

Karrin Allyson - Ballads: Remembering John Coltrane (2002)

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1. *Say It (Over And Over Again)* 2. *You Don't Know What Love Is* 3. *To Young To Go Steady*
4. *All Or Nothing At All* 5. *I Wish I Knew* 6. *What's New* 7. *It's Easy To Remember* 8. *Nancy*
(*With The Laughing Face*) 9. *Naima* 10. *Why Was I Born* 11. *Everytime We Say Goodbye*
(*Total Time: 61:46*) Karrin Allyson - Vocals James Williams – Piano John Patitucci – Bass
Lewis Nash –Drums Bob Berg - Tenor Saxophone James Carter - Tenor Saxophone Steve
Wilson - Soprano Saxophone.

I am listening to The John Coltrane Quartet's Ballads as I write this piece. I have never considered Coltrane a player of "pretty music." Where Charlie Parker was "just looking for the pretty notes" during his frenetic creative spurts, Coltrane was just planning to look for a place for all notes, presented in just the right order and at the right tempo. Coltrane's solo on Miles Davis' "Round Midnight" on 'Round about Midnight is a perfect example of what would become the tenorist's "wall of sound."

"Giant Steps" brings his vision a little closer to fruition and Coltrane's "My Favorite Things," from Live At the Village Vanguard is again probably could be considered Coltrane attaining spiritual perfection. Harold C. Schoenberg, former New York Times music critic, described music from Beethoven's final period as "music on a rarified plane—not pretty but merely sublime." So with John Coltrane.

I do not find John Coltrane's playing on Ballads pretty. It is his genius clarified through the cheesecloth of standards that makes this recording so timeless. His Impulse! recording with Johnny Hartman (John Coltrane and Johnny Hartman, Impulse! 157, 1963) is the same way, but this time with a melding of voice and saxophone, somehow softening Coltrane's thorny exterior. Karrin Allyson takes this a step further with her new release, Ballads: Remembering John Coltrane.

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With a voice and facility equal to any singer presently singing, Ms. Allyson infuses this special collection of standards with a pure beauty without sacrificing the Coltrane vision. Using the same arrangements as the Coltrane Quartet and for the most part following his playing, *Ballads: Remembering John Coltrane* offers the listener an idea of what Coltrane was thinking when blowing these ballads out of the bell of his horn. "Say It" is breathtaking as is "Too Young to Go Steady" and "All, or Nothing at All." Fellow saxists Bob Berg, Steve Wilson, and James Carter make no attempt to emulate the master, only to express happiness in playing the same music he once did. James Williams and John Patitucci are most tasteful in their support. --- C. Michael Bailey, allaboutjazz.com

Here's a singer who has mostly slipped past my radar. It won't happen again. Allyson's new CD is a very personal remembrance of the balladry of John Coltrane, sweetly reviving the memory of how in the midst of his most explorative period, J.C. paused to lay down his memorable *Ballads* date for Impulse!. Apparently among musicians he not only touched horn players, but at least one singer. There's a lot of heart in how Allyson approaches this material, a sense of yearning that is quite intimate, right from her tender reading of "Say It (Over and Over Again)" that opens the date. There's just a hint of Jeri Southern in her work.

Allyson isn't entirely new to my ears, but it's apparent with this disc that she's gotten better and better with age, like all upper-echelon singers. Her phrasing is graceful, never rushed, and she makes fine use of space, allowing this music to breathe. Allyson makes a real investment in this material. There's fragility, even vulnerability in her convergence with this material; try the opening phrases of "It's Easy to Remember" for evidence. Allyson's wordless "Naima" is delivered with a kind of quiet urgency, braced by a fine tenor solo by James Carter that recalls the spirit of its composer. "Everytime We Say Goodbye," the closer, finds Allyson lagging a fraction of a step behind the rhythm section, lending further drama to her reading. All is not at slow tempo here, though: Witness her easy swing and scat solo on "All or Nothing at All." --- Willard Jenkins, jazztimes.com

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