

Thelonious Monk Quartet With John Coltrane – At Carnegie Hall (2005)

Written by bluesever (Bogdan Marszałkowski)
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Early Show 1 *Monk's Mood* 7:52 2 *Evidence* 4:41 3 *Crepuscule With Nellie* 4:26 4 *Nutty* 5:03 5 *Epistrophe* 4:29 *Late Show* 6 *Bye-Ya* 6:31 7 *Sweet And Lovely* 9:34 8 *Blue Monk* 6:31 9 *Epistrophe (Incomplete)* 2:24 Bass – Ahmed Abdul-Malik Drums – Shadow Wilson Piano – Thelonious Monk Tenor Saxophone – John Coltrane Recorded on November 29, 1957 by Voice of America at Carnegie Hall, New York City.

Larry Appelbaum, the recording lab supervisor at the Library of Congress, came across this tape by accident while transferring the library's tape archive to digital. What a find. Forget the Five Spot recording that sounds like it was recorded inside of a tunnel from the far end. The sound here is wonderfully present and contemporary. More importantly, this band -- which also included drummer Shadow Wilson and bassist Ahmed Abdul-Malik -- had it right on November 29, 1957, at Carnegie Hall. The John Coltrane on this date is far more assured than he had been four months earlier on the Five Spot date and on the initial Prestige side Thelonious Monk with John Coltrane. He'd been with Monk for four months and had absorbed his complex, multivalent musical system completely. It's clear from the opening track, "Monk's Mood," where the pair play in duet, that Coltrane is confident and moving into his own. Monk feels that confidence with his nearly Baroque entrance on the tune. This is a hard-swinging band with two front-line players who know how to get the best from one another. Coltrane knows the music inside out and his solos reflect an early version of his sheets of sound methodology. Check the joyous "Crepuscule with Nellie" for the hard evidence. Coltrane's cue and Monk's arpeggios are wondrous, swinging, and full of fire and joy. Trane's fills on the melody that leads into his solo are simply revelatory, and the solo itself is brilliant. Or check Wilson's cymbal work on "Nutty" before the band kicks it in full force. Even on the knottiest of Monk's tunes, "Epistrophe," Trane shines and takes charge of his instrument while being utterly receptive to the continual shape-shifting Monk put into his compositions in a live setting. There are nine tunes here (an incomplete version of "Epistrophe" finishes the set) taken from early and late performances. These 51 minutes of music leave the Live at the Five Spot date in the dust. This is one of those "historic" recordings that becomes an instant classic and is one of the truly great finds in jazz lore. It documents a fine band with its members at the peak of their powers together. The package also contains voluminous liner notes by the likes of Ira Gitler, Amiri Baraka, Ashley

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Khan, Stanley Crouch, and others. This is a must-have. ---Thom Jurek, AllMusic Review

Let's be clear from the start: this discovery of a new Monk/Coltrane live concert completely puts to shame the over-hyped Five Spot CD from years ago. Not only is the sound as sterling and clear as the sound on the Five Spot date was excretory, but the performances of the stars are light years beyond that muddy recording.

There is a sense that both Monk and Coltrane knew they were going to make history in 1957 at Carnegie Hall, and it's palpable from the opening notes of "Monk's Mood. Monk sounds grandly baroque in summoning grandly cascading arpeggios from his piano (which sounds infinitely better than the junk pianos he was often saddled with), while Coltrane sounds immensely assured.

To really savor Coltrane's performances, begin by listening to the studio session with Monk currently listed in the Fantasy catalog (Thelonious Monk With John Coltrane). Then listen to the Five Spot recording, and then this new discovery.

During the studio date, Coltrane sounds remarkably reserved, perhaps too star-struck still, as he was on his session with Duke Ellington, to do very much but hang on for the ride. The Five Spot recording has Coltrane sounding looser, particularly on "In Walked Bud, but the recording sounds like it was recorded at the wrong end of a mine shaft, and much of what Coltrane played has to be imagined. Coltrane at Carnegie Hall with Monk is a man certain of his own voice while not afraid of showing his roots, clear-thinking, wonderfully focused, in tune with Monk's logic, simpatico with the rhythm section. A case could be built that this is the finest Coltrane recording before the historic Atlantic and Impulse sessions.

High points among Coltrane's solos abound, but my favorites are on "Nutty, with some wild cross-conversations between Coltrane and Monk going on, and "Sweet and Lovely, which Coltrane goes into a galloping romp, clearly revealing his roots in early Dexter Gordon. The only dull patch for me is his lackluster accompaniment to "Crepuscule With Nellie, which was never about Coltrane anymore than Nellie was. It was Monk's showcase, regardless of who accompanied him.

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On to Monk. After the grand opening gestures, he continues with buoyant, hyper-kinetic interpretations of "Evidence, "Epistrophy" (two versions, the complete one perhaps the better of the two for Monk, the incomplete one more of a Coltrane showpiece), and "Blue Monk. Very familiar fare, but toyed with harmonically and rhythmically as only Monk could do on a good night, and this was. Drummer Shadow Wilson was no Art Blakey, whom I always thought of as Monk's most apt drummer, but he respectably kept the band churning, along with rock-steady bassist Ahmed Abdul-Malik.

The only flaw, and a minor one at that, is the heavy set of liner notes by five different hands. Only Lewis Porter really says something that deepens appreciation of this lovely recording. Amiri Baraka and Stanley Crouch pass beyond self-parody. I suggest that their future liner notes be published as e-books, though even that format might not accommodate their stadium-sized egos.

This is, though Woody Allen hated the phrase, "jazz heaven". ---Norman Weinstein, allaboutjazz.com

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