

STEREO

BST 81577

BLUE TRAIN **john coltrane**





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Blue Note BST-81577

JOHN COLTRANE

LEE MORGAN, trumpet; CURTIS FULLER, trombone; JOHN COLTRANE, tenor sax;
KENNY DREW, piano; PAUL CHAMBERS, bass; "PHILLY" JOE JONES, drums.

JOHN COLTRANE PERFORMS BY COURTESY OF PRESTIGE RECORDS, KENNY DREW BY COURTESY OF RIVERSIDE RECORDS.

BLUE TRAIN

MOMENT'S NOTICE

LOCOMOTION

I'M OLD FASHIONED

LAZY BIRD

JOHN COLTRANE has often been called a "searching" musician. His literally wailing sound—spearing, sharp and resonant creates what might best describe as an ominous atmosphere that seems to suggest (from a purely emotional standpoint) a kind of intense probing into things far off, unknown and mysterious. Admittedly such a description is valid only in a personal way but "searching" remains applicable to Trane in view of actual fact. He is constantly seeking out new ways to extend his form of expression—practicing continually, listening to what other people are doing, adding, rejecting, assimilating—molding a voice that is already one of the most important in modern jazz.

John's "sound" as mentioned in the lead is rather unique. It is certainly his most obvious trademark (similar to Dexter Gordon, his earliest and strongest influence) but has meaning apart from just a "different sound." His way of thinking is at one with his tonal approach. His ideas often seem to run in veering, inconsistent lines appearing at first to lack discipline but, like Miles Davis and Thelonious Monk (two of his closest musical associates, both of whom have been labeled by some as "eccentric" and/or "poorly equipped" instrumentalists) John is aware and in control of what he is doing. What may appear to be suddenly rejected is used, rather, as a basis for further exploration.

Born in Hamlet, North Carolina on September 23, 1926 John began his study of music with the alto horn and clarinet when he was fifteen. Later, after a hitch in the Navy, he played with King Colfax, Eddie Vinson (switching to tenor), some spotted gigs with Howard McGhee at the Apollo in New York, Dizzy Gillespie's big band, Lonnie Slapney in Philadelphia, Guy Crosse in Cleveland, Earl Bostic and Johnny Hodges. In 1955 Trane joined the Miles Davis Quintet for what turned out to be more than a year and a half gig and is currently a member of the Thelonious Monk Quartet. (Incidentally, at this writing, the Monk unit was moving into its fifteenth consecutive week at the hip Five Spot in Greenwich Village). Trane feels that working with Miles and Monk have been "invaluable musical experiences." His employment with each of these giants has provided him with an education that most musicians could not acquire in a lifetime. In addition Miles, and now Monk (being of this school themselves) have never inhibited John's musical sense of freedom. He is able to

experiment while on the stand with no fear of being called down and with a good chance of being congratulated.

John, though highly self-critical, has broad and varied tastes when it comes to others. His favorites are many; Miles ("His style of playing is very interesting to me. He has a very good knowledge of harmonics and chord structure. I used to talk with him quite often."), Dizzy, Lee Morgan, Donald Byrd, Joe Gordon, Hank Mobley, Johnny Griffin, Sonny Stitt, Cliff Jordan, Monk ("He plays with a whole range of chords. I had never heard anything like it before and I've learned a lot from him."), Red Garland, Kenny Drew, Phineas Newborn, Max Roach, Philly Joe Jones, Elvin Jones, Paul Chambers, Wilbur Ware, Earl May, Cannonball, Jackie McLean, Jay Jay Johnson, Curtis Fuller and Milt Jackson.

John has recorded previously for Blue Note with Paul Chambers (BLP 1534) and Johnny Griffin (BLP 1559).

Trane selected all the musicians used for this date. Lee Morgan, the exciting Gillespie—Navarro—Brown styled, young trumpet player who made his professional debut with Dizzy Gillespie when he was only eighteen and who, in a fantastically short period of time, has become an accepted front-runner on his instrument is also represented on Blue Note with five of his own albums (BLP 1538, 1541, 1557, 1575 and 1578), and with Hank Mobley (BLP 1540).

Curtis Fuller who, next to Jay Jay Johnson, is for this listener modern jazzdom's top trombonist can be heard on his own LPs (BLP 1569 and 1572) and as a sideman with Bud Powell (BLP 1571) and Cliff Jordan (BLP 1565). His conception continues to mature and increase in potency.

The rhythm section, comprised of Kenny Drew, Paul Chambers and Philly Joe Jones, is superb. Drew is a blues rooted pianist with a swinging, cohesive technique. Chambers and Jones are known primarily for their sparkling work with Miles Davis. They are both more than familiar with Trane's style having worked with him for an extensive period and assist in brilliant fashion. Paul fronts his own units on BLP 1534, 1564 and 1569 and is with Kenny Burrell (BLP 1523 and 1543), Lee Morgan (BLP 1541), Hank Mobley (BLP 1540) and Sonny Rollins (BLP 1558). Philly

Joe has driven the groups of J. R. Monterose (BLP 1536), Chambers (1534), Clifford Brown (BLP 1526 and Morgan (BLP 1538).

The four impressive originals in this set are by Coltrane. The title number, *Blue Train*, is a moving, eerie blues. Trane rides swiftly down a lonesome track with Lee and Curtis shoveling extra coal into the boiler near the end of his solo. Lee follows with an energetic statement and is succeeded by a gutty Fuller. John and Lee riff behind Curtis just before he gives way to funky Kenny Drew. Chambers takes a brief but effective solo before the group returns to the theme.

Moment's Notice is a happy romper with expressive solos by Coltrane, Fuller, Morgan, Chambers (bowed) and Drew.

Locomotion, an uptempo blues begins with a rocking drum statement and a unison riff theme with Coltrane taking off on several "breaks" in between the repeated pattern before moving into his actual solo which, like those of Fuller, Morgan, Drew and Jones who follow, is played in a hard, slashing fashion.

I'm Old Fashioned, a pretty, old popular song that was suggested to Trane by a friend is rendered a delicate treatment. Here John is given a chance to display his warm handling of a ballad and shows himself to be adept with tunes set in any tempo. Curtis, Kenny and Lee are also provided with solo space and their interpretations are sensitive and poignant.

Lazy Bird is faintly reminiscent of Todd Dameron's *Lady Bird*. After a short piano introduction Morgan (with a brief assist from the other horns), Fuller, Coltrane, Drew, Chambers (with bow) and Jones, take off in that order. Lee returns at the end to ride out over John and Curtis with the theme.

What is perhaps the most striking attribute (among many) about this LP is its free, but not disorganized, blowing mood that has everyone in exceptional form both individually and collectively.

—ROBERT LEVIN

Photos by FRANCIS WOLFF
Cover Design by REID MILES
Recording by RUDY VAN GELDER

Users of Wide Range equipment should adjust their controls for RIAA curve.



JOHN COLTRANE

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I'M OLD FASHIONED
(J. KERN-J. MERCER)
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ALL COMPOSITIONS BY
JOHN COLTRANE, UNLESS
OTHERWISE NOTED.

HIGH RESOLUTION MASTERING
BY ALAN YOSHIDA AND ROBIN
LYNN AT BLANCHE DUBOIS,
APRIL 2012.

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—Robert Levin
original liner notes

JOHN COLTRANE

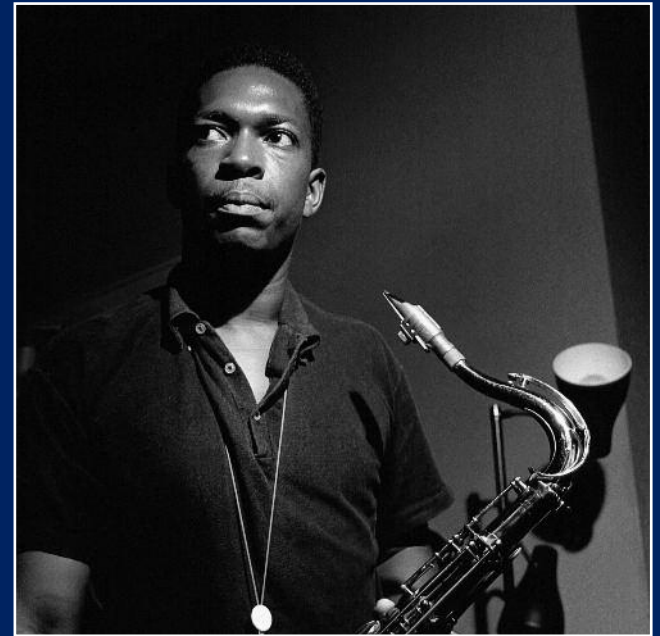
In 1957 while in the midst of finding his own voice on the tenor saxophone in bands led by jazz freedom riders Miles Davis and Thelonious Monk, John Coltrane enlisted a band of peers and entered Rudy Van Gelder's Hackensack, N.J., studio. With a new spirit rising, Coltrane created *Blue Train*, a 40-plus-minute masterwork that stands as one of the greatest jazz records of all time. It was only his second album as leader—and his sole recording under his own name for Blue Note Records. Of course, Trane, always the insatiable seeker, went on to launch new rockets of interstellar music—including 1959's ground-breaking *Giant Steps*, 1964's sublime jazz prayer *A Love Supreme* and 1966's large ensemble expedition *Ascension*, which sparked the burgeoning free jazz movement.

But it all started for Coltrane with *Blue Train*, a pioneering five-song, blues-steeped, post-bop outing that exhilarates with pockets of brawn and poetry, excursions of ferocity and finesse, stretches of blazing velocity and soulful tenderness. By all measures it began as an organic session with four spirited Trane originals and a gorgeous rendition

of the Jerome Kern-Johnny Mercer ballad, "I'm Old Fashioned." But graced by the incantations of inspired improvisation, *Blue Train* yielded a transcendence that few recordings achieve.

Today, 55 years later, *Blue Train* permeates the air and sounds as fresh as it did in jazz's '50s golden age. Its richly lyrical tunes are instantly identifiable by longtime listeners as well as aspiring saxophone students. But songs from the album also elicit vague memories from even those uninitiated into the jazz world. The iconic title track, one of Trane's all-time catchiest themes, could easily pass for comfort background music at a loud party or serve as a quiet-toned dinner jazz companion that won't upset candlelit conversations.

However, *Blue Train* is best appreciated, like all jazz recordings, with listening intent attuned to the fine artistry—in this case, the otherworldly quality of Coltrane commandingly searching on his horn for the right notes, the ideal phrasings, the perfect flights, the risk-taking leap of faith into a state of jazz nirvana.



In addition, *Blue Train* buoys with the instrumental communion within the band—trumpeter Lee Morgan and trombonist Curtis Fuller, both recent Blue Note signings; pianist Kenny Drew; and the dynamic rhythm section from Davis's classic '50s quintet: band mates Paul Chambers on bass and Philly Joe Jones on drums.

On "Blue Train," Coltrane's saxophone exploration is followed

BLUE TRAIN

by Morgan's equally questing trumpet speak, then Fuller's deep-brewed bluesy response. On the jaunty "Moment's Notice," Trane speeds on his saxophone but never sounds like he's in a hurry, creating a brisk dance with the festive help of the rhythm team—Chambers's pulsing rhythms and Jones's swinging beats. Both the other uptempo numbers, "Locomotion" (Trane on the first full-gusto solo) and "Lazy Bird" (Morgan leading with a rapturous solo), feature the band members interplaying with jubilant zest.

While so much of today's music seems to feature solos that are brazen blow bashes or ego-driven opportunities for one-upmanship, *Blue Train* stands as a classic example of how collective self-expression overrides posing for the spotlights. This is a session where every note blown on every track is in service to the song.

Coltrane himself recognized the consummate character of *Blue Train*, later in his career referring to it as one of his favorite recordings. On the

2003 Blue Note SACD reissue of *Blue Train*, producer and liner note writer Michael Cuscuna called the album "perfect" and the music "eternal," adding that "the ingredients for such alchemy cannot be quantified any more than genius can be defined and described. But we know it when we hear it."

More than a half-century after it was conceived, *Blue Train* continues to marvel.

—Dan Ouellette

