

JOHN COLTRANE / Settin' The Pace

prestige

PR 7213



DESIGN/PHOTO: DON SCHLITTEN

SETTIN' THE PACE / JOHN COLTRANE

JOHN COLTRANE, tenor saxophone
RED GARLAND, piano
PAUL CHAMBERS, bass
ARTHUR TAYLOR, drums

1. I SEE YOUR FACE BEFORE ME
2. IF THERE IS SOMEONE LOVELIER THAN YOU
3. LITTLE MELONAE
4. RISE AND SHINE

bonus track

5. BY THE NUMBERS

Settin' the Pace seems to me to be an excellent title for a collection of John Coltrane performances recorded in 1958. By that time, he had already been a member of both the Miles Davis Quintet and the Thelonious Monk Quartet, and his role in jazz (as evidenced by a brief listening to several of the younger tenor players) was shifting from student to teacher.

The decision to release this album now is to a certain extent determined by economic considerations, but it also happens to throw light on certain aspects of the jazz business which warrant discussion. Had the album been released at the time it was recorded, it would have reached the small nucleus of Coltrane followers then active, and for the rest been largely ignored. The record that was released at that time (**Traneing In**, Prestige 7123,) made with the same personnel as this, got more or less that kind of reception, but today is regarded as one of the highest points of Coltrane's recorded achievement. **Settin' the Pace**, on the other hand, will undoubtedly find a large waiting audience, for Coltrane has by now stepped into the small circle reserved for those jazz musicians whose every recording is of unique interest.

Of course, by definition, that was true at the time (the record was obviously just as good when it was made as it is today or will be ten years from now), but it takes the audience and the writers a while to catch up.

Much of that circumstance, it seems in retrospect, was a direct result of the jazz audience's tendency to turn the music into a battle of "who is best" — polls are only the most obvious manifestation of this. There are also innumerable private conversations centering on whether or not Musician A can "cut" Musician B. It seems not to occur to very many people that rather than a battle, jazz is simply a matter of each individual standing up and doing what he does; contributing, if he can, to the total legacy of the music.

By the time the pendulum of fashion had swung from the west coast to the east, there were two pre-eminent tenor saxophonists, and since they had played with many of the same men, and even, on one notable occasion, recorded together, they became the center of the "who is best" conversations. They were, of course, Coltrane and Sonny Rollins, and for those who are interested, their joint recording is **Tenor Madness** (7047). It is interesting and puzzling to note that at the time of the release of that record, many listeners could not tell the two players apart.

I doubt that anyone was less pleased than the two principals at the sort of publicity-inspired controversy that centered around them. But one of the results it had was that it was not until Rollins' temporary retirement in 1959 (there were those who said the controversy was a contributing factor in his decision) that Coltrane came, in terms of public acceptance, into his own.

That he had come into his own musically long before that time is nowhere better attested to than on this current release. He has, of course, been covered with a great deal of public glory since that time (the 1961 **Down Beat International Critics Poll** found him in first place in three different categories), and he has begun to play another instrument, the soprano saxophone, on which he has played some startling music. But those

awards seem to me to be somewhat similar to the Academy Award Humphrey Bogart received in 1951 for his performance in **The African Queen**: It was, at least in part, an apology for not having recognized his brilliance in **The Treasure of the Sierra Madre** in 1948.

To Coltrane, the new approval manifests itself primarily in terms of economics: more work, and a better price for it. That he already had the assurance can be heard throughout this record.

One aspect of Coltrane's work, apparent here, is just beginning to be noticed. He is one of our most lyrical musicians, but it is not a standard form of lyricism — it does not gush and does not cloy — and that quality went unnoticed for a long time when the discussions of his work were primarily concerned with the technical innovations he was making. While Ornette Coleman, in whose playing John is extremely interested, has been concerned with more freedom from what has been termed "the chord barrier", Coltrane was pushing to the ultimate harmonic limit. As Cannonball Adderley put it in **Jazz Review**, "Coltrane knows more about chords than anyone. John knows exactly what he's doing; he's gone into the melodic aspects of chords. He may go 'out of the chord', so-called, but not out of the pattern he's got in his mind." That insistence on implicit harmonic effect, coupled with his rhythmic innovations ("I found," Coltrane wrote in **Down Beat**, "there were a certain number of chord progressions to play in a given time, and sometimes what I played didn't work out in eighth notes, 16th notes, or triplets. I had to put the notes in uneven groups like fives and sevens to get them all in.") resulted in the so-called "sheets of sound" that, for a time, blinded people to anything else he was doing.

But there can be no doubting the lyricism of a performance like **I See Your Face Before Me**. That, and **If There Is Someone Lovelier Than You**, are both songs

much more closely associated with Frank Sinatra than with the standard jazz repertoire (although Miles Davis has recorded **Face** beautifully on Prestige 7007, **The Musings of Miles**). Coltrane, However, is one of those valuable musicians who never feels constricted by what is generally thought to be acceptable, and, as usual, he validates his choices. This is, to my knowledge, the first jazz recording of **Someone**, made more unusual by the medium tempo.

Only one of the four tracks on this set is what is usually thought of as a "jazz" piece. That is Jackie McLean's **Little Melonae**. Prior to this, it was recorded and played primarily by the group of musicians most closely associated with McLean. It probably suggested itself to John for recording because of its unusual harmonic and rhythmic implications.

The last track, **Rise and Shine**, is perhaps the most unexpected. A Hollywood flag-waver type of piece, John rescues it here from what had seemed to be an interminable purgatory in which it served, because of its title, as the theme song for early-morning small-town disc jockey shows. It is hard to avoid making the obvious remark that this performance would probably wake anyone up much quicker than the dozens of others.

The rhythm section here has appeared on several Prestige recordings as the Garland Trio, and both Garland and bassist Paul Chambers were co-members with Coltrane of the Miles Davis Quintet. Drummer Arthur Taylor also worked with Davis for a while. So the highly necessary community of purpose necessary to a successful recording was already there as an element to be used, rather than a needed quality to be strived for.

It seems pointless, in a case like this, to go into typical annotator's puffs and shout "This is the best

record John Coltrane has ever made!" or something of the sort. Certainly, portions of it are as good as anything he has ever done, and all of it is an excellent example of one of the most productive periods in the career of one of the few undeniably important figures in contemporary jazz.

Notes: Joe Goldberg

Supervision: Bob Weinstock

Recording: Rudy Van Gelder

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