

STEREO

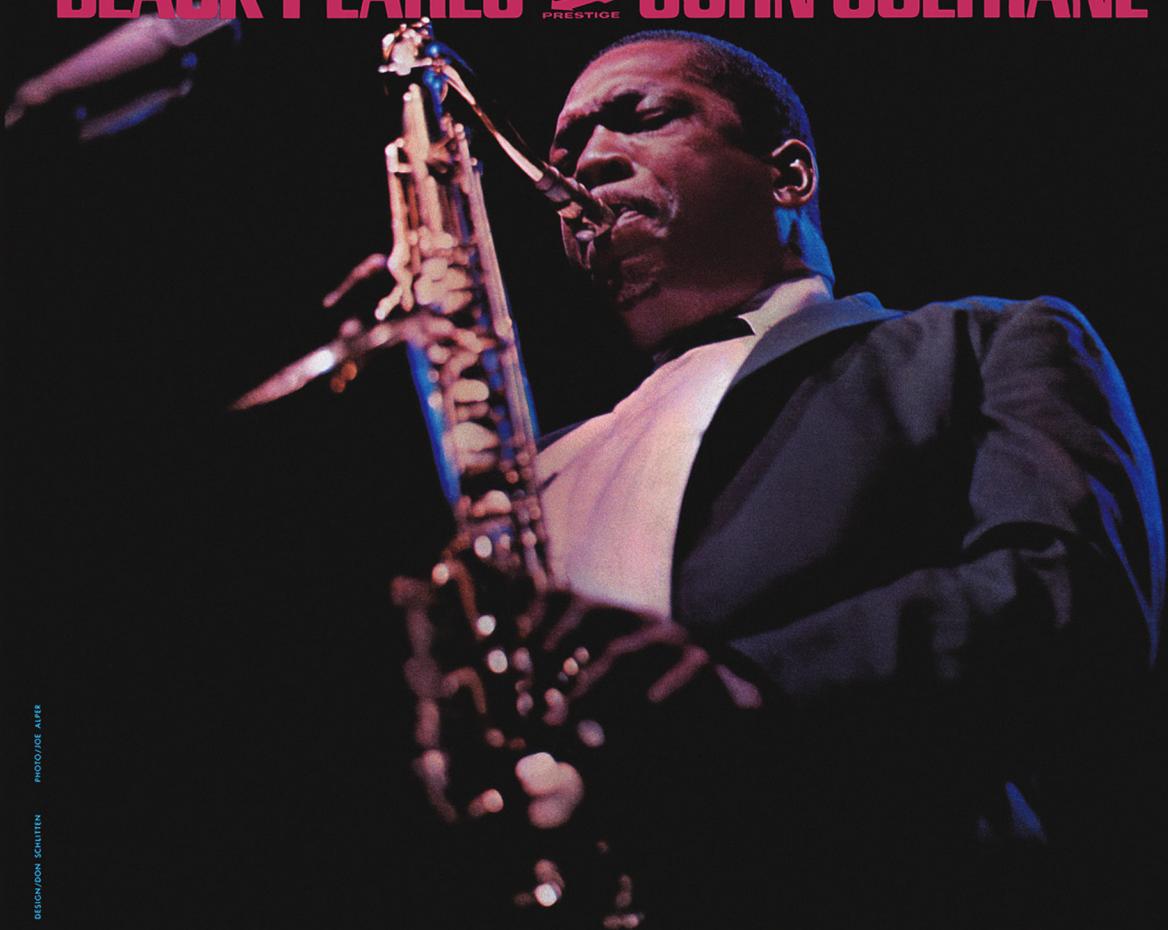
PR 7316

BLACK PEARLS



PRESTIGE

JOHN COLTRANE



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JOHN COLTRANE, tenor saxophone
DONALD BYRD, trumpet
RED GARLAND, piano
PAUL CHAMBERS, bass
ART TAYLOR, drums

1. BLACK PEARLS
2. LOVER COME BACK TO ME
3. SWEET SAPPHIRE BLUES

Because of his sense of self-responsibility, John Coltrane is known as a musician who comes to play and as a man who chooses his co-workers who also can, in the current vernacular, take care of business. In one sense, taking care of business means listening to others while playing.

The time when a musician comes into his own is the time when he becomes cognizant that he can never selfishly transcend his cohorts. Most of us never realize that it is not only John Coltrane or Donald Byrd with rhythmic backing, alone and unaffected by the musical surroundings, but that the endless sweep of musical experience is a product of a vital inter-play which can never be denied. When the vital energies work their way through a group of musicians, the psychological experience is of inner joy that becomes greater than the sum of the individually invested parts. The procreation, caused by the conjoining of solitary talents produces, in each of the participants, at perhaps only rare moments, a feeling of over-riding whatever it is in us which makes us work in the prison of limiting dualities.

A few years ago, Oscar Peterson, in an interview done at the occasion of the opening of his school to teach young jazz musicians, remarked that many of

these neophytes who had come to study with him were not good listeners. I don't remember whether he went on to account for the poor listening abilities of these people, but, on thinking about this problem, it occurred to me that with the numberless hours in which we are forced to listen to unwanted and inferior music, there also comes into existence that protective device which all of us use to counteract a surfeit of any idea or substance, no matter how good or enjoyable that experience is in regulated amounts—we stop listening. Perhaps the effects of the devise have grown into us to the degree where listening is, *a priori*, blocked because of the fear of again being imposed upon by unwanted and annoying musical substances and, therefore we are not able to overcome this censor to the point of being totally free to experience all that music can do to us.

Jazz critics, unlike their bored counterparts in the theatre, never ask, 'where is the new music?'. Not only the critic of jazz, but the jazz listener has difficulty in keeping in touch with new or demanding music. In this area, John Coltrane has his problems. Many people, even those who are well acquainted with the history and spirit of music tend to ask, 'what does it mean?' or, 'what is he trying to say?'. Unlike a speaker or 'realistic' writer, a musician does not have the tools in his music to 'say' anything, to make verbal pronouncements. The musician does 'say' something-musically, using sounds and rhythms that have no ingrown value and no power to perform any other function than to assist in their own organization and projection. Unless we are subject to the influence of mythology and the idea of the personification of intangibles, a random note—let us say—C natural has nothing, in itself to deny it or place in special favour, other than its' appropriate placement in a musical framework. A series of notes, again keeping in mind the idea of personification, does nothing other than fall or place itself in one of an infinite number of orders or series.

John Coltrane following the lead of Charlie Parker's

musical adventurousness, has developed a style of ordering the available sound in a multitude of melodies and rhythms which, only in the area of number, outweigh most of what has been done by contemporary musicians, i.e.: he plays more permutations or orders of notes in a given musical framework, hence exploring more areas of that catalogue of sound. On first listening one might think that Coltrane's music was an example of raw Dionysian spirit untamed by the guiding hand of Apollo, but there is ample evidence that the raw musical energy has been directed, not tamed by what is primarily his talent. Coltrane not only has developed a talent but has been able to enlarge these accomplishments to the point of complete musical mastery.

After the more experimental uses which many record companies found for the newly designed twelve inch long playing record had been exhausted, these manufacturers followed the practice of getting a number of musicians into the recording studios and allowing them to devise, without the guidance of competent supervisory personnel, lengthy tracks with long improvised solos which often turn out to be dull listening. One of the greatest difficulties with a process which allows unbridled enthusiasm to take prominence over carefully designed musical edifices is the risk that the product, as often as not falls, as does a badly yeasted cake. Musicians with the talent and experience which the group represented on this album has, have no difficulty in playing and sustaining long solo statements as can be heard on the blues, **Sweet Saphire** which takes up the entire second side.

The example of the five artists on this record is refreshing to those who have begun to think that lengthy improvisation is a lost art. It is good to know that the recording studios can be filled with musicians who not only take responsibility for the making of music, but who can direct their own creativity without being mothered or cajoled by apprehensive recording directors. In this sense of responsibility, all the musicians repre-

sented here not only come into the studio to play for a period of time but come to discourse themselves of their music.

Most people are impressed with the fact that Coltrane, Byrd, Garland, Chambers and Taylor are not makers of extraneous, time-filling sounds which might serve to fill out an album. The long blues on the second side clearly shows that there is not a wasted or unneeded note played. The experience which these musicians have shared on many previous Prestige albums again shows itself in this display of virtuosity.

Black Pearls, the first side opener, is a happy minor thirty-two measure opus that has a string of fiery solos, with Coltrane leading off. The problem confronting any writer who attempts a description of what it is that Coltrane does can be solved with recourse to statement by analogy. The running and flying notes are quite similar to the visual trails which one follows in the photography of Judson Yalkut. The images are not ordered to present a well known picture of a familiar subject. What occurs in both this music and the Yalkut movies are combinations of contrasting rising and falling light and sound substances which dart in completely unexpected directions. The images whirl in spiral through an unlimited space, as do birds, without ever seeming to be hampered by any arbitrary limits. With Coltrane, there appears to be a complete loss of the binding chordal sense. The music ribbons outward as though it could and would never be limited by a chord structure that would force it to stop.

Donald Byrd's forte, gliding and skipping over the material is demonstrated forcefully on Sigmund Romberg's, **Lover Come Back To Me**, which takes up its post as the closer of the first side. Byrd punches his way through the changes with a loving fury that not only demonstrates technical ability and complete familiarity with the tune's changes but a demoniacal desire to get everything said—with musical taste.

The long, themeless A major blues which takes up the entirety of the second side, has Red Garland winging it from measure one. **Sweet Saphire Blues** has one of Garland's most amazing outings that I have ever heard on record. For chorus after chorus, Garland plays with a full lyrical and punching mastery of the piano that cancels out all those opinions which say that Red was or is a limited swinger. Following Red are some powerful adventures by 'Trane, Byrd, Chambers and Taylor.

The complete musicianship evidenced by the quintet members on this album, as on many of the group's previous albums, can be set down to the fact that each member is aware not only of their own personal needs but are conscious of being part of a living productive musical organism which not only fulfills the needs of its members but provides endless pleasure and stimulation for the listener.

Notes: Michael Gold (Apr. 1964)

Supervision: Bob Weinstock

Recording: Rudy Van Gelder