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Sonny Rollins: Saxophone Colossus

Publisher: **Essential Jazz Classics**

Using the word "colossus" is a bit like saying "gargantuan" or "monumental." Unlike the word "awesome," which in most vernacular has come to mean little more than "great" or "good," something about "colossus" still sounds impressive and exotic. This was as true in the '50s when **Saxophone Colossus** was released as today. Setting aside whatever hype the title suggests and listening to the music, one finds an actual factual (to borrow a phrase from Stan & Jan Berenstain) Colossus on this record. Much as Rollins' predecessors Charlie Parker, Lester Young, and Coleman Hawkins became musical waypoints for a generation of horn players, Sonny innovated so completely and consistently that he redefined the tenor saxophone for years to come. Not long after **Saxophone Colossus** was released, players coming up would be themselves not along the Lester Young-Coleman Hawkins continuum, but along Rollins-John Coltrane continuum. Not only is **Sonny Rollins: Saxophone Colossus** a fascinating collection of this classic album and another incredible one originally *Work Time*, it is a real historical benchmark in jazz.



Three out of the five compositions on **Saxophone Colossus** are Rollins' original "Don't Know What Love Is" and "Moritat" filling out the record. The latter is what I recognize as "Mack the Knife," credited here as in other versions to Kurt Weill, and the original German name for *The Ballad of Mack the Knife*. The second album, *Work Time*, has only one original and includes great uptempo versions of classics like "There's No Business as Show Business" and "It's All Right With Me." The only man in common in the line albums is Max Roach on drums; Roach provides perfect counterpoint to Rollins' lines and keeps impeccable swinging time at even the most blistering fast tempo. Flanagan and Ray Bryant ride the piano across the two albums, with Doug Watkins and Morrow on bass. *Work Time* was the earlier album by a year, and has seat-of-the-pants feeling to it, as if the entire band is hanging on by a thin line all time. Contrast this with **Saxophone Colossus** where even the fastest tunes are studied, methodical solos by Rollins and the rest.

From the joyous island rhythm of "Saint Thomas" to the aching melancholy of "You and I" to the quirky downtempo "Blue" to the jolly winking "Moritat" to the asymmetrical driver "Strode Rode," **Saxophone Colossus** tells an epic musical tale. Bundling the pushy, raucous, and joyful songs from *Work Time* is like adding syrup to the icing already on top of the cake... Any tenor saxophone player that doesn't have at least one of Rollins' solos from this collection by heart is a jazz illiterate, and anyone who hasn't heard **Sonny Rollins: Saxophone Colossus** for the first time, prepare to have your mind broken and your mind blown, all with a "colossal" smile on your face.

-Fridtjof, GameVortex Communications AKA M



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