



MEDITATIONS |  
**JOHN COLTRANE**



## Meditations

# JOHN COLTRANE

I asked John Coltrane to what extent this album was an extension of his incantatory *A Love Supreme* (originally Impulse AS-77). Both albums obviously focus on Coltrane's religious concerns. I use the word "religious" not in any sectarian sense, but rather in the sense that Coltrane's persistent searching in music is simultaneously a searching for meaning in the world and for his place in the world.

"Once you become aware of this force for unity in life," said Coltrane, "you can't ever forget it. It becomes part of everything you do. In that respect, this is an extension of *A Love Supreme* since my conception of that force keeps changing shape. My goal in meditating on this through music, however, remains the same. And that is to uplift people, as much as I can. To inspire them to realize more and more of their capacities for living meaningful lives. Because there certainly is meaning to life."

Other than this comment, Coltrane prefers not to be specific about the various sections of the album. He expects that each listener will react in different ways to what he hears. And Coltrane adds that it doesn't matter what particular religion — if any — a listener professes because "I believe in all religions."

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I noted that in his live appearances, as on this record, Coltrane has been adding to what long was his basic quartet structure. Rashied Ali is here, for example, on drums along with Elvin Jones. "I feel," Coltrane explains, "the need for more time, more rhythm all around me. And with more than one drummer, the rhythm can be more multi-directional. Someday I may add a conga drummer or even a company of drummers." (In a San Francisco engagement in January 1966, after this record was made, Coltrane had two drummers plus an African percussionist in his complement.)

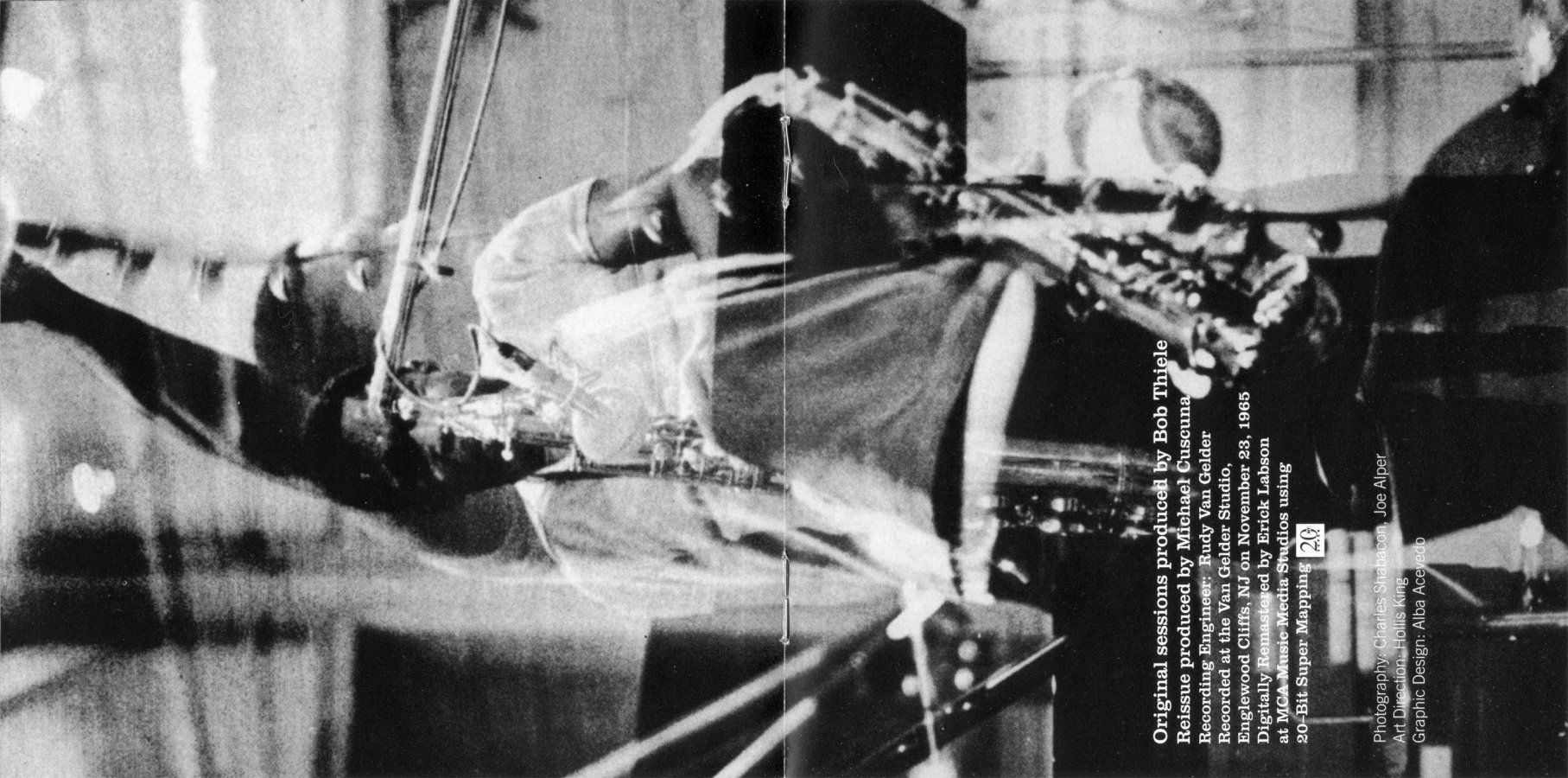
On this set, there is also another tenor, Pharoah Sanders, as of now a regular member of the Coltrane group. "What I like about him," says Coltrane, "is the strength of his playing, the conviction with which he plays. He has will and spirit, and those are the qualities I like most in a man."


From the first note of the first track it's clear that these meditations on the nature and meaning of existence involve uncommon intensity of expression. While Coltrane does dig deeply into himself in these explorations, his corollary concern is then to communicate as fully as he can what he is in the process of discovering. Here, for example, it is as if he

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and Sanders were speaking with the "gift of tongues" — as if their insights were of such compelling force that they have to transcend ordinary ways of musical speech and ordinary textures to be able to convey that part of the essence of being they have touched. The emotions are imperious; they cannot be braked or polished into conventional ways of "beauty" or "symmetry." They must explode as felt — in the rawness of palpable, visceral, painful, challenging, scraping, scouring self-discovery. For there to be unity, there must first be a plunge into and through the agony of separateness. And that, in any case, is the way this listener reacts to the opening half of the album.

And as the horns reach into themselves and across to each other, the molten rhythm section is also, in one sense, atomized but in another, deeper sense, it envelops the whole. Much like waves breaking on top of a sea that is constantly in motion, constantly in change, constantly effecting and being effected by all of its parts. On the first side, the relaxation in ensemble intensity that precedes McCoy Tyner's churning solo leads into another dimension of intensity — the action of one man's self-discovery in what strikes me as one of Tyner's most absorbing solos on record.



Original sessions produced by Bob Thiele  
Reissue produced by Michael Cuscuna  
Recording Engineer: Rudy Van Gelder  
Recorded at the Van Gelder Studio,  
Englewood Cliffs, NJ on November 23, 1965  
Digitally Remastered by Erick Labson  
at MCA Music-Media Studios using  
20-Bit Super Mapping 

Photography: Charles Shabason, Joe Alper.  
Art Direction: Hollis King  
Graphic Design: Alba Acevedo

Love begins, as it must, with one man alone — Jimmy Garrison in what sounds to me like a questing, a testing, a building of one's capacity to reach beyond the self. However you interpret it, Garrison's is an unusually thoughtful, evocative solo. With what can be called serene authority, Coltrane joins him, followed by the drums and Tyner. After the rolling catharsis of the first side, this is the time for examining what remains after so unremitting and perilous a journey into the self. With strong, surging lines, Coltrane constructs a musical concept of love that suggests limitlessness to me — a line that never really ends because love, if it is anything, is continuity but continuity within inevitable change in the self, in the world.

As Pharoah Sanders returns in what I take to be **Consequences**, it is time for further excavations into the marrow of being and again, the horns can barely contain the musical speech that is propelled fiercely from below. As for Sanders' part of the proceedings, one of the most astute descriptions of his approach was that by A.B. Spellman in a Down Beat review of a night with Coltrane and colleagues at New York's Village Gate: "He went on for minute after minute in a register that I didn't know the tenor had..."

Those special effects that most tenor men use only in moments of high orgiastic excitement are the basic premises of his presentation. His use of overtones, including a cultivated squeak that parallels his line, is constantly startling. He plays way above the upper register; long slurred lines and squeaky monosyllabic staccatos... Pharoah is ready..."

And if you're ready to drop preconceptions of what the tenor should sound like, the impact of Sanders can be shatteringly revelatory — revelatory of the further possibilities of each listener's self-discoveries in reacting to this kind of movement through textural shapes. Tyner is again forceful and authoritative, finally acting as a bridge — including a shimmering, impressionistic sequence — to **Serenity**, a serenity that has been hard won and is thereby all the more satisfying in its fulfillment as Coltrane shapes an undulating, lyrical line. But the note of searching and of the "cry" of the blues is still integral to this plateau of serenity, indicating more turbulence, more and deeper plunges to come.

"There is never any end," Coltrane said at the conclusion of our conversation about this album. "There are always new

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sounds to imagine, new feelings to get at. And always, there is the need to keep purifying these feelings and sounds so that we can really see what we've discovered in its pure state. So that we can see more and more clearly what we are. In that way, we can give those who listen to the essence, the best of what we are. But to do that at each stage, we have to keep on cleaning the mirror."

And that is what *Meditations* is about — cleaning the mirror into the self, going as far through the looking glass as is possible each time. Making music as naked as the self can be brought to be.

Nat Hentoff  
(1966 original liner notes to *Meditations*, A-9110)

Photography: Charles Shabacon, Joe Alper  
Art Direction: Hollis King  
Graphic Design: Alba Acevedo

To The Listener:

In our continuing attempt to remain true to the original recordings (in both sound quality and design), we at Impulse! Records have not made any changes in content, spelling or grammar to the original text.

1. **The Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost** 12:52
2. **Compassion** 6:47
3. **Love** 8:10
4. **Consequences** 9:12
5. **Serenity** 3:30

All compositions by John Coltrane (Jowcol Music [BMI])

Note: The first two movements are played in continuous performance, as are the last three movements.

**Personnel:**

**John Coltrane**, tenor saxophone,  
percussion (left channel)  
**Pharoah Sanders**, tenor saxophone,  
tambourine, bells (right channel)  
**McCoy Tyner**, piano  
**Jimmy Garrison**, bass  
**Elvin Jones**, drums (right channel)  
**Rashied Ali**, drums (left channel)