



John Coltrane

(September 23, 1926 – July 17, 1967)

Like a baby coming into the world, when the time came for Jazz to explore other avenues of it's realm, John Coltrane was right there leading the way. When others did not understand the method, style or texture, John showed them that it was ok to follow him anyway, and boy did they.

With the help of Miles Davis and Thelonious Monk, They seemed to reach to the far edges of space with their music and many took that ride with them. John got me through some deep times when I was in Alabama and I owe him a lot to this very day.

Johns music had to be different because it took that difference to make it through some of the worst history America had established for people of color. John's solo's were dam near mystical in there creation and he was constantly making changes to heighten it's directions. His music was the birth of Jazz high to me. It was nothing for us to get some alcohol, lay down and get stoned listening to John's Coltrane as he soar and express things than many of us felt, but did not have the method of expressing ourselves.



As Coltrane's interest in jazz became increasingly experimental, he added Pharoah Sanders to his ensemble



Percussionist Phashed Ali helped to augment Coltrane's sound in the last years of his life



Coltrane's second wife Alice performed with him and also challenged his spiritual beliefs

When it came to Jazz, John Coltrane was the ultimate explorer. There were keys he played in that you did not know existed and in combination of his crescendo and decrescendo approach, there was no doubt about it, there was something different even if you could not quite put your fingers on it. His composing abilities were extraordinary which showed why he established his own group.

John Coltrane joined the ranks of dying before his time as well. Liver Cancer was his killer and it was a shame too. I think John was really becoming in his own and

many saw this. Even to this day they flock to dedications to John Coltrane concerts and buy up any of his albums/CD's when they are on sale. I guess John and many others whom had some illness/use take them away before their time just did not fathom the atmosphere they were working in. Today we are smarter about our health as with everything else hindsight is 20-20. Even if you did not smoke, take drugs or drink, just playing and working long hours in such demanding atmosphere's would take a toll on anyone. Many artists whom work the Jazz roads today are being as healthy as they can, but it can still be a challenge. It takes a lot of energy to entertain people to the point where they applaud or give a standing ovation. If nothing else, we should at least give tribute to John Coltrane and those early pioneers in Jazz whom took the unknown steps toward acceptance. We are a better people because of them.



Bill Sommerville