

John Coltrane – Both Directions At Once (The Lost Album) [2018]

Written by bluesever

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1-1 Untitled Original 11383 (Take 1) 5:41 1-2 Nature Boy 3:24 1-3 Untitled Original 11386 (Take 1) 8:43 1-4 Vilia (Take 3) 5:32 1-5 Impressions (Take 3) 4:36 1-6 Slow Blues 11:28 1-7 One Up, One Down (Take 2) 8:01 2-1 Vilia (Take 5) 4:37 2-2 Impressions (Take 1) 4:06 2-3 Impressions (Take 2) 4:37 2-4 Impressions (Take 4) 3:40 2-5 Untitled Original 11386 (Take 2) 8:41 2-6 Untitled Original 11386 (Take 5) 8:23 2-7 One Up, One Down (Take 6) 7:17 Bass – Jimmy Garrison Drums – Elvin Jones Piano – McCoy Tyner Tenor Saxophone, Soprano Saxophone – John Coltrane

The day before John Coltrane, McCoy Tyner, Elvin Jones and Jimmy Garrison convened at the Van Gelder studios in Englewood Cliffs, John, Paul, George and Ringo recorded "From Me To You" at Abbey Road in seven takes. That night the Coltrane quartet tore apart Birdland and the next day recorded an album with Johnny Hartman. Music was changing everywhere and, thus, the world.

Bob Thiele's voice is the first we hear, cutting through the political panic of fifty five years. "This is an original, isn't it?" he asks. A quick "Yea," passes from Coltrane's lips. Yet there's a knowing force in that one word, a quiet assurance and burgeoning need to get the tape rolling.

Like a countdown, Thiele slates the take "1-1-3-8-2, uh, 8-3, original. Take 1." Lift off. The leader's soprano falls from on high, Jones' muscles punctuate and Tyner is loosed, his left hand eagerly constructing those huge, angular chords for Coltrane to soar over searingly and searchingly over. Garrison steps forward with an arching, pronounced solo. (One of the major beauties of Both Directions At Once: The Lost Album is the bassist's effortlessly profound playing and pace setting on the trio cuts where Tyner sits out, as on "Nature Boy," "Impressions (Take 3)," the first part of Take 1 of "One Up, One Down," and most of "Slow Blues.")

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And so, the once-lost is found, rescued from Coltrane's quarter-inch home reference tapes found in his first wife's estate. (The original masters were either trashed in the purge of Impulse when its parent label, ABC-Paramount, moved to Los Angeles, or when it was purchased by MCA in 1979, or just lost to the cold neglect of man and time.) Either way, the album is an essential bridge, a creatively cohesive whole that makes one wonder why Thiele and Van Gelder didn't argue strenuously for its release at the time. (It's well documented that Coltrane was frustrated with Prestige and Atlantic, his first labels, and their habit of releasing older material to capitalize and compete with his new music and confusing the faithful, so perhaps this led to Thiele and Van Gelder's reluctance to push the point.)

That aside, the aforementioned "Nature Boy" flows next with the tenor in minor-key mode, one moment rhapsodizing, the other a more somber, melodic dance with Jones his partner and Garrison's ostinato anchoring it all. "Untitled Original 11386" finds the quartet taking things lighter with a stepped-up bossa-nova. Yet Coltrane's soprano wails and squalls, opening the new door a bit more to let in hints of things to come. But, as the album title declares, these guys were both cognizant of the past while yearning fearlessly forward; so "Villa (Take 3)," with a lyrical Tyner solo that simply dazzles, and "Slow Blues" take us back to the more controlled, less controversial sound of say, Ballads or even My Favorite Things. For four guys ready to blast the music and our heads wide open, these tracks are almost cool, considered deceptions. Like they didn't want us getting whiplash when they really took off. Or maybe they were just warming up for the next day's sessions with Hartman. Genius seems to harbor many reasons.

Though Coltrane continued to revisit, revive, de-and re-construct "Impressions" exhaustively throughout his live canon (perhaps to clarify a more original connotation of the theme from Morton Gould's "Pavane,") the four takes of "Impressions" that grace Both Directions At Once: The Lost Album (in playing order #'s 3, 1, 2, and 4) are the last studio attempts and all are finished, focused works worthy to be called masters. Taken as a trio, "Take 3" takes it hands down, but arguments can and will be made for the other three takes. Burning takes of "One Up, One Down" close out both discs, each charged with stacked triads and fearless ensemble playing; kudos again to Garrison whose solo, especially on "Take 1," is the epitome of driving intent.

It isn't often new archival work is released and revelations abound. Both Directions At Once: The Lost Album is that rare work indeed. Just like its creators. ---Mike Jurkovic,
allaboutjazz.com

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