

Les McCann & Eddie Harris □ – Swiss Movement (1969)

Written by bluesever

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1 *Compared To What* 8:55 2 *Cold Duck Time* 7:08 3 *Kathleen's Theme* 6:15 4 *You Got It In Your Soulness* 7:34 5 *The Generation Gap* 9:12 6 *Kaftan* 8:43 Bass – Leroy Vinnegar Drums – Donald Dean Piano, Vocals – Les McCann Tenor Saxophone – Eddie Harris Trumpet – Benny Bailey Recorded live at the Montreux Jazz Festival in Montreux, Switzerland in June 1969

One of the most popular soul jazz albums of all time, and one of the best, although Harris (and trumpeter Benny Bailey) had never played or rehearsed with the Les McCann Trio before, and indeed wasn't even given the music. Perhaps that's what sparked the spontaneous funk coming through clearly on the tape of this show, recorded at the Montreux Festival in 1969. It's actually much more of a showcase for McCann than Harris, although the tenor saxist's contributions are significant. The sole vocal, a version of Gene McDaniels' "Compared to What," remains McCann's signature tune. [Some reissues add a nine-minute bonus track, "Kaftan."] ---Richie Unterberger, AllMusic Review

Something of a happy accident, this recording from the 1969 Montreux Jazz Festival has actually become one of the most talked about, exhilarating and fun live jazz performances ever captured on wax.

The session (on the last night of the festival) was a truly impromptu event - this particular line up had never played together before and at least half of the group had no idea what material they were going to play as they took the stage!

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Kicking off with Gene McDaniels'; 'Compared To What', vocalist & pianist Les McCann sings this topical rant against Nixon and the Vietnam war over a funky backbeat. Horn men Eddie Harris and Benny Bailey take turns to blow some down home blues in between verses, surprisingly holding together brilliantly what was nothing more than a jam session to great effect.

The Harris original "Cold Duck Time" continues with a similar feel, an extrapolated blues vamp in the key of F. This simple good-time approach may not have pleased those with more critical ears, but the sound of the enthusiastic crowd prove that an up-tempo groove with some spirited blowing was exactly what the audience wanted to hear.

'Kathleen's Theme' swings in a more straight ahead approach and gives Harris's tenor the opportunity to investigate the intricacies of the melody - before the gospel based 'You Got It In Your Soulness' takes us right back to funky soul-jazz territory. McCann probes into the piece with his spiky, articulated piano chords and solo lines whilst drummer Donald Dean provides a sanctified back beat that reminds us of the church roots of much jazz & blues music.

The more contemplative and modal piece "The Generation Gap" provides a brief respite from the blues before the final track (not included on the original vinyl issue of the date). 'Kaftan' written by bassist Leroy Vinnegar is a pleasing if not overwhelming jaunt with a mildly afro-Cuban feel. Swiss Movement has long been a sought after collectors piece and the addition of expansive sleeve notes and anecdotes from the musicians involved makes this anniversary edition a great live recording to enjoy once again - 35 years after this very happening event. ---Greg Boraman, BBC Review

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