, Davis' rhythm section was still Kelly, Chambers and Cobb. This seems an ideal coda for an association that left us so much, with its keening statements from Davis bookending a glorious Coltrane solo that is not the Coltrane of the classic quintet, nor the supercharged sextet, but of his own classic quartet.

All of the material on the original releases of the records mentioned above accounts for about six and a half of the nine LPs in the set. But several other tracks were included on various collections over the years, many of them every bit as good as the tracks on the original albums. Add those to the dozen or so previously-unissued alternates and odd tracks, put them all in one place, and you see why the original 9-LP release was a collector's dream. It's probably not the way to begin with the Davis/Coltrane material, but it's a great way to finish!

For more info visit milesdavisstore.com/products. "Coltrane 100" is at Symphony Space Nov. 20 (featuring Joe Lovano and Melissa Aldana). "Miles @ 100" is at New Jersey PAC (Newark NJ) Nov. 12 (featuring Jon Faddis). Jazz WaHi Big 'Nuff Band "Celebrates Miles and 'Trane" at Le Chéile Nov. 7 (part of Washington Heights Jazz Festival). Ian Froman "Plays Miles and Trane" Nov. 22 at the Deer Head Inn (Delaware Water Gap, PA). See Calendar and 100 Miles Out.



People & Places (with Ernie Watts) Marc Seales (Origin) Live Your Dream

Brad Goode Quintet (feat. Ernie Watts) (Origin) Right Time Left (with Ernie Watts) Thom Rotella (HighNote) by Scott Yanow

Tenor saxophonist Ernie Watts has always had the rare ability to sound soulful even during his most adventurous solos. Now 81 (as of Oct. 23), he gained early recognition for his playing with the Buddy Rich Big Band in the late '60s. A versatile studio musician for decades, he appeared on numerous recordings (including with Marvin Gaye), toured with the Rolling Stones in 1981, and had a hit with "Chariots of Fire" in 1982. However, since the mid '80s, Watts has mostly played jazz exclusively, including a lengthy stint with Charlie Haden's Quartet West and a series of his own sessions. As these three recordings show, he also remains very much in demand as a sideman.

Pianist-keyboardist Marc Seales' *People & Places* is a quartet set with Watts and the tastefully supportive

team of Bruce Lett (bass) and Moyes Lucas Jr. (drums). The material is mostly the leader's originals, filled with infectious but offbeat melodies, catchy if unpredictable rhythmic patterns and original chord changes—a perfect fit for Watts' playing. Among the more memorable performances are a celebratory version of Wayne Shorter's "Palladium", Seales' sensitive solo piano on the ballad "Prelude" leading right into "For You My Dear", its melody caressed by Watts, and a spirited "The Muddy Chicago Blues". The nostalgic groove piece "Home Light" (co-written by Seales and Watts) serves as a perfect wrap-up for what is a fine release.

Watts and trumpeter Brad Goode first played together in 2010 and have since toured on a yearly basis. In 2018 they recorded a quintet album, *That's Right*, and nearly the same group appears here on the recently-released *Live Your Dream*, a live set from 2025. For the album's five originals, plus "Lover Man" and "Someday My Prince Will Come", the two horns are joined by Adrean Farrugia (piano), Jay Anderson (bass, replacing Kelly Sill from the earlier lineup) and Adam Nussbaum (drums). Goode and Watts constantly challenge each other throughout the intense set. The opener, "Covid Nightmare", has a stormy melody; Goode engages in screaming and tonal distortions and Watts contributes ferocious sheets of sound. The other selections are just as passionate, particularly "For Michael", which

features heated interplay between the two horn players. Even Goode's feature on "Lover Man", which starts out tastefully, gets a bit crazy for a stretch before ending with a Charlie Parker quote. Farrugia is impressive when he gets to solo, and the rhythm section is highly intuitive and interactive. While there is little variation in mood, and the temperature is always very high, in small doses *Live Your Dream* reveals quite effective results.

Ernie Watts has a much smaller role on guitarist Thom Rotella's *Right Time Left*, guesting on just three of its thirteen songs. The core group features Wil Blades (organ), Charles Ruggiero (drums) and Lenny Castro (percussion), joined by ten different guests, including Watts, Jeremy Pelt (trumpet), Tierney Sutton (vocals) and Antonio Adolfo (piano). Rotella readily admits to the influence of Wes Montgomery in his playing, although his own musical personality is evident across this soul jazz-oriented set. While the guitarist is generally in the lead, fans of the classic organ combo will enjoy this outing. Most of the music is a throwback to the mid '60s and early '70s period when organ trios were at their most popular. The program includes the swinging "This Is for Lou", a medium-tempo "Willow Weep for Me", the joyfully funky "Light It Up", and tributes to Benny Golson, Russell Malone and Ray Brown.

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