



**PRESTIGE RECORDS RELEASES *SIDE STEPS*,  
A 5-CD BOXED SET OF JOHN COLTRANE'S PRESTIGE RECORDINGS  
AS A SIDEMAN TO A HOST OF JAZZ LUMINARIES**

The artistic prowess of saxophonist John Coltrane was so expansive and influential - even in his own short lifetime, let alone in the decades since his death - that it's difficult to quantify or differentiate his significance as a leader, a collaborator, a sideman or any other role in the jazz idiom. What's certain, though, is that some of his most pivotal session work took place on the Prestige label in the 1950s.

Over the past three years, Prestige Records has released boxed sets of Coltrane's numerous sessions from the mid- to late '50s, each spotlighting a specific dimension of his tenure with the label. *Fearless Leader* - released in September 2006, in celebration of Coltrane's 80th birthday - showcases his recordings as a bandleader. *Interplay*, released in September 2007, contains Coltrane's early collaborative recordings with a variety of stellar musicians from the same era.

*Side Steps* is the third and final set in this series, scheduled for release on October 6, 2009. The 5-CD set captures Coltrane in a supporting role, as a sideman to leaders like Sonny Rollins, Gene Ammons, Red Garland, Tadd Dameron and others. The collection of 43 tracks represents the entirety of Coltrane's session work as a Prestige sideman, from mid-1956 to early 1958, with the exception of his work with Miles Davis (which is featured in *The Miles Davis Quintet: Legendary Prestige Quintet Sessions*, released in 2006).

"It is easy to measure Coltrane's musical growth through his recordings with Miles, and as a leader, while at Prestige," says jazz historian Ashley Kahn in his extensive liner notes for the *Side Steps* collection. "But it is especially revealing to gauge his progress through impromptu studio sessions with a wider variety of musicians and music. They tested his increasing abilities, and allowed him to apply the techniques and confidence gained from Miles's tight-lipped tutelage (and his later apprenticeship with Thelonious Monk). They also introduced his name to an expanding community of fans and fellow musicians, and permitted him entry into the rank and file of jazz players, many of whom were destined to become leaders and help shape the future of the music."

In short, Prestige was the place where Coltrane cut his teeth, according to Nick Phillips, co-producer of the boxed set. "This is where he was really gaining his experience," says Phillips, who is Vice President of Jazz and Catalog A&R for Concord Music Group, Prestige's parent company. "You can hear him developing his individual voice in these recordings, already sounding like no one else but John Coltrane, yet not having fully developed into the John Coltrane who would become one of the most important and influential artists in the history of jazz."

On Disc one, Coltrane joins two other up-and-coming horn players of the day - trumpeter Donald Byrd and saxophonist Hank Mobley - in a session recorded in May 1957 and led by pianist Elmo Hope. "Weeja" and "On It" are both Hope originals, the former a bebop number and the latter a blues tune that includes Coltrane and Mobley trading lines. Coltrane delivers a breathy solo on

"Polka Dots and Moonbeams," and even makes a few minor technical fumbles on a rendition of Al Jolson's "Avalon." The tracks were initially part of a release entitled *Informal Jazz* and credited to the Elmo Hope Sextet, and were later included on an album called *Two Tenors*.

The first disc also features six tracks recorded six months earlier - late November 1956 - with Tadd Dameron for *Mating Call*, an album released the following year. Coltrane joins bassist John Simmons and drummer Philly Joe Jones behind Dameron in the making of an album that was the first to feature Coltrane's name on the cover. The original liner notes by Ira Gitler include the following prophetic analysis: "Trane is a searcher who is not afraid to essay new combinations of notes when performing publicly...he does not play by rote. As they say in theatre, 'He reacts.'"

Disc two leads off with "Tenor Madness," a track from a May 1956 session that included Coltrane alongside leader Sonny Rollins, with Red Garland on piano, Paul Chambers on bass, and Jones on drums. The 12-minute track "captures the much-celebrated, spontaneous studio encounter of the two jazzmen most responsible for shaping the modern sound of the tenor saxophone," says Kahn. "That Coltrane and Sonny Rollins recorded together but once - and only on one track - endows this extended jam with historical weight."

The second disc also includes five tracks from a session in April 1957, just a few days before Coltrane took a week to detoxify and kick his narcotic habit, followed immediately by three more tracks recorded about a month later. "The improvement in Coltrane's performance on all three tunes is palpable," says Kahn. "More assured, with a marked clarity in his ideas."

Discs three and four include 15 tracks from two sessions recorded in late 1957 - the first in mid-November and the second in mid-December. The lineup is consistent throughout both discs: Garland as leader, Coltrane, trumpeter Donald Byrd, bassist George Joyner, and drummer Art Taylor. "By late '57, Coltrane's sound was becoming a revelation," says Kahn. "With Monk's guidance under his belt, he began to enter his so-called 'sheets of sound' phase, tackling changes, playing long flurries of notes, and stacking chords with unbridled passion." On some of the slower tunes that spoke of romance or loneliness, Coltrane's phrasing and tone show early signs of the haunted feel that would later infuse ballads like "Naima."

Disc five captures Coltrane's last two sessions as a sideman for Prestige - one in December 1957 and the other in the early days of January 1958. By this time, Coltrane is clearly coming into his own, as evidenced in the final track from the January date, an unhurried rendition of Rodgers and Hammerstein's "It Might As Well Be Spring." Coltrane joins tenor saxophonist Gene Ammons as leader, backed by the rhythm section of pianist Mal Waldron and Joyner and Taylor on bass and drums, respectively. "With the tempo nice and slow," says Kahn, "it's easy to see who is following in the path of the saxophone masters who came before, and who has begun to forge his own way forward."

In addition to Kahn's own extensive commentary, the beautifully packaged *Side Steps* includes a transcript of an interview that Kahn conducted with Prestige founder Bob Weinstock.

"Other than Miles, is there a modern jazz star shining as brightly today as John Coltrane?" says Kahn. "His sound and stature have come to eclipse so many who also deserve lasting applause. It says much of his continuing appeal - and the way we hang onto our heroes - that some of the music included in this collection was later reissued with Coltrane as the titular leader. Among its intentions, *Side Steps* is meant as an acknowledgment that greatness can begin, and abide, in a supporting role."

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