AFRO BLUE IMPRESSIONS

JOHN COLTRANE

JOHN COLTRANE—tenor, soprano saxophones
McCOY TYNER—piano
JIMMY GARRISON—bass
ELVIN JONES—drums

DISC 1
1. LONNIE'S LAMENT 10:15
2. NAIMA 8:05
3. CHASIN' THE TRANE 5:45
4. MY FAVORITE THINGS 21:07
5. AFRO BLUE 7:34
6. COUSIN MARY 9:55

DISC 2
1. I WANT TO TALK ABOUT YOU 8:20
2. SPIRITUAL 12:29
3. IMPRESSIONS 11:36

BONUS TRACKS (Not On Original Album)
4. NAIMA 6:39
5. I WANT TO TALK ABOUT YOU 9:52
6. MY FAVORITE THINGS 13:57

Original recordings produced by **Norman Granz**
Reissue produced by **Nick Phillips**
24-bit Remastering—**Joe Tarantino**
(Joe Tarantino Mastering, Berkeley, CA)
Disc 1 and Disc 2, #1 recorded live in Berlin; November 2, 1963.
Disc 2, #2-6 recorded live in Stockholm; October 22, 1963.

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The nature of John Coltrane's performance on this album demands that it be taken in its historical context. In order to understand what he is doing and why he is doing it, the listener must acquaint himself with great thoroughness to the prevailing winds of style at the time the performance was made. To some extent, of course, this is true of every jazz musician at every juncture of his career, but it is particularly so of Coltrane, who, in a comparatively brief and extremely brilliant career, advanced with a kind of desperate courage to the very frontiers of lucidity and even, it should be said, occasionally beyond them at the very end of his life. One has only to hear half a chorus of Coltrane to perceive that he was a man chafing under the restraints of traditional jazzmaking, a man struggling to establish some new kind of method which would somehow reconcile a thirst for adventure with a respect for the canons of logic. In other spheres creative artists like James Joyce, Pablo Picasso, and Bela Bartók made the acquaintance of the same enigma, creating new techniques to solve new problems. Did Coltrane succeed? The answer is that sometimes he did and sometimes he didn't. What is important to the understanding of him is the fact that he was one of the most intrepid explorers in jazz history, which raises the question of how much, by the time he arrived on the scene, there was left to explore.

Not so very much. The historians will certainly see Coltrane as a musician who, having inherited the vast new harmonic territories bequeathed by Charlie Parker sought to consolidate those gains and to build upon them. The problem was to know how to build upon them, for Parker, in opening the way for the incorporation into jazz of an all-embracing harmonic system, had, like a westering pioneer too successful for his own eventual good, reached the sea; after Parker, where else could an experimenter wander without violating the bounds of formal logic altogether? In this album that is the question which Coltrane is constantly asking himself; what makes it fascinating is that there are some moments when he appears to have found a few answers. The difficulty inhibiting players like Coltrane and Sonny Rollins, who was caught on the horns of the same dilemma, is that you can only build so many chord changes into the structure of a solo. The old-timers used to make one harmony stretch over four bars; the virtuosi of the prewar swing age preferred the idea of harmonies which shifted from bar to bar; with Parker came the idea of chromatic bridges linking the main harmonies, much as a series of subjunctive clauses can lend color to a simple sentence. Coltrane himself often sounds like a player cramming a chord change into every beat; but where lay the ultimate? Much of the relevance of what Coltrane played is to do with certain experiments conducted by Miles Davis a few years earlier, in which the question was asked: Are conventional chord sequences necessary at all? In one or two Davis albums, harmonies as such were laid aside in favor of modal patterns, that is to say, instead of finding himself confronted by a series of resolving chords, the soloist was offered a scalic line, a melodic rather than a harmonic pendant on which to hang his improvisation. Or perhaps he might use harmony only in the limited sense of a theme consisting only of two chords, with the dynamism of the performance based on the pendulum-like swing of the solo from one of those harmonies to the other. The aim was to liberate the jazz musician from his self-made prison of discord-to-concord resolution and in so doing increase the likelihood of his finding fresh patterns of thought. It was intended to be an uncluttering process, but the irony was that in uncluttering the harmonic freeway, the experimenters inadvertently encouraged an even more cluttered melodic line. When a man has no laws of perspective to observe, his inclination will be to doodle. That is why so many people mistake avant-garde frippery for a phenomenal technique, forgetting in their excitement that virtuosity in music consists not of playing a lot of notes fast, but of playing a lot of notes fast within the constraints of form.

But Coltrane is an exception to that rule which makes us doubt the claims of so many experimental pretenders. For whatever one thinks of Coltrane's playing, the one charge which can never be laid against him is of posturing or insincerity. For this reason he is one of the most important figures in any attempt to appraise the validity of the avant-garde. The truth is that no matter how far he sometimes strayed

from the harmonic fold. Coltrane always retained a mastery over conventional jazz-making methods which was total. Some of his performances were so fine that they literally took the breath away; both in cleanliness of execution and beauty of tone Coltrane possessed classic virtues, so that when he turned away from this control and deliberately courted disaster, and by so doing implied that the constraints of form were now intolerable to him, we cannot do what we are inclined to do when we hear the same story from younger men, which is to wonder, if their mastery is all that complete, where they have hidden the evidence (Coltrane left the evidence all over the place); had he never conducted a single experiment in that improvising art, he would still have been one of the great soloists of jazz.

There is something else about Coltrane which needs to be said, and that is that not even the limits of his instrument were sufficient for his purpose. Within a few moments of starting to play in "Lonnie's Lament" he is straining after notes far higher than those originally considered to be a practical possibility by the instrument's inventor Adolphe Sax. The listener should also take note of the fact that once into his stride, Coltrane becomes implicated in a duet with drummer Elvin Jones. There occur several parallel passages during the album, where McCoy Tyner and Jimmy Garrison drop out, and it is safe to assume that each time they do so, it is a hint that Coltrane is to an extent chancing his arm, following in the wake of his own inspiration or "freaking out" as it subsequently became known. The consummation of this approach comes in the coda of "I Want to Talk About You," a passage so extended that it may be nominated as a remarkable example of the tail wagging the dog, in so far as the coda virtually obliterates the performance it is meant to be tying up. At this point in the concert, Coltrane is like a man transported by self-absorption into a room on his own, where he can blow his instrument and finger runs and arpeggios for the sheer naked pleasure of playing them. There is a sense in which this sort of thing is a confidence trick, because the content of the ruminations is attached to no known system of thought or notation.

However, I can think of no saxophone player who will not attend closely to this remarkable opening of the saxophonist's Pandora's Box and admire the wonderful variety of its contents. As the concert proceeds, Coltrane brings up his reserves, as it were, only instead of cavalry he deploys the soprano saxophone, an obsolescent instrument which he did more than any other saxophonist of the period to revivify. If the tricks he was attempting on the tenor were impractical, then they should have been downright impossible on the soprano, where the player can do so much less with his embouchure and fingers to render the execution more pliable. In the album's one theme drawn from the conventional popular repertoire, "Favorite Things," Coltrane the soprano player achieves his best strokes. This was the theme which always appeared to him to be the one perfectly suited for his soprano experiments; he never tired of playing it on the instrument and it can be discerned quite unmistakably that he was able to somehow add the theme to the horn and arrive at some marvelous solutions. His soprano playing as typified by "Favorite Things" consists of passages of furious endeavor punctuated by other exquisitely beautiful interludes whose most precious virtue of all is that they are starkly original; in the passages where the soprano takes wings in "Favorite Things." Coltrane is genuinely extending the frontiers of improvisation, that is to say, he is annexing new territory without resorting to methods of musical barbarism. The frightful problems which Coltrane set himself in his career were never really resolved; Coltrane himself would have been the first to admit that.

Shortly after this concert he was dead, still a young man and still with his evolutionary cycle uncompleted. This album, which catches him at a point of balance between the comparative orthodoxies of the mid-1950s and the maelstrom of his last performances, is as graphic an illustration of jazz in the instant before dissolution as any I can remember hearing.

—BENNY GREEN

These notes appeared on the original album liner.

There's something about "50 years" that catches our eyes and ears.

A half-century represents an extraordinary but still accessible milestone: a voluminous period of time that remains well within the grasp of the human intellect—and, in modern times, within the physical life span of the species. When something lasts 50 years, whether it be a marriage, a business, or an artistic breakthrough; and when that creation not only endures but actually improves with age—well, it captures our attention. (There's a reason we shower 50th-anniversary recipients with gold, the most desired of precious metals.)

And when the celebration marks the anniversary of recordings as vital as these to the history of modern music—to modern culture as a whole—it deserves the treatment afforded this reissue.

Coming almost exactly 50 years after these tracks were recorded, this set commemorates a pivotal moment in the development of John Coltrane, himself a pivotal figure of his turbulent times. Among the handful of most influential musicians in the 20th century, his relentless search for new sounds and sonic truths has inspired musicians across genres—from jazz to rock to what we quaintly call "world music"—as well as visual and literary artists, poets and painters.

The performances heard here document the fulcrum of Coltrane's artistic development. Recorded during his European tour in the fall of 1963, they land smack in the middle of a five-year period in which the saxophonist and his band completed a frankly astonishing stylistic transition, with wide-ranging implications for the music that would follow. This transition saw Coltrane move from his vertiginous solo structures of the 1950s—the famous "sheets of sound," constructed of swooping scales and steeplechase arpeggios, built on a foundation of increasingly complex harmonic patterns—to a new method of improvisation, one that eschewed harmonic movement almost entirely to better facilitate an expansive lyricism. For the next three generations, musicians would continue to model their approach upon Coltrane's, or at least use his example as a spur to opening up their own music.

Coltrane displayed his earlier approach, on disc and on stage, in bands led by Thelonious Monk and Miles Davis, as well as in a cornucopia of recordings under his own name, culminating in the 1959 album *Giant Steps*. You can describe this as his "vertical" period: his solos raced up and down the horn, seemingly seeking an escape from the chord structures that anchored them. But entering the '60s, Coltrane also entered a new phase: his "horizontal" period, with music free of harmonic constraints, often thrilling in its melodic sweep and its incantatory power, and refusing to conform to the clock. (The performance of a single tune could run 25 or 30 minutes). He had, for all intents and purposes, turned his music 90 degrees and attained an entirely new perspective.

This viewpoint encompassed more than just notes and rhythms. The first half of Coltrane's career occurred during a decade when America, flush with wartime victory and peacetime prosperity, grew up and out. The country matured into a world leader and marked this development with an endless parade of vertical accomplishments, from skyscrapers to moon shots; Coltrane's solos of the '50s captured that spirit. But after 1961, when the world first got to hear his recording of "My Favorite Things"—the song that emblematized his "horizontal" period—Coltrane's solos anticipated and then mirrored the new decade's hallmarks: America's rejection of '50s values, its fascination with meditation and introspection, and even its newfound suspicion of hierarchy (in the music's abandonment of the traditional theme-variation-theme format). It was hardly an accident that "My Favorite Things" should become the poster child for the second half of Coltrane's career--despite the fact that, as a hit song from an inspirational Broadway smash about Austrian folk-singers fleeing the Nazis, it was about as far from American jazz as you could get.

The song uses surprisingly few chords and has a simple, diatonic melody line written in the Dorian mode (which to most American ears sounds quite similar to a minor key), and in these respects, it closely resembled several of Coltrane's own compositions of the time, such as "Impressions" and "Cousin Mary" (and later the "Resolution" movement from *A Love Supreme*.) In fact, jazz fans who had not followed the Broadway season assumed that Coltrane had written "My Favorite Things" himself, since it offered such an ideal setting for his newly open-ended solo explorations.

(Those who did know the song's provenance may have expressed surprise, and even dismay, upon learning it had entered Coltrane's repertoire; if so, they had nothing on the members of his quartet. As pianist McCoy Tyner recalled, in a 2000 interview: "When John first brought in 'My Favorite Things,' I thought, '*The Sound of Music*? He wants to do this?' Some fan had brought it in and said, 'John, take a look at this'; I think it was at the Jazz Gallery [a New York nightspot where the Coltrane Quartet often worked at the time]. Before I knew it, we were playing it.")

The re-appearance of these tracks commemorates not only the 50th anniversary of their creation, but also the 40th anniversary of Pablo Records, the label that originally released them.

The last of several vital record companies founded and supervised by the impresario and record producer Norman Granz—preceded by Clef and Norgran in the 1940s, and culminating in the grand creation of Verve Records in the 1950s—Pablo offered an unexpected coda to one of the great careers associated with jazz. Having scored an initial success through the invention of the touring shows known as "JATP" ("Jazz At The Philharmonic") in the 1940s, Granz was arguably the first jazz auteur, in the cinematic sense of that term: a producer who so firmly stamped his recordings that, no matter the artists, a listener had a good chance of picking out the man who had brought them together. In that sense, he set the stage for such later producers as Creed Taylor, of Verve and later CTI records; Manfred Eicher, of ECM Records; and the multifaceted Quincy Jones.

In 1961, Granz sold his Verve Records catalog, which included all the recordings that had originally appeared on Clef and Norgran—and artists such as Erroll Garner, Stan Getz, Dizzy Gillespie, Coleman Hawkins, Billie Holiday, Sarah Vaughan, Lester Young, and dozens of others—as well as some that had been licensed to Mercury Records. The price? A tidy sum of $3 million—more than $23 million in 2013 dollars. Granz then chose to (and could obviously afford to!) leave the record business behind. But a dozen years later, he again heard the call, amplified by the belief that many of the storied artists he had recorded or enjoyed in their younger years—shunted by rock and fusion from the jazz spotlight—now more than ever needed someone like him: a contemporary who could understand and fully appreciate their talents. (The catalog included Count Basie and Milt Jackson, Joe Pass and Zoot Sims, and many others of that echelon.)

That, of course, would not have applied to John Coltrane, for several reasons, not the least of which was that by the time Pablo Records started up in 1973, Coltrane had been dead for six years. And even if he had beaten the cancer that took his life and had remained on the scene, I doubt that Coltrane's music—had it continued to develop in the direction it took at his death—would have appealed to Norman Granz.

As shown by his pairings of such artists as Charlie Parker and Lester Young, or Roy Eldridge with Oscar Peterson, Granz was among the first producers to have connected the brilliance of the beboppers to the giants who preceded them in the Swing Era; this left no doubt as to his big ears and wide-ranging aesthetic. Nonetheless, his association with Coltrane comes as a surprise. Granz's tastes navigated the mainstream: In fact, it was at a 1954 recording session by Duke Ellington's star altoist Johnny Hodges that Granz first met Coltrane, then an up-and-coming tenor player (and still a year away from joining Miles Davis). But by the time Granz and Coltrane next crossed paths, the saxophonist had embarked on the voyage that would soon take him quite beyond the bounds of mainstream jazz.

As Granz would later write on the liner notes to the original LP issue of *Afro Blue Impressions*: "Between the Hodges album and 1960, I had little to do with Trane, but when I presented Miles Davis on his first extended European tour, Trane . . . was part of his group. Two years later, he selected me to be the impresario for his first European tour as a leader." That first tour took place in 1961; several more would follow.

Granz, as a veteran record producer, was savvy enough to record the concerts that he himself produced on the tour; this collection, taken from concerts in Stockholm and Berlin. Those were just the ones under Granz's control, as opposed to the ones handled by local European promoters; in fact, this particular tour encompassed at least seven other cities, including Oslo, Helsinki, Amsterdam, and Paris, during a period of just under two weeks.

This remastered edition comprises the original double-LP of the same name, issued on Pablo in 1977, and available on CD since 1993. But with the 50th anniversary repackaging of these performances, you get a bonus: three more tracks, recorded at a late-October concert in Stockholm. "Naima" and "I Want to Talk About You," first appeared on the 1980 release of *The European Tour*, while the closing version of "MY Favorite Things" was formally issued only once before—on the 2001 multi-disc set *Live Trane: The European Tours*—although bootleg copies circulated for years. (A fair amount of confusion has attached to the details of Coltrane's recordings for Granz between 1961 and 1963, owing to several factors: haphazard record-keeping in the Pablo files; the lack of modern research tools available to discographers of the 1970s and '80s; and plain old human error and oversight. Those interested in delving further into the controversy should access http://www.wildmusic-jazz.com/livetrane.htm. But no dispute exists among Coltrane experts regarding the place and date of the specific 1963 performances reissued here.)

In 1963, the Coltrane Quartet used a relatively limited (and accordingly well-honed) repertoire designed to best display the strengths of their methodology; it contained a few standards, a couple of older Coltrane compositions, and several songs from the burgeoning crop of new pieces Coltrane had begun nurturing to suit the band's new direction. But compare the dual versions of "Naima," "My Favorite Things," and "I Want To Talk About You" to hear that despite the band's similar game plan on multiple performances of a given tune, each version provides a distinct aesthetic experience. These tracks brim with the wonder and the power of discovery. At this juncture, the Coltrane Quartet existed in a state analogous to quantum mechanics. In physics, quantum theory suggests that the natural processes under observation shift with the observer—in fact, with the very act of observation. Each new performance yielded new insights. As the musicians gathered this data and sifted through it, they would arrive at the polished theories underlying the eventual masterworks to come, such as the album *Crescent* and the monumental suite *A Love Supreme*—achievements that would then launch a new age of chaotic discovery, on such albums as *Om*, *Sun Ship*, and *Meditations*.

How much those recordings will resonate on their 50th anniversaries will likely engender some controversy; Coltrane didn't live long enough to complete the journey that began with them, and the jury remains out, even decades later, regarding the impact of that work. But history long ago weighed the import of his work in 1963, when his music stretched and struggled its way toward becoming Coltrane's iconic stylistic statement.

—NEIL TESSER
June 2013

Disc 1

1. **LONNIE'S LAMENT** 10:15
2. **NAIMA** 8:05
3. **CHASIN' THE TRANE** 5:45
4. **MY FAVORITE THINGS** 21:07
   (Rodgers-Hammerstein)
   Williamson Music-ASCAP
5. **AFRO BLUE** 7:34
6. **COUSIN MARY** 9:55

Disc 2

1. **I WANT TO TALK ABOUT YOU** 8:20
   (Billy Eckstine)
   Unichappell Music-BMI
2. **SPIRITUAL** 12:29
3. **IMPRESSIONS** 11:36

BONUS TRACKS (Not on original album)

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All selections composed by **John Coltrane** (Jowcol Music-BMI), except as indicated.

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JIMMY GARRISON—bass
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Original Liner Notes by **Benny Green**
Cover photo by **Y. Sato**

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Disc 1 and Disc 2, #1 recorded live in Berlin; November 2, 1963.
Disc 2, #2-6 recorded live in Stockholm; October 22, 1963.

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24-bit Remastering—**Joe Tarantino** (Joe Tarantino Mastering, Berkeley, CA)
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