John Coltrane - Live at The Village Vanguard Again (1997)

1. "Naima" - 15:08 2. "Introduction to My Favorite Things" - 6:07 3. "My Favorite Things" - 20:21 Personnel John Coltrane – soprano saxophone, tenor saxophone, bass clarinet, flute Pharoah Sanders – tenor saxophone, flute Alice Coltrane – piano Jimmy Garrison – bass Rashied Ali – drums Emanuel Rahim – percussion

Live at the Village Vanguard, was one of John Coltrane's most successful and controversial albums. It was one of the first by the "classic quartet," and contained a boffo guest appearance by Eric Dolphy on the magnificent "Spiritual."

This isn't it. Five years after that triumph, Coltrane returned to the Vanguard with his New Thing quintet, expanded to a sextet for the occasion: Coltrane on soprano, tenor, and bass clarinet; Pharoah Sanders on tenor and flute; Alice Coltrane on piano, Jimmy Garrison on bass, Rashied Ali on drums, and Emanuel Rahim on percussion. This album contains only two songs: "Naima" and "My Favorite Things," which were perhaps the two most celebrated numbers, or overplayed chestnuts, of the Coltrane catalogue. Here they are given a treatment like no other.

Ali was no Elvin Jones. This band lacks the propulsive power brought by Jones and pianist McCoy Tyner. There is a slower, more meditative, less definite pace than Coltrane had worked with previously. The master seizes the opportunity to turn in, on "Naima," a theme statement and, later, a solo of such a richness and passion that Eric Nisenson, a Coltrane biographer, suggests that it was for this kind of thing Coltrane cast his lot with the avant-garde in the first place. Sanders here is still in a screaming mode, but his solo here shows in its melodic invention and fervent lyricism that Coltrane wasn't deaf when he asked him to join the band. He knew he would be able to hold up his end, and he does; too often his work in the late Coltrane quintet is overlooked for its style, rather than appreciated for its real substance.

"My Favorite Things" starts with an extended Jimmy Garrison bass solo that is good, but not as involving as the ever longer ones on Live in Japan (recorded the next month) or the astounding turn he takes to begin "Impressions" in France in the summer of 1965 (hear it—run, don't walk—on Live at Antibes, 1965, Le Jazz CD 10). Coltrane enters in high gear but with high lyricism as well. Sanders drops by for another solo of searing intensity and a furious duel with Coltrane, where the bass clarinet and flute appear, at some distance in the storm. Here the overall performance is perhaps less effective than the calmer but much longer (nearly one hour!) version recorded on Live in Japan ; certainly it's worlds away from the 1960 Atlantic original or any of the previous live versions.

This CD is worth the price for the breathtaking "Naima." "My Favorite Things" has its moments, too. People talk of "late Coltrane" as if all of his music after A Love Supreme sounded the same, but actually the music on this disc is much removed from the likes of Ascension, Om, or Live in Seattle. One might call this version of "Naima" The Gentle Side of Late Coltrane. Not for all tastes, perhaps, but essential for the musically adventurous. ---Robert Spencer, allaboutjazz.com

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