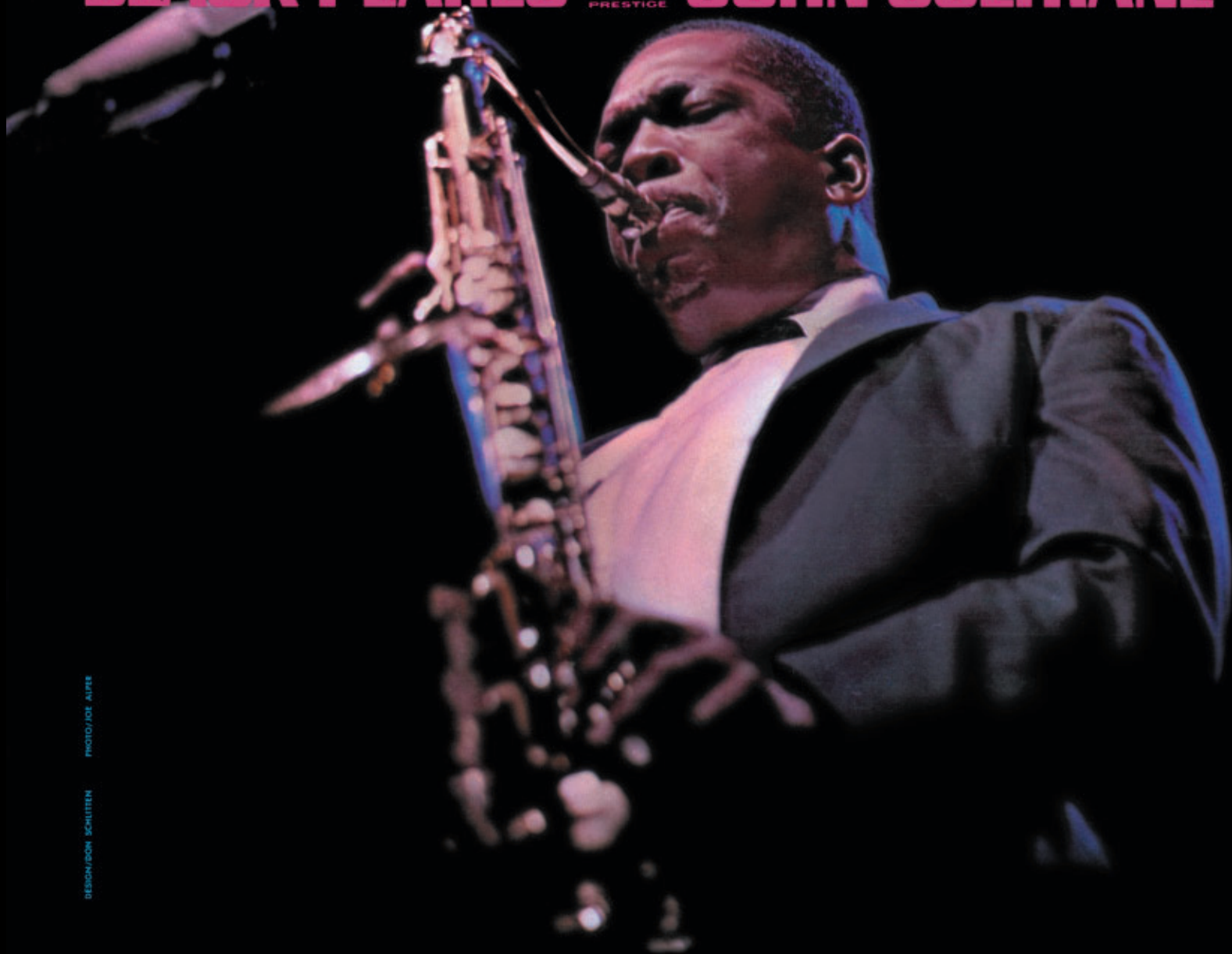


STEREO

PR 7316

BLACK PEARLS **JOHN COLTRANE**



PHOTO/JOE ALPER

DESIGN/BOB SCHLITEN

BLACK PEARLS
JOHN COLTRANE

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

1 BLACK PEARLS 13:13
2 LOVER COME BACK TO ME 7:27
3 SWEET SAPPHIRE BLUES 18:13



*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; May 23, 1958.
Supervision by **BOB WEINSTOCK** 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 **ASHLEY KAHN**

JOHN COLTRANE

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

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 unattached 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 overriding 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 his 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 of substance, no matter how good or enjoyable that experience is in regulated amounts—we stop listening. Perhaps the effects of the device 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 theater, 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 favor; 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 catalog 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 Sapphire" 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 represented here not only come into the studio to play for a period of time but come to disgorge 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 blues which takes up the entirety of the second side, has Red Garland winging it from measure one. "Sweet Sapphire 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.

—MICHAEL GOLD
April 1964

These notes appeared on the original album liner.

BLACK PEARLS

BLACK PEARLS
LOVER COME BACK TO ME
SWEET SAPPHIRE BLUES

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 messenger. — **RUDY VAN GELDER**

BLACK PEARLS REVISITED

FRIDAYS WITH RUDY

By the late Fifties, Rudy Van Gelder's recording studio in Hackensack, New Jersey was in constant demand. Many of the engineer's best clients—recording companies like Blue Note, ABC, the classical Vox label—were scheduling sessions with enough regularity that Van Gelder set aside a day of the week for a few of them. In 1958, the end of each workweek belonged to Prestige Records.

"The company was doing well," Bob Weinstock, Prestige's founder and primary producer, told jazz writer James Rozzi in 2000. "So for a certain period of time while I was supervising sessions, I had every Friday booked at Van Gelder's studio, often without anything in particular in mind."

True to form, Weinstock hired John Coltrane to lead a quintet date at Van Gelder's on May 23, 1958: an ad hoc blowing session that yielded three extended performances—two originals plus the standard "Lover Come Back to Me." The resulting album *Black Pearls* drew its title from the lively opening track, and it featured the saxophonist in familiar company, alongside trumpeter Donald Byrd, drummer Art Taylor, pianist Red Garland, and bassist Paul Chambers—the last two were Coltrane's fellow sidemen in trumpeter Miles Davis's famed mid-Fifties quintet.

Not that Weinstock had caught the Davis band—or any group—recently. He had begun to regard his daytime recording dates as private listening opportunities in lieu of his formerly active evening schedule. "I had stopped going to clubs because I wasn't hearing what I wanted to hear. So, for my own gratification, I'd set up session personnel for the enjoyment of hearing certain musicians stretch out together. Most recordings were just loosely organized jam sessions. That's why most of the tunes are standards . . . and blues, which sold the records."

Consistent with Weinstock's habit of stockpiling recordings for future release, *Black Pearls* was not released for six years. When it was in 1964, the album received warm reviews, sold well, and—in a year that saw Coltrane moving into more spiritual territory with albums like *Crescent* and *A Love Supreme*—served as a backwards glance at a time the saxophonist had been a member of a tight and busy brotherhood. His son Ravi Coltrane today hears in *Black Pearls* an intense workman sensibility that his father shared with other jazz sidemen of his day.

"These guys were journeymen. They were here, there, and everywhere, making it happen, struggling at times, innovating most of the time. There were probably all these other things happening during that week in '58 that factor into the music, like playing gigs, three or four sets a night, driving down to Philly or D.C. That's what I think about. I look at his schedule and I'm like okay, one minute he's recording with Donald Byrd, Red Garland, and Art Taylor. And a week later he's doing 'Stella By Starlight,' and 'On Green Dolphin Street' with Miles, Bill Evans, and Cannonball [Adderley]."

In fact, Coltrane recorded with Miles Davis's all-star sextet only three days after recording *Black Pearls*—both sessions took place during and just after Davis headlined a weeklong engagement at the Red Hill Inn near Philadelphia.

In 1958, jazz musicians could count on Friday night gigs somewhere within a few hours radius of Van Gelder's studio. Coltrane was playing music constantly, seeing more of his fellow musicians than his family, and probably more than enough of the New Jersey Turnpike. When Coltrane got the call from Weinstock to record a midday date up in Hackensack, he had little time to prepare material. The younger Coltrane sees *Black Pearls* as a noteworthy departure from the more meticulously crafted albums his father recorded for Prestige and other labels.

"The cuts on this particular record are a little more freewheeling than usual. They were treating it more like a gig—stretching out, mixing it up—a blues, a ballad, and an upbeat number like 'Lover Come Back to Me' which definitely feels like a live-set closer." In a 2001 interview, Weinstock backed up the impression. "Coltrane just came in and played. He didn't rehearse the musicians, just 'bang bang, boom boom' and

that's the way it was recording with him and those musicians."

Ravi finds another significant departure in the first tune recorded that Friday—"Black Pearls," a number written by Coltrane. "It's really generic, a very by-the-numbers bebop, 32-bar form, with no Coltrane-esque alterations anywhere in the piece. There's a four-bar vamp at the end of the form before they go into the blowing, that is more typical of his writing, you hear that in a bunch of his tunes, like 'Moments Notice.' But most of his writing from this period is very distinctive, with an unconventional kind of harmonic movement. 'Black Pearls' is unusual in that it's not unusual."

Yet, Coltrane's performance on "Black Pearls" stands out as a prime example of his oft-referenced "sheets of sound" approach. Coined by jazz journalist Ira Gitler in an early *Downbeat* profile, it's a term Coltrane himself thought was an accurate description; others since have felt the same way. "I've always liked that term, just for the energy of it," says Ravi. "John was cramming long phrases and more information into smaller spaces. In a sense, he was widening the beat by playing clusters of notes, often in irregular groupings, which give it that sweeping rhythmic feel. And because he's dealing with harmonic content, there's that sense of chords moving by."

To many Coltrane fans, "sheets of sound" has come to refer primarily to his rapid fire playing, the more outward effect of his technique in 1958. But as Coltrane biographer Lewis Porter wrote in his illuminating essay for the Prestige box set *Fearless Leader* (PRCD6-30059-2), Coltrane himself believed the term applied "only when he was playing faster than the rhythm section, and especially when he was playing different scales over each chord not when he was simply keeping up with a fast tempo."

Porter points out that on "Black Pearls," Coltrane notably delivers "sheets" 1:28 and 3:28 into his solo, "and quotes [the melody of the tune] 'Dearly Beloved' at 1:14." Byrd and Garland follow in succession, each establishing their own stylistic footprint with energetic solos, each in marked contrast to the others.

Reflecting the egalitarian feel of a live performance, Coltrane cedes the first solo of the next two performances to his session-mates. Byrd ignites the top-gear rendition of "Lover Come Back to Me," deftly skipping through the tune's harmony with the fire he was capable of even in his earliest years. "Sweet Sapphire Blues," another performance that highlights Coltrane's "sheets of sound" style, also functions as a showcase for Garland. The pianist's improvisation kicks off the 18-minute blues—in fact, the tune barely begins before Garland is off and running—revealing both his rhythmic dexterity and his agility with a variety of devices, like double octaves and triplets.

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of the track is the name listed as composer of the tune. In an era when many producers and record company heads demanded full or partial songwriting credit as a sort of *droit du seigneur*, Weinstock recalled the tune being constructed in the moment in order to complete the session, then being offered to him by one of his favorite artists.

"On that one session the songs weren't long enough [for a whole album] so I said, 'Let's do a slow blues to finish it out.' And Trane said, 'you write it,' and I said, 'I can't write it, I don't know music.' But he insisted, 'just tell me what you want me to play.' It was like a joke—he had a good sense of humor. He asked, 'should it go like this?' and went 'vv-vv-vv-vv-vv.' Then he said, 'Okay, you wrote it.' You know, that's the only song I ever got credit for writing—"Sweet Sapphire Blues."

It was a playful gesture of generosity that was certainly like Coltrane, yet it was not as if he was gifting Weinstock an original composition on the level of "Naima" or "Giant Steps." That the defining melody of "Sweet Sapphire" is not played until the very end of the track by Garland strongly suggests it was intended as a blues workout more than anything else.

"Red doesn't play the theme going in, but you hear it at the end of the track," Ravi notes. "It's a minor-themed riff blues that these guys would just start playing, a launching pad for their solos. It has a simple melody that sounds like something somebody sung in an elevator and said 'OK, here, play that.'"

"But what great solos, just blowing over a simple riff blues! In fact, with many of those Prestige recordings, you can find these diamonds, these jewels hidden away, which makes these informal moments all the more valuable."

Coltrane recorded two more sessions for Prestige in 1958 before his three-year association with Weinstock and Van Gelder came to a close. In 1959, he began to record for Atlantic Records, and two years later, signed to Impulse, reuniting for more momentous Fridays—and other days of the week—with Rudy.

— **ASHLEY KAHN**

April 2008

Ashley Kahn is the author of The House That Trane Built:

The Story of Impulse Records and other jazz titles.

He often contributes to National Public Radio's "Morning Edition."

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BOOGALOO JOE JONES—Right On Brother (PRCD-30659)

1 BLACK PEARLS 13:13
(John Coltrane) Jowcol Music-BMI

2 LOVER COME BACK TO ME 7:27
(Romberg-Hammerstein) Warner Bros./Bambalina Music-ASCAP

3 SWEET SAPPHIRE BLUES 18:13
(Robert Weinstock) Prestige Music-BMI

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

Recorded by RUDY VAN GELDER at Van Gelder Studio, Hackensack, NJ; May 23, 1958.

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RUDY VAN GELDER REMASTERS

