

review of music

this week's essential reading

'Bob Dylan and the subterranean homesick blues revolution' by Richard Williams, *The Guardian*

'The song had co-opted the urgency, the iconoclasm and the ecstatic surrealism of the beat poets. Here was a different Howl for a different generation'

Blown away

A new four-CD set of John Coltrane and Miles Davis's European tour of 1960 reveals a revolutionary duo at the height of their powers, writes Andy Battaglia

Before he was derided as too radical and long before he was lionised as one of the greats of all time, John Coltrane was just another jazzman trying to make a name for himself in a scene studded with stars. Miles Davis was one of those stars, with a reputation established early on during precocious stints as a sideman for Charlie Parker and on his own in his heady bebop prime.

By the mid-1950s, Davis had done enough already to build a legacy sure to withstand, though he of course had more decades to go. Among his best and most visionary decisions, however, owed to prophetically recognising the genius of someone else.

When Davis hired Coltrane to be in his band in 1955, the saxophone player was little-known. Davis had other preferences first – among them Sonny Rollins, Cannonball Adderley and John Gilmore (who went on to play with the intergalactic eccentric Sun Ra) – but Coltrane was the one that stuck. What good fortune too, for all of us.

Both were just 29 years old, and the quintet they were a part of went on to count among the best in jazz history. That the strongest competition comes from groups led by both of them later on (Davis's second great quintet from 1964-69 and Coltrane's classic quartet from 1962-65) says a lot about the brilliance of each. Before those later adventures apart, however, together they would have to begin – and end.

A fascinating new four-CD set on the Acrobat label chronicles the last of their shared activities. Credited to the Miles Davis Quintet and titled *All of You: The Last Tour 1960*, it draws on recordings from eight different concerts in Sweden, Denmark, West Germany, Switzerland and the Netherlands. The three-week tour came at a significant time: Coltrane had already released his classic albums *Blue Train* and *Giant Steps* and was rising in notoriety on his own. Some of that notoriety came from listeners convinced he was onto something emphatically meaningful and new. But just as much, if not more, came from detractors who were indignant, scandalised and utterly confused.

The first concert on *All of You* opens with *So What*, from Davis's magisterial album *Kind of Blue*. It's faster than the familiar studio version, with Davis soloing at the start over a fleet, assertive beat chasing something twitchy underneath. Davis sounds playful, spacey and, as always, cool.

When Coltrane enters after three minutes for his turn at the fore, he sounds slow and suspicious, with shifty notes blowing as if sidelong looks from a leering eye. As he settles in, he starts to sound more deep and full, and then, around the 4.20 mark, he launches into the kind of formidable, frenetic playing he remains known for. It's subtle and sly – nowhere near the kind of his horn later on – but it's immediately striking and recognisable in the flurry of notes that surround each and every passing moment.

In *All of You's* impressive 34-page liner notes, Simon Spillett acknowledges what some consider Coltrane's "marked propensity towards excess" in runs that literally stuff hundreds of notes into spaces where just a couple or a few might do. Excess can work well, though, especially when it's as searching and fierce as the excess that Coltrane favoured.

The rest of the band are no slouches. Wynton Kelly is col-



Above, Miles Davis in the studio; below, John Coltrane at the Newport Jazz festival. Hulton Archive / Getty Images; Gai Terrell / Redferns

ourful and free-flowing on piano, Paul Chambers is steady and sure on bass and Jimmy Cobb is a dashing master on drums, laying down beats that transmit tons of life with great imagination and economy. It's only natural, however, to gravitate towards Davis and Coltrane as they trade missives, one long solo against the next.

Fran Dance, the second song of the first concert, goes slower than *So What*, offering a chance to hear both in different modes. Davis manages to sound ever so sultry while also existential and alone, and Coltrane opens up all the more fully when toying with his alternately appropriate and inappropriate sense of tempo. In the slow *Medley: All Blues/The Theme*, Coltrane goes on a tear eight minutes in that finds him hovering in some strange register close to that of a wounded bird. It wavers and wanders wondrously, so weird but also so intriguing – what could be going on inside a head responsible for a sound like that?

Writing in the liner notes, Spillett again acknowledges critics "sniping at him for sounding angry, bellicose and overly ornate". It was a common complaint to be made. In an interview included on the set, recorded

with an English-speaking host for Swedish radio, Coltrane gets asked: "Do you feel angry?" His answer: "No, I don't... Maybe it sounds angry because I'm trying so many things at one time, you see? I haven't sorted them out. I have a whole bag of things that I'm trying to work through and get the one essential." Here you hear a musician in search of something worth searching for.

You can hear it too in another fantastic archival Coltrane release, of a concert six years later, just eight months before his death. He died of liver cancer at the age of 40, but he sounds

anything but weak or frail on the two-CD set *Offering: Live at Temple University* on Resonance Records.

Six years had passed since he took leave from Davis's band, and Coltrane had been through many cycles and diverging paths since. He had wandered beyond the outermost edges of "free jazz", in which vehemence and intensity reigned supreme, and he had played in shapes that were spacious and contemplative. On stage in Philadelphia for the concert on *Offering*, he does a little bit of all of that.

The show opens simmeringly with *Naima*, a song that Coltrane first presented on his 1960 album *Giant Steps*, before moving into a 26-minute version of *Crescent* that has to rank among the most intense jazz recordings ever set to tape. Coltrane starts out with a somewhat furtive run, but then it's another saxophonist, the great Pharoah Sanders, who takes over and commences a blistering attack on all notions of propriety and restraint.

As he flits through squealing upper registers and swoops down low, he sounds ecstatic, pained, panic-stricken and serene all at once. It's not even the most out-of-body highlight, either. That comes next, by way of a legendary performance of *Leo*, in which Coltrane takes to-

tal command again – this time without his horn. After a long and ruminative drum solo by Rashied Ali, Coltrane steps up to the microphone and starts, startlingly, to sing. Maybe it's more like a bellow, or perhaps an odd kind of chant; either way, he'd not been known to do such things before and the effect of it is otherworldly. He bangs his chest to modulate the sound and he keeps heaving, as if unaware that the saxophone is not in his mouth. Maybe it didn't matter, at least for the moment – maybe all sounds are the same when surveyed with such total spirit and devotion.

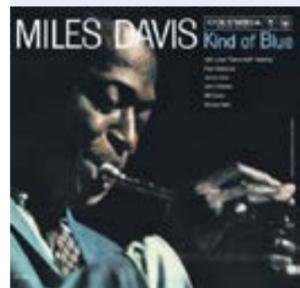
The horn comes back for *Offering* and a long take of *My Favorite Things*, the Rodgers and Hammerstein classic that Coltrane turned into an unlikely free-jazz launch pad. There's horn, horn and more horn, all played with a sensibility that suggests a learning process that started long before.

There's a quote in the booklet to *All of You*, that set from just a few years earlier with Miles Davis, that says a lot by saying just a little: "As with Davis's tone," the notes go, "it was a sound you couldn't forget."

Andy Battaglia is a New York-based writer whose work appears in The Wall Street Journal, Frieze, The Paris Review and more

the playlist

Milestones in modern jazz by Coltrane, Davis and others



Kind of Blue
Miles Davis
(Columbia, 1959)

This seminal album from 1959 is the most-decorated classic of all time, and it rewards repeat listening even for those who think they've heard all there is to hear. Davis and Coltrane are similarly laid-back, excitable, and exploratory.



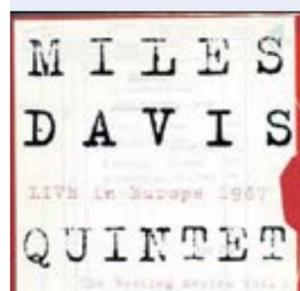
Tauhid
Pharoah Sanders
(Impulse!, 1966)

Pharoah Sanders, so good in Coltrane's band on *Offering*, made a long list of classic albums, including this deep dive into mythology and spirituality. Sonny Sharrock plays scintillating electric guitar and Sanders blows like a whizz.



Journey in Satchidananda
Alice Coltrane
(Impulse!, 1970)

Alice Coltrane, John's wife and bandmate at the time of *Offering*, was an enlightened musician on her own; her harp and piano sounds grand on this cosmic jazz masterpiece that also features bells, tamboura and oud.



Live in Europe 1967
Miles Davis Quintet
(Sony / Columbia Legacy 1967)

Davis's second great quintet – and there's a lot to like from saxophonist Wayne Shorter, pianist Herbie Hancock, drummer Tony Williams and bassist Ron Carter. Davis once again remade jazz.