

ONWARD AND UPWARD

The John Coltrane Quartet: *One Up, One Down*
Impulse B0002380-02 (2005)

Let's get to the point. If you don't like *A Love Supreme*, stop reading. Everybody else should go right out and buy this record.

In any generation there are a handful of people who have "The Voice." The Voice is more than an individual, identifiable sound; The Voice transcends musical skill. Surely Jose Careras had an operatic tenor of the highest order, but when Pavarotti sang the world simply stopped. Rooms full of trumpeters could run rings around Miles Davis; he could play one note and slay them in their tracks.

John Coltrane had The Voice. My son has a 1956 "tenor battle" disc featuring Hank Mobley, Zoot Sims and Al Cohn along with 'Trane. Cohn sounds fine; I will never play as well. Mobley is a long-time personal favorite. Sims actually may cut him on the date. But every time Coltrane plays a note the sound is arresting. Coltrane's playing is unmistakable not simply for its tone but as an incandescent reflection of his utter commitment to every instant. Even a nine-year-old could pick him out of the pack, every time.

Famously, as the years went forward Coltrane went deeper and deeper on a musical quest to tap his own energy. Many acknowledge his 1964 album *A Love Supreme* as one of the 20th century's musical masterworks. That record shows 'Trane reaching to his core, projecting his own inner beauty and trouble and bringing millions along for the ride. But for many who love "straight ahead" jazz *A Love Supreme* stands as an outer boundary of the comfort zone.

The news that the Coltrane family was willing to re-master and release two 1965 radio tapes of The Quartet has stirred the jazz world deeply. The new double-CD, entitled *One Down, One Up*, was out-of-stock on Portland shelves for weeks. People want to hear more from the Great Band and this album does not disappoint. It is worth noting that technically the record sounds fine, no doubt reflecting difficult engineering work. A few very brief drop-outs from lost magnetic particles are a small price to pay to hear this music.

The tapes on *One Down, One Up* date from March and May, 1965 and they show how far the members of the great Coltrane Quartet were willing to follow their leader. A youth once asked Elvin Jones how he could play with such intensity backing Coltrane. The drummer responded simply, "You have to be ready to die with the man up there." This new record shows four great musicians leaving nothing behind.

The repertoire is nothing extraordinary for the period: In addition to the title composition and Song of Praise, the album showcases Afro Blue and My Favorite Things. Each piece receives a lengthy exploration, ranging from Afro Blue's thirteen minutes to the title tune's twenty-seven-plus minutes (apparently missing fifteen more minutes of music before tape spun). Yet each piece somehow leaves the impression, no pun intended, that it lasts only a moment. For those of us who never had the good fortune to see The Coltrane Quartet this record serves to show that

this band could hit and sustain the depth of *A Love Supreme* night after night, set after set, even in a New York dump like The Half Note.

One Down, One Up captures one of jazz' essential artists on the very brink of a musical life-change. Only a month later, the June, 1965 recording *Ascensions* shows Coltrane rocketing away from the boundaries of song-form and often away from harmonic changes altogether. He had also left many jazz fans behind (then and now). Ultimately, by the fall of 1965 even his drummer Elvin Jones and pianist McCoy Tyner had made the difficult choice to depart the band. The saxophonist's explorations continued ever outward, ultimately reaching *Interstellar Space* several months before his death in July, 1967.

There is great jazz now and there will be more tomorrow. Human nature being what it is, there are rafts of mediocre jazz now and there will be more coming tomorrow. This record is The Voice that cuts through the fog of the humdrum to remind us mortals that if we only have the courage to let ourselves we can be reflections of the divine. Find *One Down, One Up* and go where the 'Trane brings you once more.