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**Music Review: Sonny Rollins - *Saxophone Colossus***

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## Music Review: Sonny Rollins - *Saxophone Colossus*



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The reissue of Sonny Rollins' first acknowledged masterwork, *Saxophone Colossus* not only contains some of the best work of his career, it is a real bargain as well. This Extended Jazz Classics release includes *Saxophone Colossus* in addition to his previous *Work Time* album.

Sonny got his start with the Max Roach - Clifford Brown Quintet. Max Roach shows his appreciation of Sonny by drumming on every track on both records. Roach's style is immediately identifiable as he opens up *Saxophone Colossus* with Rollins' great Calypso composition, "Saint Thomas."

Bobby Darin's classic "Mack The Knife" started off as the theme song to Kurt Weill's *The Threepenny Opera*. Sonny Rollins uses the original, German title "Morita" to reinvent the song as a ten minute tour de force. It becomes a showcase for some amazing solo excursions, especially from pianist Tommy Flanagan. Doug Watkins' substantive bass playing also benefits from this extended outing.

The quartet fulfill their destiny with *Saxophone Colossus*' final track, "Blue." Although the song is legendary in jazz circles, it deserves plaudits for what it later inspired. That would just happen to be the most famous album in jazz history: Miles Davis' *Kind Of Blue*.

Forget the historical importance though, and just listen to these four players improvise at the very top of their game. "Blue" is a stunning eleven minute example of what a band in tune with each other are capable of.

*Saxophone Colossus* is regarded as one of Sonny Rollins' very best with good reason, and could certainly stand on it's own, as it has since 1956. So it is somewhat incongruous to hear track one of *Work Time* follow "Blue" Even more so because it is a comparatively pedestrian version of "There's No Business Like Show Business."

This is Sonny Rollins however, and there is at least one track on *Work Time* which ranks with the best of *Saxophone Colossus*. "There Are Such Things" is a ballad which ranks among his finest. It is just a gorgeous tune, with an inspired piano solo by Ray Bryant. One gets the feeling that Kenyon Hopkins, composer of the soundtrack to *The Hustler*, was intimately familiar with this track.

The packaging is great as well, featuring the original liner notes by noted jazz writer Ira Gitler. Two albums, ten tracks, and not a bad one among them. Sonny was definitely at a career high here. *Saxophone Colossus*, indeed.

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Greg Barbrick is an expert on the wrestler Terry Funk, Grand Funk Railroad, and Funkadelic. He smells pretty funky too.