

BLUES REVIEWS
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ing. Fifty years have now passed since the illegitimately-titled *Beano* began invading record collections and, in turn, blues-rock psyches. *Talk About That* shows that, 65 albums later, Mayall is busily still at it.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

BRUCE EWAN

Bluesero
RED KING

Mucho mojo is at hand. Although Charlie Muselwhite took a crack at such



hybridization via 1999's *Continental Drifter*, Bruce Ewan comes faithfully committed to deciphering sambalicious, rumba-riffic rhythms through a blues harp. The mission is not a whim. But one that comes internationally road-tested from two decades of being repeatedly requested at clubs, concert halls and festivals from Brazil and Argentina to Spain and Portugal. He's *un favorito* in Mexico, too. *Sí*, he's from north of the border, down Washington, D.C. way. And *absolutamente*, he's Bobby Radcliff's kid brother, who has shared stages with American heavies like John Lee Hooker and Albert Collins. Yet Ewan has got the timbales to pull off *Bluesero*. Literally. Certainly commanding a percussion-heavy, horn-leavened band is a major asset for when Latin fever strikes or Carnival time comes around. Most importantly, his chops are bilingual: capable of speaking in diatonic Chicago squalls as fluently as in tropical chromatic breezes. Half of that fire-and-ice manifests in the streetwise blues aggression of "Red Head Woman" and "Ewan Shuffle." At the opposite pole, "São Paulo Blues" and "Polka Dots & Moonbeams" caress the reeds with agile Cugat class and an airy, cufflink tone a la maestro Toots Thielemans. "Hit the Equator" and "Los Jibaros" split the equatorial difference. Exotic instrumentals, like those, are what distinctly separate Ewan from the pack, as when engaging a nylon-string guitar in a "Gringo Tango" or dancing the specially engineered "La Bluecaracha" to sound like a cantina record from 1934.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

JOHN COLTRANE

Trane 90
ACROBAT (4-CD SET)

Had John Coltrane lived to turn 90 back in September, where would jazz be now? It's one of those million-dollar questions. Because by the time the saxophone deity died in 1967 at age 40, his pioneering had already thrust the genre—along with improvisation, the tenor horn, the soprano horn, artistic breakthroughs, intensity of performance—beyond the pale. Jazz beyond jazz. Although Simon Spillet's 48 pages of scholarly notes do some of that "What if" pondering, *Trane 90's* 35 tracks instead stick to tracing a monstrosity creative trajectory. That means being there when Coltrane was searching for the sound—live, "On Green Dolphin Street," under the wing of master trumpeter Miles Davis. When spilling 'sheets of sound'—from the more-is-more "Giant Steps." Certainly when spewing torrential blizzards of sound, too—for 16 insanely bristling minutes as "Chasin' the Trane" scorches the Village Vanguard's sacred ground. And for all points in between as well.

To cover such expanse, the four-disc anthology doles out thematic subsets: *Stablemates* (Coltrane the sideman); *Straight Street* (Coltrane the leader); *Just Friends* (Coltrane collaborations); and *Impressions* (Coltrane broadcasts and private tapes). Performances date as early as a 1951 Dizzy Gillespie Septet gig, when his playing was formative and more mortal. Only ten years later, Trane's own quartet explodes surreal in a wild-eyed Helsinki lashing of "Impressions," with added guest Eric Dolphy co-straining on alto. And what Coltrane appreciation would be complete without an onstage exhortation of "My Favorite Things"? This particular odyssey dates to the 1961 Newport Festival, where pianist McCoy Tyner does yeoman's work chanting chords into the almighty maw of Elvin Jones' inspiringly abused drums. Absolutely, this is jazz in full roar.

Yet for as much of the after-shock expected of Coltrane's music, afterglow resides here just as well. "Soultrane" and "Naima" charm with their tenderest of



balladeering. The big-band discourse around "Manhattan" is polite. The landmark "So What" is cerebrally modal. "Max is Making Wax," however, turns back toward edgy fastballing.

Fringe benefits continue to accrue. Trane is heard locking (tenor) horns with Sonny Rollins. Tranquilizing the blues with vibraphonist Milt Jackson. Rounding off pianist Thelonious Monk's jagged angles. Mirroring Cannonball Adderley's alto through the twists of "Grand Central." And, astutely, the dream-team alchemy with Miles is captured no less than ten times (eight with the Quintet, twice with the Sextet). Headliners as great as Lee Morgan, Johnny Hodges, Cecil Taylor and Hank Mobley also show up. So do albums as colossal as *Blue Trane*, *Kind of Blue*, *Tenor Madness*, *'Round About Midnight* and *Giant Steps*. Less ordained albums like pianist Todd Dameron's *Mating Call* or *Art Blakey: Big Band* (where Trane plays off Donald Byrd's flared trumpet) likewise contribute.

After nearly five total hours of flying from frontier to frontier, *Trane 90* eventually touches back down on "Body and Soul," the very piece with which Coleman Hawkins first revolutionized the tenor saxophone in 1939. How fitting to close out this exploration of pushing boundaries with its exponential escalation on Birdland's bandstand 23 years later?

No wonder Coltrane's sound roused across party lines, beckoning fellow jazzmen (Wayne Shorter to flamethrower David S. Ware) as well as rockers (Carlos Santana), hip-hoppers (Mos Def), and anyone up for a good adventure to tune into its unique frequency.

DENNIS ROZANSKI

HOUSE OF WOUNDED GUITARS
houseofwoundedguitars.com

PETE KANARAS
Electric/Acoustic guitar and electric bass repair
info@houseofwoundedguitars.com
(410) 241-0926
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