PR 7280

John Coltrane

Dakar

PRESTIGE

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DAKAR

JOHN COLTRANE

JOHN COLTRANE tenor saxophone **CECIL PAYNE** baritone saxophone **PEPPER ADAMS** baritone saxophone
MAL WALDRON piano **DOUG WATKINS** bass **ART TAYLOR** drums

1 DAKAR 7:11	4 VELVET SCENE 4:54
2 MARY'S BLUES 6:49	5 WITCHES PIT 6:42
3 ROUTE 4 6:56	6 CAT WALK 7:10

I remember the sessions well, I remember how the musicians wanted to sound, and I remember their reactions to the playbacks. Today, I feel strongly that I am their messenger. —RUDY VAN GELDER

Recorded by RUDY VAN GELDER at Van Gelder Studio, Hackensack, NJ; April 20, 1957.
Supervision—TEDDY CHARLES Remastering, 2008—RUDY VAN GELDER (Van Gelder Studio, Englewood Cliffs, NJ)
All transfers were made from the analog master tapes to digital at 24-bit resolution.
Notes by NEIL TESSER

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There are, in fact, two types of artists. On one side of the creative fence there is the Look-Ma-No-Hands Genius, associated with prodigious youth, sometimes madness and often, early death—the artist as a direct pipeline between the source of inspiration and the resultant art. In music, the classic example is Mozart, from whose head a full-blown music sprung like Minerva's boney army, without apparent effort. On the other side is the sort of Day-Laborer Genius, whose art is the final draft of a mountain of revisions, second thoughts and erasures. The case history usually given is Beethoven, a composer who wrote, rewrote and rewrote again. The goals of both may have been the same, but it is the execution that, in the second case, is less immediate, full of grunts and hard breathing like that of a woodsman who must cut down the entire forest to reach the golden bough.

Jazz, being a romantic as well as a performer's music, abounds in geniuses of the first type; indeed, the music itself in its spontaneous, virtuoso way often has the aspect of heaven sent, here-comes-the-flood intuition. Consequently, most of jazz's influential luminaries have, in creative temper, been more Mozartean than Beethovenian. In art that demands so much of the present tense, there has been precious little opportunity for afterthoughts and second guesses. Louis and Bix, Pres and Bird, even the improvising compositional methods of Duke Ellington have a diffident, anything-I-do-is-okay quality. And the jazz fan has come to expect this phenomenon as the common currency of his favorite enthusiasm, ruthlessly commanding each generation and its heroes to obedience to this rule.

We may be none the wiser than we were a couple of decades ago, but we certainly are better informed. Fashions change and we would feel slightly cheated if we hadn't at least the illusion of progress. Consequently, records are longer, or frequently produced and jazz is a four letter word that now can be pronounced in the parlor. In the old days (I almost said "good old days") musicians were "discovered" after a considerable period of experimentation, apprenticeship, study, and practice. All this fumbling and growing was delivered out of general earshot and disturbed only neighbors and relatives. When the young musician finally appeared before the public (you had to be a bitch to get a record date) what must have seemed a miracle of originality to the audience was often the fruit of laborious experiment, imitation, and many lonely hours in the woodshed. Which brings us to our subject.

John Coltrane, a star in the ascendant in the jazz galaxy, falls into the predicament of rising to his present influential position during a time when the old show business code of the jazz performer has been overthrown; in a time when the jam session has been unionized out. Now the solution of musical problems is brought before the general public, albeit in the guise of entertainment. In other words, the laboratory, the study hall, and the woodshed have been placed directly on stage. And Coltrane has been forced to find himself in the full glare of public light. Like Miles Davis, who began recording at a tender age, before he had worked out much more than the basic ideas of his approach, the stages of Coltrane's musical maturity are well-documented on records and near misses abound in his recorded work; indeed, it is only the fact that he is a serious artist that saves many of them at all. It is to Coltrane's great credit that he has survived not only the scorn of the status quo seekers and the death kiss of the cultists, but, more crucially, his own groping explorations and failures.

Hectored by would-be defenders of the faith who were upset by the sheer quantity of notes he played (during his famous "sheets of sound" stage, when the musical idea was to subdivide the 16th note rhythmic basis that bebop had established, Coltrane would often hurl himself into a solo with the furious indifference of a man pedaling a bicycle up and down a flight of harmonic stairs at top speed) or those who abhorred his lengthy discourses (one can appreciate the feelings of non-initiates upon whom his long-windedness has the stultifying effect of school graduation ceremony oratory), Coltrane has managed to keep his head, persevere, and accomplish a considerable quantity of music.

This session was cut in the late Fifties, during Coltrane's "sideman days" before he moved out of the Miles Davis quintet and into his own group.

DAKAR

DAKAR **VELVET SCENE**
MARY'S BLUES **WITCHES PIT**
ROUTE 4 **CAT WALK**

(This album, in fact, is a sort of reissue, since these tracks were released once before as one side of a really long playing record during a short-lived experiment with 16rpm phonography.) His playing had already developed his personal "cry" a quality of sound perhaps originally derived from Dexter Gordon, but now most severely his own. His jagged-metal tone, which has struck many listeners as a steel finger on the nerve, set a new emotional climate for modern jazz or perhaps signaled the victory of intellect over emotion in the music. The urgency of his approach (which detractors coldly call "strident"), the general humorlessness of his conception (often a saving grace in experimentalism) and the tortured lyricism of his ballad style (an attitude that has changed considerably in recent months, it should be noted) have driven many listeners whose associations with jazz are based on pleasure and warm feeling. It is a shame since when Coltrane's music congeals into a coherent shape, it flows with acetylene beauty and nonpareil swing.

What is the "mystery" of Coltrane's music? Why do some decry his music while others stand in passionate adoration? Is he following some twisted muse to the Cloud Cuckoo Land of excess, full of neurotic bleatings and the impossible egotism of the interminable perorations of a mad Pericles? These invaluable "early" recordings, when Coltrane was not even the nominal leader of the date are serving to dispel the idea that Coltrane is a man without jazz roots, and a valid direction. On most of these tracks the direction as well as the finished music is, sometimes startlingly in evidence.

In finding baritonists to fill out the unique instrumentation of the front line one could do no better than Messrs. Payne and Adams. Cecil Payne's light and airy intonation (on these sides it appears to be dressed in veils) contrasts excellently with the more rugged, burr-edged attack of Pepper Adams. Both men, with their roots imbedded in bebop and even in the older music provide a framework and limits for Coltrane's excursions that are comfortable and stimulating. And the rhythm section is everything that one could wish for.

"Dakar," the title tune is named for the Senegalese city, and its sinuous theme is stated by the ensemble. Payne solos first and his musicianship is considerably better than his geography since the song is based on Norwegian rather than African sources. Coltrane restores the original mood, trying to form a mosaic out of fragmented bits of melody and Pepper bullies his way through a chorus. Waldron takes one after the bridge and the out has Coltrane playing lead.

An original by Pepper, "Mary's Blues," puts everyone on more comfortable ground. The blues and bebop mix smoothly as Pepper and Cecil split the intro, then solo with Coltrane splitting the difference. Quotes and semi-quotes from the Forties abound, mostly Parker and Tadd Dameron (a variation of his "Good Bait" line forms the basis for Coltrane's excursion) before a false ending unison statement, four exciting rounds of fours and the final ensemble.

The most fulfilling track to me is Teddy Charles's "Route 4." His writing is more "legitimate" than either Waldron's or Adams's ("Dakar" and "Cat Walk" are his as well) and Cecil plays lead with a straight but swinging sound. The rhythm section really gets itself together as Waldron plays a strikingly Bud Powellian chorus. Payne, with a sound like a nervous man wringing his hands, takes a furious solo and then Mr. Coltrane unleashes one. On the bridge his daring attempt to construct a melody out of harmonic fragments works, and he brings off the gambit in breathtaking style. Pepper's squat and robust voice loses nothing at the tempo and the whole thing comes together with great unity.

And so it goes. "Velvet Scene" has Coltrane playing melody with acetic grace; "Witches Pit" is a broiling blues by Pepper Adams and contains the baritonist's best solo of the date and "Cat Walk" has good solos all round.

Here is Coltrane in his formative years, a record that will delight his admirers and perhaps rankle his enemies. It may even win a few new recruits. A trip down "Route 4" is sure to be instructive.

— DAVID A. HIMMELSTEIN
These notes appeared on the original album liner.

I WAS THE ENGINEER on the recording sessions and I also made the masters for the original LP issues of these albums. Since the advent of the CD, other people have been making the masters. Mastering is the final step in the process of creating the sound of the finished product. Now, thanks to the folks at the Concord Music Group who have given me the opportunity to remaster these albums, I can present my versions of the music on CD using modern technology. I remember the sessions well, I remember how the musicians wanted to sound, and I remember their reactions to the playbacks. Today, I feel strongly that I am their messenge r. —*RUDY VAN GELDER*

DAKAR REVISITED

FOR SEVERAL REASONS, *Dakar* occupies a sweet spot in John Coltrane's discography of the 1950s. The album places him in the context of two other saxophonists, a setting that was relatively rare for Coltrane but yields tough-and-lovely ensemble work on almost every tune. In addition, the selection of material could serve as a template for how to wed adventurous improvising to unequivocal swing in the heady heyday of post-bop jazz. And the name of the album, like the title track, seems to presage the increasingly strong pull—musical, social, and spiritual—that the African continent would exert upon Coltrane from the late 1950s until his death in 1967.

But for several reasons, *Dakar* should hardly count as a John Coltrane album at all.

The original LP containing these tunes wasn't even issued under Coltrane's name; rather, it arrived in stores in 1957 as the first half of *Modern Jazz Survey—Baritones & French Horns* from Pepper Adams/Cecil Payne/Julius Watkins/Dave Amram. It only became *Dakar*—and first appeared under Coltrane's name—in a 1963 reissue, when Prestige redesignated it to take advantage of the saxophonist's recent success as a jazz star and burgeoning cultural icon. What's more, Coltrane wrote none of the six tunes on the disc—not even the title track, which sends its exotic melody hurtling across a polyrhythmic underbrush in admittedly Trane-like fashion. (He didn't undertake his first engagement with Africa, as either a musical or symbolic inspiration, until the albums *Dial Africa* and *Gold Coast*, which came thirteen months after *Dakar*.) And I doubt Coltrane had much chance to think too deeply about the music he had to perform at this session, since it was the last of four studio dates—each for a different leader—that he recorded during a five-day stretch in the spring of '57.

In fact, *Dakar* is not so much an album by John Coltrane as it is an album by Teddy Charles.

Who?

Teddy Charles (born Theodore Charles Cohen, 18 months earlier than Coltrane) made his first recordings on vibes at the age of 21; and although his name has receded into historical mists, he had a noteworthy if ultimately minor impact on jazz in the '50s. One of the first vibes players to fully embody bebop, his playing in some ways foretold the free-jazz movement that was still a few years down the road. He played on discs by Buddy DeFranco, Miles Davis, Benny Carter, and vocalist Jimmy Scott, to name a handful, and took part in one of the century's undisputed masterworks, Charles Mingus's *Mingus Dynasty*; a student of composition and a protégé of the arranger Hall Overton, he had earlier joined Mingus's Jazz Composers Workshop. From that experience grew the Teddy Charles Tentet, an iconoclastic and highly regarded ensemble that lasted about a year.

When he recorded under his own name, he could command the best: among those who appeared on Teddy Charles dates were Eric Dolphy, Booker Ervin, Thad Jones, Shelly Manne, Frank Morgan, Jimmy Raney, Zoot Sims, and Lester Young. But Charles soon turned his primary attention to composition and "supervision," a 1950s euphemism for record producing (with the perhaps unintentional effect of equating the musicians with wayward children). Still alive at this writing, he essentially left the music business in the early '60s, with only occasional recordings and performances since then.

Prestige credited Charles with "supervision" on *Dakar*, and he certainly acted as producer, writing three of the six tunes, choosing the lineup—including two musicians with whom he worked often, Mal Waldron and Pepper Adams—and remaining in the control room rather than adding his vibes to the mix. But without a doubt, his signal inspiration on this album was to pair Adams, who would become the leading hard-bop baritone saxist, with Cecil Payne, whose earlier contributions to Dizzy Gillespie's big band had made him perhaps the best-known baritonist in bebop. Hearing these two in direct proximity traces the evolution of jazz styles on the instrument—a passing of the torch, really—and that alone might have made an entertaining album. Together, Payne and Adams form a sandwich in the front line; Coltrane, already further along than both of them, supplies the spicier meat in the middle.

Despite the lineage connecting them, you shouldn't have too much trouble distinguishing Payne from Adams. The older man has a more polished timbre, slightly frilled at its edges; Adams, on the other hand, earned the nickname "The Knife" in part for the slashing bite of his sound. On "Dakar," Payne solos first; on "Mary's Blues," Adams takes the first improvisation. But you can hear the difference best on the introduction to "Mary's Blues": Adams, who wrote the song, fires the opening salvo, and Payne answers with a lighter and softer flurry.

Coltrane's own sound aligns with one bari player or the other. Paradoxically dark and bright at the same time, this magnificent tenor voice was by turns throaty, aching, elated, and mournful, but utterly distinctive (even among the legions of imitators who would follow); it becomes an iridescent asset in Teddy Charles's arrangements, shifting polarity depending on the tune. Most often, Coltrane stands apart from the other horns, or tops the richly threaded three-part harmonies, as on the propulsive "Route 4" or Adams's "Witches Pit" (inexplicably described in the original liner notes as a "broiling blues"; it's a 32-bar song with no blues changes whatsoever). On "Dakar," where Coltrane joins with Payne to play the theme, his sound strengthens Payne's own, while on "Mary's Blues," the theme belongs to Coltrane and Adams, and the tenor smoothes the baritonist's rougher edges.

Still a couple years removed from the triumphant cry of his breakthrough album *Giant Steps*, Coltrane nonetheless has complete command of the "sheets of sound" that he had unveiled in Miles Davis's band, and which would soon rock the music world forever. Throughout his short but prolific career, Coltrane showcased this command in mostly quartet or quintet settings, playing his garrulous tenor off of Miles Davis's laconic trumpet or up against McCoy Tyner's loquacious piano. On only a few occasions did he match up with other saxophonists, and on only one did he throw in with a couple of baritone players. But in retrospect, as Teddy Charles must have realized, it made a lot of sense to match him up with a double dose of the bigger horn; after all, how many *tenor* players of Coltrane's acquaintance could summon the heft and depth to confront him in the first place?

—NEIL TESSER

February 2008

Neil Tesser is a writer, broadcaster, and Vice Chair of The Recording Academy.

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1 DAKAR 7:11
(Teddy Charles) Tajah Music, Inc.-BMI

2 MARY'S BLUES 6:49
(Pepper Adams) Prestige Music-BMI

3 ROUTE 4 6:56
(Charles) Tajah-BMI

4 VELVET SCENE 4:54
(Mal Waldron) Prestige-BMI

5 WITCHES PIT 6:42
(Adams) Prestige-BMI

6 CAT WALK 7:10
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