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**The melodic and polyrhythmic development of John Coltrane's
spontaneous composition in a racist society**

Hester, Karlton Edward, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1990

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**THE MELODIC AND POLYRHYTHMIC DEVELOPMENT OF
JOHN COLTRANE'S SPONTANEOUS COMPOSITION IN A RACIST SOCIETY**

by

Karlton Edward Hester

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Music
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1990

c 1990

KARLTON EDWARD HESTER

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Music in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

THE MELODIC AND POLYRHYTHMIC DEVELOPMENT OF
JOHN COLTRANE'S SPONTANEOUS COMPOSITION
IN A RACIST SOCIETY

by

Karlton E. Hester

Adviser: Professor Howard Brofsky

My dissertation posits an essential relationship between the spontaneous compositions of John Coltrane's late period, his musical evolution from his formative years to the end of his career, his spiritual development, and the socioculture in which he lived and created. Because of this interdependence, I also propose that racism in American society had a significant negative impact upon the music of this African-American composer and his musical colleagues in numerous ways.

In African-American art music, one of the results of a racist American agenda is that the process by which the music is analyzed, documented, and disseminated becomes grossly distorted. Rather than evaluating the music of spontaneous composers on its own terms, for example, European musical standards, are imposed upon an African-American art form which has its own musical values (that are often diametrically opposed to many of the tenets of the former system). Instead of asking African-American composers and performers to define and discuss their musical creations, European-American laymen have often arrogantly assumed the position of spokesperson for those denied the freedom to comment on and evaluate their own ideas and music. Although most of the world openly acknowledges the value of the artistic contributions that spontaneous African-American composers such as Coltrane have made to twentieth-century music, no educational or cultural institutions have been established for the preservation and perpetuation of their viable art music within African-American communities. As this dissertation attempt to point out, these factors and limitations negatively effect many of the musical parameters that concern African-American innovators, from instrumentation and orchestration to choice of ensemble personnel.

Coltrane's musical evolution involved an absorption of African and Asiatic music and culture. He systematically absorbed and utilized the elements of at least five definitive American musical styles: blues, bebop, hardbop, "modal jazz," and developed his own

personal approach to the so-called "free jazz" of the sixties. His adroit saxophone technique greatly expanded the musical language not only for that instrument, but for all twentieth-century performers. Showing the ways in which these accomplishments were achieved is a main concern of this research.

Although most musicians and serious listeners acknowledge the strength, beauty, and uniqueness of Coltrane's music from his first three stylistic periods, it is his final period that is usually the most controversial. The final chapter of this dissertation, therefore, attempts to demonstrate that the spontaneous compositions of Coltrane's most mature stylistic period is not aimed at the annihilation of musical systems, but, rather, is the culmination of a systematic musical evolution that was nurtured throughout his career (virtually without interruption). The analysis of his compositional suite, *Interstellar Space*, is largely intended to show various elements of the composer's earlier stylistic characteristics as expressed within the more sophisticated improvisational structure of his fourth period.

Coltrane states throughout his career that he is concerned with improving his modes of musical "expression." His spiritual growth and his musical development were indivisible in the composer's mind. Although it is difficult to convincingly discuss such personal and intangible factors in Coltrane's life and music, their extreme

significance to him demands that they remain united in any discussion of his creative output.

In tracing Coltrane's musical evolution I have tried to shape this dissertation in a fashion that reflects the nature of his music to some extent. I have tried to allow both the music and the musicians involved in creating it to often speak for themselves. Although I have tried to adhere to the basic requirements of systematic research, I have also tried to avoid letting this same process interfere with the expression of the ideas I originally aspired to present and develop.

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Prologue

Composition, whether it be spontaneous or systematically notated over a long period of time, becomes a living organism through performance. Therefore, it really doesn't matter what symbols or other methods of communication were involved in creating the sounds utilized as long as the desired effect is obtained in the performance of the composition. As Cecil Taylor clearly suggests, improvisation is an essential component of African-American spontaneous composition.

Most people don't have any idea of what improvisation is . . . It means experiencing oneself as another kind of living organism much in the way of a plant, a tree - the growth, you see, that's what it is. And at the same time, when one attains that, one also genuflects to whatever omnipotent force made you, made it, possible. I'm hopefully accurate in saying that's what happens when we play. It's not to do with 'energy.' It has to do with religious forces ¹.

As an African-American composer, performer, and improvising artist, I have serious concerns regarding the many ways racism impacts upon artistic creation in American society. From the manner in which African-American art music has frequently been

¹ Berendt, Joachim-Ernst. Jazz: A Photo History. (New York: Schirmer Books, 1978), p. 81.

(and continues to be) exploited and misrepresented in performance, to the unfortunate fact that impertinent criticism has often formed a significant portion of the body of historical documentation of the musical contributions of African-American artists, it is clear that much of the music that bears the unfortunate term "jazz" has suffered due to this oppressive condition. Whether or not this same music would have experienced a similar fate had it been the invention of Europeans in Europe or European-Americans here in America, is a hypothetical question that may never be answered. The different ways in which African-American and European-American experimental artists have been treated in general in America, however, may provide at least a mildly suggestive comment on this issue. These concerns are addressed in connection with this dissertation on John Coltrane and his music.

In response to my question regarding the term "jazz," Alice Coltrane said "For John Coltrane it was totally unacceptable. First of all, what does the word mean, and what does such meaning imply? Such a term never was an accurate description nor definition of John Coltrane's music."² Artists such as Max Roach, Sun Ra, The Art Ensemble of Chicago, Anthony Braxton, and Charles Mingus have expressed their extreme disapproval for this term in connection with their music. Others, such as Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie, Cecil Taylor, Wynton Marsalis, Anthony

² In a letter to me dated September 4, 1990, Alice Coltrane responded to several questions that I had requested comments upon.

Davis, and myself, acquiesce in the employment of the term because of its association with a distinguished group of some of the greatest artists in the twentieth century; but the latter artists have also created music and developed other creative modes of expression that strongly defy any existing definition of the term "jazz."

Besides the presentation of various musical features in this research, a significant characteristic of my approach involves allowing the musicians who created Coltrane's music to describe that music, and the circumstances in which it was created, for themselves. Since it is impossible to avoid the term "jazz" when quoting such a large and eclectic number of sources as cited herein, the term is reluctantly retained for the sake of simplicity. Apparently, the word "jazz" has been used by Coltrane and his musical colleagues purely for the sake of simplicity as well, and often merely facilitates discussion in frequent encounters with the press and a general public that has incorporated the term into its musical jargon. In approaching John Coltrane's art music (spontaneous composition that I consider highly significant, inspirational, and engaging), it is important to be reminded that his legacy remains intact despite the social environment in which it was created. His ability to rise above the horrors of racism was another area of concern that Alice Coltrane was able to address in response to my question regarding that issue.

A genius like John Coltrane had greater accessibility and greater opportunities far above the average musician; ultimately, he would become a paragon of success despite his culture, economic situation, his country, and the changing times.³

Few artists, regardless of their creative potentials, can defy such debilitating odds. Without the established cultural institutions such as those that support and foster European art music in America, it seems almost impossible for such an influential art form (as "jazz") to emerge and evolve so rapidly under the systems of racism and oppression that continue to exist in America. Although many of the African-American "jazz" composers and musicians of Coltrane's era were open to new ideas and influences from around the world, they have paid a price for being the innovators of one of the most influential art forms in the twentieth century.

One should not have to be an artist, African-American, a female, or a child to objectively review and/or empathize with the social injustice and adversity that has taunted and oppressed any particular group of people. Members of any oppressed cultural group, making historical note of the obvious things that severely impact upon their lives, and of the human difficulties existing within the contemporary American population, should not

³ September 4, 1990 letter from Alice Coltrane.

necessarily be considered aggressive or irascible for merely bringing sociocultural views and concepts to the attention of the world. On the other hand, it seems that historians and theoreticians who willfully conceal or avoid relevant social or cultural issues of these types may be guilty of the real malfeasance. Similarly, the problems involved in having the history of any disadvantaged social group documented and analyzed by individuals from outside a given culture (especially if those individuals in question are members of the social order that perpetuates the injustices) should be obvious to an objective observer. For the purpose of this investigation of John Coltrane's musical innovations, "leaving one's cultural baggage at the door" merely refers to possessing a desire to thoroughly and objectively understand the social problems and principles involved in creating the music of his culture, and to retain this understanding, attitude and perspective as each of the following chapters is read.

It seems reasonable to expect an honest exegesis of the artistic plight and social position of twentieth-century African-American musicians to confront the reality of racism, although the social circumstances surrounding the issues involved are often too embarrassing for most of us to openly acknowledge. Unless a society is firmly rooted in the execution of the principals of unequivocal freedom and equality for all its citizens, not only in theory but also in practice, such an issue cannot be avoided. The fact that American music historians failed to document much of

John Coltrane's thinking in print may have been due in part to racist social conditions. Yet a valuable legacy of recordings and the vivid impressions left in the minds of his associates (and his audience) are fortunately a portion of the 'remains' Coltrane left the world of art music.

Modern and contemporary society has witnessed the Nazi Holocaust, *apartheid* in South Africa, and multifarious forms of American oppression. Modified versions of these malignant institutions still plague humankind and thwart all efforts aimed towards world peace and spiritual enlightenment. Currently, *apartheid* remains well intact within the country of its origin, and, although the Berlin Wall has recently come down, African-Germans realize that the *Deutschland Uber Alles* is a Germany "of blue eyes and blond hair."⁴ In America the random racist assault has reached such epidemic proportions that the United States Congress has passed the new **Hate Crime Statistics Act** (recently signed by President Bush) that is intended to serve as a way of helping the nation come to grips with the dimensions of ethnoviolence.⁵ Such a pathological social condition obviously has an adverse effect on the oppressed artists forced to create their work within such a system of suppression, madness, and injustice. Within these types of capitalist societies, where a portion of the people profit tremendously as a result of the

⁴ Lester Sloan, "Not Quite Aryan: The Afro-German", *Emerge*. August 1990, p. 16.

⁵ Vern E. Smith, "The Vanishing Rainbow: Ethnic Violence on the Rise", *Emerge*. August 1990, p. 58.

economic exploitation of other select sectors of the general population, one must expect issues such as racism or sexism to be considered highly controversial and can often expect to have attempts made to severely criticize or censor such unsettling issues and ideas. As some post-structuralists point out, without such measures control cannot be maintained over the exploited population.

Liberal law polices the social universe as much by policing meaning as by making certain that those who do not benefit greatly from liberal capitalism do not get out of hand. Liberal law polices meaning by making certain that concepts like equality and fairness are limited to understandings that do not disturb the basic structure of liberal society, a structure characterized by a high degree of material inequality and practical unfairness. Hence, equality, for example, shall mean equal treatment by the government rather than a redistribution of wealth or a leveling of power.⁶

A "redistribution of wealth or a leveling of power" might be accomplished in our society in one way by simply giving African-American musical artists a fair share of the money their art generates (through record sales, live performances, literature written and sold on the music, etc.), or providing educational and cultural governmental support for the establishment of conservatories and orchestra associations within their own

⁶ Michael Ryan, Politics and Culture: Working Hypotheses for a Post-Revolutionary Society. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1989). p. 165.

communities. Although this certainly has not been the trend in either education or patronage in our country, all Americans would benefit from having an opportunity to learn about such a rich art form from within the culture in which its creators and innovators evolved. In America, where much of the historical information written on African-American music is biased or its historians often unqualified (as a result of some of the conditions described above), a dilemma exists for African-American musicians that is akin to a condition encountered by contemporary feminists who realize the importance and necessity of documenting themselves (rather than having men write their versions of women's history).

Although my approach to John Coltrane's music did not consciously grow out of an external mode of social or philosophical thought, in retrospect, I recognize and acknowledge some mutual perceptions and positions between postmodernism, post-structuralism, and my own thinking. Postmodernism seem to be to art what post-structuralism is to philosophy and social theory.⁷ "Postmodernism finds its object neither wholly in the cultural sphere, nor wholly in the critical-institutional sphere, but in some tensely renegotiated space between the two."⁸ Jean-Francois Lyotard (a postmodernist) argues that modern science is characterized by the rejection of knowledge based upon narrative and defines narrative knowledge by drawing upon anthropological

⁷ Steven Connor, Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary. (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1990). p. 82.

⁸ Ibid., p. 7.

accounts of traditional societies in which the function of the narrative is embodied in clear sets of rules regarding who is qualified and responsible to speak in a given social group.⁹ Arthur Kroker and David Cook present a contrasting, and somewhat more extreme, form of a postmodern theory of contemporary culture that tends towards totalized and all-inclusive narratives.¹⁰ I too feel that the musicians who create music within a particular culture are the ones best qualified to discuss that music; and, along with the actual music performed and recorded, this serves as the primary source of information for that particular art form. On the other hand, if the thinking of both the transmitter and receiver of art is valued, the presentation of a cross-section of other secondary and tertiary perspectives (from within as well as from outside a given culture) can provide additional insight into the holistic social structures within which art is created. In other words, all viewpoints are important in discussing various aspects of the music under discussion, but it is the creator of the music who is the principal authority.

In an attempt to follow a proposition or hypothesis that suggests any degree of interdependence between American and/or World society and the art Coltrane produced, an examination of his work is placed within a context of both supportive and reactionary responses to the music, as well as situated amidst other related aspects of the social environment in which it was created.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 172.

Therefore, comments from critics, scholars, and the listening public at large are also represented and are viewed as having social relevance to the musical environment. Rather than isolating each individual aspect of this complex relationship into separate chapters, they are distributed throughout the chronological discussion of Coltrane's musical development. This, of course, forces the reader to make a few long-range connections between related concepts and events from various chapters while the force and logic of Coltrane's incredible musical evolution provides unwavering historical continuity.

Thus the Master is available to all people
and doesn't reject anyone.

He is ready to use all situations
and doesn't waste anything.

This is called embodying the light.

What is a good man but a bad man's teacher?

What is a bad man but a good man's job?

If you don't understand this, you will get lost,
however intelligent you are.

It is the great secret.¹¹

The primary purpose of this study is to investigate those aspects surrounding John Coltrane's music that facilitate a basic

¹¹ Lao-tzu. Tao Te Ching: A New English Version with Forward and Notes by Steven Mitchel (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), p. ix.

understanding of the spontaneous compositions he created in the last period of his music career. Because this particular genre of twentieth-century American music involves a symbiotic relationship between performing and composing music spontaneously that does not rely upon traditional stereotypes or cliches, it is more inseparable from the environmental context in which it becomes manifest than music produced otherwise. This may tend to suggest that spontaneous composition is, therefore, more prone to vulnerability than music composed prior to its performance. The particular performers involved in making collective contributions to the musical creation; the personal frame of consciousness and environmental conditions that shape and color the composer's imagination; and all of the economic and social factors that influence the limitations placed upon this art form, directly or indirectly, affect the impulse of the moment in which spontaneous music is composed. Some of these elements, such as many of the master musicians that performed with Coltrane, evolved with him during his lifetime. Other factors in Coltrane's environment, like racist attitudes in American society, appear to devolve or remain static when compared with the astounding musical growth and colossal influence his music had on the transformation of saxophone playing. Along with other members of the trend-setting vanguard that grew out of the sixties, Coltrane's music would contribute heavily to the establishment of new musical goals and directions for modern improvising artist and spontaneous composer.

The music of a Master composer stands on its own merit and provides insight into the nature of the human spirit. It defies analysis in many ways because the music created by such individuals is a reflection of all the influences and experiences that the artist encounters. Even if the seemingly impossible task of notating and analyzing all of the various musical elements presented in one of Coltrane's late works is eventually accomplished, of what value would such a purely technical transcription and analysis alone be to a student of spontaneous composition? Coltrane was expressing his own individuality; musicians cannot expect to do likewise if they spend a significantly larger portion of their time imitating someone else's mode of expression rather than focusing on developing their own stylistic approach.

The best examination of any Master's work is through direct contact with both the artist and with the work he or she creates. Since discussing the artist's work with the creator in person is not possible in this case, every attempt has been made to keep Coltrane's music within the context of its inherent domain and to approach this artist on his own terms. To do otherwise is disrespectful and counterproductive. Although there are common elements in all music, it is not always productive to try to derive an understanding of European classical or romantic music, for instance, through an application of jazz standards or expectations. Conversely, African- American art music cannot be

meaningfully judged according to European art music or any other standards extraneous to its own intrinsic characteristics.

A close examination of the music of John Coltrane can be more than a look at the life and music of a great American composer; it may provide a brief glance into American society, aesthetic values, and into the relationship between our own inner nature and environment. A broader perspective on this composer's music may contribute to the understanding of ways in which personal growth and development take place even under the most enervating and discouraging circumstances. In the last decade of the twentieth century, I feel that focusing closely upon this angle is necessary, not only for the benefit of aspiring artists who are experiencing oppression in their society, but for anyone seeking a holistic understanding of artistic creation.

In an effort to elaborate upon the relatively few documented comments that Coltrane made publically regarding his personal philosophies, spiritual beliefs, and the impact of various social phenomena on his music, this investigation will include reactions to his music from a fairly eclectic portion of our society. Occasionally liberties have been taken in the following historical overview in order to augment Coltrane's implicit musical conceptions with explicit ideas from other sources that seemed compatible with his. Some opposing viewpoints are also included for the sake of balance.

The September 7, 1967 issue of Down Beat ("John Coltrane: In Memoriam") contains numerous reactions to Coltrane's death from individuals young and old, and from various contrasting sectors of our society. Musicians and listeners alike attest to the "inner charging and self-realization that his music arouses in those who open themselves to it and listen well," and some speak of the "religious awakening" that Coltrane was obviously undergoing in his musical and personal development.¹² Many of the musicians who worked with Coltrane were also religious. McCoy Tyner talked to Michael Bourne about some of the intangible aspects of the music.

I've always had religious belief, ever since I was a teenager. I had my own faith even way back.

It was related to my life. Music is my life. I can't separate the two. Every man has to pursue that course himself. John came up in a Baptist type of environment; his grandfather was a preacher. So he always had a religious influence in his life. I think that's very important; that's very essential.

I was able to learn things we could never talk about. You can't verbalize about music; most of it is about a person's life and a person's emotions, and you can't talk about that. There are very few things you can explain about music in a few words. It's a non-verbal communication, anyway.¹³

¹² Gus Matzorkis, "Tribute to John Coltrane," Downbeat, September 7, 1967, pp. 16-17.

¹³ Michael Bourne, an interview with "McCoy Tyner," Down Beat, June 7, 1973, p. 19.

The fact that Coltrane's sacred music (the most indisputable ones being those bearing spiritual titles) could only be performed in nightclubs and in recording studios apparently did not diminish its impact on numerous listeners. The various Coltrane biographies contain strong personal reactions to his music from people around the globe. Yet American educational institutions remain slow in recognizing this artist as a "serious" American composer. It is difficult to imagine an artist being more serious or more strongly committed to his or her chosen mission in life than Coltrane proved himself to be.

Controversy has often been an important catalyst in the evolution of style, perception and creativity. When a creative artist opposes the standard models that norms and traditions have established, a conflict usually ensues between the values held by the artist and those who feel that an existing aesthetic stands as the paragon of creative excellence. The elements contained in both the traditional model and the new artistic approach may be essentially the same in numerous respects. Nevertheless, the innovations and modifications of the prototype that form the contiguous circumstances that usually attach themselves to the inevitable growth pattern that takes place in any progressive artistic endeavor, are frequently protested against based solely upon the degrees to which presumed archetypal elements are transformed. The schism that results from such differences of

perspectives is further aggravated when the values of a given cultural tradition are forcibly imposed upon art from contrasting social and artistic cultures. Aspects of all of these concepts have an impact on and relevance to this investigation of John Coltrane's music.

Self expression is a prime motivating factor for many artists. Therefore, if the artist is satisfied with his or her work, then the validity of that work is undeniable regardless of subjective feelings an audience may hold about that work. In music and other art forms, a sense of power, purpose and beauty can be obtained through various combinations of colors, stylistic approaches, and creative devices that produce elements of tension and release that initiate artistic action and perpetuate infinitely varied motion. In many cultures repetition, diversity, or combinations of those two elements are ingredients utilized in ways that obtain an infinite array of artistic variations. To question artistic choices such as the size of a canvas, the length of a composition, or the degree of emotional intensity of an artistic presentation, is to presume a better understanding of the expressive intent of an artistic work than that possessed by the artist who created the work. Thus, the same sense of humility with which one reads private letters and diaries left in one's trust should be assumed when investigating art produced in a similar spirit. Such a posture, it would seem, could only enhance sincere inquiry and objective music scholarship. This writing is based upon an effort to maintain such a position of humility.

To those desiring a basically informational approach to research on Coltrane's music, it may appear that the number of references made to social factors in Coltrane's creative environment thwarts the flow of the historical and theoretical discussion in this presentation. Coltrane certainly must have felt that these same troublesome social circumstances too often interfered with the creative mission he set out to accomplish in his lifetime. The April 21, 1962 *Down Beat* article "John Coltrane and Eric Dolphy Answer the Jazz Critics," suggests that Coltrane was indeed concerned about the negative and erroneous press that he felt was continually misrepresenting his music. The paradox that existed between the unprecedented progressive strides that were made in Coltrane's music during his career and some of the moronic assessments of his musical output that were made by the American press at the time, exposes an astonishing fact about African-American art in a racist American society. The friction that is evident between the expansion of Coltrane's musical concepts, on the one hand, and the archaic and musically uneducated views of recalcitrant critics, on the other, creates a slightly different meaning in each new context in which these opposing factors occur. This is not unlike the tension generated in Coltrane's music when his unrestrained saxophone solos move in oblique relationship to the repetitive nature of the ostinati patterns over which they sometimes occur. Unfortunately, just as some listeners will concentrate on the ostinato rather than on the entire musical portrait, some readers may be more inclined to

focus their attention on the distracting and mundane comments of some of the arrogant reviewers cited in this paper than on more essential aspects of Coltrane's life and music, or on the supportive commentaries made by his peers. However, since including a representative aspects of a cross section of Coltrane's social environment is one of the desired goals here, the artistic and spiritual advances that transform Coltrane's music will occasionally collide with some of the opposing and lumbering viewpoints that occurred within the social milieu in which his music was created.

Many other artists and other members of contemporary society have likewise suffered tremendous hardships and have managed to make enormous contributions to the world despite their difficulties. There is, nevertheless, an unusually novel situation that exists for the African-American artist in twentieth-century America. Although mentioning the fact that Beethoven became progressively deaf after age thirty (a devastating fate for a musician) is always included in studies of his uncompromising music and character, for instance, Coltrane's social handicap is ignored in many writings. Like Beethoven's deafness, Mahler's psychological turmoil, or the love affairs and drastic mood swings of Berlioz, the anomalies or even grotesque social or psychological aspects of an artist's life can often provide insight into his or her music. Comparatively speaking, this type of consideration is given scant attention in discussions on Coltrane's music.

Generally speaking, social orientation is a neglected aspect of jazz study in America. Consequently, due to the enormous void this inadequacy creates, an attempt to create a balance in the situation may appear to be over-compensation to the eyes of some beholders. This is understandable. In the first place, a society that inflicts hardship and injustice upon a sector of its population rarely wants to be reminded of that fact. It is also true that most documented accounts of Coltrane's music have been made from positions outside the African-American community; this increases the importance of keeping the social context of his music in proper perspective. Additionally, African-American jazz is not often taught or performed in the African American community. Any one who studies European "classical" music does so within an environment where a basic understanding of and exposure to European history, government, language, and social values are patent requirements of those aspiring to develop any degree of expertise in any aspect of that musical culture. Because the structure of American society denies the serious jazz student exposure to similar cultural experiences in African-American culture, a similar fundamental orientation is missing in jazz education. Perhaps this is why some of music Coltrane produced was often considered "angry," "too long," or chaotic to many listeners while experimental music of similar length and intensity, and of similar revolutionary significance (by composers such as Penderecki, Charles Ives, Lukas Foss, and others, for example) tends to strike the American public as much

less threatening. Even if their music stirs up serious controversy and enmity, the latter composers' positions as "serious" artists within the musical culture is rarely questioned. The reasons for this difference in treatment needs to be explored in order to appreciate the impact of American culture on the African-American creative artist.

Coltrane's music and comments gives me the impression that he considered himself a member of the human race and none other. Like all great human beings, he discovered himself as an individual and learned to express that individuality through a mastery of his innate talents, and he possessed a desire to share his gift with humanity. It is evident to me that he possessed an understanding of the relationship between the universal or cosmic consciousness and his own inner being. Consequently, his music will most assuredly stand the test of time.

I would like to express my gratitude to the members of my dissertation committee, Professors Howard Brofsky (my dissertation advisor), Stephen Blum and Bruce Saylor. These three gentlemen gave freely of their time, knowledge, patience, and guidance throughout this project. I would also like to extend a special thanks to Professor Barbara Hampton (dissertation defense committee chair), and to Professors Ted McIrvine, and Robert Starer for their thoughtful assistance in the final stages of this research and for their valuable participation on the defense committee. Finally, I sincerely appreciate the kind

efforts of Ms. Alice Coltrane and M. Babatunde Olatunji for making time to contribute their personal knowledge, insight, and musical experience with me and those who will read this paper.

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Introduction

THEORETICAL APPROACH. Spontaneous composition, in the hands of the masters of African-American music, is a twentieth century art form that emerged from the traditional blues and jazz forms. In modern jazz, it has expanded its vocabulary to include any sonic phenomena that serve to express the innovators' aims, moving beyond the manipulation of established forms, styles and patterns that govern a "jazz improviser's" approach to performance. Charles Mingus has explained the significance of this form of expression in remarking on the impact that Charlie Parker's music had on his conception of this approach to music composition.

I studied Bird's creative vein with the same passion and understanding with which I'd studied the scores of my favorite classical composers, because I found a purity in his music that until then I had found only in classical music. Bird was the cause of my realization that jazz improvisation, as well as jazz composition, is the equal of classical music if the performer is a creative person. Bird brought melodic development to a new point in jazz, as far as Bartok or Schoenberg or Hindemith had taken it in the classics. But he also brought to music a primitive mystic, supra-mind communication that I'd only heard in the late Beethoven quartets and, even more, in Stravinsky.¹

¹ Charles Mingus, Mingus Dynasty: Charles Mingus and His Groups (New York: Columbia Records, 1959). Liner notes.

A Charlie Parker protege, Coltrane displayed many of the same melodic and expressive characteristics in the music he created throughout his relatively brief career. As the most influential jazz performer in the last thirty years, Coltrane joins Parker and Dizzy Gillespie as master musicians no jazz performer can deny having been influenced by.

One must examine the entire career of an evolutionary artist in order to understand the later works with depth and clarity. In doing so, there are often extra-musical aspects of that artist's environment that impact greatly on the creative development and output of that individual. In beginning to research the life and music of John Coltrane, it is immediately apparent that his music is not given the same status in American culture as other Western composers. It is safe to say that Coltrane's music has had as great an impact on twentieth-century world music as the music of Aaron Copland, Charles Ives, John Cage, or any other American composer, yet the relatively few books that deal with aspects of Coltrane's music are not shelved with other American composers, and his country still treats his music with insidious disrespect. Although some progressive changes are taking place within modern music scholarship, most books and encyclopedias on twentieth-century music and musicians invariably omit Coltrane from their discussions.² The discrimination against

² See H. H. Stuckenschmidt, Twentieth Century Music, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Reprint 1975); Paul Griffiths, Modern Music: A Concise History from

African-American spontaneous composition tends to be more a reaction against the people who create the music than a reaction against the musical concepts employed. Some of the reasons for this travesty of artistic justice deserve closer scrutiny.

Throughout time, those leaders who aspired to control the economies and the politics of the world always recognized the necessity of controlling the creative output of the artists around them. Much like the power of the African griot, who has been both highly respected and feared among African people, the power of creative expression has often caused a similar love/hate relationship to exist between the artists and their patrons in most other world societies as well. There is a keen interest in artistic expression, and society strives to keep that expression under the auspices of a conservative monitoring establishment. During the Medieval era, that monitoring institution was the church. Later, from around 1400 to 1750, the church shared artistic control with the aristocracy during the Renaissance and Baroque periods in Western music. From the beginning of the Classical period (1750), throughout the Romantic, and into the twentieth century, private patronage and the public at large gained control over musical and other artistic production. Our present century has witnessed, in addition to continuing public buying power and private patronage, government (school

Debussy to Boulez (New York: Thames and Hudson, Reprint 1986); Joseph Kerman, Listen (New York: Worth Publishers, Third printing 1985); and Leon Dallin, Twentieth Century Composition (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Company, Third Edition 1974) are examples.

programs, grants, fellowships, etc.) and large corporation (record companies, the media, publishers, etc.) sponsorship, resulting in an even more complex network of patronage for the arts. The complexity of the economics and social politics involved is intensified in jazz because of an added social problem: the irrational institution of racism.

Veteran jazz critic Leonard Feather, who grew up in England but spent his late adolescent days and almost his entire adult life in the United States, talks at length about the racism he has witnessed in jazz. In his recent publication, *The Jazz Years*, he devotes a chapter to discussing the racist attitudes of white jazz players, managers, and others with whom he has associated, who have openly expressed their narrow-mindedness or hatred toward African-American jazz musicians. In citing both violent and non-violent racial incidents involving Fats Waller, Miles Davis, Andy Kirk, and others, he says that it may be argued that these types of situations are a product of the past; but "the argument doesn't bear close examination. In 1964 [during the peak of Coltrane's career] three young civil-rights workers, two of them white, were murdered in cold blood in Philadelphia, Mississippi. In November 1985 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, white neighbors rioted, shouted 'nigger' and had to be restrained after a black couple, and a black man with a white wife moved into their neighborhood. . . the struggle goes on"³

³ Leonard Feather, *The Jazz Years: Earwitness to an Era* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1987), p.118. Cited hereafter as *Jazz Years*.

Artists like John Coltrane appear to attempt to diligently build bridges to all their fellow humans and to God. The prima materia of composition is the same basic criteria utilized by other systems of creation, and these systems aspire to reflect and explore the laws of Nature. This involves a basic comprehension of balance, magnetism, polarity, and an intuitive realization of the diverse and contrasting physical stimulants and emotional energies at the artist's disposal. The individual ingredients within this infinite array of possibilities can be isolated or combined to form new elements; and the entire range of colors, structural phenomena, and the exhaustive set of permutations can be applied to the individual elements of music, or to combinations of musical parameters simultaneously. A spontaneous composer, such as Coltrane, must consider all of these factors in real-time performance as he or she creates. The levels of command over the manipulation and comprehension of the principles involved vary tremendously from one musician to another. While some composers are only capable of imitating existing models, others gradually evolve to a level that allows them to produce some of the most complex and aesthetically pleasing music known to humankind. If a composer begins to feel that any aspect of the musical language begins to inhibit the creative process of self expression severely, then that limitation must be modified or eliminated.

The purpose of this examination of John Coltrane's music is to explore the evolution of his spontaneous compositional styles with special emphasis on his last creative period. In an attempt to shed additional light on his final period, *Interstellar Space* will be analyzed from a perspective that strongly considers African musical influences a motivating conceptual factor for this compositional style. In fact, an inquiry will be made into whether or not a cyclical process from African roots (as contained in the African-American blues), to European and Eastern musical influences, and back to clearly articulated traditional African musical characteristics can be traced through the unfolding of Coltrane's musical language.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND. One of the anomalies found in African-American jazz that sets it apart from other Western art music (as well as from jazz as created by other people in cultures outside of America) is the effect that racism has had on the individual African-American artists and the consequent effects on the development of the music he or she creates. Although the injustices that have confronted the lives of African-American jazz artists are mentioned in the biographies and films on various artists, little has been said regarding the debilitating effect that racial prejudices have had on jazz composition. If careful attention is not given to all aspects of this particular detail, it may be perplexing to future generations of readers (who may not be familiar with this lingering malady) who may try to understand the peculiar function of African-American jazz in

twentieth-century America based on documentation that fails to emphasize the social limitations placed upon this music and its musicians. Such a reader might well assume that African-American jazz musicians preferred to perform their music in noisy 'clubs,' located outside their own neighborhoods, where they are usually forced to play forte (with little or no opportunity for changes in dynamics) all evening. It might also be presumed that these particular jazz composers preferred to restrict their writing to the standard combo or (occasionally) big band instrumental configurations. One might even believe that the creators and innovators of this music preferred the term jazz for the music they created.

Although an in-depth study of the topic of the effects of racism on John Coltrane's music is beyond the scope of this paper, it will not be ignored. Yet even a cursory investigation of racism in music becomes somewhat difficult to support with scholarly evidence due to relatively little material having been published on the topic by those musicians who suffer from its effects. Those Americans not directly affected by discrimination are not usually interested in discussing the issue, and since the majority of jazz scholars are not African-Americans, it should not be surprising that discussion on this topic has been minimal. Hopefully, there will eventually be many more autobiographies

like those written by African-American master musicians such as Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Miles Davis, and Charles Mingus.⁴

It is important to begin our research and analysis with such a discussion because racism is the strongest negative reality confronting the African-American artists whether launching or trying to sustain their professional careers. Many musicians and jazz enthusiasts would argue that Louis Armstrong "taught the world to swing;" that Charlie Parker revolutionized twentieth-century melodic, harmonic and rhythmic vocabularies; or that Coltrane's music provides a thorough and progressive aural treatise for a musical language that spans the entire existing jazz vocabulary from basic blues to free systematic abstraction of the music. Yet, besides "museum style" ⁵ preservation of their music, these innovators never received the befitting respectability that is usually extended to artists who have a great impact on the music and artistic development of the world. Why has there always been greater appreciation for these artists' work posthumously than during their lives?

Poet, historian and critic A.B. Spellman said "There is a kind of culpability in the discovery of dead artists in that it seems

⁴ Louis Armstrong, Satchmo: My Life in New Orleans (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1954); Duke Ellington, Music Is My Mistress (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1973). In Da Capo paperback; Miles Davis, Miles (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989); and Charles Mingus, Beneath the Underdog (New York: Penguin Books, Reprinted 1980).

⁵ This refers to the tendency towards the selfish confiscation of life or property by an individual or group in order to display 'items' as trophies or sell them for profit.

almost criminal, certainly exploitive, even within the approved limits of capitalism, that the benefits of a man's work accrue to those who ignored him during his life. Certainly the Cézannes and the Gorkys, after their deaths, hold no debts to those critics who fattened their reputations on their posthumous discoveries or merchants who fattened their wallets on after-the-fact accreditations."⁶ Whereas Coltrane and his contemporary African-American jazz masters (Eric Dolphy, Charles Mingus, Cecil Taylor et. al.) are still at the dawn of 'discovery' by American society at large, the recent attention given to innovators Charlie Parker and Thelonious Monk shows some of the tendency to present African-American music as a stylish commodity in a fashion-conscious society. Such ventures surely involve some individuals who are making a profit on artists who did not receive a similar proportion of attention from these same people during their careers. Many, like Louis Armstrong's manager, apparently feel that African-American jazz musicians are "ignorant" and "deserve no better than they got."⁷

The music of John Coltrane becomes a relatively unconventional topic if significance is given to the fact that his work represents art music by a preeminent American composer that has been segregated from its culture at large in many prejudicial ways. The caustic influence that an oppressive American society has on

⁶ A. B. Spellman, Four Lives in the Bebop Business (New York: Limelight, 1985), p. 153. Cited hereafter as Four Lives.

⁷ Jazz Years. p. 121.

the creative potential of an artist like Coltrane must remain attached to any discussion of the music produced under such limitations. While comparisons to other musical artists who have suffered injustices at the hands of the societies they helped to advance are appropriate to some extent, the situation regarding jazz is still a unique phenomenon. If Bach, Mozart or Beethoven were denied access to the formal knowledge and training available within their cultures, restricted to writing music exclusively for the string quartet, and had that music presented in noisy local pubs, the world's impression of their potential as composers would surely have been altered. For this and other related reasons, it occasionally becomes necessary to differentiate between the jazz created by African-American musicians and that created by their European American analogues when making social investigations.

The segregated musical worlds are not related to the two separate Americas (one white and one black) that Booker T. Washington proposed as an alternative in his "Atlanta Compromise" speech of 1895, that put forth the "separate but equal" doctrine, suggested as one of the few possible solutions available in the racist American community at that time. Despite the fact that most jazz innovators have been African-Americans, little equality has been experienced. Within this profession, the social hiatus that exists in the jazz culture is visible historically throughout the field from the introduction of race

records early this century, to a corresponding situation in contemporary America where only a small proportion of the jazz educators, commercial studio musicians, and jazz scholars are African-Americans. It was well after Coltrane had begun his professional career(1953) that the black Musicians Union Local 767 merged into the white Local 47 in Southern California. This was very apparent to Coltrane and his contemporaries who witnessed the popularity of Stan Kenton and Dave Brubeck on college campuses during the fifties and sixties at a time when they could not hope to experience the rewards of such exposure. Despite this advantage, Kenton expressed his "complete and total disgust" for the 1956 Down Beat Critics' Poll for naming so many African-American jazz musicians as winners that year.⁸ Brubeck was also given the preferential opportunity to describe his aims to critics articulately, a factor which also contributed to the economic success and to the enthusiastic response given his comparatively "unsatisfactory group" among his cult followers.⁹ Many years would pass before the music of Coltrane and his associates would be afforded similar courtesies to any degree.

Racism within the American institutions that support European concert music denies composers like Coltrane a proper musical setting for their music. As a spontaneous composer Coltrane is excluded from the circles of so-called "serious" American music;

⁸ Jazz Years, p. 122.

⁹ Barry McRae, The Jazz Cataclysm (New York: Da Capo Press, 1985), p. 48. Cited hereafter as Jazz Cataclysm.

as an African-American jazz musician he was forced to perform almost exclusively in bars even as many of his European American jazz contemporaries were performing in concert halls and at educational institutions; and as a Diasporic African he and his colleagues were (as they still are) severely discriminated against as citizens within the United States at large. The latter disposition was particularly evident to the pacifist Coltrane when he wrote *Alabama* for the four African- American girls (aged eleven to fourteen) who were murdered on the Sunday morning of September 15, 1963 in Birmingham as they finished their Sunday school lesson in the 16th Street Baptist Church.¹⁰ Hence, African- American jazz is a great American art form that has been treated as a cultural stepchild within its own domicile.¹¹

The numerous histories, photo albums, articles, and other writings on jazz and jazz musicians have failed to give appropriate emphasis to the nature of the impact of racism on the development of African-American jazz. Both spirituals (which expressed hope for freedom from the capitalistic institution of slavery) and the blues (in lamenting the despair and adversity of urban bondage) form the quintessential elements that are contained in the nucleus of the music. Although frequently clandestine, the lyrics of numerous blues and jazz songs

¹⁰ J. C. Thomas, Chasin' the Trane (New York: Doubleday, 1975), p. 167. Cited hereafter as Chasin'.

¹¹ Four Lives. p. 16.

corroborate claims of the oppressive conditions within the artists' environment and inspired these melancholy creations. Billie Holiday's song *Strange Fruit* was a reflection of her tour to the South, where the bodies of African-American men were frequently found 'hanging from the poplar trees.' Such barbaric behavior was not confined to the southern states. The August 14th, 1911 headlines of the Coatesville Record (Coatesville, Pennsylvania) tell how local white citizens dragged Zachariah Walker (a black citizen) to Newlin Farm and burned him at the stake.¹² Reactions to painful circumstances, such as the situation involving Billie Holiday cited above, were frequently the topics of the reactionary blues. The reactionary blues tradition is as much a part of the progressive instrumental jazz versions of blues expression as it was in original country blues. Blues "queens" of the early twenties sang reactionary songs that characterized the shuffling back and forth from place to place in an effort to escape the poverty, alienation, and discrimination they encountered in America.¹³ To deny, diminish or eliminate these essential factors in any examination of the music is to misrepresent intrinsic aspects of jazz history.

An attentive investigation of Coltrane's spontaneous compositional development reveals innovative approaches to all of the elements of musical expression, notwithstanding the

¹² Middleton Harris, et. al., The Black Book (New York: Random House, 1974), p. 56.

¹³ Daphne Duval Harrison, Black Pearls: Blues Queens of the 1920's (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988), p.95.

encumbrance and circumscription that has imprisoned the African-American jazz innovator within the limited instrumentation of the jazz combo or the instrumentation of the standard big band. Each performer in the ensemble is a spontaneous composer, contributing to the collective musical landscape. A look at a complete score (not just a transcription of his saxophone solo) from any of the works from Coltrane's last two periods would make it evident, to an informed and objective observer, that some of the most challenging music in the history of American music is contained within them. As his career progresses, the increasingly complex approaches to timbre, linear note placement, and the polyrhythms and polytonal nature of much of Coltrane's music, has made total transcription of his music difficult. Nevertheless, the rapid advancements being made in today's digital sound sampling and sequencing capabilities as well as in other aspects of computer technology will soon enable us to provide more representative scores containing many relevant aspects of Coltrane's music.

In terms of texture, Coltrane moves from solo tenor saxophone cadenzas to saturation density while demonstrating a complete command of multiphonics, harmonics, and other experimental details. His polytonal "three in one" harmonic approach combines with and moves through the densely configured arpeggiated chords Ira Gitler dubbed "sheets of sound" towards a gradual but complete liberation from tonal harmony. Coltrane accomplishes

these developments within parallel developments regarding the stratification of polyrhythms, while constantly controlling climactic points within formal contexts that become increasingly less influenced by traditional Western musical structures. This is all basically accomplished within a period of twelve years (1955-1967). As more research and analysis is done on his music, it will become even more undeniable that Coltrane's music has been ignored for racist, and not musical, reasons.

In order to appreciate another aspect of the restrictions under which Coltrane was forced to work, it is interesting to note that a symbiotic relationship has occasionally been evident at times between black and white musical traditions. Dating back at least as far as the early part of the nineteenth century, the white minstrel tradition demonstrated that there was a demand for what black culture had to offer. Just as African-American spirituals and field-holler forms preferred to assimilate white culture in small doses, white America too preferred its allocation of black culture in small amounts. One of Coltrane's friends and contemporaries, jazz innovator Ornette Coleman, relates an incident that stands as evidence of the ambivalence caused by a social differences of this type. Early in his career, after he performed for an all-white audience in Texas, one of the patrons at the small establishment said to him "It's an honor to shake your hand because you're really a saxophone player - but you're a nigger to me." Coleman goes on to say "That's how sick he

was. There's no answer for that, that's insanity."¹⁴ This style of patronage is a blatant version of the more subtle message the African-American jazz musician contends with on a daily basis when extending himself artistically and socially into his community.

In remembering similar racial incidents and racial slurs made by band leaders Glenn Miller, Nick LaRocca, and others, Feather soon realized that these were "isolated examples of a much larger picture, and that American racism was indiscriminately spread throughout every stratum of white society. Indignities and humiliations, some of them relatively petty, others entailing outright physical violence, were embodied in the black lifestyle."¹⁵ This is the environment in which Coltrane was usually forced to create.

Unlike the early minstrels, circus and marching bands, and other forms of African-American music that were derived from and based upon organized acceptance of Western musical forms, the music tradition from which Coltrane's various styles evolved was primarily the blues. The blues tradition can be seen as a rejection, or at least a reevaluation, of established Western forms.¹⁶ The more progressive forms of this tradition expand to include a greater proportion of African (and other non-European)

¹⁴ Four Lives. p. 94.

¹⁵ Jazz Years. p. 117

¹⁶ Ben Sidran, Black Talk (New York: Da Capo, 1981), p. 31.

musical elements, the less tolerable it has become in the minds of America at large. Thus, the so-called 'avant garde' is attacked, labeled chaotic, and ostracized for lacking 'swing,' melody, etc. Just as the exclusion of almost four hundred years of African-American history from the history created for American educational system has kept white Americans from knowing its black citizens, lack of knowledge of non-Western music contributes to the negative reaction of some listeners when encountering music that is different from their own.

It is difficult to maintain the usual procedures used in the investigation of music compositions created by Western composers when approaching African-American jazz. Since the music created by the innovators in this genre involves an art form based primarily upon an oral tradition, with its own highly unique vocabulary and a set of musical values that frequently conflicts with the expectations and aesthetic sensibilities of some listeners, the perspective and approach utilized to examine African-American jazz music has to be both ecumenical and specialized. Therefore, whereas certain analytical tools derived from Eurocentric perspectives and investigative traditions will be valuable assets to particular aspects of the musical processes utilized in John Coltrane's music, this work may come closer to resembling a modern ethnography (where it is assumed that cultural baggage is dropped "at the door") at times than any other type of scholarly method.

Most of the historical documentation of jazz has been in the form of audio and video recordings, interviews and reviews by jazz critics, and a highly deficient measure of jazz scholarship. Therefore, it is a peremptory fact that the vast majority of these records have been produced by, or produced under the auspices of, European or European-American entrepreneurs or writers. Like Joe Marsala, Benny Goodman, Nelson Riddle, and many of the white jazz musicians who made pioneering efforts to integrate their bands, other sensitive whites (like entrepreneur John Hammond, author Frank Kofsky, Leonard Feather, and others) have been treated with contempt for promoting black music or for giving it the respect they feel the music is entitled to. In the hands of more typical record producers, often the same inaccuracy and insensitivity that affected most of the ethnographic (if that term may be use to describe these early documents) recordings made of musicians in "primitive" societies earlier this century can be found within the documentation of jazz as well. Performances are often abbreviated or edited in some fashion. Many recordings are never released to the public during the lives of the artists who created them. From a purely objective perspective, the poor treatment of such information could be highly suspect when viewed within a culture that still remains highly charged with racial prejudice against the African-American community in general.

In reviewing the entire history of the classic musics of Western society, this mental pabulum obviously creates a multifarious

dilemma. Although the American Congress has proclaimed that jazz is Classic American Music, the society at large has not yet accepted that pattern of thinking. There are still no African-American jazz conservatories, and jazz musicians are still denied the economic stability enjoyed by their European-American counterparts. It is trite to cite the many well-worn references to Paul Whiteman (the highly disputed "King of Jazz"), Benny Goodman (who few African-American swing musicians would call the "King of Swing"), George Gershwin (a man often praised for his contributions to jazz even though he was not a jazz musician), and others that have been made by numerous writers in connection with this problem. Consequently, it is difficult to gather literary evidence from existent documentation that can be considered highly objective, sensitively aware appraisals of the music; and that contain the unquestionable precision and truth that should be a part of any historical document or empirical perspective.

Considering the limitations stated above, the analytical aspect of this work will review Coltrane's music from a position based upon many of the aims expressed by the composer himself, rather than attempting to force his music into other preconceived frameworks. In order to accomplish this to an effective degree within the limitations of the topic, I feel that a definition of African-American jazz (as viewed by the musicians in and around the four periods of Coltrane's development) is pertinent to such a discussion. By briefly examining some related jazz criticism, and

through touching upon other segments of his creative environment, we can determine the degree to which these factors are of any consequence to Coltrane's compositional processes.

Many essential qualities of Coltrane's music are extremely difficult to quantify. African-American jazz has developed out of a tradition of black music, that was originally created by Diasporic Africans in America randomly, for the sole purpose of individualized expression. The techniques that evolved from the music are predicated upon the feelings of the moment (spontaneity) and a desire for emotional honesty. It is the product of a peculiarly black voice that manifested as blues in the context of Western harmony.¹⁷ Antonin Dvorak stated that he had discovered all that was needed for the creation of a great and noble school of music in the melodies of African-Americans,¹⁸ while Aaron Copland felt that "the jazz band is a real creation in novel tonal effects, whether you like them or not."¹⁹ If the vocabulary of jazz is indeed unique, then any pertinent means of analysis must develop from within that same culture. Of course the prospect of jazz criticism, scholarship, and economic control evolving from within the culture might arouse indignation from individuals who have capitalized on the social and economic inequities within American society to establish their own

¹⁷ Ibid p. 67

¹⁸ Chasin' p. 1

¹⁹ Ibid p. 194

livelihoods. Only within an oppressive society would such an obvious and inalienable right be questioned or challenged.

As an American composer, Coltrane was forced to create his music within limitations that severely impact upon the resultant compositions. Unlike any of the other musical forms in the Western world that have become a part of its art music (as opposed to the various folk music traditions), jazz music, like the people who created it, has also been segregated from the mainstream of American society. An important characteristic of legal segregation was the irrational and illogical racial prejudice upon which it is based. The mythological fabrications adopted by American and European societies for centuries to create the fallacious arguments utilized in attempting to justify the mass homicides, abductions and filching that took place throughout the world were transposed into the "Black Codes" and other American policies after the ideological framework of slavery was dismantled. From the Emancipation onwards many African-Americans have attempted to defeat the blatant and growing irrationality of their suppression by proving themselves worthy of freedom, which proved to be not only a thankless task but one which was contrary to the basic assumption of American society.²⁰

²⁰ Black Talk, p. 30

A society constructed upon racist values is going to be a sexist society as well. Consequently, African-American women musicians had two social handicaps to overcome. W. C. Handy and Perry Bradford spent many hours trying to convince record companies that women blues singers had a ready market of African-American consumers. From 1919 on they repeatedly approached various companies but were "rebuffed by managers who claimed that the black women's voices were unsuitable, or that their diction was different from that of white women, or that they could not fill the requirements."²¹ In her book *Black Pearls: Blues Queens of the 1920's* Daphne Duval Harrison tells how "the blues women of Ida Cox's era brought to their lyrics and performances new meaning as they interpreted and reformulated the black experience from their unique perspective in American society as black females."²² She talks about how working-class women from southern cities were no better off than their rural counterparts, and how the tough, brutal life of northern cities began to take its toll on many black women in the early years of our present century. Few female African-American women were able to work as professional musicians on instruments other than the piano or the voice (perhaps because both of these instruments could be pursued in the church). This social situation certainly influenced their musical development. European-American women did not escape the problem of prejudice and the limitations this

²¹ Lawrence Levine, Black Culture and Black Consciousness (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 224-25.

²² Daphne Duval Harrison, Black Pearls: Blues Queens of the 1920's (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988) p. 64.

condition places upon musical development. Author Diane Peacock Jezic mentions that virtuoso flutist and composer Katherine Hoover's career was negatively affected, and "because of prejudice she encountered against women majoring in composition at the graduate level, Hoover's degrees are in music theory."²³

It is certain that John Coltrane's music evinces an acute awareness of the value of repetition, methodical transformation, and of tension and release in music. He also realized the importance of intuitive contemplation and of uninhibited emotional expression to the process of spontaneous composition. Through an extremely thorough and orderly process, Coltrane mastered tonal harmony and, as we shall see, felt that this earned him his freedom to continue to evolve beyond the limitations of that system. Clearly, the dedication, musical maturity and psychic energy needed to accomplish such a task is a colossal feat; nevertheless, only a portion of the psychic energy possessed by a musician in Coltrane's position can be directed towards his work. Unfortunately, the culture of Diasporic Africans in America has been shaped by the large amount of psychic energy spent adjusting to white culture. Within this predicament, creative black artists have come into conflict with the Anglo-conformity syndrome of American life.²⁴ In music, the

²³ Diane Peacock Jezic, Women Composers: The Lost Tradition Found (The Femanist Press at the City University of New York, 1988), p. 166.

²⁴ Four Lives. p. 16

friction generated from this esthetic collision can be attributed, in part, to differences between literary (Western European) and oral traditions (as applied to jazz and other African-American music). However, it is a related, yet different, set of circumstances that account for the reactions of the numerous citizens in American society who become infuriated when they encounter African-American musicians taking the process of cultural definition of their art into their own hands the way the Bop musician did.

Author Ben Sidran suggests that there were two principal reasons for the growing trend of hostility of whites toward modern black music as the Bop era became manifest. One was related to the emergence of the New Orleans "revivalist" movement led by white "purists" who sought to employ both aesthetic and economic pressure to hold back the growing wave of "modernism".²⁵ Outside of the group of older musicians who benefited economically from being called out of retirement, this revival had little effect on the African-American community. An appurtenant event was the openly hostile attitude of the jazz critics. Sidran feels that these reactions indicate that this hostility was the byproduct of a mentality that implied that the alternative idioms of black expression had been accepted as "gospel"; thus, black music had engaged the white listener on an emotional level. It was not uncommon, therefore, for writers to respond to the new music in

²⁵ Black Talk. p. 97

the manner of influential critic Hugues Panassié who referred to Bop as heresy during the 1940's. Although Panassié was devoutly anti-racist, he expressed a basic and profound difficulty in accepting the new music on its own terms, as opposed to his "falling over backwards to assert black taste as he perceived it."

²⁶ This type of arrogant attitude, too, has frequently attached itself to black music.

Some of the magazines devoted to jazz felt that they were in solidarity with black music even though their actions demonstrated otherwise. In pointing out some of the reasons for a lack of awareness of the true essence of African-American jazz, Coltrane biographer C. O. Simpkins states:

Looking through the pages of Downbeat [sic] , it seems as though it considers itself "liberal" on racial matters. There were articles denouncing the prejudice against mixed bands and later articles denouncing the police harassment of clubs with a mixed clientele. Downbeat may have been liberal in a relative sense. But it reflected all too well the self-interest and racial arrogance of whites. The effects of the music industry reach even the smallest cities.²⁷

²⁶ Ibid. p. 97.

²⁷ J. O. Simpkins, Coltrane: A Biography. (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, reprinted 1989). p. 13.

Coltrane, in an interview with Frank Kofsky in 1964, said that he felt that arrogance and the delusion of power prevented music critics (and others who have a problem with accepting the new music) from assuming the position of humility that is imperative for a "student" encountering a new subject. He continues, "You open your mind. You absorb. But you have to be quiet, . . . you have to be still to do all this."²⁸ This was an artistic attitude inherited from Bop. Before bebop led jazz into the arena of art, or at least severed it from the vestigial patronage of the parochial term folk art,²⁹ local African-American bands played for social situations in small establishments (with distressing acoustics) where patrons congregated primarily for the purpose of dancing, drinking, laughing, and talking. The music in such environments was mere background and the musician was forced to cater to the tastes of the general public. Certainly this is not the educational or artistic arena that Coltrane suggested for listeners interested in learning the new music. Although faced with many of the same atrocities, the progressive jazz musician no longer accepted the situation quietly, but began seeking other alternatives.

The positive attitude that has propelled most jazz innovators compels them to share their art with the public in an intimate way. In the interview with Kofsky cited above, Coltrane made it

²⁸ Pauline Rivelli and Robert Levin, Giants of Black Music. (New York: Da Capo, 1979), p. 38. Cited hereafter as Giants.

²⁹ Four Lives. p. 16.

clear that he liked for his audience to respond, and he considered that active participation that listening involves placed the listener in a position of being "another member of the group".³⁰ Similarly, the artist's work is subject to the interests of the professional audience; that audience, however, is likewise susceptible to denunciation by the artist.³¹

PROBLEMS WITH DATA SOURCES. Since, for the most part, objective historical documentation of jazz has remained outside the hands of the African-American community that creates the music, a special responsibility to being thoroughly informed should be a minimum prerequisite for those who contribute to the documentation of the music. As we will see, this has not been the case. Unfortunately, due to a deficiency of authoritative sources on African-American jazz music, most of the historical documentation fell into the hands of non-musicians who placed their opinions in popular magazines and on the back of record jackets. Writers like Down Beat critic Don DeMichael, for instance, in 1960 said that Ornette Coleman's approach was "not musical freedom; disdain for principles and boundaries is synonymous not with freedom but with anarchy."³² Such writers lack the ability to musically substantiate subjective arguments of this type. There is a similar scarcity of convincing musical

³⁰ Giants, pp. 25 - 26.

³¹ Four Lives, p. 32

³² Ronald M. Radano, "The Jazz Avant-Garde and the Jazz Community: Action and Reaction," Annual Review of Jazz Studies #3, Ed. Dan Morgenstern, et. al. (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1985), p. 73.

evidence coexisting with most of the historical information collected on jazz.

Sidran again suggests that black culture is, above all, a culture that places emphasis on actions and deeds rather than words. Consequently, to accept black modes of expression is to embrace a kind of activism which is an inherent part of an oral tradition.³³ He asserts that white society in America tends to be conformist, while black culture is collective or communal.³⁴ As examples in music, he offers a comparison between the approaches of white bands such as that of Paul Whiteman (where the individual was usually submerged in the "section" work), as opposed to the exploitation of the soloist's spontaneous voices in the Fletcher Henderson and Duke Ellington bands. The latter leaders developed a process that, while utilizing somewhat formal (written) compositional practices, transcended the restrictions to improvisation posed by the large organizations. Avoiding the passivity imposed upon individuals in the white organizations, these black aggregations displayed the individualistic vocalized tone qualities even in the brass or reed "section" playing. Ellington apparently recognized differences between conformist and communal tendencies in his audiences as well, keeping separate books for white and black performances.³⁵

³³ Black Talk, p. 33.

³⁴ Ibid. p. 76.

³⁵ Ibid. p. 74.

Given the opportunity, jazz masters have frequently commented upon the inappropriateness of imposing outside values on their unique musical language. In responding in a letter dated June 2, 1962 to Don DeMichael, who had mailed him a book by Aaron Copland, Coltrane emphatically states his views on African-American Music.

Dear Don,

Many thanks for sending Aaron Copland's fine book 'Music and Imagination.' I found it historically revealing and on the whole, quite informative. However, I do not feel that all of his tenets are entirely essential or applicable to the 'jazz' musician. This book seems to be written more for the American classical or semi-classical composer who has the problem, as Copland sees it, of not finding himself an integral part of the musical community, or having difficulty in finding a positive philosophy or justification for his art. The 'jazz' musician (You can have this term along with several others that have been foisted upon us.) does not have this problem at all. We have absolutely no reason to worry about lack of positive and affirmative philosophy. It's built in us. The phrasing, the sound of the music attest this fact. We are naturally endowed with it. You can believe all of us would have perished long ago if this were not so. As to community, the whole face of the globe is our community. You see, it is really easy for us to create. We are born with this feeling that just comes out no matter what conditions exist. Otherwise, how could our founding

fathers have produced this music in the first place when they surely found themselves (as many of us do today) existing in hostile communities where there was everything to fear and damn few to trust. Any music which could grow and propagate itself as our music has, must have a hell of an affirmative belief inherent in it. Any person who claims to doubt this, or claims to believe that the exponents of our music of freedom are not guided by this same entity, is either prejudiced, musically sterile, just plain stupid or scheming. Believe me, Don, we all know that this word which so many seem to fear today, 'Freedom' has a hell of a lot to do with this music. Anyway, I did find in Copland's book many fine points. For example: 'I cannot imagine an art work without implied convictions.' - Neither can I. I am sure that you and many others have enjoyed and garnered much of value from this well written book.

If I may, I would like to express a sincere hope that in the near future, a vigorous investigation of the materials presented in this book and others related will help cause an opening up of the ears that are still closed to the progressive music created by the independent thinking artist of today. When this is accomplished, I am certain that the owners of such ears will easily recognize the very vital and highly enjoyable qualities that exists in this music. I also feel that through such honest endeavor, the contributions of future creators will be more easily recognized, appreciated and enjoyed; particularly by the listener who may otherwise miss the point (intellectually, emotionally, sociologically, etc.) because of inhibitions, a lack of understanding, limited means of association or other reasons.

You know, Don, I was reading a book on the life of Van Gogh today, and I had to pause and think of that wonderful and persistent force - the creative urge. The creative urge was in this man who found himself so much at odds with the world he lived in, and in spite of all the adversity, frustrations rejections and so forth - beautiful and living art came forth abundantly. . . if only he could be here today. Truth is indestructible. It seems history shows (and its the same way today) that the innovator is more often than not met with some degree of condemnation; usually according to the degree of departure from the prevailing modes of expression or what have you. Change is always so hard to accept. We also see that these innovators always seek to revitalize, extend or reconstruct the status quo in their given fields, wherever it is needed. Quite often they are the rejects, outcasts, sub-citizens, etc. of the very societies to which they bring so much sustenance. Often they are people who endure great personal tragedy in their lives. Whatever the case, whether accepted or rejected, rich or poor, they are forever guided by that great and eternal constant the creative urge. Let us cherish it and give praise to God. Thank you and best wishes to all.³⁶

Coltrane's letter stands as evidence of his acute awareness of the problems involved with having his music evaluated and appraised by those who lacked the "intellectual, emotional, sociological," and musical credentials to do so. It is important to pay close

³⁶ Cuthbert O. Simpkins, Coltrane: A Biography. (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1989), pp. 159 - 161. Cited hereafter as Coltrane.

attention to two other significant details. First of all, he realized that he (like his forefathers) was creating music in a hostile environment (America) where trust could be placed in very few individuals because of the racist legacy that has been perpetuated throughout the history of the culture. With the exception of the brutalized Jewish musicians forced to perform in the gas chambers and crematories of Auschwitz and other noxious Nazi concentration camps earlier this century, there are few other examples in twentieth-century Western music history of well-trained professional musicians being forced to perform for those who gave them "everything to fear." As he pointed out, the austere and inimical condemnation encountered by the innovator who strays too far from established norms is pernicious enough alone. Second, Coltrane's trenchant declarations regarding the validity, philosophical stability, and positive purpose of his art, demonstrate a realization of the futility of outside criticism by people such as DeMichael on the "indestructible truth" contained in his music. Coltrane knew that the evolutionary nature of his concepts created problems for those "hostile" jazz critics, who were like insidious parasites that were unable to cope with and write about music that transcended the musical jargon they had memorized. Finally (and significantly), Coltrane, like many other African-American modernists, articulates his annoyance with the term 'jazz.'

Coltrane's career began as the Bop tradition was coming to a close. Bop musicians availed themselves of the tradition that

required that the black man prove himself to be accepted by learning Western harmony with a vengeance, and then applying it to his new music in radically inventive ways. The resulting musical style was for change (and against conservatism in any form), and created culturally exclusive idioms that were openly antagonistic toward "Uncle Tomism" and middle-class attitudes. These younger musicians accepted the musical precedents of the older musicians but not their social orientation, which had adopted Western esthetic criteria and values.³⁷ As a consequence of these revolutionary maneuvers, the conservative urban white public was left with only the limited understanding of pre-1940's African-American jazz that could be obtained from the outer fringes of black culture. From this extremely remote position, writers began to attack the new black music.

Another group of outside and uninformed laymen who exploited and thwarted the progress of the new music were the record companies.³⁸ Although Coltrane was delighted with his association with jazz master Eric Dolphy, for instance, a storm of protest from his recording advisors eventually convinced him to ask Dolphy to leave.³⁹ In 1962 Coltrane and Dolphy had recorded on four successive nights at the Village Vanguard in New York and

³⁷ Black Talk, p. 95.

³⁸ Examples of such exploitation is well documented in numerous autobiographies, biographies, and articles on jazz musicians (i.e., Miles: The Autobiography; Bird Lives, by Ross Russell; Beneath the Underdog, by Charles Mingus, etc.)

³⁹ Joe Goldberg, Jazz Masters of the Fifties (New York: Da Capo, 1980), p. 205.

everything the group played was taped by Bob Thiele for Impulse records. Only five compositions (on two records) were released from the many hours of taping, and Eric Dolphy was only included on two of those recordings. The gravity of this infringement can only be appreciated if one considers the importance of each individual voice to the process of spontaneous jazz composition which involves communal interaction of the highest order. As history clearly confirms, Dolphy's voice was irreplaceable. Whether the company's reaction against Dolphy was due to its subjective opinion about his music, or a consequence of Dolphy's frankness (he once said that "critics should consult the musicians when there is something the critic does not fully understand"⁴⁰) is not known. The more significant question would seem to be, . . . of the people involved in forcing Coltrane to sacrifice a major function of his compositional palette, who was appropriately qualified to do so? Who is ever qualified to over-rule a master composer in reference to his own creations?

The titles of his compositions, and the remarks from his musical associates, indicate that Coltrane was a profoundly spiritual person. Jazz composer Sun Ra commented that "Coltrane's music, like mine, is cosmic and spiritual. But there is a strong romantic strain in his music that I hear and love."⁴¹ In the 1960's he was coming closer to the Creator through music, as well as through

⁴⁰ Coltrane. p. 153

⁴¹ Chasin'. p. 180

readings in the Bible, pre-Koranic texts and other sacred works.⁴² He and Elvin Jones would discuss these readings. These studies continued to be assimilated in 1964 in spite of the traumatic loss of his friend Eric Dolphy and his separation from his wife, Naima.⁴³ This *modus operandi* contrasts sharply with the old standard interpretation of New Orleans jazz and subsequent forms of the music that promote the stereotype that jazz is a product of a hedonistic society. Sidran feels that it seems evident from black history and from musical artifacts of this period, that black music is very much spiritually inclined.⁴⁴ A music is coerced into an adverse environment and is then damned for being there.

In the explorations of Coltrane's music that follow, an understanding of his spiritual aspirations may clarify questions pertaining to the progressive nature of his compositions. A large portion of the fad-conscious American society depends upon "planned obsolescence;" something must go out of fashion in order to be capable of being brought back into fashion. The capitalistic motivations of a conformist mentality, therefore, conflict incisively with the evolutionary paths of the innovative artist, philosopher, or any devout seeker of knowledge residing within that system. As Coltrane said in the mid-August (1966) interview with Frank Kofsky, "I want to be a force for real good. .

⁴² Coltrane. p. 179

⁴³ Ibid. p. 178

⁴⁴ Black Talk. p. 47

"there are bad forces, put here to bring suffering to others and misery to the world, but I want to be the force which is truly for good."⁴⁵

The devastating effect that racism has had on Coltrane and other jazz innovators has limited the progress of twentieth-century music. Changes in the racist attitudes in America would have had a tremendous effect on his music, since then he would have significantly increased his control over his possibilities for orchestration, over the performance environment in which his music was played, and in public support for his music. It will be interesting to witness the inevitable change that will occur when African- American jazz masters are given access to the educational, commercial and musical advantages their white colleagues have enjoyed while they have been systematically denied them. If one considers the powerful jazz creations that became manifest under such oppressive circumstances, and that these musicians still managed to be a major force in twentieth-century world music, perhaps an answer can be surmised regarding the ignorance, fear and insecurity that compel certain individuals to persist in trying to maintain systems of oppression for those who contribute such beautiful art to society.

⁴⁵ Giants. p. 38

THE FORMATIVE YEARS AND FIRST PERIOD (1926 to mid-1957)

John William Coltrane was born in Hamlet, North Carolina on the equinox, September 23, 1926. His mother, Alice Blair, and John R. Coltrane, his father were both ministers' children and amateur musicians whose household maintained a religious influence that left ample freedom for John Jr. and his Cousin Mary who resided with them. Thus his study of music began in a church music program. Much like both of his parents, John was a quiet person who made a good impression on his teachers because of his academic achievements and his peaceful disposition. At an early age, he began to ask perceptive questions about God and demonstrated an ability to concentrate for long periods of time as he worked on his model airplanes.¹

For the purpose of this examination of John Coltrane's musical development, his compositional evolution will be divided into the following stylistic periods: Formative Years = 1926 through 1954; First Period = 1955 through mid - 1957; Second Period = mid - 1957 through the end of 1959; Third Period = 1960 until the end of 1964; and Fourth Period, from 1965 until his death on July 17, 1967. These demarcations are aligned with the four "loosely defined settings" proposed by Coltrane scholar Andrew White III, who has transcribed over four hundred and twenty saxophone solos taken from one hundred and six phonograph recordings

¹ Cuthbert O. Simpkins, Coltrane: A Biography (New York: Black Classic Press, 1989), p. 8. Cited hereafter as Coltrane.

made by John Coltrane over the twelve year period from 1955 to 1967.²

When Coltrane was twelve he began studying the E-flat alto horn (a brass wind instrument) with Reverend Steele, who formed a community band, but later changed to the clarinet. He practiced day and night, sometimes until four in the morning, a fact his family learned to live with. His senior year in high school, Grace Yokley formed a new school band and Coltrane occupied the ensemble's principal clarinet chair.³ His mother soon bought him a used alto saxophone for his birthday. Jazz composer/performer Benny Golson recalls Coltrane's "exquisite sound" at this time that was "even bigger than Johnny Hodges's."⁴ In addition to Hodges, it was Lester Young and Coleman Hawkins who made the biggest impression on the young Coltrane.

I've been listening to jazzmen, especially saxophonists, since the time of the early Count Basie records, which featured Lester Young. Pres was my first real influence, but the first horn I got was an alto, not a tenor. I wanted a tenor, but some friends of my mother advised her to buy me an alto because it was smaller horn and easier for a youngster to handle. This was 1943.

² Andrew Nathaniel White III, Trane 'n Me: A Treatise on the Music of John Coltrane (Washington D. C.: Andrew's Musical Enterprises, 1981), p. 43. Cited hereafter as Trane 'n Me.

³ J. C. Thomas, Chasin' the Trane (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1975), p. 34. Cited hereafter as Chasin'.

⁴ Chasin', pp. 34-35.

Johnny Hodges became my first main influence on alto, and he still kills me. I stayed with alto through 1947, and by then I'd come under the influence of Charlie Parker. The first time I heard Bird play, it hit me right between the eyes. Before I switched from alto in that year, it had been strictly a Bird thing with me, but when I bought a tenor to go with Eddie Vinson's band, a wider area of listening opened up for me.

The reason I liked Lester so was that I could feel that line, that simplicity. My phrasing was very much in Lester's vein at this time.

I found out about Coleman Hawkins after I learned of Lester. There were a lot of things that Hawkins was doing that I knew I'd have to learn somewhere along the line. I felt the same way about Ben Webster. There were many things that people like Hawk, Ben and Tab Smith were doing in the '40s that I didn't understand but that I felt emotionally.

The first time I heard Hawk, I was fascinated by his arpeggios and the way he played. I got a copy of his *Body and Soul* and listened real hard to what he was doing. And even though I dug Pres, as I grew musically, I appreciated Hawk more and more.⁵

⁵ Coltrane, John in Collaboration with Don DeMicheal. "Coltrane on Coltrane." Down Beat, September 29, 1960, p. 17.

After High School he moved to Philadelphia where he enrolled in the Ornstein School of Music. He soon transferred to the Granoff Studios where he became one of the best students in the history of the school. C.O. Simpkins states that Coltrane continued post-graduate studies over a period of eight years after graduating (until around 1951), at which time Mr. Granoff, his saxophone teacher, felt the school had no more to offer him. However, the degree or diploma he received at the completion of these studies is not mentioned.

Coltrane made his professional debut at the age of nineteen in a small group playing background music for the disinterested patrons of a Philadelphia club.⁶ Jazz musician Bill Barron remembered Coltrane's weekend trips during the summer to Wildwood, New Jersey where he and his friends would sit in and discuss Charlie Parker recordings with the local professional musicians.⁷ Shortly afterwards, he was drafted into the Navy Band and posted in Hawaii. While stationed in Hawaii he played clarinet with the marching band and the stage band, practicing the alto saxophone on the side. After being discharged in 1946, he joined Eddie 'Mr. Cleanhead' Vinson's uncompromising rhythm and blues band. Borrowing Golson's tenor saxophone, which he did not like at first because of the added weight and size of the horn, Coltrane toured with the band throughout most of 1947 and 1948 and

⁶ Barry McRae, The Jazz Cataclysm (New York: Da Capo Press, 1985), p. 101. Cited hereafter as Jazz Cataclysm.

⁷ Chasin', p. 34.

began to develop his extraordinary confidence and firm blues roots. He had played alto saxophone until Red Garland convinced him to switch instruments so the two musicians could travel together in Vinson's band. Within this time frame(1947), he also played a few jobs with Sonny Rollins in Miles Davis' group and with Jimmy Heath, and later became a member of the Apollo Theater orchestra in Harlem during 1948.

Vinson had an agility and a way of bending and sustaining notes that Coltrane admired. Barry McRae suggests that some writers feel that this time with Vinson may have been wasted,⁸ but Coltrane was not prompted by the same sense of extreme urgency that musicians like Charlie Parker apparently had. When not sight reading he would watch this superb technician and frequently asked questions about the arrangements, chord resolutions, etc.

"Any time you play your horn, it helps you," Coltrane said regarding his stay with Earl Bostic in 1952. "If you get down, you can help yourself even in a rock 'n' roll band. But I didn't help myself." His move to the group led by Johnny Hodges in 1953 was a more productive one. "We played honest music in this band, " he recalled. "it was my education to the older generation."⁹

⁸ Jazz Cataclysm, p. 102.

⁹ Ira Gitler, "Trane on the Track," Down Beat, October 16, 1958, p. 16. Cited hereafter as "Trane on the Track."

Vinson felt that Coltrane "was a fine young man" whom he loved "like a son".¹⁰ Although Coltrane was experiencing problems with his teeth at this time, he was involved in an entertaining routine with the bandleader devised to "keep their chops up" and grab the audience's attention. Starting on alto, Vinson would play a long, loping blues on alto while John filled in the background on tenor. They would then begin to exchange horns (by flipping them) immediately duplicating what had just been played by the other. This exercise in coordination was rarely muffed.

Through such a diverse background Coltrane continued to develop a sound knowledge of earlier jazz forms. He played with the Dizzy Gillespie Big Band and was one of the few carefully selected sidemen asked to play with Gillespie's new combo when the big band broke up at the end of 1950. This ensemble included vibraphonist Milt Jackson, alto saxophonist Jimmy Heath, bassist Percy Heath, drummer Specs Wright, and Fred Strong on conga drums. Performing with Gillespie, renowned for his commitment to encouraging young reed men, enabled Coltrane to develop excellent timing and smooth out the rough rhythm and blues edges as he studied the master Bebop trumpeter's technique. In listening to recordings from this early period in Coltrane's career, one hears traditional tenor saxophone playing (with obvious Lester Young influence) that contrasts sharply with Gillespie's boppish style. In spite of this basic approach to style and sound at

¹⁰ Chasin', p. 42.

this time, his 1951 solos on *A Night in Tunisia*¹¹ show the innovative, individualistic and risk-taking Coltrane experimenting in a fashion that is evocative even among such iconoclastic company. Coltrane mentioned his time with Gillespie.

What I didn't know with Diz was that what I had to do was really express myself, Coltrane remembered. I was playing cliches and trying to learn tunes that were hip, so I could play with the guys who played them.

Earlier, when I had first heard Bird, I wanted to be identified with him . . . to be consumed by him. But underneath I really wanted to be myself. You can only play so much of another man.¹²

Subsequent to the rare and marvelous apprenticeship experienced thus far in his career, Coltrane spent time performing with Earl Bostic. Drummer Art Blakey feels that " If Coltrane played with Bostic, I know he learned a lot. . . Working with Earl Bostic is like attending a university of the saxophone."¹³ During this period (early 1950's), Coltrane's style began to come under the influence of Charlie Parker. Vinson's band's book had contained a few Bird tunes among its essentially rhythm and blues songs and ballads. Coltrane explains:

¹¹ Coltrane 1951: Trane's First Ride (First Broadcasts : Never Available Before), Vol. 1, Oberon 5100, and Vol. 2, Broadcast Tributes 0009.

¹² " 'Trane on the Track,' p. 16.

¹³ Chasin', p. 58.

When I went with Eddie Vinson on tenor, a wider area of listening opened up for me. On alto, Bird had been my whole influence, but on tenor I found there was no one man whose ideas were so dominant as Charlie's were on alto. Therefore, I drew from all the men I heard during this period on tenor, especially Lester Young and his melodic phrasing. I found out about Coleman Hawkins later and became fascinated by his arpeggios and the way he played. I got a copy of *Body and Soul* and listened real hard. Even though I dug Pres, as I grew musically, I appreciated Hawk more and more.¹⁴

Tenor saxophonist and vocalist Gay Croose asked Coltrane to be on a recording session in Nashville, Tennessee in 1952. John played alto saxophone on the the compositions *Bittersweet* and *Fat Sam from Birmingham* in Croose's band with Tommy Turrentine (trumpet), Stash O'Laughlin (piano), Alvin Jackson (bass), and Oliver Jackson (drums).¹⁵ In 1953 Coltrane went with Johnny Hodges to begin another phase of his development. Both men regarded Sidney Bechet as a brilliant jazzman and emulated elements of his smooth and enigmatic Creole style in their own playing. Like Bechet's, each of Coltrane's performances throughout his career would be full of intensity and utmost integrity. In

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 42

¹⁵ Bill Cole, *John Coltrane* (New York: Schirmer, 1978), p. 211. Cole does not indicate the record label this date was for. Cited hereafter as John Coltrane.

addition to his more experimental ventures, Coltrane always returned to the 'roots' of jazz, and considered opportunities to work with older stylists both educational and gratifying. Although individual styles may differ, the emotionalism that results from such collaborations is noticeably amalgamated in the music such as that recorded by Coleman and Coltrane on *Thelonious Monk - Monk's Music* ¹⁶ (June 26, 1957) and other later recording sessions.

There were also some much less rewarding musical ventures. In 1954 Coltrane had worked in a rhythm and blues band with vocalist Big Maybelle, guitarist Jr. Walker, and others, where he was asked to walk the bar while playing his tenor. Everyone in the band was quite amused when the soft spoken Coltrane refused saying "Sorry, I've got ulcers."¹⁷ With the exception of a few bootleg recordings, much of Coltrane's free lance work prior to 1955 is not well documented on phonograph records.¹⁸

A basic ingredient in Coltrane's (as well as most of his African-American peers') foundation is the intensely emotional spiritual of the typical African-American religious service. Both of his grandfathers were ministers of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, so Coltrane was exposed to the religious music of the

¹⁶ Riverside Records, OJC - 084.

¹⁷ *Chasin'*, p. 66

¹⁸ Bootleg recordings on the Oberon, Broadcast Tributes, Ozone, and Session record labels are included in the discography.

southern African-American church at a very young age.¹⁹ The importance of this factor cannot be overestimated, as it accounts for much of the basic melodic and rhythmic orientation that shapes the knowledge of many of the blues and jazz performers who are rooted in this musical/spiritual experience. The blues, in turn, is the foremost vehicle for individual expression in modern jazz.

In the hands of the innovative jazz performer, the blues becomes a highly complex and progressive musical form harmonically and melodically, leading to an endless variety of chromatic and pantonal possibilities. It employs very few Western chords and, when properly executed, allows for the judicious imposition of virtually any note on a given chord. Coltrane apparently felt that the simple blues form and blues essentials could serve as a foundation for his music. Like other classic blues shouters before him, the simple fundamentals involved combined with complex instrumental or vocal timbres (grunting, whailing, etc.) to produce high levels of emotional intensity in performance.

Blues has evolved harmonically through various stylistic periods, progressing from the minimum number of chords contained in the original forms of the performer-centered rural blues, through the intricate chord substitutions involved in Bebop, then ultimately back to a minimum use of chords in the music of many

¹⁹ John Coltrane, p. 24.

contemporary jazz innovators. This cycle parallels the movement from nineteenth century forms of original African- American music that retained many traditional African features (such as call and response, a highly vocal oriented instrumental sound, a freedom from Western formal structures, etc.), through music that began to incorporate more aspects of Western music; then returning to a utilization and understanding of traditional African music, as well as scrupulous exploitation of other world music from around the globe. This also appears to be an unconscious cycle to which Coltrane's music succumbed.

Miles Davis remembers that in September, 1955, Sonny Rollins disappeared from the jazz scene "like he said he would" and Miles could not track him down. In trying to find a replacement for him, Davis tried John Gilmore (who was playing with Sun Ra at the time) but he didn't fit Miles' needs. Philly Joe Jones then brought up Coltrane, with whom both Miles and Rollins had performed at the Audubon a few years prior. Miles felt that Sonny had "blown him away that night," so Miles was not extremely excited about Coltrane as a prospect. Much to his surprise, however, Coltrane "had gotten a lot better" in the interim.²⁰ Working earlier part of the year in Philadelphia with the aim of "creating forcefully," Coltrane had spent time with Bill Carney's group where he felt "We were too musical for certain rooms."²¹

²⁰ Davis, Miles. Miles: The Autobiography (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), pp. 194 - 195. Cited hereafter as Miles.

²¹ "Train on the Tracks," p. 16.

Miles and Coltrane did not get along at first because Davis felt "Trane liked to ask all these mother fucking questions back then about what he should or shouldn't play." Miles felt that his silence and evil glances turned Coltrane off, and refused to comment because a professional musician should always "find their own place in the music."²² Frustrated, Coltrane left for home only to accept another invitation to rejoin Davis' band later the same year. Coltrane confides:

After I joined Miles in 1955, I found that he doesn't talk much and will rarely discuss his music. He's completely unpredictable; sometimes he'd walk off stage after just playing a few notes, not even completing one chorus. If I ask him something about his music, I never knew how he was going to take it.²³

Beyond extreme differences in temperament, it would seem that Coltrane's hard bop style would be incompatible with Miles' Cool approach to some listeners. Although this cleavage remained to some degree, it was in fact an artistic advantage and the partnership lasted off and on until 1960. Along with Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers and the Charles Mingus band, Davis had one of the most notable bands in jazz in the mid-to-late fifties. It

²² Miles. p.195.

²³ Chasin' the Trane. p. 81.

was here that Coltrane was able to put the eclectic grounding of jazz principles that now formed his musical foundation to proper use, which rapidly gained him national recognition. The recording of *'Round About Midnight* with the original Miles Davis group brought Coltrane to the attention of the segment of the jazz public which had been ignoring him.²⁴

Having always profited from associating with musicians such as Tadd Dameron and others more adroit than himself, his work with Miles was his main source of knowledge in those days. With pianist Red Garland, bassist Paul Chambers, drummer Philly Joe Jones, and, later, alto saxophonist Julian Cannonball "Adderley," Coltrane shaped his style while Miles produced some of his best work. Gradually Coltrane's style became more confident and progressively more assertive, while his now distinguished full tone acquired a hard resilient sound. Some jazz historians feel that the period of "Cannonball" Adderley's association with Miles and Coltrane marked Davis' creative peak.²⁵ Of course there were other classic Miles Davis ensembles featuring musicians such as Wayne Shorter, Herbie Hancock, and the like. Miles, however, predicted the importance of this new band, but recalls some of the difficulties that had to be overcome prior to the initial launching.

²⁴ Joe Goldberg, Jazz Masters of the Fifties (New York: Da Capo Press, 1980) p. 147.

²⁵ Mark Gridley, Jazz Styles: History and Analysis. Second Edition. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1985. p. 213. Cited hereafter as Jazz Styles.

His group "almost didn't happen" when Coltrane went back to Philadelphia to play with Jimmy Smith.

We practically had to beg him (Coltrane) to come join the band for this gig we had in Baltimore, in late September 1955 . . . But after we started playing together for a while, I knew that this guy was a bad motherfucker who was just the voice I needed on tenor to set off my voice . . . (Faster) than I could have imagined, the music . . . was unbelievable. It sent chills through me at night and did the same to the audience.²⁶

Coltrane decided to return because of the room he had to stretch out in Miles' band. Although Miles and Coltrane utilized contrasting approaches to performance, they shared a more important mutual aspiration and worked along similar lines to achieve their objectives. During his Bebop days, Davis' technique had been criticized as being suspect; perhaps due to this criticism Miles had always tended to play with simplicity. The severance of his solos from the chord changes upon which a song was built facilitated his aims, and this initiated the transition into the modal

²⁶ Miles, p. 195.

approach he would codify in the near future. While Coltrane, on the other hand, continued to emphasize the potential harmonic functions within a given composition, he too began to base his improvisation upon scales. The resulting "modal" approach to jazz improvisation was the most significant innovation to occur in jazz since Bebop. Miles recognized Coltrane's value and the gravity of this historic encounter.

The group I had with Coltrane made me and him a legend. . . put me on the map in the music world, with all those great albums we made for Prestige and later Columbia Records. . . (it) made all of us stars.²⁷

Unlike the Bebop era, Hard bop produced a large number of excellent tenor saxophone players. Just as the trumpet had been the predominant force in early jazz, Sonny Rollins and John Coltrane were indisputably the most outstanding tenor saxophone players in an age dominated by their wind instrument. Their radical note placement and other stylistic characteristics influenced rhythm sections as well as front line jazz instrumentalists.²⁸ Although there was little indication of the substantial involvement with Oriental music that would take place within modern jazz in a few years, the late fifties found Rollins employing themes with bitonal implications where the piano was

²⁷ Ibid., p. 147.

²⁸ Jazz Cataclysm, p. 11.

omitted to provide maximum freedom of improvisational interpretation of the harmonic structures. Coltrane's approach was equally explorative as he continued to discover material that would serve as a springboard for a significant portion of his later development.

Naturally, Coltrane's early recordings with the Miles Davis Quintet (1956 -1957) lack the confidence and clarity of his later work. Where public acceptance is concerned, Coltrane became a somewhat controversial figure in the Miles Davis group. His Hard bop tenor style was diametrically opposed to the Cool style and, consequently, divided the jazz audience into two opposing camps; one was negative and critical while the other was highly enthusiastic. Many of those opposed to Coltrane's approach still desired a familiar sound such as that which included the lazy vibrato that the great New Orleans clarinetists displayed to instill a feeling of pathos, and felt that Coltrane's unrelenting tone exuded anger.²⁹ In fact, Coltrane was moving beyond the tone quality and the expressive way of bending notes that had been applied to his earlier approach (influenced by the styles of Lester Young and Dexter Gordon in the late 1940's), to a more personal sound. As he began to gain in confidence and precision of execution to an extent that surpassed all his predecessors and his peers on the tenor saxophone, his musical power began to overwhelm the uninitiated. In the four stylistic periods of

²⁹ Jazz Cataclysm, p. 103.

Coltrane's career to be discussed in the chapters that follow, we will see the numerous shapes that this power takes. The composer mentions some of the musical influences that helped formulate this power.

As far as musical influences, aside from saxophonists, are concerned, I think I was first awakened to musical exploration by Dizzy Gillespie and Bird. It was through their work that I began to learn about musical structures and the more theoretical aspects of music.

Also, I had met Jimmy Heath, who, besides being a wonderful saxophonist, understood a lot about musical construction. I joined his group in Philadelphia in 1948. We were very much alike in our feeling, phrasing, and a whole lot of ways. Our musical appetites were the same. We used to practice together, and he would write out some of the things we were interested in. We would take things from records and digest them. In this way we learned about the techniques being used by writers and arrangers.

Another friend and I learned together in Philly-Calvin Massey, a trumpeter and composer who now lives in Brooklyn. His musical ideas and mine often run parallel, and we've collaborated quite often. We helped each other advance musically by exchanging knowledge and ideas.³⁰

³⁰ Coltrane, John in collaboration with Don DeMicheal, "Coltrane On Coltrane," Down Beat, September 29, 1960, p. 17.

In retrospect, Coltrane's musical contribution was a dominant and pervasive force which influenced mightily the mid-twentieth-century transformation of jazz style. While most of the older jazzmen tended to mix their artistic creation with a desire to please their audiences, Coltrane and other musicians of his generation rejected this aesthetic. This attitude became increasingly more apparent as the saxophonist matured, as Coltrane's discussion regarding his audience (in an interview at Shelly's Manne Hole in Los Angeles) reveals.

I never even thought about whether or not they understand what I'm doing," he said. "The emotional reaction is all that matters; as long as there is some feeling of communication, it isn't necessary that it be understood. After all, I used to love music myself long before I could even identify a G Minor Seventh chord.³¹

During the year and a half that comprises his first period, Coltrane developed his own repertory of formulas distinguishing his voice from all others. The seed of his later tendencies toward motivic development was planted through his occasional development of a motive introduced as an opening gesture of his improvisation. This technique was particularly evident in the improvisations that occurred within the relatively flexible harmonic framework of the

³¹ Feather, Leonard, "Coltrane Shaping Musical Revolt," New York Post (Jazz Beat), October 18, 1964.

blues. Coltrane's music required of the listener more than an abstract interest. As author Lewis Porter indicates, Coltrane's music, while retaining the goal of intellectual involvement, contains a spiritual element that created an aesthetic with far reaching influence on the style and repertoire of countless jazz groups and inspired cultish devotion among his public.³² Porter also notes that most of the writing about jazz has been produced by classically trained composers, performers, and scholars such as Gunther Schuller and Lawrence Gushee.³³ As a consequence, the importance of the spirituality as well as more tangible musical components commonly observed in the classical idiom (the importance of texture, long-range structural connections, and a new definition of consonance in Coltrane's compositional approach) remain undetected. Of course, with the exception of a few composers such as Beethoven, Alexander Scriabin and Dane Rudhyar, spirituality is not frequently discussed even in writings about Western European music. It becomes a basic element in Coltrane's late music. Coltrane biographer J. C. Thomas agrees with this appraisal of the spiritual aspects of his music.

³² Lewis Porter, "John Coltrane's A Love Supreme: Jazz Improvisation as Composition," Journal of the American Musicological Society, 1985, vol. 38, p. 593.

³³ For example, Gunther Schuller, "Sonny Rollins and Thematic Improvising," *Jazz Review*, I(1958), p. 6-11. Also Lawrence Gushee, "Lester Young's 'Shoe Shine Boy,'" *International Musicological Society, Report of the Twelfth Congress Berkeley, 1977*, ed. Daniel Heartz and Bonnie Wade (Kassel, 1981), pp. 151-69.

John Coltrane was more mystic than musician. This is the only logical explanation for the effect his music had on many members of his audience; in fact, many of them knew nothing whatsoever about any kind of music, including jazz, yet they were mesmerized, entranced, and quite often . . . had their lives changed from continuous exposure to Coltrane's music. There had to be something else *besides* the music there; in reality, there was a force *beyond* music that was communicating with Trane's audience on quite a different, higher level of meaning.

Call it Universal Consciousness, Supreme Being, Nature, God. Call this force by any name you like, but it was there . . . ³⁴

Lewis Porter, in his dissertation on Coltrane, shares Stephen Horenstein's opinion regarding the "shortcomings" of the biographies by Simpkins, Thomas, and Cole on the life of the saxophonist:

The first utilizes his life as the pretext for mediocre poetry, the author of the second wallows in the myths that people love to bring up about black musicians (drugs, marital problems), and, finally, the third offers an outmoded, boring method of melodic analysis,

³⁴ Chasin', p. 171.

flagrant hyper-intellectualization, and religious extrapolations that Coltrane himself judged too personal to put in writing.³⁵

Coltrane may have also felt that his music was too personal to be subjected to the kinds of "blow-by-blow" systematic analysis that methodically examines the various structural and ornamental components of his music without considering the spiritual context that the composer so carefully mentions in almost every public statement he made regarding his music in his last late periods. Whether or not one agrees with Horenstein's position or that of J. C. Thomas is less important than the fact that most of those musicians who were closely associated with Coltrane during his career expressed comments similar to those expressed by Thomas regarding the impact of Coltrane's music. It is also clear from statements made by Coltrane regarding creative expression, his life-long inquiry into the nature of the Creator, as well as from the titles of his later compositions, that he was aligned with many mystical principles in his thinking.

Composer Dane Rudhyar felt that it is difficult for those restricted to Western processes of thought to fully comprehend more ethereal qualities of progressive music.

³⁵ Stephen Horenstein's "L'Offrande Musicale de Coltrane," Jazz Magazine 283 (February, 1980), pp. 32-33. Translation by Lewis R. Porter, as cited in "John Coltrane's Music of 1960 Through 1967: Jazz Improvisation as composition" (Ph. D. Dissertation. Brandeis University, 1983), p. 35.

The most creative and future-oriented musicians of the twentieth century - which does not mean the most famous and most often performed! - have been attempting to expand their musical feeling and their approach to composing and performing music. The more or less conscious and consistent urge to dis-Europeanize and even deculturalize music has driven them to repudiate the organizational rules and patterns of their Western traditional (the European tonality system) and try to free their musical consciousness from the exclusive use of traditional instruments that produce that produce only particular qualities of sound.³⁶

Many twentieth composers outside of jazz, like Morton Feldman, have indeed thrown aside every concept and all the materials that the history of Western music has developed - serial music included. Avant-garde painters Jackson Pollock and De Kooning have done likewise. John Cage's use of the *I Ching* , and the mystical elements contained in Alexander Scriabin's multimedia futuristic works near the end of his career, were all looking beyond the vocabulary of European music to discover new modes of expression.

Responding to Frank Kofsky in an interview in the sixties where the question was put forth - "Do the musicians who play in these newer styles look to Africa and Asia for some of their musical

³⁶ Dane Rudhyar, The Magic of Tone and the Art of Music (London: Shambhala, 1982), p. 137. Cited hereafter as Magic.

inspiration?" - Coltrane said he felt that the musicians had been exposed to European concepts and were not exposed to others. Speaking for himself, he sought a well rounded education.³⁷ In keeping with the African tradition of improvising on tone quality, Coltrane produced a wide range of sound qualities; from smooth to guttural, and from robust to shrieking. During his first period, densely organized streams of notes became a part of his musical vocabulary along with a quadruple timing solo approach that was based on a sixteenth note feeling (as opposed to the quarter note emphasis of Louis Armstrong and the eighth note basic unit that Charlie Parker utilized) which commonly incorporated carefully chosen melodic pitches often approached by sweeping runs. Added to the acceptance of expanded blues harmonies (containing chords that would be considered dissonant outside of jazz) was a group telepathy that eventually became the motivating factor and the basis for formal coherence in many of the ensembles with which Coltrane was associated. Rudhyar would have referred to the collective musical elements involved in Coltrane's method as a pleroma of sound or a holistic resonance.³⁸

Rudhyar defined a pleroma of sound as "an all-encompassing organization of sound produced by the interaction and interpenetration of a multiplicity of relationships, each ensouled by its own tone, all these tones actualizing diverse aspects of the

³⁷ Frank Kofsky, Black Nationalism and the Revolution in Music (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1972) p. 230.

³⁸ Magic, p. 139.

Tone of the whole pleroma."³⁹ He thought the pleroma concept was opposed to the tonality concept in much the same manner in which consonant harmony differs from dissonant harmony. Since the basic fundamentals of tonality rest upon the assumption (psychologically and philosophically) that an urge exists to refer the multiplicity of sound- relationships (intervals) to a primordial tonic or fundamental tone, it conflicts with an inclination towards a process of harmonization based on tension and release which defies this notion. Therefore, trying to analyze Coltrane's (the pleroma) musical approach with the empirical formulas of Western music can prove as fruitless as translating Yoruba rituals with an English dictionary. Cecil Poole, a long time student of mysticism, made a related observation.

In the physical sciences man is limiting his observations to the physical world which he inhabits. The tendency of physical science is to isolate its findings and to interpret what it studies. The result of the research of many individuals is to try to arrange these findings into a complete pattern so that reason will gradually evolve a full meaning.

It is the scope of metaphysics to attempt to view such a complete picture. Metaphysics does not content itself with a partial or abstract view of life and reality, even from a scientific standpoint these partial glimpses may each be accurate. The entire phenomenal

³⁹ Ibid.

world might be compared to the pieces of a picture puzzle. Each piece is as important as another, but the ultimate aim in trying to solve the puzzle is to put it together so that a whole picture may be formed.⁴⁰

In addition to the Western technical or historical analytic tools typically imposed upon Coltrane's life and music, some emphasis must also be directed toward all of the factors that were involved in the process of development. Norma McLeod states in her dissertation that "since music is a complex sound phenomenon, its description requires that the various types of sound which combine in its basic structure be described both separately and together."⁴¹ This implies that a utilization of both deductive and inductive reasoning should be involved in arriving at a full understanding of any music. This is extremely important in jazz and other Western or non-Western musics that are not conceived from an empirical frame of reference. With this position in mind, beyond an examination of the impact of racism or of metaphysical concepts on Coltrane's music, each element of the musical environment surrounding his spontaneous compositions must be examined individually and collectively with an objective and holistic intent. Viewing music in this fashion immediately brings forth the realization that jazz composition is not aspiring to emulate Western musical values. This understanding would be of

⁴⁰ Poole, Cecil A., "The Metaphysical Concept," Rosicrucian Digest, Sept./Oct. 1989, p 21.

⁴¹ Norma McLeod. "Some Techniques of Analysis for Non-Western Music." Ph.D. dissertation (Northwestern University, 1966) Abstract.

value to both critics and the general listening audience alike, as jazz big band leader Artie Shaw points out in reference to Coltrane's music.

I listen to the new music including his but the public, whose ears are not so specialized take a long time to make the historical discovery of the obvious. Also, as artist, Coltrane was creating in public and not expecting to create a masterpiece each time he picked up his horn. But he was going to try each time for a classic performance and hope before he was through that he'd say a few things worthwhile.⁴²

Since African-American jazz has produced the first generation of composers to create their music primarily in public in the history of Western music, a different set of criteria is obviously called for other than that used for the more typical "sketch book" composers.

A similar broadening of perspective is needed in viewing jazz harmony, rhythm, approaches to texture, melody, form, and the like. In contrast to earlier jazz forms, Coltrane's music (as well as the music of other spontaneous jazz composers) becomes increasingly farther removed from the "fake book" notation that earlier jazz forms used, where root position is assumed in the bass line and inversions are specifically notated. Although "swinging rhythms" are still the norm during his first period, flexible

⁴² Quoted in Chasin' the Trane. p.180.

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relationships between recurring cells and the beat create a new function for the motive. An inability to perceive this relationship often led the uninformed jazz critic to pull repeated motives out of musical context to make sophistic comments such as "Coltrane repeats more than he recreates."⁴³ Like most good composers and improvisers, Coltrane's early music uses many characteristic formulas with a sufficient amount of variation to avoid repetitiveness. If a generalization must be made it should also be remembered that, when examining the music of one of the paramount rhythmic saxophone players in jazz, one must consider the rhythmic, harmonic and over-all dynamic positioning of any motive within the context of the polyrhythmic texture in which it occurs. Extracting isolated motives or cells from this genre of music can otherwise lead to erroneous conclusions similar to those of musicologists who produce inauspicious analyses of folk music outside their culture. Meki Nzewi's comments related to the study of rhythm in Nigerian folk music is germane to this principle.

A certain measure of adjustment to the prevailing cultural ethos of an alien culture should be prerequisite to making a balanced appreciation, creditable assessment, and meaningful content judgement of its folk music. This is hardly ever the case in practice, though there are exceptional cases of a few talented scholars who have produced authentic analyses of and reports on folk music

⁴³ Barry Kernfeld. "Adderley, Coltrane, and Davis at the Twilight of Bebop. The search for Melodic Coherence (1958-59)," vols. I and II, Ph. D. Thesis (Cornell University, 1981), p.48.

outside their culture. The adjustment advocated above would enable us to view with sympathetic understanding some erroneous attempts and, at times, assaults on the true content and character of some folk music cultures which some scholars have committed with commendable enthusiasm, although in ignorance or through academic mal-equipment.⁴⁴

As Coltrane's music evolves towards the complete elimination of a written score, acquiring long-range structural goals as its sole point of reference, it becomes progressively more difficult to judge whether a tone is harmonic or non-harmonic. Likewise, it is often neither a simple nor a productive process to merely classify his motives according to rhythmic or harmonic types. To further complicate these already extremely complex requirements, it must also be understood that, in addition to applying these principles to Coltrane's approach, they must also be applied to each of the other spontaneous composers (i.e., each member of the rhythm section) in each of the music ensembles with which he was affiliated. It soon becomes apparent that Coltrane's music can only be approached in the same spirit in which it was created if any valuable information is to be derived from it.

The genesis of the ideas that were to become basic ingredients in Coltrane's spontaneous compositional vocabulary took place in a

⁴⁴ Meki Nzewi, "Melo-Rhythmic Essence and Hot Rhythm in Nigerian Folk Music", The Black Perspective In Music 2/1: 23-28 (1974).

variety of settings. Beginning with The New Miles Davis Quintet,⁴⁵ his first period would place Coltrane in a variety of recording situations ranging from two engagements with his cohort Paul Chambers, to tenor saxophone collaborations with Hank Mobley (May 7, 1956), Sonny Rollins (May 24, 1956), Johnny Griffin (April 6, 1957), and the *Four Tenor Saxes - Tenor Conclave* recording with Al Cohn, Hank Mobley, and Zoot Sims (September 7, 1956). His first encounter with Miles and his work with other leaders was discussed by the saxophonist.

I first met Miles Davis about 1947 and played a few jobs with him and Sonny Rollins at the Audubon ballroom in Manhattan. During this period he was coming into his own, and I could see him extending the boundaries of jazz even further. I felt I wanted to work with him. But for the time being, we went our separate ways.

I went with Dizzy's big band in 1949. I stayed with Diz through the breakup of the big band and played in the small group he organized later.

Afterwards, I went with Earl Bostic who I consider a very gifted musician. He showed me a lot of things on my horn. He has fabulous technical facilities on his instrument and knows many a trick.

⁴⁵ The New Miles Davis Quintet, Prestige 7254, October 27, 1955.

Then I worked with one of my first loves, Johnny Hodges; I really enjoyed that job. I liked every tune in the book. Nothing was superficial. It all had meaning, and it all swung. And the confidence with which Rabbit plays; I wish I could play with the confidence that he does.

But besides enjoying my stay with Johnny musically, I also enjoyed it because I was getting firsthand information about things that happened way before my time. I'm very interested in the past, and even though there's a lot I don't know about it, I intend to go back and find out. I'm back to Sidney Bechet already.⁴⁶

Coltrane was basically involved in exploring the possibilities available within the standard jazz repertoire and new compositions based on a similar language and structure. Inside the limits of the standard blues and song form formats, his innovations were centered upon incorporating uneven subdivisions of the beat (i.e., note groupings of five, seven, eleven, etc.) into his post-bop lyricism, and developing a crystal clear tone that throughout the range of the tenor. His extraordinary facility often led listeners to believe that he was playing an alto saxophone when Coltrane performed in his middle and upper registers.⁴⁷ This clarity would become extremely important in his future work where the density of notes would cause the typical

⁴⁶ "Coltrane On Coltrane," p. 17.

⁴⁷ Trane 'n Me. p. 44.

tenor saxophone player's execution to sound muddy. With Miles, Coltrane would gain an opportunity to develop an individual style and approach that provided the perfect setting in which to develop an unorthodox jazz vocabulary. By the time the band made its first tour, Miles appreciation of Coltrane's contribution had grown to a new level.

I think a lot of people had expected Sonny Rollins to be in the band. Nobody in St. Louis had ever heard of Trane, so a lot of them were disappointed until he played. Then he just fucked everybody up, though some people still didn't like him yet.

By the time Sonny Rollins came back from Lexington to New York, Trane was a fixture in the band and had taken over the place reserved for Sonny. And Trane's playing was so bad by then that it even made Sonny go out and change *his* style - which was a great style - and go back to woodshedding. . .

By the time we got back to New York and opened at the Cafe Bohemia, a club down in the Village on Barrow Street, the band was playing great, and Trane was blowing his ass off. George Avakian from Columbia records used to come down almost every night to hear the band. He loved the band, thought it was a great group, but he especially loved the way Coltrane was playing now. I remember he told me one night that Trane "seemed to grow taller in height and

larger in size with each note that he played," that he "seemed to be pushing each chord to its outer limits, out into space."⁴⁸

This enthusiasm led to a recording contract with Columbia Records for Miles and his group even before his obligations to Prestige were completed. While Coltrane's relatively conservative beginning with Miles is evident in his solo on the October 27, 1955 recording of *Budo*,⁴⁹ where Coltrane's improvisation stays fairly closely related to Miles straight ahead (but "cool") bebop stylistic conception. This bears sharp contrast to the more trenchant tenor solo on the September 10, 1956 recording of *Sweet Sue, Just You*, recorded as a part of an album put together by Leonard Bernstein titled *What Is Jazz*. The recording came out of a television series ("Omnibus") Bernstein hosted wherein he explained music in its various forms. Notwithstanding the difference in maturity levels, both recordings demonstrate Coltrane's remarkably flexible sense of timing and his rich and beautiful tone.

Although progress had obviously been made, Coltrane was not satisfied. After performing with Miles throughout 1955 and 1956, Coltrane decided to return home to woodshed and to resolve personal problems. In addition to his work with Davis, however, he had found time to record the album *Mating Call* with Tadd

⁴⁸Miles Davis, *Miles: The Autobiography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), p. 199.

⁴⁹ Miles first recording for Columbia with his new band.

Dameron on November 30, 1956, and a third album with Chambers.

Upon returning to New York, Coltrane joined Thelonious Monk and his highly innovative quartet. This would prove to be a challenge that would permanently alter Coltrane's approach to music, as recordings made during 1957 demonstrate; his technical and creative authority increased dramatically.

In 1955, I joined Miles on a regular basis and worked with him 'til the middle of 1957. I went with Thelonious Monk for the remainder of that year.

Working with Monk brought me close to a musical architect of the highest order. I felt I learned from him in every way-through the senses, theoretically, technically. I would talk to Monk about musical problems, and he would sit at the piano and show me the answers just by playing them. I could watch him play and find out the things I wanted to know. Also, I could see a lot of things that I didn't know about at all.

Monk was one of the first to show me how to make two or three notes at one time on tenor. (John Glenn, a tenor man in Philly, also showed me how to do this. He can play a triad and move notes inside it-like passing tones!) It's done by false fingering and adjusting your lip. If everything goes right, you can get triads. Monk just looked at my

horn and "felt" the mechanics of what had to be done to get this effect.

I think Monk is one of the true greats of all time. He's a real musical thinker-there're not many like him. I feel myself fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with him. If a guy needs a little spark, a boost, he can just be around Monk, and Monk will give it to him.⁵⁰

In contrast to Miles' quintet, Monk's music was difficult and based upon densely constructed chords that were innovative, exciting, and in defiance of traditional song form and blues formats Coltrane had grown accustomed to. Even his approach to performance presentation was iconoclastic. After ending a piano solo, Monk would often leave the piano bench frequently for more than a half hour, leaving Coltrane to solo alone as he ventured out on an uninhibited spiraling and lurching dance to the music. Of course Monk's repertoire also contained many pieces that adhered to traditional song form and blues formats, to some degree, such as *Ruby, My Dear* (song form), *Straight, No Chaser* (blues), and others.

In Monk's band Coltrane expanded his harmonic conception, gained independence from the keyboard function of the rhythm

⁵⁰ "Coltrane On Coltrane," p. 17.

section, and learned the principles of multiphonics on the saxophone.

(Monk) also got me into the habit of playing long solos on his pieces, playing the same piece for a long time to find new conceptions for solos. It got so I would go as far as possible on one phrase until I ran out of ideas. The harmonies got to be an obsession for me. Sometimes I'd think I was making music through the wrong end of a magnifying glass.⁵¹

Their collaboration at the Five Spot Cafe in New York demonstrated Coltrane's immediate sympathy for Monk's progressive style. Monk's assistance on Coltrane's harmonic explorations led him to new methods of superimposing supplementary intervals on the fundamental chords of bebop (Example 1). The saxophonist said "I would talk to Monk about musical problems, and he would sit at the piano and show me the answer."⁵² Coltrane took this a step further into the realms of polytonality by stacking related chords upon fundamental chords, a system that was most probably arrived at through contemplative theoretical study and through experiments at the piano before the results were applied to spontaneous composition. Coltrane reveals a few years later:

⁵¹ Chasin', p. 90.

⁵² "Coltrane on Coltrane," pp.17 and 53.

I've been devoting quiet a bit of my time to harmonic studies on my own in libraries and places like that. I've found you've got to look back at old things and see them in a new light.⁵³

As a result of this beneficial association, Coltrane recorded an album of Monk originals for the Jazzland record label on June 26, 1957 which shows both men adapting toward a mutual musical vocabulary. Monk's harmonic punctuations behind Coltrane's improvisational embarkations are sensitively executed. By the time the collaboration ended, Coltrane felt ready to rejoin Miles.

⁵³ Ekkehard Jost, Free Jazz (New York: Da Capo Press, 1981), p. 20.

SECOND PERIOD (Mid-1957 to the End of 1959)

Two landmark performances served as harbingers for the jazz avant garde and signified a gravitation toward the new revolutionary music on the part of the responsive New York literati, and a somewhat less responsive New York jazz community. This salient introduction began with Cecil Taylor's appearance at the Five Spot Cafe in the Lower East Side of New York in 1957, which was followed by Ornette Coleman's debut in 1959 at the same performance spot.¹ Taylor's musical style was considered exotic and his music was largely approached with curiosity, while initial criticism of Coleman's music was also favorable.² Later in this period, Coltrane recorded the album *Coltrane Time* for the United Artist record label in collaboration with Taylor on October 13, 1958 with Kenny Dorham (trumpet), Chuck Israels (bass), and Louis Hayes (drums).³ By now both Taylor and Coltrane were developing cults of their own based on their innovative styles and astounding technical proficiency. Yet the same advanced musical ideas and excellence would also connote incomprehensibility for many of the more conservative listeners and musicians.

¹ Ronald M. Rodano, "The Jazz Avant-Garde and the Jazz Community: Action and Reaction," Annual Review of Jazz Studies, vol. 3 Ed. Dan Mogenstern, Charles Nanry, and David A. Cayer (New Brunswick:Transaction Books, 1985) p. 72. Cited hereafter as Rodano, Annual Review.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73, refers to Gunther Schuller's and Larry Gushee's Jazz Review comments from 1959 and 1960; Whitney Balliett's August 1958 New Yorker review; and Bill Coss's positive Down Beat review from 1961.

³ Coltrane Time, (New York: United Artists Jazz, 1958) liner notes.

In late-1957 the air seemed right for experimentation in jazz, although critics, club owners, and much of the jazz establishment would soon become less tolerant of these jazz innovators. With Coltrane reunited with Miles, Davis too was ready to try new things. He knew that his music in December of 1957 was different than Bebop in December of 1944 had been, and realized that people now heard new things.

I wanted the music this new group would play to be freer, more modal, more African and Eastern, and less Western. I wanted them to go beyond themselves . . . but he's (the musician) got to think differently in order to do it. He has to use his imagination, be more creative, more innovative; he's got to take more risks. He's got to play above what he knows - far above it . . . So then he'll be freer.⁴

Miles understood that Coltrane's musical voice was headed in a new direction. He felt that Cannonball Adderley's "blues-rooted" alto saxophone juxtaposed against Coltrane's "harmonic, chordal way of playing, his more free-form approach," would create a "new kind of sound."⁵ Taking notice of Ahmad Jamal's use of space, he would try to leave plenty of room in this musical mixture while having his trumpet sound float over and cut through this concord. This, Miles felt, would create a highly

⁴ Miles Davis, Miles: The Autobiography (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), p. 220.

⁵ Ibid.

desirable tension in the music. Coltrane felt that this ensemble engendered the kind of freedom he was now ready for.

Miles was once interested in chords for their own sake, but now it seemed that he was moving in the opposite direction, using tunes with fewer chord changes and free-flowing melodic lines. This approach allowed the soloist the choice of playing chordally (vertically) or melodically (horizontally). I now found it easier to apply the harmonic ideas that I had. I could stack up chords - say, on a C7, I sometimes superimposed an Eb7, up to an F#7, down to an F. That way I could play three chords on one. But on the other hand, if I wanted to, I could play melodically. Miles's music gave me plenty of freedom.⁶

During Coltrane's leave of absence from the Miles Davis Group he had engaged in an assiduous and exhaustive approach to the development of saxophone technique that had resulted in total command of his instrumental voice. In addition to an emphasis on scale chords and glissandi (what critics would dub "sheets of sound"), his brief encounter with Thelonious Monk had added multiphonics, new insight on polyharmonic approaches to basic chords, and a new freedom to Coltrane's musical lexicon. As a pianist, Monk could control the harmonic density to a much

⁶ J. C. Thomas, Chasin' the Trane: The Music and Mystique of John Coltrane. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1975), p. 105. Cited hereafter as Chasin' the Trane.

greater degree than Miles, a trumpeter. Monk's commonplace "strolling" left much more space and harmonic flexibility than Coltrane encountered in Davis's band (where Red Garland would stroll much less frequently and for far shorter periods of time). Thus, performing polyphonically with the bass player drastically increased the possible interpretations of any pitch complex that Coltrane would create above the bass line. This also allows for incorporation of a greater number of extended-chord tones within pitch complexes functioning around a given fundamental tone (Example 1). The tenor saxophonist made good use of this advantage by saturating the metrical unit with large and unusual groupings of notes. Coltrane's spontaneous melodies would now be ensconced amid a colorful vocabulary that stymied the listener and began to replace the outworn phrases that had been the innovations of Bebop.

About this time, I was trying for a sweeping sound. I started experimenting because I was striving for more individual development. I even tried long, rapid lines that Ira Gitler termed "sheets of sound" at the time. But actually, I was beginning to apply the three-on-one chord approach, and at that time the tendency was to play the entire scale of each chord. Therefore, they were usually played fast and sometimes sounded like glisses.

I found there were a certain number of chord progressions to play in a given time, and sometimes what I played didn't work out in eighth

notes, 16th notes, or triplets. I had to put the notes in uneven groups like fives and sevens in order to get them all in.

I thought in groups of notes, not of one note at a time. I tried to place these groups on the accents and emphasize the strong beats-maybe on 2 here and on 4 over at the end. I would set up the line and drop groups of notes-a long line with accents dropped as I moved along. Sometimes what I was doing clashed harmonically with the piano-especially if the pianists wasn't familiar with what I was doing-so a lot of times I just strolled with bass and drums.¹

Now fluent in all aspects of the jazz language, Coltrane's propensity towards emphasizing harmonic motion seems highly germane to the overall balance of elements for the composer at this phase of his development. As a Hard Bop player, he had totally digested the linear concepts of Bebop and had evolved his saxophone technique to a point where it could no longer be confined by the notes that comprise the even divisions of the beat. Nevertheless, as a wind player, he still could not play chords on his instrument. A spontaneous composer who was constantly seeking new means of self expression, Coltrane found the only means available to an saxophonist as a substitute for simultaneous chords: arpeggios, measured glissandi, multiphonics, and the like. Although these devices were executed over an obdurate metronomic pulse, Coltrane's solos began to increase in length and his complex pyrotechnics often approached a saturation density.

¹ "Coltrane On Coltrane," p. 53.

This music began to involve a rich instrumental timbre and the polyrhythmic complexity of African music; and as Miles indicated above, this was very desirable in his band at this time.

Many critics were horrified by the *Milestones* album recorded for Columbia by the Miles Davis sextet on April 2, 1958. The title composition, written by Davis, consisted of a theme played over only two chords: the first based on G Dorian (with the bass on the fourth below) followed by a second shift to A Aeolian. This was a first significant step on the road to "modal" playing.⁸ Having recorded numerous albums both as a leader and in collaboration with other top jazz artists, Coltrane was ready for music where improvisational treatment of the thematic material was of greater importance than the material upon which the improvisations were based. About a year after the *Milestones* album, however, the *Kind of Blue* album (in 1959) by the same ensemble (and also for Columbia) proved to have even more far-reaching influence on jazz in general, and Coltrane's later spontaneous composition in particular.

Following a slow written introduction between pianist Bill Evans and bassist Paul Chambers in a rubato style that creates suspense, the composition *So What* opens up with a theme based on a call and response pattern between bass (question) and the ensemble (answer). The thematic pattern involved avoids functional

⁸ Ekkehard Jost, *Free Jazz* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1981), p. 18. Cited hereafter as *Free Jazz*.

harmonic relationships by placing the only two tonal areas involved a minor second apart (D Dorian shifting to Eb Dorian) over a simple formal pattern (AABA). Chambers avoids typical leaps of fourths and fifths in moving between the two modes while the other performers likewise avoid all traces of functional relationships as they make the chromatic shift between tonalities. *So What* and *Flamenco Sketches* were collaborative compositions written by Miles and Bill Evans.

While *Flamenco Sketches* explores a greater number and variety of tonal areas (involving the progression C Ionian, Ab Ionian, Bb Ionian, D Phrygian, G Aeolian) than *So What*, its historical significance lies in the fact that the length of those tonal areas is determined by each individual soloist, who makes stylistic gestures to signal the unpredictable harmonic changes. Davis uses silence to allow Chambers to move to the next mode; Coltrane's playing tends to become increasingly more agitated; and Adderley creates a change in the character of his melody by incorporating sequences or other colorful contrasting material. This formal freedom is also found in Bill Evans's composition *Blue in Green*, based on a ten bar phrase pattern (unusual for jazz). Here the soloists alternate freely between doubling or halving the duration of the chordal pacing while basing their improvisations on the change between this augmentation or diminution of the harmonic rhythm. Although *So What* and *Flamenco Sketches* are the most commendable "modal" performances on the *Kind of Blue* album, the compositions based on traditional blues patterns (*All Blues*

and *Freddie the Freeloader*) are also approached in the linear melodic fashion that had become associated with the group's "modal" playing.

Even before rejoining Miles for these special recordings, Coltrane's rhythmic approach had become much freer in his freelance recordings as well as in his appearances as a leader. In the latter situation, he often left the rhythm section the task of providing the more clearly traditional approaches to rhythmic phrasing for the listener's musical orientation.

Although jazz has always retained many of its African characteristics to some degree, the emphasis on rhythmic complexity has always been the more obvious connection. Rhythm is the most important factor in African music. Even melodic patterns generally serve rhythmic functions as well. An inclination towards ensemble playing lends itself to a wide assortment of vertical rhythmic relationships with African music south of the Sahara. This results in a stylistic predisposition toward the use of hemiola and polyrhythms. Even in solo performance the existence of at least two independent rhythms is maintained. This may be in the form of a vocalist accompanying himself/herself on an instrument, or a wind player singing a part in hocket to his instrumental part. Additionally, each line may contain its own beat pattern which may not coincide with the pattern of the other complementary lines. These and other Africanisms came to North America via West African sources to

form the unique rhythmic elements contained in jazz. While, due to external pressure from European America, jazz often became more syncopated than polyrhythmic, African cross-rhythms can even be clearly (but subtly) isolated within early ragtime compositions such as Scott Joplin's *Maple Leaf Rag* of 1899.⁹ In addition to the use of polyrhythms, hemiola, the shifting of accents, and the application of syncopated patterns, the placement of notes and their relation to the basic pulse provides a source for additional rhythmic color and contrast; this latter aspect also often baffles the listener as well as the scholar.

Barry Kernfeld, in his dissertation "Adderley, Coltrane, and Davis at the Twilight of Bebop: The Search for Melodic Coherence (1958-59)" stated that "Coltrane duplicates more than he re-creates."¹⁰ He goes on to cite a four or five note fragment that is "heard an unbearable thirty-six times in one of Coltrane's *Jazz at the Plaza* solos. These comments demonstrate how scholars, in an effort to validate their system of analysis, almost invariably ignore the African elements of the music, choosing instead to superimpose any number of Western theoretical systems that had nothing at all to do with the spontaneous composer's frame of reference. The first questions that come to mind are (1) can the listener aurally perceive these repetitions at a tempo of 300 beats per minute,

⁹ Gunther Schuller, Early Jazz: Its Roots and Musical Development (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 24.

¹⁰ Barry Dean Kernfeld, "Adderley, Coltrane, and Davis at the Twilight of Bebop: The Search for Melodic Coherence (1958-59)" Vols.... 1 and 2 (Ph. D. Dissertation. Cornell University, 1981), p. 44. Cited hereafter as Kernfeld thesis.

and (2) how many repetitions are "bearable?" Such assertions are deleterious to the development of African-American jazz because they obfuscate the essence of the music by removing it from its particular musical context. Even within the European classical system of music one cannot say how many times Beethoven should have repeated his four-note motive in his Fifth Symphony.

Coltrane's music evolves from a tradition where the emphasis is on collective improvisation. Within this tradition, the soloist often functions as the master drummer, providing a central point of reference for the remaining members of the ensemble. Along with changing harmonic structures, the polyrhythmic strata created by the drummer renders any repetition potent even on the most basic level. This realization has been dramatized in simple jazz compositions like Antonio Carlos Jobim's *One Note Samba* or Charlie Parker's *Now's the Time*. Therefore, if the stratification of rhythms between the other members of the ensemble becomes highly active and polyrhythmic, for instance, the soloist or master drummer may apply a repetitive figure to provide that balancing point of reference for the listener. An understanding of this rationale will enable the uninitiated to comprehend the function of the ostinato or the drone in the otherwise free-style music of numerous jazz innovators. If one insists upon listening to only one part at a time (or analyzing a single part at a time), the communal nature of the music will be missed. This fact becomes increasingly more important as we approach Coltrane's metrically free collective improvisations.

Coltrane's interest in polyharmonic application was likewise a natural outgrowth of his experience with the blues. His appreciation for the harmonic depth inherent in this form of music dated back to his second encounter with Charlie Parker at the home of Red Callender near Los Angeles during the latter part of 1947. Parker had just been released from Camarillo and would sometimes try to get his music and his mind back together at impromptu sessions with Callender and Erroll Garner, who was staying with Callender at that time.¹¹ Coltrane attended one of these sessions one Sunday afternoon where, after sitting in on an abstract blues that was completely new to him, Charlie Parker showed him the chord changes to his composition *Relaxin' at Camarillo* (Example 2). This example shows only three possible sets of chord changes that can support this particular melody out of the infinite variety of chord substitutions that could theoretically be applied. In addition to the numerous chord substitutions that are feasible for this melodic and harmonic setting, the basic chords can be extended in accordance with a blues matrix of the time (Example 3). The unusual rhythmic characteristics of the melody were also influential on Coltrane's inquisitive mind. This instilled in Coltrane a new understanding of the blues that can be recognized in his treatment of *Sweet Sapphire Blues* (not *sapphire*) on the May 26, 1958 recording of the *Black Pearls* album, and other later blues performances.

¹¹ Chasin' the Trane , pp. 42-43.

Sweet Sapphire Blues is a purely spontaneous composition involving a harmonic construction that is closely related to the "blues in C" of Parker's *Relaxin' at Camarillo*. The melodic and harmonic manifestations created in this style of blues tonality cannot be interpreted in terms of the major or minor tonalities of Western music as the chord symbols of this particular vocabulary clearly indicate. The initial chord symbol in this blues key (C7), does not suggest that Bb is an altered tone of the key of C major; it is an inherent part of a fundamental chord that serves as the nucleus of a complex of possibilities that allow virtually any chromatic tone to be incorporated as an upper extension (or altered tone) above its basic pitches. In jazz notation, altered tones are enclosed in parenthesis (i.e., C7(b9), C9(#11), etc.), and the jazz performer knows which pitches "support" any given alteration even though the symbol itself fails to give visible representation of the complete pitch complex implied. For instance, a jazz player knows that a flat 13 is supported by a flat 9 or, in other words, that the symbol C7(b13) implies a chord spelled C-(E)-(G)-Bb-Db-E-Ab. The professional musician in jazz also realizes that the fifth (G in this case) and other tones can usually be omitted for greater clarity or utilized to create greater tension at the performer's discretion in altered chords. Interestingly, the fact that the blues form involved in Coltrane's music is based on a highly unstable chord (a dominant seventh chord) that never resolves to a stable Western tonic renders any attempt to force it into a major/minor theoretical analysis a fatuous and futile

endeavor. On the other hand, the blues tonality is flexible enough to be interchanged between similar compositions and interesting enough to serve as the sole basis for a jazz composition (as we see with *Saphire Blues* which has no written melody). Thus Coltrane's and Parker's "blues in C" can easily be combined (example 3).

Even from this brief investigation of a few aspects of the blues as exploited by the modern jazz artist, it is clear that one needs to be more than a veteran listener to analyze even the more traditional forms of the progressive styles of the music. Comments from even those considered by some scholars to be some of jazz's most talented listeners¹ can often lead to radically opposing viewpoints which may or may not shed light on Coltrane's music or his musical aspirations during this phase of his development.

Whitney Balliett:

Coltrane, a hard-toned,
uninhibited performer, took
several solos, during most of
relied on a
series of complex dancing
runs that seemed,
nonetheless, more automatic

Zita Carno:

The only thing you can, and
should, expect from John Coltrane
is the unexpected; that is what which he
makes listening to his tenor style
hard for people who look for the
familiar and for the conventional,
cliches. They are puzzled when

¹ Kernfeld thesis, p. 38. Zita Carno is a pianist and composer who has distinguished herself in both jazz and classical idioms.

than inspired.²

they fail to find such things.³

During his second period, Coltrane was experimenting with pushing established jazz forms (blues and song form) to their limits. Blues in the African-American folk tradition had variable lengths. In the 1920's, jazz musicians began to standardize the twelve-bar form. Coltrane challenges this standardization by opposing it. On his own record dates we hear Monk's effect on his melodic development in the blues form where his spontaneous melodic development obscures the twelve bar framework. As can be noted in the *Sweet Sapphire Blues* example, Coltrane's often extends his phrases to unprecedented lengths that are sometimes separated by unpredictable breaks in the melodic line. The resulting music is delivered with such intensity and surging power that even the most elementary phrase is given potency. The temerity of his "sheets of sound" executed with an unquestionably virtuosic instrumental technique and vigorous dark tenor saxophone sound, caused some critics to make a series of egregious errors of judgement regarding what they perceived as anger in Coltrane's performances with Davis during this period.

² *Ibid.*, Quoted from the article by Whitney Balliett, "Hot and Cold," *New Yorker*, XXXIII (December 7, 1957), pp. 192-194.

³ *Ibid.*, Zita Carno, "The Style of John Coltrane," *Jazz Review*, II/10 (October 1959), p. 17.

Unfortunately the group did not perform effectively. Although Miles continues to play with delicacy and infinite grace, his group's solidarity is hampered by the angry tenor of Coltrane. Backing himself into rhythmic corners on flurries of notes, Coltrane sounded like the personification of motion without progress in jazz. What is equally important, Coltrane's playing apparently has influenced Adderley. The latter's playing indicated less concern for melodic structure than he has illustrated in the past . . .¹⁵

The self-critical Coltrane was indeed dissatisfied with his performance at this time.

I have more work to do on my tone and articulation, . . . I must study more general technique and smooth out some harmonic kinks. Sometimes, while playing, I discover two ideas, and instead of working on one, I work on two simultaneously and lose the continuity.¹⁶

Nevertheless, the *Down Beat* reviewer criticizes the performance for the diversity and "tension" that Miles sought in his music at this time, on the one hand, while contradicting that position by acknowledging a similarity between Coltrane and Adderley's approaches to the music. Coltrane was being criticized from a

¹⁵ Don Gold, Review of the Newport Jazz Festival by Don Gold and Dom Cerulli, *Down Beat*, January 11, 1958, p. 16.

¹⁶ "Trane on the Tracks," p. 17.

position that is akin to the comment made by Gunther Schuller regarding Monk's playing, which Cecil Taylor addressed at the 1959 United Nations Jazz Society forum, which many prominent members of the performing and critical jazz establishment attended.

Referring to one of Schuller's Jazz Review articles, Taylor said:

"Schuller had made a remark that it would never occur to Monk to practice and thereby change his technique to improve his music. I asked them, 'Would it ever occur to Horowitz to practice to change *his* technique? . . . Monk can do things that Horowitz can't, and that's where the validity of Monk's music is, in his technique. I told him that the Schullers wanted to change jazz to fit their own needs; that, essentially, they couldn't recognize the tradition that came from a black subculture as being valid in the face of European culture."¹

Based on the comments quoted thus far in this chapter, it appears that many of those who have been involved in writing historical and analytical statements about African American jazz usually fail to view the music as a holistic communal phenomenon. A failure to assume this type of perspective gradually renders impotent attempts to comprehend new jazz, if they fail to see the possibility of portions of the music falling into unpredictable musical

¹ A. B. Spellman, Four Lives in the Bebop Business (New York: Limelight Editions, 1985), pp. 31-32.

patterns and involving other artistic directions that combine to form new progressive spontaneous creations. Furthermore, it was seen that such writers have definitions for musical elements in jazz (such as melody, for instance) that contrast sharply with the jazz performer's musical concepts. Current musicological studies go so far as to develop tendencies (in thought and analysis) to create hypotheses, theories, and analytic systems using scientific and mathematical language (including information theory, set theory, and computers) to approach modern jazz music.¹⁸ Based upon a projection of their own conformist perception and mentality, these researchers try to superimpose their own value system upon the intuitive realm of collective jazz improvisation, a musical process that is based on an opposing value system. Arthur Koestler assumes the following:

A chess player must conform invariably to "rules of the game." In the same way, the jazz musician has "rules of the game" and innumerable strategies to achieve musical goals. Some of the rules are: the chord changes must be adhered to; swing is essential; dynamics are usually similar for all members; only complete choruses are performed, etc. Each member has rules that only apply to him - pianist may use substitutions, the bassists must walk quarter notes in swing . . . ¹⁹

¹⁸ Paul Rinzier, "Preliminary Thoughts on Analyzing Musical Interaction Among Jazz Players," Annual Review of Jazz Studies IV, Ed. Dan Morgenstern, Charles Nanry and David Cayer (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1988), p. 153.

¹⁹ Quoted by Rinzier, p. 155.

Similar concepts may have shaped the concepts upon which many of Coltrane's critics evaluated his new music. The character of this type of ineptitude could be considered a perfunctory, narrow, and slightly embarrassing perspective in the face of innovative modern jazz performances. On the other hand, other scholars (who have apparently arrived at the same conclusions as the progressive ethnographer working with musical cultures that are beyond his/her social orientation) argue that spontaneous composition cannot be analyzed.

We accept the desirability of studying internal formal and structural relationships in a human product which is obviously systematic - yet we have no tools for approaching the intuitive human activity that controls the decision making in spontaneous composition.²⁰

All musical elements in progressive jazz (functions of the performer, composer, melody, rhythm, harmony, form, etc.) gradually become increasingly more interdependent as the musical styles demand greater freedom. Coltrane also mentioned that improvising and composing were interdependent.

²⁰ Norma McLeod, "Some Techniques of Analysis for Non-Western Music," (Ph.D. Dissertation, Northwestern University, 1966), p. 35. Cited hereafter as McLeod Dissertation.

I think playing and writing go hand in hand. I don't feel that at this stage of the game I can actually sit down and say I'm going to write a piece that will do this or that for the people-a thing which some artists can do-but I'm trying to tune myself so I can look to myself and to nature and to other sounds in music and interpret things that I feel there and present them to people. Eventually I hope to reach a stage where I have a vast warehouse of study and knowledge to be able to produce any certain thing.

Duke Ellington is one person who can do this-that's really heavy musicianship and I haven't reached that stage yet. I've been predominately a soloist all my natural life, and now I'm a soloist with my own band, and this has led me into this other thing: what am I going to play and why?

My material is mainly my own, and I find some of my best work comes from the most challenging material. Sometimes we write things to be easy, sometimes to be hard, it depends on what we want to do.

A year ago we had quite a few standards which made up a third of the book, but now a number of people, certainly Ornette and Eric, have been responsible for other influences.²¹

²¹ Wilmer, Valerie, "Conversation With John Coltrane," Jazz Monthly, February 1962, p. 7.

Intuition, emotional interaction between performers, and, in the case of Coltrane's later musical directions in particular, a desire to combine musical ambitions with spiritual aspirations are factors that most traditional Western systems of musical evaluation and analysis are not prepared to become engaged with. Ben Sidran observes that the technique of jazz playing is a function of the social orientation of the individual musician.²² Because white musicians and writers usually learn through a formal education (or learn improvisation through imitation), and because they lack the social and perceptual background that black jazz musicians gain through their musical and sociocultural traditions, the tools for assessing many of the features of a nonconformist art form (such as jazz) are not in place. Sidran feels that the lowest common denominator within the musical tradition of black culture had always been involved in the creative process of musical invention, while within white culture, the average person had no experience whatsoever in emotional expression through nonverbal modes of communication.²³ Dane Rudhyar expresses this point from a more ecumenical perspective.

Composers whose sense of music has been trained according to the rigid traditions of the European culture find it very difficult, if not impossible, to experience the wholeness of musical space available to human

²² Ben Sidran, Black Talk (New York: Da Capo Press, 1981), p. 67. Cited hereafter as Black Talk.

²³ Black Talk, p. 154.

consciousness and therefore to experience the quality inherent in the wholeness of that space, Tone. They experience Tone only within the limitations imposed by Western culture. . .

The human mind is so conditioned by its need for order and for a system of laws and regulations that it asserts it has discovered them in nature and the physical universe. It is reluctant to admit that its discoveries may well be a projection of its own characteristic structure, thus of its limitations or the limitations of the sense data it is asked by the whole human organism to interpret.

Because this human organism operates not only at the biological level but also at the level of collective psychism and personal emotions, the interpretation the mind is asked to formulate should provide sustainment, enjoyment, and expansion for the life functions and for the entire person.²⁴

Therefore, Coltrane and his cohorts were creating a new jazz music that required much more than a subjective opinion based upon musical features outside the realm of the music being evaluated, and more than a mere calculation of melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic events.

Like Coltrane, Miles Davis had been highly interested in chord changes earlier in his career. Miles's expanded ensemble (now a

²⁴ Dane Rudhyar, The Magic of Tone and the Art of Music (London: Shambhala, 1982), pp. 135-37.

sextet) was now much more interested in melodic and horizontal continuity than in the minimal chord changes over which these new free flowing lines were invented. The emancipation from blues and song form limitations was welcomed by Miles.

It becomes a challenge to see how melodically inventive you are. When you are based on chords, you know at the end of the thirty-two bars that the chords have run out and there's but to repeat what you've done - with variations.²⁵

Although his experience with Monk's music made him aware of many of the fundamental verities of the new jazz music and Miles Davis provided the vigorous environment and appropriate direction necessary to expose him to non-Western applications of "modal" jazz, it was Coltrane's recordings as a leader that made the greatest impact on his contemporaries.²⁶ Coltrane's new rhythmic freedom as produced through his rapid "sheets of sound" and his experiments with facets of timbre (multiphonics, etc.), were methods of expression that demanded an inventive and dynamic drummer. This is particularly noticeable in the 1959 recording of *Giant Steps*, where pianist Tommy Flanagan and drummer Art Taylor cleverly anchor Coltrane's solo to the standard chorus

²⁵ Free Jazz, p. 20.

²⁶ Barry McRae, The Jazz Cataclysm (New York: Da Capo Press, 1985), p. 104. Cited hereafter as Jazz Cataclysm.

divisions while the saxophonist plays with seemingly complete disregard for rhythmic and formal restrictions.²⁷ Rather than building gradually to an emotional climax while executing solo improvisations containing passages so fast that it is difficult to distinguish individual notes (like the musical tendencies of pianist Oscar Peterson), Coltrane, like his predecessors Sidney Bechet, Bud Powell, and Johnny Dodds, fills his opening measures with the same degree of passion that is found in his solo cadenzas.²⁸ As he begins to take the smallest note value as the basic metrical unit in these rapid performances, his playing becomes more legato, and other dynamic and expressive qualities begin to shape his melodies.

Harmonics and multiphonics became compositional devices for Coltrane that were an outward show of added emotion in his intense style. His firm rhythm-and-blues foundation and magnificent blues playing made the process of consciously creating an air of excitement a natural aspect of Coltrane's performance. As the title of the composition indicates, his 1959 recording of *Harmonique* expresses the importance he now placed upon harmonics. Harmonics are utilized in the theme as well as in the initial moments of his spontaneous development of the composition. Often, this seemingly impossible technical device (similar to a double stop on a string instrument) creates simultaneous major thirds and other harmonic intervals. The

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

influence of Monk's unconventionality can be sensed in the wide intervallic skips (jumping from a note in the low register of the saxophone to a high harmonic) and in the intentionally deliberate and generally earthy nature of this blues in 3/4 meter. Coltrane's use of harmonics has been compared to the function of the emphatic blue note in early jazz styles and had a similarly disturbing effect upon an unprepared public.²⁹ As Zita Carno suggests in the liner notes on the album, the album containing the composition mentioned above is appropriately titled *Coltrane Jazz*. The album offers a general summation of many of the expressive blues innovations evolved during this period of his development, and the revolutionary harmonic experiments of his previous Atlantic Records release, *Giant Steps*.

Giant Steps is considered by some to be Coltrane's first important recording as a leader of his quartet.³⁰ Although the "modal" implications and formal freedom that were experienced with Miles would become dominant features of his next period, this album (recorded in May and December, 1959) reverts to the polyharmonic approach he had developed earlier. The title composition explores an unprecedented number of chord changes, harmonic superimpositions, and chord substitutions in incredibly rapid succession. What results is a masterful display of what had become a harmonic quandary that Coltrane had accepted as a long-term personal challenge. Andrew White has transcribed most

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

³⁰ *Free Jazz*, p. 23.

of the other Coltrane compositions that were based upon the *Giant Steps* harmonic progression (Example 4) as well as other situations that involve superimpositions of these chords on Coltrane solos.³¹ As he admitted at the beginning of his next stylistic cycle (1960) in reference to this area of his development, " I haven't completely abandoned this approach, but it wasn't broad enough. I'm trying to play these progressions in a more flexible manner now."³²

The cyclic harmonic pattern of "*Giant Steps* (similar to chord progressions used on "*Countdown*," "*Central Park West*," "*Countdown*," "*Satellite*," "*Exotica*," and other Coltrane Compositions written between 1959 and 1960), is based on the same conventional ii-V-I pattern that Coltrane had encountered in Miles Davis's "*Tune Up* ." Coltrane modified this pattern by doubling the pacing of the harmonic motion (from one chord change per measure in "*Tune Up* " to two chord changes per measure in "*Giant Steps* "), and by delaying the arrival of the tonic chord until the fourth measure (from: Em7/A7/D maj7 in "*Tune Up* ," to: Em7 - F7/ Bb maj - Db7/ Gb maj A7/ D maj7 in "*Giant Steps* "). The approach used in "*Giant Steps* " is a polar opposite to modal playing (where the harmonic motion is drastically reduced), and Coltrane's improvisations on this composition so ferociously

³¹ Andrew Nathaniel White III, Trane 'n Me: A Treatise on the Music of John Coltrane (Washington D. C.: Andrew's Musical Enterprises, 1981), p. 50. Originals and arranged standards include "Giant Steps", "Countdown", "Exotica", etc; arrangements involving superimpositions include "The Night Has A Thousand Eyes", "Body and Soul", "But Not For Me", etc.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 25.

epitomize the ability to successfully negotiate rapid chord changes that it becomes clear that he is resolving a major personal concern in his musical evolution.

Both Davis and Monk inspired young talent, and each chose his notes carefully and thoughtfully for maximum expression and feeling in the music he created. Silence was important to both men as well, and they had a mutual concern for structure, motivicity, and for the construction of beautiful and challenging musical themes. All of these concepts were readily absorbed by Coltrane, and remained a part of his musical evolution throughout his career.

Miles and Monk are my two musicians, . . . Miles is the No.1 influence over most of the modern musicians now. There isn't much harmonic ground he hasn't broken. Just listening to the beauty of his playing opens up doors. By the time I run up on something. I find Miles or Monk has done it already.

Some things I learn directly from them. Miles has shown me possibilities in choosing substitutions within a chord and also new progressions.³³

³³ "Trane on the Track," p. 17.

The consequences of "modal" playing are not immediately apparent in the development of free jazz. Examining the many facets of Coltrane's earlier stylistic accomplishments is prerequisite, nevertheless, to an understanding of the music of his later periods for two reasons. First of all, Coltrane continues to play his earlier compositions along with his newer developments; and, as we shall see, he transfers augmented and transformed versions of the compositional devices he masters in the first two stylistic periods to his later work. In Coltrane's subsequent music, the new expressive devices developed during the second period become more significant as his music assumes more African musical characteristics, while continuing to borrow a minimum of ideas from other players. African performers on the musical bow or the flute, for instance, often manage to manipulate their instruments in such a way to produce simultaneous sounds by producing overtones or by humming while creating the instrumental sound. The percussive quality of instrumental sound that is desirable in traditional African music, as is evident from the predominance of plucked string instruments (as opposed to bowed strings), will also play an important role in Coltrane's later development as recorded for posterity on such albums as *Meditations*, *Expression*, *Live in Seattle*, *Interstellar Space*, and other progressive Coltrane works.

Despite the levels of criticism cited earlier in this and the previous chapters, there was some progress made along these lines as well. Jazz artists like Cecil Taylor and Benny Golson began to review

records by their fellow jazz artists; the effectiveness and historical significance of this form of documentation is well worth citing here. Such writings on jazz demonstrate the ability of African-American jazz artists to document their own music in a much more relevant historical and educational fashion than reviewers who were musically and culturally uneducated in the African-American jazz tradition are capable of doing.

JOHN COLTRANE: *Soultrane* , Prestige 7142

Good Bait finds Trane rocking and bouncing in a dancer's groove. He is a shouter, indeed at times a screamer. The intensity of feeling is hot and one's foot is apt to start tapping. Red Garland lays down some petunia-scented chords loaded with tension, heat and song which have the effect of bring everyone closer together and in his solo he delights the ears with a few dazzling figures employing most of the keyboard, lines that contain a rhythmic vitality and a blinkered slyness. After Paul's solo we have a section of fours, notable for Trane's hot return, making two statements which are happy hair raisers.

The ballad, *I Want to Talk About You* , is realized in Trane's particularly haunted way. His ballad approach in general is one in which the realities of the day assert themselves - he is detached, dry, melancholy, fearful, and yearning.

Devices such as tremolo and rubato can be interesting depending on the ingenuity of the person playing. If the tremolo lacks interesting

harmonic implications, the result is a throwback to silent movie days or the piano roll. If the rubatos are pompous and devoid of all musical life (which would come from interesting sounds and rhythms culminating in a logical musical thought) then they are lies because they have no basis in reality.

During the second and third chorus of Coltrane's improvisation on the attractive *You say You Care*, the group attains a good group feeling (all the players support Trane, attaining an intensity that complements his playing). The selection of this tune demonstrates another facet of Trane's ability to see unfamiliar material and turn it into a forceful jazz expression. This is one way of gauging his musical ability and is also additional evidence of his stature in relation to the rest of the field.

Russian Lullaby is taken at a jet's tempo with Paul Chambers playing in an even rockbottom way which anchors the rhythm section and makes it easier for Coltrane to fly.

Coltrane at times seems to play away from everyone rhythmically, and yet his line has a time that is angular and evil and laden with its own rhythm. His playing sometimes becomes a mirror of the past reminding one of the precision of Benny Carter, Stitt, and Gordon of the late 40s, with the texture of Pres. His interval conception is a whole one as he utilizes large and small intervals. He uses the entire range of his horn. In ballads, he ventures into areas of sound that are uncommon. One is reminded of Hodges, Gillespie, Miles and Monk.

His own ability, his perception and wisdom show themselves in his own compositions, the organization soundwise in such pieces as *Training In* , *Straight Street* , etc. In short, his tone is beautiful because it is functional. In other words, it is always involved in saying something. You can't separate the means that a man uses to say something from what he ultimately says. Technique is not separate from its content in a great artist.

Cecil Taylor

MILES DAVIS: *Milestones* , Columbia CL 1193

Side 1: *Dr. Jekyl* , while not especially melodic, gives the group an excellent opportunity to "stretch out." The eights and fours between Miles and Philly Joe Jones are fiery and invigorating. Paul Chambers, in spite of the fast tempo, takes a soulful solo. The exchange of choruses between Coltrane and Cannonball is the high point of the track, and the rhythm section is very stable throughout.

Sid's Ahead is, in reality, the old, and now classic, *Walkin'* . During his solo, Coltrane is very clever and creative in his handling of the substitute chords. Miles strolls (without piano) beautifully. He is a true musical conversationalist. Cannonball is quite "funky" at times, and Chambers exemplifies his ability to create solo lines in the manner of a saxophonist or trumpeter.

The third track, *Two Bass Hit*, opens with everyone on fire - particularly Philly, whose punctuation and attack are as sharp as a knife. Coltrane enters into his solo moaning, screaming, squeezing, and seemingly projecting his very soul through the bell of his horn. I feel that this man is definitely blazing a new musical trail. Philly and Red Garland back the soloists like a brass section, an effect which always creates excitement.

Side 2: The theme of *Milestones* is unusual, but surprisingly pleasant - particularly the bridge where Miles answers the other horns, achieving an echo affect. Philly's use of sticks on the fourth beat of every bar is quite tasteful. Cannonball cleverly interweaves melodies around the changes. Miles is as graceful as a swan, and Coltrane is, as usual, full of surprises.

Red Garland, who is undoubtedly one of today's great pianists, is spotlighted in *Billy Boy* with Philly and Paul. The arrangement is tightly knit and well played. Red employs his block chord technique on this track and plays a beautiful single line, as well. Philly and Paul do a wonderful job, both soloing and in the section.

Straight, No Chaser is a revival of a Thelonious Monk composition of a few years ago - the spasmodic harmony makes it quite interesting. Cannonball is excellent on this track. I may be wrong, but he seems to have been influenced somewhat by Coltrane. Miles paints a beautiful picture, as surely as with an artist's brush. He has a sound psychological approach in that he never plays too much. He leaves me, always, wanting to hear more.

I have heard no one, lately, who creates like Coltrane. On this track, he is almost savage in his apparent desire to play his horn thoroughly.

Red plays a single line solo with his left hand accompanying off the beat. He closes the solo with a beautiful harmonization of Miles' original solo on *Now's the Time*. Here Philly goes into a subtle 1-2-3-4 beat on the snare drum behind Red's solo, setting it off perfectly. This is the best track of the album.

In closing, I'd like to say - keep one eye on the world and the other on John Coltrane.

Benny Golson.³⁴

³⁴ Cecil Taylor and Benny Golson record reviews in, The Jazz Review (January, 1959), p. 34.

THIRD PERIOD (1960 to the End of 1964)

Coltrane left the Miles Davis sextet as a permanent member in 1959 after the landmark *Kind of Blue* recording session, just as the band was making a transition from playing chord changes into a more linear ("modal") approach.

At the time I left Miles I was trying to add a lot of sequences to my solo work, putting chords to the things I was playing, and using things I could play a little more music on.

It was before I formed my own group that I had the rhythm section playing these sequences forward, and I made 'Giant Steps' with some other guys and carried the idea on into my band. But it was hard to make some things swing with the rhythm section playing these chords, and Miles advised me to abandon the idea of the rhythm section playing these sequences, and to do it only myself. But around this time I heard Ornette who had abandoned chords completely and that helped me to think clearly about what I wanted to do.

It was Miles who made me want to be a much better musician. He gave me some of the most listenable moments I've had in music and he also gave me an appreciation for simplicity. He influenced me quite a bit in music in every way. I used to want to play tenor the way he played trumpet when I used to listen to his records. But when I joined him I realized I could never play like that, and I think that's what made me go the opposite way.

Coltrane recorded *Giant Steps* before briefly (and, apparently with reluctance¹) rejoining the quintet for Miles's first visit to Europe with a permanent unit, early in 1960. It was Coltrane's first visit to Europe as well, and European reactions to both musicians ranged from intensely critical and enthusiastically supportive. More importantly, in an interview with Carl - Eric Lindren in Stockholm, Coltrane provided interesting insight into his musical direction at this time. In response to a question regarding the negative reactions that many individuals had upon their first encounter with Coltrane's music, the saxophonist explains why people may have thought that he sounded angry to some listeners.

I'm trying so many things at one time. You see, I haven't sorted them out, I have a whole bag of things I'm trying to work through and get the one essential . . .

There are some set things that I know, some devices - harmonic devices that I know, - that will take me out of the ordinary path, you see, if I use these. But I haven't played them enough, and I'm not familiar with them enough yet, to take a single line through them. So I play all of them, you know, trying to acclimate my ear . . .

¹ Miles Davis and John Coltrane: Live in Stockholm 1960 (Stockholm, Sweden: Dragon Records, 1985), jacket notes. Coltrane also confirms the fact that he is leaving Miles's band in an interview on the record album. Music recorded live on Tuesday, March 22, 1960.

But now I'm primarily interested in trying to work what I know down into a more lyrical line. That's what I mean by more beautiful - more lyrical; so it can be , you know, more easily understood.²

Responding to a question about Miles's influence on his stylistic development in the same interview, Coltrane said that, because he was free to try whatever he wanted, the experience led him into most of the things that he was doing. In his first two periods Coltrane had indeed developed his own distinctive repertory of formulas. The unique and incredibly fast moving progressions of the highly acclaimed harmonic study, *Giant Steps* , led Coltrane to the heavy reliance on four note patterns that could easily fit the chords, a strategy that would influence all future jazz playing under the rubric *pentatonic patterns*.³ The "sheets of sound" as well as most other ornamentation are replaced by a saxophone style that has reduced the melodic elements to their most essential forms. The various melodic embellishments do not return until Coltrane's last period. On the opposite end of his spontaneous compositional spectrum were the spontaneous motivic experiments that characterized his approach to pieces with slower harmonic unfoldings. Most of the music that would comprise the repertoire for his own quartet would be of the latter

² Ibid., Interview with Lindren on tracks B2 and C1: March 26, 1960.

³ Lewis Porter, "John Coltrane's A Love Supreme : Jazz Improvisation as Composition" *Journal of the American Musicological Society* , vol. 38, 1985, pp. 593-621. Cited hereafter as A Love Supreme.

type: self-penned compositions with improvised compositional structures and static "modal" backgrounds as pedal points, over which he superimposed representative motivic, harmonic and melodic concepts from all his earlier musical analysis. The motive became most predominant during this period, with long solo improvisational passages often being derived from a single three- or four-note motive.

After his *Giant Steps* recording for Atlantic Records later that year, a second recording was made for that label, forming an association that would have a great impact on the history of jazz. The recording mentioned in the previous chapter for the album *Coltrane Jazz* began on December 2, 1959; but on October 21, 1960 pianist McCoy Tyner replaced Wynton Kelly and drummer Elvin Jones replaced Jimmy Cobb. Tyner and Jones would form the nucleus of the new Coltrane ensembles during the most popular and prolific phase of his development. Now an integral part of Coltrane's process of spontaneous composition, these two jazz masters would keep abreast with every stage of Coltrane's innovations and stylistic transformations,. It is here that the Coltrane ensemble would create some of the most advanced and unified polyrhythmic compositions in Western music. Tyner told Stanley Dance that Calvin Massey introduced him to Coltrane.

I was about 17 when I first worked with John Coltrane. He had left Miles Davis for a period, and he was a close friend of Calvin Massey, who introduced me to him. I was working with Calvin at the Red

Rooster, and John was going in there for a week. He asked us if we wanted to work with him.

After that, he would contact me whenever he came to Philly with Miles. I think he liked my playing, but we would also have long discussions on music, during which he would sometimes sit down at the piano and play. He had a lot of ideas, and we were compatible. We saw eye to eye on so many things at that time, and I could hear the direction he was going. I didn't know what it would be like, or how involved it would be, but I could hear something in his playing that was beautiful, and we enjoyed working together . . .

After about six months with the Jazztet, I got another call from John. He was forming his own group. I had a decision to make. I knew there was something with his group that I *wanted* to do, but yet the fellows in the Jazztet had been so nice to me, and they had helped me quite a bit, musically and otherwise, that I felt I owed something to them. I had to be honest with them and myself, and in the end I decided the best thing to do was to go where I could be really happy, where I could contribute more and really do some good. So I went with John.

I think I made the right move. I wasn't concerned then with whether or not John's group would be successful, for I feel the majority of good listeners will always support good music.⁴

⁴ Tyner, McCoy as told to Stanley Dance, "Tyner Talk," Down Beat, October 24, 1963, p. 18. Cited hereafter as "Tyner Talk."

Motivated and inspired by Jones and Tyner, Coltrane's sheets of sound, harmonics, and multiphonics become natural extensions of his tenor saxophone voice as he begins to take a more rhythmically anchored approach within the ensemble. Coltrane's melodic conceptions were stimulated by his work with the patterns he discovered in the *Thesaurus of Scales and Melodic Patterns* by Nicolas Slonimsky, a monumental compilation of unusual melodic patterns.⁵ His "modal" phase had refocused the jazz soloist on scales, a tremendous contribution to the emancipation of the jazz improviser from the existing harmonic framework.⁶ Coltrane would incorporate a variety of ideas into a brief span of time, increasing the level of tension by moving in and out of the implied mode, sequencing motivic fragments, and achieving a balanced alternation of brisk ascending and descending melodic phrases. Rhythmic interaction within the ensemble becomes pronounced within his new quartet due to the understanding and incorporation of polyrhythmic stratifications within Tyner's and Jones's individual approaches to jazz composition, as well as those cumulative polyrhythms that result from the superimposition of all the various rhythmic layers within the ensemble. Each player creates such complex polyrhythms alone that when these individual rhythmic units are combined, the rhythmic density becomes both rich in intensity and

⁵ Nicolas Slonimsky, Thesaurus of Scales and Melodic Patterns (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947).

⁶ Barry McRae, The Jazz Cataclysm (New York: Da Capo Press, 1985), p. 109. Cited hereafter as The Jazz Cataclysm.

amazingly supple. With this combination Coltrane would consciously and constantly seek to modify his methods and approach to spontaneous jazz composition.

Well, I tell you for myself, I make a conscious attempt, I think I can truthfully say that in music I make or I have tried to make a conscious attempt to change what I've found, in music. In other words, I've tried to say, "Well, this I feel, could be better." This is what I feel that we feel in any situation we think could be better, we must make an effort to try and make it better. So it's the same socially, musically, politically, and in any department of our lives.⁷

The 1960 recording of *My Favorite Things*, about a year after the *Giant Steps* date, is a seminal recording for the new Coltrane Quartet. Although it is no prognostication of the dissolution of tonality that would be forthcoming in his music, Coltrane does manage to extend the scope of the linear experiments he began with Davis. As previously noted, the restrictions of vertical-oriented improvising led Coltrane back to concentration on his horizontal melodic development. Jones, who respected Coltrane for his calm, peaceful attitude as well as music, said that "John, to me, had that spiritual context that he put into everything he did. It

⁷ Frank Kofsky, Black Nationalism and the Revolution in Music (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), p. 227. Cited hereafter as Black Nationalism.

was something everybody could recognize."⁸ He thoroughly appreciates the importance of the music he was involved in creating with Coltrane.

If his work was placed in a conservatory as other composers', other artists' new works have been, it would certainly give future generations a great deal to study and a great insight into the beginnings of the American art form.

John's style was completely unconventional; he has a unique approach to music. He was so far in advance of anything that I could conceive. . . I've never been that close to anyone who was that great or that good. He had so much confidence in what he was doing. . . anything he wanted to do it was a matter of getting to the bandstand, assembling his instrument and doing it.⁹

The title composition on this Atlantic recording, a waltz from a Richard Rogers musical, *My Favorite Things*, establishes the compositional framework that would provide the model and cohesion for later performances of this composition, each of which would become a new experiment. Coltrane's playing on his first recording of this composition is approached in a freer "modal" style than found in his recordings with Miles Davis, and the

⁸ Crohn, Burrill, John Coltrane: The Coltrane Legacy (New York: Video Artists International, 1985), a 61 minute documentary film. Cited hereafter as Coltrane Legacy.

⁹ Ibid.

lyricism that was more in the background of his "sheets of sound" approach is now clearly on the surface of his music. He simply divided the improvisational sections of the arrangement of *My Favorite Things* into two parts, the first in the minor and the second in the parallel major. The length of each section was left up to the soloists. His phrasing tendencies are not as periodic as in the past, and blue notes embellish the basic major and minor scales much more freely than before. This is not the tuneful lyricism that many of Coltrane's harshest critics apparently expected. On the contrary, it is a clear representation of a brilliant compositional mind at work¹⁰, settling upon particular motivic ideas, developing them, then moving forward to explore corresponding ideas in a equivalent fashion. From his polyharmonic and "polydiatonic" experiments, Coltrane knew that the close relationship between the minor scales, dorian mode, and blues scales made them interchangeable, when utilized properly, as were other related scales, modes and chords. Andrew White makes related observations.

I think Coltrane thought of the minor mode and the dorian mode as interchangeable, thus he never played "modal" in the pure sense of modality. His chromaticism and polydiatonicism can be related directly to super-tonic and dominant functions in large part. Even as far back as *So What* that he did with Miles Davis on the *Kind of Blue*

¹⁰ Porter, *A Love Supreme*, p. 598.

album he used chromaticism in primarily a standard non-harmonic ionian fashion.¹¹

In 1959 Coltrane had told Jones that he was going to form a band and asked him to be the drummer. White also points out that Elvin Jones "had the unique sense of knowing when and when not to breathe at the cadence,"¹² Jones told DeMicheal:

I follow the improvisation the soloist has taken, . . . and when he's through I pick up the last phrase he's played and use this as the beginning of my improvisation on the melodic pattern of the composition. It can be very simple or very complicated, and you can get into unlimited rhythmic and polyrhythmic patterns and phrases. Actually, a lot of solos I have taken have drum and rhythmic phrases, just as a saxophonist or trumpeter will play phrases with his instrument . . . drums have to breathe too.¹³

While Coltrane always maintains a respect for rhythmic, harmonic, and melodic cadences, Jones's musical awareness becomes increasingly more important to the musical continuity within the

¹¹ Andrew White, Trane 'n Me : A Treatise on The Music of John Coltrane (Washington, D. C.: Andrew's Musical Enterprises, 1981), p. 14. Cited hereafter as Trane 'n Me.

¹² Ibid., p. 25.

¹³ DeMicheal, Don, "Elvin Jones: The Sixth Man," Down Beat, March 28, 1963, p. 17. Cited Hereafter as "The Sixth Man."

ensemble as Coltrane's phrasing becomes less predictable. His fascinating drum style often creates polyrhythmic layers involving simultaneous occurrences of intricate duple ride cymbal patterns with the right hand, rapid syncopated triplet snare drum patterns (Example 1) with the left hand, with both feet providing opposing punctuating polyrhythmic layers on the hi-hat and bass drum. Meanwhile, on another rhythmic level, McCoy Tyner creates a hemiola pattern that often accompanies a return to the main theme (Example 2). Beneath the relatively slow accentuated pattern in the treble part, Tyner often reaches down to the bass register of the piano to add a yet slower rhythm that contributes to a polymetric feeling as demonstrated in a rare televised performance of *Afro Blue* (Example 3), over which Coltrane builds tension through chromatic passing chords. These passing chords, which Andrew White refers to as polydiatonicism, are far removed from the particular tonal area (most frequently a "modal" area), in sequential patterns that force the listener to concentrate on the systematic pattern rather than the dissonances.¹⁴ In spite of personal problems, these musical ideas were developed over many years as McCoy Tyner points out.

At that time, it was an interim period between the time he was first with Miles and his reappearance with Miles. Actually, he was a little disheartened in a sense, because I guess he didn't know what he was

¹⁴ Andrew White, "Coltrane: Not Just Saxophone Music But An Extra Feather In His Cap" (Andrew's Musical Enterprises, 4830 S. Dakota Ave. N. E., Washington, D. C. 20017). Brief article on what the author call Coltrane Saxophonics and Polydiatonicism..

going to do from there. He was thinking about getting a job, a construction job. His wife at that time encouraged him to pursue music, which I felt he was going to do anyway. At the time, he was used to working, making a living; all of a sudden he didn't have that privilege. But he began to work on a lot of beautiful things. I think a lot of these things were within him and there were a lot of ideas he had on his mind that he wanted pursue. He was a very interesting person, a very creative individual.

I had a chance to hear Bird, but I really didn't get a chance to see him. I detected the same thing in John's playing.¹⁵

Impressions (a composition inspired by Miles's *So What*) and other "modal" compositions are where the masterful execution of such passing chords or polydiatonicism, combined with multiphonics, harmonic devices, various permutations of the "sheets of sound" figures, etc., combine in the highest density to produce an integrated vocabulary that becomes a dramatic extension of the highly inventive (Coltrane) lyricism (Example 4). This extremely natural sounding mixture of systematic rationale, unorthodox timbres, and emotional effect are quite convincing and forms the unique language that set Coltrane apart from his peers. Coltrane would soon add yet another timbre to his performances.

¹⁵ Bourne, Michael, "McCoy Tyner," *Down Beat*, June 7, 1973, p. 19. Cited hereafter as "McCoy Tyner."

Last February, I bought a soprano saxophone. I like the sound of it, but I'm not playing with the body, the bigness of tone, that I want yet. I haven't had too much trouble playing it in tune, but I've had a lot of trouble getting a good quality of tone in the upper register. It comes out sort of puny sometimes. I've had to adopt a slightly different approach than the one I use for tenor, but it helps me get away-lets me take another look at improvisation. It's like having another hand.

I'm using it with my present group, McCoy Tyner, piano; Steve Davis, bass, and Pete LaRoca, drums. The quartet is coming along nicely. We know basically what we're trying for, and we leave room for individual development. Individual contributions are put in night by night.¹⁶

On My Favorite Things, Coltrane proved to be a very fine soprano saxophone player, an instrument that has had few masters in jazz (among them are Sidney Bechet - who incorporated vocal elements into his wide range of expression, Johnny Hodges, and Emmett Matthews), perhaps due to the instrument's problematic intonation and other technical demands. Nevertheless, as expressed in an interview with Frank Kofsky, Coltrane was strongly attracted to the instrument and his saxophone playing on tenor changed as a result.

¹⁶ "Coltrane On Coltrane," p. 53.

Well, the soprano, by being this small instrument, I found that playing the lowest note on it was like playing one of the middle notes on tenor - so therefore, after I got some embouchure. . . I found that I would play *all over* this instrument. On tenor, I hadn't always played all over it, Because I was playing certain ideas which just went in certain ranges, octaves. But by playing on the soprano and becoming accustomed to playing on soprano from that low B-flat on up, it soon got so that when I went on tenor, I found myself doing the same thing. It caused the change or the willingness to change and just try to play as much of the instrument as possible.¹⁷

My Favorite Things sold 50,000 copies when it was released. This recording elevated the soprano saxophone to a position of unprecedented popularity. C.H. Garrigues of the San Francisco *Examiner* said "It is without question, the best Coltrane album to date and - almost equally without question - one of the most important of the 1960's."¹⁸ With Coltrane's musical applications, the soprano saxophone often evoked exotic associations¹⁹ and brought him a greater popularity (including a feature story in

¹⁷ Giants of Black Music, Ed. Pauline Rivelli and Robert Levin (New York: Da Capo Press, 1979), p. 35. Cited hereafter as Giants of Black Music.

¹⁸ J. C. Thomas, Chasin' the Trane (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1975), p. 133. Cited hereafter as Chasin' the Trane.

¹⁹ Ekkehard Jost, Free Jazz (New York: Da Capo Press, 1981), p. 25. Cited hereafter as Free Jazz.

Newsweek magazine).²⁰ Master flutist Jean-Pierre Rampal mentions his first impression.

I first heard John Coltrane when his record of *My Favorite Things* was released in France in 1962. I was impressed; no I was amazed how he could obtain such beautiful intonation on his horn. I knew Sidney Bechet's music well, because he had lived in Paris for so many years. But until Coltrane I had never heard the soprano played like this, with no vibrato yet such a clear, singing sound.²¹

My Favorite Things could be played almost as a raga. His next recording involving the soprano saxophone was an arrangement of the traditional song *Greensleeves*, also with a hypnotic approach that had the same effect as a raga on the listener. Coltrane had been fascinated by Indian music and particularly the Indian water drum, which is essentially a drone instrument that provides a foundation over which other performers improvise. For a similar function, Coltrane employed two bassists because he "liked music to be heavy on the bottom,"²² and he wished to add to the polyrhythmic density of the ensemble by having one of the bassists playing freely against the more circumscribed function of

²⁰ Joe Goldberg, *Jazz Masters of the Fifties* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1980), p. 201-02. Cited hereafter as *Jazz Masters*.

²¹ *Chasin' the Trane*, p. 134.

²² *Jazz Masters*, p. 203.

the other. He was pleased to learn that Ali Akbar Khan, considered one of the greatest Indian musicians, was fond of playing *Greensleeves* and said "I wish I could hear him do it. . . Then I'd know if I was playing it right."²³ In the spirit of the performance of Indian music, Coltrane says his performances became longer organically.

When, some evenings, in beginning to play, we feel the inspiration, and we foresee the possibility of realizing good things, it seems illogical and unreasonable to us to shorten our solos . . . My ideas have to develop themselves naturally in a long solo.²⁴

Jazz scholar Lewis Porter notes that "Ekkehard Jost points out that Coltrane's solos felt longer than they actually were because of their modal framework; to the listener accustomed to the reference points provided by more conventional harmony, Coltrane's pieces probably seemed like one interminable chord."²⁵ This problem becomes pronounced with much of the music produced by the jazz avant-garde that employ various forms of *ostinati* in the music to serve as a point of reference for the more

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ J. Clouzet and Michel Delorme, "Entretien avec John Coltrane," *Les Cahiers du Jazz*, VIII (1963), p.6. Translated by Lewis Porter, and cited in *A Love Supreme*, p. 600.

²⁵ *A Love Supreme*, p. 600.

aleatoric music that occurs around it. If one is incapable of absorbing the entire sonic spectrum, and is limited to becoming fixated on a single aspect of that music, then the essence of the music is lost.

From a technical viewpoint, I have certain things I'd like to present in my solos. To do this, I have to get the right material. It has to swing, and it has to be varied. (I'm inclined to not to be too varied.) I want it to cover as many forms of music as I can put into a jazz context and play on my instruments. I like Eastern music; Yusef Lateef has been using this in his playing for some time and Ornette Coleman sometimes plays music with a Spanish content as well as other exotic-flavored music. In these approaches there's something I can draw on and use in the way I like to play.

I've been writing some things for the quartet-if you call lines and sketches writing. I'd like to write more after I learn more-after I find out what kind of material I can present best and what kind of material I can present best and what kind will carry my musical techniques best. Then I'll know better what kind of writing is best for me.

I've been devoting quite a bit of my time to harmonic studies on my own, in libraries and places like that. I've found you've got to look back at the old things and see them in a new light. I'm not finished with these studies because I haven't assimilated everything into my

playing. I want to progress, but I don't want to go so far out that I can't see what others are doing.²⁶

The *Africa/Brass* recording date (May 23 and June 7, 1961) on which *Greensleeves* was recorded demonstrated Coltrane's commitment to communal participation in the creation of his music, and also demonstrated his growing interest in African music as well as traditional European folk music. Coltrane gives insightful comments in the album's liner notes.

It is one of the most beautiful folk melodies I've heard . . .

Greensleeves is most enjoyable to play. It was a challenge to add the band to it. I wanted to keep the feeling of the quartet. That's why we took the same voicings and the same rhythm McCoy comps in.²⁷

Elvin Jones said "The most impressive thing about working with Trane was a feeling of steady, collective learning."²⁸ He also made an interesting remark regarding musical influences in the interview with DeMicheal cited previously.

²⁶ "Coltrane On Coltrane," p. 53.

²⁷ *Africa/Brass: The John Coltrane Quartet* (Impulse 6). Liner notes. Cited hereafter as *Africa/Brass*.

²⁸ *Chasin' the Trane*, p. 139.

But I think even Indian music has its origins in the African art form. You can see the influences. Whatever we do, it can be traced back to some of the African forms-there are so many. It's like the languages; there might be a thousand dialects in one section of African, and the music has as many, if not more, dialects, you might say.²⁹

The tenor saxophonist's first recording for the Impulse record label featured arrangements by Eric Dolphy, based upon compositional ideas that Coltrane and Tyner collaborated on. The session utilized usual instrumentation: trumpet, four French horns, alto saxophone, baritone saxophone, two euphoniums, two basses, piano, drums, tuba, and Coltrane on soprano and tenor saxophones. Dolphy said, "John thought of this sound, He wanted brass, he wanted baritone horns, he wanted that mellow sound and power."³⁰ Coltrane listened to many African records for rhythmic inspiration for musical direction. He seemed pleased with the results that were obtained when he commented, "I had a sound that I wanted to hear, . . . And what resulted was about it."³¹

²⁹ "The Sixth Man," p. 17.

³⁰ Africa/Brass.

³¹ Ibid.

The 1960's are the beginning of the period in which John Coltrane's name becomes prominently associated with free jazz despite the relatively small proportion of his recorded compositions that are free from tonal, formal, metric, or other organizational constraints. In musical style and personal and political character, the musicians comprising the jazz avant-garde have been considered a different kind of musician, situated on the fringe of the jazz community. They certainly failed to receive the recognition that the "downtown" experimental school under the aesthetic leadership of John Cage received, nor did they want to be identified with this music.³² In response to Cage, who criticized modern jazz for using regular intervals and for being too much on the emotions, Cecil Taylor said:

He doesn't have the right to make any comment about jazz, nor would Stravinsky have any right to make evaluations about jazz, because they don't know the tradition that jazz came out of. I've spent years in school learning about European music and its tradition, but these cats don't know a thing about Harlem except that it's there. Right away when they talk about music they talk in terms of what music is to them. They never subject themselves to, like, what are Louis

³² Ronald M. Radano, "The Jazz Avant-Garde and the Jazz Community: Action and Reaction," *Annual Review of Jazz Studies III*, Ed Dan Morgenstern, Charles Nanry, and David Cayer (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1985), p. 77. Cited hereafter as "Jazz Avant-Garde."

Armstrong's criteria for beauty, and until they do, then I'm not interested in what they say.³³

Certainly no musical evidence exists that reveals that any members of the "downtown" movement had evolved through a systematic development of any form of spontaneous composition that would qualify them to make educated appraisals of the music created by the masters involved in the jazz avant-garde. H. Wiley Hitchcock described the jazz avante-garde as "cultivated" musicians trapped in a "vernacular" milieu.³⁴ The latter assertion is difficult to understand in a country where jazz is the only native musical art form. Like Bebop in the forties, the music revolution in the sixties was the center of jazz development and, therefore, could not possibly be on the fringes of itself. A large portion of the avant-garde was not concerned with the developments in jazz criticism; its artistic developments heralded the coming of the "new" black society, and the opinions of a primarily white, middle-brow establishment were the irrelevant comments of saboteurs, "the enemy."³⁵

By the sixties, the desire for white respectability was vacuous, or had become inverted into anti-white sentiment. Charles Mingus,

³³ A. B. Spellman, Four Lives in the Bebop Business (New York: Limelight Editions, 1985), p. 35. Cited hereafter as Four Lives.

³⁴ "Jazz Avant-Garde," p. 77.

³⁵ "Jazz Avant-Garde," p. 74.

who was furious at even being referred to as a "jazz musician," stated that "to me the word jazz means nigger, discrimination, second-class citizenship, the whole back-of-the-bus bit."³⁶ Nightclubs were now no more than "crude stables" to Archie Shepp or "whorehouses" to Ornette Coleman, while Cecil Taylor proposed a national boycott to "take the music away from the people that own it."³⁷ These feelings were not so much centered on bitterness or anger, as they were aimed at artistic freedom and social justice. The musicians were insisting upon the status they were entitled to as the consummate members of the tradition that created the most influential musical language in the twentieth century. As Archie Shepp insisted:

Give me leave to state this unequivocate fact: jazz is the product of the whites - the ofays - too often my enemy. It is the progcnay of the blacks - my kinsmen. By this I mean: you own the music, and we make it. By definition then, you own the people who make the music. . . I give you, then, my brains back.³⁸

Many of the critics and writers of this period were apprehensive about a music that was unfamiliar. Musical freedom and collective improvisation were considered nihilistic neurosis and psychosis

³⁶ Ben Sidran, Black Talk (New York: Da Capo, 1981), p. 69. Cited hereafter as Black Talk.

³⁷ "Jazz Avant-Garde," p.74.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 75.

by white reviewers like John Tynan (creator of the acrimonious "anti-jazz" epithet) in reaction to the music of Ornette Coleman and his associates,³⁹ while emotional intensity was linked to unmusical "noise," bitterness and aggression in other uninitiated minds.⁴⁰ Coltrane responded to this criticism.

Some people say 'your music sounds angry', or tortured', or 'spiritual', or 'overpowering' or something: you get all kinds of things, you know. Some say they feel elated, and so you never know where it's going to go. All a musician can do is to get closer to the sources of nature, and so feel that he is in communion with the natural laws. Then he can feel that he is interpreting them to the best of his ability, and can try to convey that to others.

Until 1960," musically universal" meant melodic, harmonic, textural, and formal simplicity for many listeners.⁴¹ Accordingly, the theme, taken as a basis for improvisation, determines the formal and harmonic unfolding of the entire composition. The jazz record industry arbitrarily determined that the new music should not be played on radio in black neighborhoods and could only be heard on university stations scattered across the country.⁴² In

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁴⁰ C. O. Simpkins. *Coltrane: A Biography* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1989), p.178. Cited hereafter as *Coltrane*.

⁴¹ *Free Jazz*, p. 17.

⁴² *Four Lives*, p. 17.

talking with Frank Kofsky, McCoy addresses this particular problem as it affects jazz.

Tyner : I think that jazz music, if you want to use the term, jazz - I don't particularly care for it, but it's an accepted word and I use it because I have so much respect for the music , . . . I think that jazz is really not given the proper exposure, and it's really not exposed in the true light of what it really is. This is the way I look at it; and consequently I think that we suffer, because people get the wrong idea about what it's all about. And I think that sometimes deliberately it seems as though the music doesn't get the right exposure - it's not being exposed right or properly. It gets sort of a minimum amount of exposure - not enough, I don't feel.

Kofsky : Could this be connected with the fact that many of the musicians are themselves black?

Tyner : Possibly, possibly. I believe that to a degree, I really do. Because I mean that's like in any other field, any other thing, especially. I believe that being that black musicians seemingly have been the innovators in this particular field, that's another thing that I think keeps it at a certain level.

Kofsky : You mean white people find it difficult to accept the fact that black musicians could make valid artistic innovations?

Tyner : I wouldn't say as a whole, white people; but I think that there is a good majority, probably because of the way society points to the black as inferior, in many, many ways. So I guess it's very difficult for white people to accept that.⁴³

This was the social climate in which Coltrane's third musical period was situated. In response to Kofsky's question regarding whether he felt that music was an instrument for social change, Coltrane responded, "I think music is an instrument. It can create the initial thought patterns that can change the thinking of people."⁴⁴ In the 1960's Coltrane was striving to come in closer contact with the Creator through music, as well as through reading the Bible, pre-Koranic texts and other sacred works, which he would discuss with Elvin Jones.⁴⁵ But as Ben Sidran notes, an artist in Coltrane's position would inevitably be drawn into the an awareness of social issues.

Because a jazz musician cannot escape his own cultural referents and because the idioms of jazz force the musician to stand naked, emotionally, before his audience, jazz music has always maintained, indeed, has stimulated, a race consciousness.⁴⁶

⁴³ Black Nationalism, p. 211.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 227.

⁴⁵ Coltrane, p. 179.

⁴⁶ Black Talk, p. 68.

Coltrane listened to and was impressed by many of the younger saxophonists including Pharoah Sanders and Eric Dolphy, and he took an interest in John Gilmore's melodic devices.⁴⁷ When asked by Frank Kofsky if he listened to any of the younger saxophonists, Coltrane replied "Yes, Albert Ayler first. I've listened very closely to him". . . "I think what he's doing, it seems to be moving music into even higher frequencies. . ."⁴⁸ Coltrane and Ornette Coleman were good friends and would go to hear the other's performances when they were working a few blocks apart at New York clubs in the early sixties. Like Coleman, Coltrane began to frequently dispense with chord changes. His ventures away from tonal centers and his emphasis on motivic development were approaches also employed by Dolphy and Gilmore (respectively); and Ayler's intensely emotional music certainly must have made an impression on Coltrane. Sonny Rollins, acknowledged by many as the father of motivic improvisation, also affected Coltrane's thinking (especially in his early stylistic periods) and Rollins admits being influenced by Coltrane. Of course, most other saxophonists who heard Coltrane play were strongly impressed as well. Regarding his relationship with Coltrane, Coleman remembers:

⁴⁷ Mark Gridley, Jazz Styles: History and Analysis (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1985), p. 272.

⁴⁸ Giants of Black Music, p.32.

I have only played with him once in my life; I went to listen to him at a club and he asked me to join him. We played two pieces - twelve minutes to be exact - but I think that was the most intense moment of my life.⁴⁹

At the end of the fifties Coleman made the programmatic statement "Let's play the music and not the background"⁵⁰ referring to the dissolution of the traditional jazz improvisational structures that had grown to be considered the incontestable norm throughout the stylistic revolution that had occurred in the history of jazz. The supporting harmonic, melodic, rhythmic, and formal framework had remained basically intact while only the musical particulars changed. The fact that Coleman's effect on Coltrane's music is reflected in the construction of compositions such as *Ascension* (which bears parallels to Coleman's 1960 double quartet recording, *Free Jazz*), has been pointed out by many observers.⁵¹ But an equally powerful relationship exists between both men's perception of an intangible ingredient that was considered a paramount musical element in their artistic creation. Coleman sheds some light on this subject.

⁴⁹ *Jazz Masters*, p. 204-05.

⁵⁰ Martin Williams, *The Jazz Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 207.

⁵¹ *Free Jazz*, p. 17.

It's like the difference between what people call soul and what some other people call feeling. 'Cause everybody feels . . . You know, even an animal feels. And people get feeling all mixed up with soul, because undoubtedly soul must have something to do with being very natural and feeling must have something to do with the choice of whether it hurt or didn't hurt or whether it made you happy or didn't make you happy. Choice that you can change. Soul must have something to do with where it's always positive and it's always complete. It doesn't need any elaboration on it. It happens twenty-four hours a day, and it's like a miracle.⁵²

For the remainder of his career, Coltrane would refer to a similar element as expression. When Frank Kofsky asked him about the relationship between Malcolm X's ideas and the new music he gave insightful comments.

Well, I think that music, being an expression of the human heart, or the human being itself, does express the whole thing - the whole of human experience at the particular time it is being expressed.⁵³

This desire for total expression was extended into the principles upon which Coltrane's ensemble was directed in performance.

⁵² Four Lives, p. 145.

⁵³ Coltrane, p. 175.

Each member of the ensemble had to be attuned to Coltrane through a type of psychic sensibility or kinesthetic perception that would enable them to respond instantaneously to music cues that had no mnemonic aids or other overt forms of musical representation. Tyner discusses the spontaneity with the ensemble.

People sometimes say our music is experimental, but all I can answer is that every time you sit down to play, it should be an experience. There are no barriers in our rhythm section. Everyone plays his personal concept, and nobody tells anyone else what to do. It is surprisingly spontaneous, and there's a lot of give and take, for we all listen carefully to one another. From playing together, you get to know one another so well musically that you can anticipate. We have an over-all different approach, and that is responsible for our original style. As compared with a lot of other groups, we feel differently about music. With us, whatever comes out - that's it, at that moment! We definitely believe in the value of the spontaneous.

So far as we are concerned, too, a lot depends on what John does. A rhythm section is supposed to support and inspire the soloist, and it is a very sensitive thing. How each one of us feels can determine so much, but when I come to solo I may be inspired by what John has played and by the support Elvin Jones and Jimmy Garrison are giving me. It's all too personal to analyze on paper, anymore than

it's possible to say why one person likes chocolate and another cookies.⁵⁴

Elvin Jones relates how the members of the ensemble had no idea what composition would be played until Coltrane began to play the piece. This was even the case with a new musical piece which, although treated somewhat gingerly for the first few choruses, became a "standard" as far as the members of the ensemble were concerned the first time it was played.⁵⁵ Jones continues, "Sometimes it would be adapted even sooner. It was almost telepathic - the way that ideas were transmitted within the group - the rapport was just that close." No visible cues were ever given for the changes in instrumental texture either.

When it first started to happen I was just as surprised as anybody else, because I didn't see him give any signals. But after a while I began to understand what it was all about and the reasons for it. Once the piano was out of the group, that vacuum could be filled rhythmically, by the bass, or by the expanded harmonics of his horn - his own expanded range - and without any preconceived pattern of chord progression.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ "Tyner Talk," p. 18.

⁵⁵ Coltrane Legacy, Elvin Jones's commentary.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

As Coltrane would later confirm, his choice of sidemen provided the assurance necessary to achieve this type of tacit understanding and interaction. In an interview with Michel Delorme and Claude Lenissois for the French magazine *Jazz Hot* in September, 1965, he explains his criteria for choosing his musicians.

I never have anything to say to them, they always know what they should do and are constantly inspired. I know I can always count on them and that gives me confidence. There is between us a perfect musical communication which doesn't take human values into consideration.⁵⁷

The implied emphasis on a communal rather than a conformist approach reasserts itself in the music of the vanguard jazz of the 1960's. Just as Coltrane was influenced musically by his early associations with the Baptist church, and as Charles Mingus retained the spirit of spontaneous group participation that he experienced at his stepmother's Holiness Church as a child, most African-American jazz musicians bring an intrinsic understanding of polyrhythmic interplay and communal music making to

⁵⁷ Michel Delorme & Claude Lenissois, "Interview with John Coltrane," from the French magazine *Jazz Hot*, September 1965. Reprinted in *Change Number Two*, Detroit Artists Workshop Press, (Spring/Summer 1966), pp. 67-72.

synergistic jazz performances. Elvin Jones emphasizes the importance of church music to him.

I was brought up in a climate of church music. I can still hear those tambourines ringing in those churches. That was sweet music. Music is not hateful - it's loving, the opposite to what some people seem to think it should be.

The only hateful music in history has been the sound of war drums - and, man, that wasn't jazz. That was a military band.⁵⁸

Even within more simple formats, such as the earliest marching bands around the turn of the present century, the "swing" or syncopation came from the imposition of African-type rhythms on Western time structures and not from alterations of Western meters. The increased importance of solo playing in the 1920's led to a decline in collective improvisation within larger ensembles, but this is part of the tradition that is restored by modern jazz. This tradition of musical knowledge provides direction for like-minded jazz artists and allows a freedom of musical expression within the music ensemble.

This is the antithesis of leaders of conformist organizations such as those led by untiring taskmasters such as Glenn Miller and Tommy Dorsey who were regarded as martinets by their

⁵⁸ Hennessey, Mike, "The Emancipation of Elvin Jones," Down Beat, March 24, 1966, p. 25.

players.⁵⁹ The approach taken by many avant-garde musicians of the sixties also seemed to be a recalcitrant gesture to music listeners and critics who had finally grown accustomed to the Bebop innovations they initially rejected. Now that this audience had finally agreed among themselves on new definitions for modern jazz, based upon the melodic, rhythmic, formal, and harmonic aspects of the Bebop language, they were not eager to assume a position of humility as innovators of the 1960's seemingly abandoned or drastically modified the old musical criteria. The avant-garde musicians were merely evolving into a new era in jazz, yet they were confronted with insults and largely ostracized from the economic mainstream of the jazz music industry. This reaction, of course, is related to the effects that racism has on the development of jazz in America as the first chapter of this dissertation began to point out. It stems from a lack of knowledge of the fundamental essence of African-American music and often stems from an attitude that African-American culture is not rich and complex enough nor black people sufficiently inventive to produce artifacts worthy of emulation and celebration.⁶⁰ A type of hidden agenda lies beneath this posture, nevertheless, as demonstrated by the attraction to African American music that has always existed. One aspect of this dishonesty manifests as economic exploitation, by record companies and the media, of the music created by African-

⁵⁹ Gunther Schuller, The Swing Era (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 677.

⁶⁰ Playthell Benjamin, "Two Funky White Boys," *The Village Voice*, January 9, 1990, p. 34.

American artists after failing to support and recognize these same individuals during their lifetimes. American culture at large has not yet evolved to a point where it can freely acknowledge superb accomplishments by African artists, or been capable of assuming a humble enough posture to enable those desiring information about African-American music to enter the culture in which it was created to gain the knowledge necessary to form educated conclusions. As a consequence, few jazz innovators have been born into jazz who have not experienced (first hand) African-American culture despite the levels of conceptual understanding of instrumental technique they may achieve. Writer Playthell Benjamin describes the three resulting approaches to African-American music that European American culture has taken.

There's a three-pronged tradition among white musicians who've wanted to perform in the black idiom. Some sought to "improve" it: Paul Whiteman's "symphonic jazz," or Dave Brubeck's "third stream." Others were basically parodists, from white blackface minstrels through the Original Dixieland Jazz Band to the Beastie Boys. But others have immersed themselves in the culture, sincerely endeavoring to observe the performance values promulgated by black musicians themselves; among the most musically successful of these acolytes are the New Orleans Rhythm Kings, Benny Goodman, Eric Clapton, and now Third Bass.⁶¹

⁶¹ Ibid.

Ethnomusicologist David Reck discusses a highly relevant issue regarding the distortion contained in European perception of the indigenous music of many of the world's people in his book, Music of the Whole Earth.

The entire evolution - paralleling the development of man from slimy, squirming creatures in the water, things that go "bump" in the night, and "the apes" - culminated in the full flowering of high European art, in the sublime musical thought and expression of Mozart, Ludwig van Beethoven, Johannes Brahms, and Richard Wagner: a master race of geniuses capering in the Elysian Fields of European melody, harmony, form, and idioms.

The only problem with such a neat and logical structure is that it is not true. . . Tribal people who live in isolated pockets in hills, deserts, and forests and who must have been related to the original inhabitants of the various regions make music that fully uses harmony and polyphony, while people of the later, more modern, dominant "high" culture prefer a music that is primarily monophonic. The historical movement would appear, then, to have been away from the earlier harmonic/melodic style of the tribal people to a later monophonic melody-oriented music developed and synthesized in "higher" city and palace cultures - in other words,

the exact opposite of the evolutionary projection drawn up by our nineteenth-century musicologists!⁶²

By the early 1960's the tolerance for Cecil Taylor and the enthusiasm that was initially expressed for Ornette Coleman's music had waned for reasons related to that put forth by Reck. The history of jazz clearly demonstrates that, after the exoticism had worn thin, innovations in the music have always been vilified by the European-American majority until it could be diluted and imitated by white musicians, or sold by white businessmen. Although Coltrane (and his colleague Eric Dolphy) continued to play representative compositions from his earlier periods and was therefore considered by some to be on the fringes of the avant-garde, he was also considered anathema by those captious listeners who maligned the members of the jazz avant-garde of the sixties as jazz executioners.⁶³ Soon, however, others began to see Coltrane's music within a more general historical perspective. Author Barry McRae admits,

As it was I was too busy telling myself that he had gone too far to appreciate that this was in itself a stage of overstatement similar to

⁶² David Reck, Music of the Whole Earth (New York: Charles Scribner & Sons, 1977), p. 271-72.

⁶³ "Jazz Avant-Garde," p. 73.

the one that affected Armstrong around 1932. Great music was created by both men in these circumstances.⁶⁴

Writer Charles Hanna expressed thoughts in the Minneapolis *Sunday Tribune* that demonstrated that he approached Coltrane's music with a degree of understanding.

Coltrane is not an artist you can listen to casually. You must give him your undivided attention to even begin to appreciate his talent. He emits a stream of musical consciousness that could, I suppose, be likened to some of the writings of James Joyce. He produces music that might be incomprehensible to some listeners, but its value and meaning lie in his compulsion to weave an entire piece of musical cloth almost instantaneously.⁶⁵

Contrary to the pronouncements of those jazz journalists who published pejorative remarks about free jazz and made cursory predictions regarding Coltrane's future musical output, he continued to play a repertoire that consisted of blues, song form, and "modal pieces, in addition to the freer styles of music experimentation. Bassist Reggie Workman recalls that the longest trip the Coltrane group made was on its European tour in 1961.

⁶⁴ *The Jazz Cataclysm*, p. 101.

⁶⁵ *Chasin' the Trane*, p. 134.

While in Germany, Coltrane remarked that he had dreamed of the band he now had back in 1957, so he felt that this group was coming into fruition for quite a while.⁶⁶ Shortly after this tour, Eric Dolphy joined the ensemble and "we began to deal with another dimension in the music,"⁶⁷ Workman says. In live performances Coltrane's performances continued to become longer. Elvin Jones mentions a three hour matinee engagement at which the entire performance time was devoted to the performance of a single composition (without pause!). Understandably, Jones was apprehensive before the television appearances the group made around this time, thinking that Coltrane would not get all of his intended selections in within such a restricted format. Coltrane controlled the pacing of the presentations on the air perfectly, which made Jones aware of just how acutely conscious Coltrane was of pacing despite his seemingly complete absorption into his music during performance.⁶⁸ Jimmy Cobb remembers Miles Davis asking Coltrane why he played such long solos while he was still with Davis's sextet. Coltrane had said that he sometimes got so involved in what he was doing that he didn't know how to cut it off. Davis simply responded, "Take the horn out of your mouth."⁶⁹ Similarly, when guitarist Wes Montgomery joined Coltrane's band in 1962

⁶⁶ Coltrane Legacy, comments by Coltrane.

⁶⁷ Ibid., Workman's remarks.

⁶⁸ Ibid., Jones's comments.

⁶⁹ Ibid., Comments by Jimmy Cobb.

he soon realized that the spaces between his solos were longer than the intervals between sets and left.⁷⁰

The penchant for long improvisational solos and his fanaticism about recording continued throughout the early 1960's. Both the polyrhythmic inclinations and the "modal" experiments are a part of the 1961 recording of the album *Olé*, the title track of which is an entire side. The composition *Olé*, as the title implies, has a marked Spanish flavor and again employs two basses. Coltrane's movement toward an economy of compositional means in his themes begins to become apparent in the fact that *Olé* has no written theme and in the simple five note theme upon which the composition *Dahomey Dance* is based. Both the "modality" and economic theme (often motives of a few notes) tendencies can be found in other compositions of this period as well, including recordings of *India*, *Africa*, and *Impressions*. *India* is one of the spontaneous compositions that grew out of Coltrane's partnership with Eric Dolphy and is a classic example of a work organized almost solely around the creative abilities of the musicians involved, and their ability to integrate their individual musical conceptions into the artistic whole. Except for a theme derived from a simple motive (Example 5), all formal schematism is abandoned in favor of procedurally developing structural contexts organized primarily by the soloists. Although Coltrane treats the G Mixolydian mode of the implied tonality freely, it is Dolphy who

⁷⁰ *Jazz Masters*, p. 206.

adds a more distinctive bitonal character to his solo (Example 6). With *India* as a model, all subsequent "modal" pieces performed by the Coltrane Quartet during this period are comparatively conventional.⁷¹ Coltrane continues his process of exploring scalar patterns in a seemingly analytical fashion while, paradoxically, always sounding completely natural, vibrant, and expressive. Coltrane says:

Basically I am trying not to stagnate. I go this way and I go that way and I don't know where I'm going next. But if I should get stagnant, I'd lose my interest.⁷²

In 1962 three albums were recorded for the Impulse record label that all had a significant effect on Coltrane's career to varying degrees. The record *Coltrane* contained the composition *Out of This World*, which finds Coltrane, through masterful use of rubato, playing in greater rhythmic opposition to the entire rhythm section than ever before to create an astounding effect. The album entitled *Ballads* once again demonstrated Coltrane's lyricism, imagination, and control in a style that is considered the greatest challenge to the mature jazz artist due to the demanding nature of ballad playing.

⁷¹ *Free Jazz*, p. 31.

⁷² Wilmer, Valerie, "Conversation With Coltrane," *Jazz Monthly*, February, 1962, p. 7. Cited Hereafter as "Conversation With Coltrane."

There are some great songs that have been played in this music and only need a new approach to revive them. Faced with this fact, I couldn't revise my musical approach drastically, and so I said well, maybe I'm really doing something with this harmonic approach and should stick with it for a while.

There are going to be songs with one chord and songs with no chords, which in my case means freedom to see if I can develop more in a melodic fashion through these unlimited harmonies.⁷³

The Duke Ellington and John Coltrane recording made on September 26, was considered the album of the year by some⁷⁴, while others considered it uneven, mainly due to the "unsuitable drumming of Sam Woodyard."⁷⁵ It was the influence of Ellington on the entire future of Coltrane's recording career that ranks this collaboration as undoubtably the most significant studio session for the saxophonist that year. Coltrane's producer at Impulse, Bob Thiele, spoke of the effect that Duke had on the younger musician.

⁷³ "Conversation With Coltrane," p. 7.

⁷⁴ Chasin' the Trane, p. 153.

⁷⁵ Jazz Cataclysm, p. 108.

He (Coltrane) would do a tune twelve, fifteen, or twenty times before he was satisfied . . . The first tune we did with Ellington was *In A Sentimental Mood* . We did that in one take, and I'll never forget my reaction. . . Ellington, I know from past experience, is going to say *that's it* , great, and Coltrane would say, I feel we should go over this a few more times. Immediately I ran out of the studio and though I didn't know how I would handle it, I had to get the two guys together. I said, Duke (he was the oldest of the three of us there), what do you think. . . He said, "That's fine," and I said, John, do you think we should do it again. . . Duke immediately interrupted, and said, "Well, what for, you can't say it again that way, this is it." John said, "Yes, Duke, you're right," and from then on the album went very smoothly. Also, from then on John's recordings were really based on one and two takes.⁷⁶

By the time the album with Ellington was completed, the quartet that is considered the "classic quartet" was formed after Coltrane had spent most of the time in the early 1960's searching for the right personnel. In addition to McCoy Tyner, Elvin Jones, and Jimmy Garrison, Eric Dolphy would also appear regularly with the band from 1961 until Coltrane was pressured into asking him to leave the band. His departure from the band will be discussed later in this chapter. The empathy within the group continued to increase, as did the communal confidence. Tyner comments:

⁷⁶ " Bob Thiele Talks to Frank Kofsky about John Coltrane," CODA Publications , May, 1968, pp. 3-10.

The group? We knew we had something different, but I didn't realize its influence until after I'd left. Actually, it wasn't until after John died, after he passed on into the other dimension, that I realized how much of an impact it had, how much of an influence it had. As a matter of fact, I thought that was the norm, in a sense. Even though I knew we were doing something different, I thought maybe other people were at a similar level. I was very surprised to find they weren't, because for us it became a normal thing. We were nurtured in that, and we grew and cultivated ourselves in that particular setting. It was even really a surprise to realize the specialness of the sincerity in our music. It was such a contrast between being around somebody that shared our music and being around somebody else.⁷⁷

The firm foundation set harmonically by Tyner's piano and Jones polyrhythmic underpinning, gradually freed Coltrane from the restrictions of sequential improvisational patterns and plunged him even more deeply into linear melodic development. Jones explains how he reacted musically.

And sometimes John gets on 1 and 3; I go right along with him to let him know he's not alone. It lends sort of a moral and physical

⁷⁷ "McCoy Tyner," p. 19.

support to whatever he wants to do. It knits the whole thing a little tighter and makes it flow more smoothly, keeping in mind, as far as the rhythmic picture is concerned, where you're at all the time.⁷⁸

What might have become another highly restrictive channel was charged with Coltrane's tremendous emotional projection.⁷⁹ The intuitive understanding, the compatible levels of musical proficiency, and the strong interaction between the soloist and the rhythm section made the ensemble a single unit in the most literal sense of the term. Thus, whereas most rhythm sections provide a springboard from which the soloist's ideas are launched (also often determining his or her effectiveness), the various levels within the Coltrane quartet were becoming different aspects of a single manifestation. Therefore, the call-and-response pattern of traditional African music, which carried over into the blues in jazz, was taking on new dimensions. Coltrane explains some of his musical directions.

I want to broaden my outlook in order to come out with a fuller means of expression. I want to be more flexible where rhythm is concerned I feel I have to study rhythm some more. I haven't experimented too much with time; most of my experimenting has been

⁷⁸ "The Sixth Man," p. 17.

⁷⁹ Jazz Cataclysm, p. 105.

in a harmonic form. I put time and rhythms to one side, in the past.⁸⁰

The division between soloist (master drummer or professional musician in Africa) and the group (tribe) would begin to dissolve as Coltrane came closer to his fourth period of development. The independence and freedom that began to take place within the Coltrane ensemble in performances of compositions like *India*, are even more evident by the end of this stylistic period. Although the sound engineering of most of Coltrane's albums caused his saxophone sound to be stronger in audio presence than other instruments in the ensembles (thus diminishing the democratization of the group sound somewhat), it is still clear in the last movement of *A Love Supreme* (*Psalm*, to be discussed shortly) that the soloist is no longer functioning on a level separate from that of the other members of the ensemble. This annihilation of the distance between soloist and the rhythm section is an obvious characteristic of most free jazz of this period as well. McCoy Tyner remarks on the democratic nature of the music in an interview with David Wild.

Wild: It's interesting that some of the players who have worked with you, like George, seem to have assimilated a lot of Coltrane. But I

⁸⁰ "Coltrane On Coltrane," p. 53.

would imagine that's natural, because after all a lot of it is your music, too.

Tyner: Yeah. It's a funny thing, the John Coltrane Quartet was actually four elements. We had one guy who led the whole team, but it was really a compounding of personalities, like four personalities contributing. Whenever any of us were missing ...when Roy was with the band it was interesting, but when Elvin came back it was a glorious situation. And Roy was very interesting. I enjoyed him, he's a very good musician, a good performer. But I think that Elvin was really a missed part of that, because it was just his spot, you know. One time, when my son was born, I took a couple of weeks off, Eric Dolphy was with the band, and John didn't hire a piano player for those weeks-he played without a piano player.

When you're a part of something like that you can't really ascertain how strong it is. We knew that we were doing something different, that it was fresh, timely. We know that it had come from something that had happened before. At the same time, you're swept up in that force-you're not cognizant of how different it is. When something is good, timely, it has a lasting quality.⁸¹

⁸¹ Wild, David, "McCoy Tyner: The Jubilant Experience of the Classic Quartet," Down Beat, July 12, 1979, p.48. Hereafter cited as "McCoy Tyner."

Coltrane felt that "McCoy has a beautiful lyric concept that is essential to complement the rest of us," while Elvin said that "Even I can't play with him" . . . "He uses so many accents."⁸² The unpredictable rhythmic nature of Tyner's style behind the soloist made ensemble cliches impossible. By the same token, the pianist recalls the appropriateness of bassist Jimmy Garrison's contribution to the music.

I believe Reggie Workman went with Art Blakey after he left, and Jimmy Garrison came to us from Ornette Coleman. This was around December, 1961. I don't remember exactly why Reggie left, but I'll say this about Jimmy, his time and choice of notes was the best of all the bass players John had used. He stayed more in the background, and that was what John really wanted."⁸³

Alto saxophonist, bass clarinetist, and flutist Eric Dolphy, like Coltrane, continued to maintain ties between his hard bop roots and his more radical experimentation. The level of contribution that he made to the polyrhythmic fabric in Coltrane's ensemble is extremely visible in the contrasting approach he takes on his solo in *My Favorite Things* on the Burrill Crohn film John Coltrane: The Coltrane Legacy, where he breaks away from the overwhelming predominance of triplets to create a new layer of melodic and

⁸² Jazz Masters of the Fifties, p. 206.

⁸³ Chasin' the Trane, p. 149.

polyrhythmic tension (**Example 7**). Similarly, the length of Coltrane's melodic lines added an elongated rhythmic phrase dimension that provided yet another level of polyrhythmic tension. While Coltrane's stylistic development evolved gradually from traditional hard bop to a freer musical approach in a highly methodical fashion, Dolphy continued to oscillate between the two opposing stylistic poles. He participated as co-leader in the 1960 *Free Jazz* recording with Ornette Coleman, then recorded with Oliver Nelson and Booker Little a year later in sessions that were decisively hard bop oriented. Yet Dolphy's influence on Coltrane had far reaching consequences in directing his music toward free jazz.¹

Coltrane and Dolphy had been friends for many years. In Dolphy's many visits to his home they often practiced together and came to realize that they held many ideas about music in common. They felt that there should be some raggedness about their music in order to move closer to the imperfect perfection of nature.² Coltrane felt that Dolphy's presence in the band opened up new possibilities.

Eric and I have been talking music for quite a few years, since about 1954. We've been close for quite a while. We watched music . . . discussed what was being done down through the years, because we

¹ *Free Jazz*, p. 27.

² *Coltrane*, p. 134.

love music. . . Since he's been in the band, he's been a broadening effect on us. There are a lot of things we try that we never tried before.⁸⁶

To Dolphy, in an attitude similar to that of Ornette Coleman's, tempered intonation in jazz was of secondary interest. While Coltrane expanded the human-like quality of his sound with harmonics and multiphonics, Dolphy augmented the timbre of his individual voice with a sound that often avoided precisely definable pitches. Just as Coltrane's spontaneous compositional vocabulary assimilated all his individual performance characteristics into a unified vocabulary, Dolphy too integrated the various elements involved in his highly unusual sonic language that reflected the qualities of the human voice to an even greater extent. His disdain for traditional approaches to sound production brought about the same kind of skepticism that critics had attached to Lester Young's music when he broke with the standard conventions by altering pitches with substitute fingerings and took a linear rather than arpeggiated approach in his melodic conception. Dolphy admitted that his flute playing was inspired by bird songs, to the astonishment of critics.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Don DeMicheal, "John Coltrane and Eric Dolphy Answer the Critics," in *Down Beat*, April 12, 1962, pp. 20 - 23.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* p. 28.

After being connected by journalists to what has been dubbed the "new thing," Dolphy and Coltrane, were both praised and damned by the musical press. In a November 23, 1961 article, *Down Beat* associate editor John Tynan became the first critic to take a strong position against these two musicians.

At Hollywood's Renaissance club, I listened to a horrifying demonstration of what appears to be a growing anti-jazz trend exemplified by these foremost proponents of what is termed avant garde music. I heard a good rhythm section . . . go to waste behind nihilistic exercises of the two horns. . . Coltrane and Dolphy seem intent on deliberately destroying [swing]. . . They seem bent on pursuing an anarchistic course in their music that can but be termed anti-jazz.⁸⁸

Although opinions such as that stated above have severely damaged the careers and economic status of innovative jazz musicians continuously, they are nebulous, perfidious, and clearly devoid of musical information. The content rests on unsubstantiated and highly subjective lay opinions. This led Cecil Taylor to express his general contempt for critics in a 1963 *Village Voice* interview. "Critics are sustained by our vitality. From afar, the uninformed egos ever growing arbitrarily attempt to give

⁸⁸ Coltrane, p. 148.

absolutes."⁸⁹ Critics rarely assume the more appropriate position of restricting their comments to social or historical aspects of the music. Furthermore, as Kofsky points out, not only are these usually lacking in a musical, sociological, or historical background, but most do not derive the major portion of their income from criticism; rather, they are dependent for their livelihoods on other unrelated employment sources. Even the more fortunate few end up writing record jacket notes or advertising copy for the record industry. Consequently, the most basic prerequisite of all artistic criticism, that which demands that the critic be free to arrive at his or her verdicts without being subtly or overtly coerced by external influences, is sometimes preempted by self-seeking and ambitious media politics. Despite all these inadequacies, many of these same critics end up influencing the public at large drastically by being allowed to vote in the annual *Down Beat* International Jazz Critics Poll each year.⁹⁰ An equally improper equivalent of such a body of people, controlling a significant economic factor in the business of art production, rarely exists (movie critics may be an exception) in any other American or European art form outside jazz.

7"Audiences haven't changed much. They say Dizzy and Bird had to face a lot of hostility; but they had their good audiences too. Eventually, the listeners move right along with the musicians.

⁸⁹ Four Lives, p. 30.

⁹⁰ Black Nationalism, pp. 71-76.

"Jazz is so much a music of individuality that every new artist with any originality effects a change in the overall scene. Lester Young represented as great a change, in his time, as some of the things that are happening now. So did Bird.⁹¹

Paradoxically, those jazz writers who have demonstrated an affinity for the music have more recently been labeled "the radical criticpolemicist" by an author (Ronald Radano in the Annual Review of Jazz Studies, 1985) who apparently fails to understand the unfortunate interchange between African-American jazz and European-American racism, and fails to see the objectivity involved in Frank Kofsky's observation (in his book, Black Nationalism and the Revolution in Music) regarding an issue that is an undeniable aspect of the American jazz journalistic tradition and of the social condition that existed in America in general during this period. Kofsky writes:

I believe that the editorial staff of Down Beat is thoroughly ingrained with the precepts of white supremacy - so much so, indeed, that they are an integral part of the magazine's frame of reference which can be taken for granted without conditional reiteration. That is why black nationalism, as well as other forms of radicalism, which threatens to disrupt the status quo, are anathema

⁹¹ Feather, Leonard, "Coltrane Shaping Musical Revolt," New York Post (Jazz Beat), October 18, 1964.

to its editors, why they are at such pains to discredit all radical ideologies.⁹²

Radano feels that "At times the polemic of the white radical critic equalled or surpassed that of (Leroi) Jones. . . unquestionably the most hostile was Frank Kofsky . . . " If the fact that white jazz critics can share a perspective on a form of revolutionary American music is still noteworthy in American jazz literature near the close of the twentieth century, then the social and journalistic condition that Kofsky refers to is apparently still in evidence. These issues certainly effected Coltrane's musical career. He was delighted with Dolphy's playing because he respected the fact that "Eric's into everything;" yet heavy critical protests led Coltrane's advisors to eventually convince him to ask Dolphy to leave his ensemble.⁹³

He just came in and sat in with us for about three nights and everybody enjoyed it, because his presence added some fire to the band. He and I have known each other a long time, and I guess you'd say we were students of the jazz scene," he smiled. "We'd exchange ideas and so we just decided to go ahead and see if we could do something within this group. Eric is really gifted and I feel he's going to produce something inspired, but although we've been

⁹² Quoted in "Jazz Avant - Garde," pp. 76 - 77.

⁹³ Jazz Masters, p. 205.

talking about music for years. I don't know where he's going, and I don't know where *I'm* going. He's interested in trying to progress, however, and so am I, so we have quite a bit in common.⁹⁴

Although these advisors have not been identified by name in any of the sources I have found, it is certain that the decision made was heavily influenced by responses to Coltrane's and Dolphy's music in the press.⁹⁵ Here we come upon a poignant examples of the negative influence of a racist press on Coltrane's music. Some people felt that if Coltrane had been able to keep his ensemble with Dolphy intact, it could have turned out to be "one of the most interesting in jazz."⁹⁶

In March, 1962, Dolphy left Coltrane's ensemble as a regular member and formed his own group. Although he had worked regularly with Coltrane, relatively few of the recordings he participated in were released, and of those commercially issued his solos were often edited out.⁹⁷ In an effort to clarify issues surrounding their musical conceptions at the time, Coltrane and

⁹⁴ "Conversation With Coltrane," p. 7.

⁹⁵ Goldberg, Joe. Jazz Masters of the Fifties. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1965). p. 205. Goldberg's observation is echoed by Vladimir Simosko and Barry Tepperman in their biography Eric Dolphy: A Musical Biography and Discography (New York: Da Capo Press, 1971), pp. 62-63.

⁹⁶ Vladimir Simosko and Barry Tepperman, Eric Dolphy: A Musical Biography and Discography (New York: Da Capo Press, 1971), p. 62. Cited hereafter as Eric Dolphy.

⁹⁷ Eric Dolphy, pp. 63-67.

Dolphy agreed to an interview with critic Don DeMicheal in an article that was printed in *Down Beat* on April 21, 1962.

DeMicheal opens with the following background.

John Coltrane has been the center of critical controversy ever since he unfurled his sheets of sound in his days with Miles Davis. At first disparaged for his sometimes involved, multi-noted solos, Coltrane paid little heed and continued exploring music. In time, his harmonic approach - for the sheets were really rapid chord running, in the main - was accepted, even praised, by most jazz critics.⁹⁸

Coltrane explained that the solos in his band were long "because all the soloists try to explore all the avenues that the tune offers. . . By the time we finish, the song is spread out over a pretty long time."⁹⁹ He assures DeMicheal that things aren't planned that way, but that the performances seem to be progressing in that direction. When asked what he and Dolphy were trying to accomplish, Coltrane answers:

It's more than beauty that I feel in music - that I think musicians feel in music. What we know we feel we'd like to convey to the

⁹⁸ Coltrane, p. 148.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 149.

listener. We hope that this can be shared by all. I think, basically, that's about what it is we're trying to do. We never talked about just what we were trying to do. If you ask me that question, I might say this today and tomorrow say something entirely different, because there are many things to do in music.

But over-all, I think the main thing a musician would like to do is to give a picture to the listener of the many wonderful things he knows of and senses in the universe. That's what music is to me - it's just another way of saying this is a big, beautiful universe we live in, that's been given to us, and here's an example of just how magnificent and encompassing it is. That's what I would like to do. I think that's one of the greatest things you can do in life, and we try to do it in some way. The musician's way is through his music.¹⁰⁰

In maintaining the clarity within the highly flexible and oscillating polyrhythmic stratification of the "classic quartet," the bass was the obvious compositional choice for Coltrane. His music would continue to undergo new discoveries that were reflected in each change in personnel from the time Garrison joined the group. *Chasin' the Trane*, for instance, was a fifteen minute blues that Coltrane performed to the accompaniment of just bass and drums after he began to examine Ornette Coleman's music more closely.¹⁰¹ He had performed with this configuration before on

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

¹⁰¹ *Jazz Masters*, p. 205.

Slow Trane and *Trane's Slow Blues* in 1957 (with Earl May on bass and Art Taylor on drums) when the pianist had failed to show up for the recording session, and, as previously noted, he had played while the pianists strolled in Miles Davis's band and with his own ensemble. During this period Sonny Rollins's *Freedom Suite*, recorded in 1958 for the Riverside record label, also featured a pianoless trio (with drummer Max Roach and bassist Oscar Pettiford). Coltrane tells Kofsky some of his thoughts on this tendency.

Well, I like to instruct the piano players that whenever they wish they can just lay out and let it go on as it is. Because after a while, lots of times, the pianists, well, they get tired. If you can't think of anything else to play - stroll!¹⁰²

Coltrane saw no purpose in having any component of his group function in a mere utilitarian capacity. Of his own function within the ensemble he felt "If I'm going to take an hour to say something I can say in ten minutes, well, I'd better say it in ten minutes." The *Chasin' the Trane* composition on the Impulse record album *"Live" At The Village Vanguard* is, nonetheless, a deliberate decision that is more than a change in ensemble texture and timbre within a larger compositional context. It

¹⁰² Black Nationalism, p. 231-32.

created another opportunity (early in his career) for Coltrane's melodic development and exploration to unfold, free from harmonic limitations that piano chords usually impose upon the music.

Although Coltrane proved that he could adapt his compositions to any given time frame, even that of a fastidious television format, he continued to gain longer solo improvisations in his nonrestrictive performances. By the time the group came to Great Britain in 1962, Coltrane suggested that still more unexpected changes of events were in store regarding the ensemble's direction, in a Melody Maker article covering his engagement at the Half Note.

I think it is going back a little. For the past few years we have been playing a more modern form of jazz rather than progressive. The next thing for me is for rhythmic aspirations. I may do some work with some more drums - on record, anyway. Not necessarily featuring any one drummer more, but featuring more than one drummer. If this works out in the early stages, I may extend it to a stage work.

I am beginning to get more interested in the drum itself. I feel that since we used fewer chordal progressions, we need more rhythm, and I want to experiment.¹⁰³

His new direction was misunderstood and, once again, severely criticized initially, and he was justifiably discontent with the reception he received in England. Rather than taking the safer route of presenting a planned concert of old standards, he performed a concert of progressive jazz that, writer Barry McRae reports, "shook many of us, perhaps a little unprepared for such new ideals in the process of creation."¹⁰⁴ During this period, even the fact that Coltrane did not announce the music he was performing (because he felt it was superfluous¹⁰⁵) became a part of the controversy over his presentation style. According to critic Don DeMicheal, "The anti-jazz epithet was picked up by Leonard Feather and used as a basis for critical essays of [sic] Coltrane, Dolphy, Ornette Coleman, and the "new thing" in general in *Down Beat* and *Show* magazines."¹⁰⁶ Answering his critics, Coltrane asked them to clarify their accusations.

¹⁰³ Melody Maker, London, July 11, 1964, p. 6.

¹⁰⁴ Jazz Cataclysm, p. 100.

¹⁰⁵ Coltrane, p. 177.

¹⁰⁶ As cited in Coltrane, p. 149.

I wish they would explain what they mean by anti-jazz. People have so many different definitions of jazz, how can anti-jazz be defined? And as for swinging, there are so many different ways to swing, too; a heavy four, or the Basie type feeling, or the kind that our group gets. How can you answer someone who says you don't swing?¹⁰⁷

Jazz history stands as evidence that no other improvising musician in the history of jazz had systematically transcended as many jazz styles as Coltrane had within a period of a decade; yet the overwhelming majority of critics failed to take this into account as they continued to view his music unfavorably. Coltrane's unanticipated reply to critics' accusation that he was practicing in public was as follows.

They are right, . . . But they should remember that I have been playing for almost twenty-five years. I have always practiced in public. But then that's the wrong word. If you are playing jazz, you have to play what comes out at any moment - something you have never said before. So the word should not be practice, but improvise.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

¹⁰⁸ "Melody Maker," July 11, 1964, p. 6.

Not all of the listening public was pugnacious about Coltrane's methods of spontaneous composition as it continued along its evolutionary axis. Composer George Russell contributed an accurate appraisal when he said "Coltrane, it seems to me, is just bursting at the seams to demolish the chord barrier, and because of this, he is enlightening everyone to what can happen on a single chord."¹⁰⁹ An unidentified California writer made interesting and what would prove to be prophetic observations, in a March 29, 1962 review of the record album, *Coltrane "Live" at the Village Vanguard*.

John Coltrane continues to be one of the most creative jazz musicians alive. Today you can hear elements of his playing not only in other tenor players but in pianists and other hornmen as well.

This is primarily because his entire conception and approach is wholly individual and completely valid to the point of being accepted by all other jazz musicians (as opposed to Ornette Coleman, who is wholly individual but not totally accepted).¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ *Jazz Masters*, p. 204.

¹¹⁰ As cited in *Coltrane*, p. 147. Simpkins footnotes the quotation exactly as follows: ? *The News* ?, a California paper, 3/29/62.

On June 29, 1964 Eric Dolphy passed away in Europe, where he had decided to live because of the racism in America. A few weeks before he died, he told German critic Joachim Berendt, "I'd like to stay in Europe. There is no race trouble. I'll live in Paris."¹¹¹ Upon hearing of his friend's final transition Coltrane remarked:

Whatever I say would be an understatement. I can only say my life was made much better by knowing him. He was one of the greatest people I've ever known, as a man, a friend, and a musician.¹¹²

The composition *A Love Supreme*, recorded December 9 and 10, 1964, stands as a pivotal work in Coltrane's stylistic development, and appears to reflect the tragic loss of his musical companion and his spiritual/musical direction at the end of his third stylistic period. Coltrane gives us a glimpse into his state of mind in his comments that were included in the liner notes that were released with this recording. Although no direct reference to Eric Dolphy are made, the solemnity and dignity of both the words and music on this occasion certainly serve as a subtle and appropriate eulogy for his friend, in addition to being Coltrane's own testimonial.

¹¹¹ Eric Dolphy, p. 86.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 87.

DEAR LISTENER:

ALL PRAISE BE TO GOD TO WHOM ALL PRAISE IS DUE.

Let us pursue Him in the righteous path. Yes it is true; "seek and ye shall find." Only through Him can we know the most wondrous bestowal.

During the year 1957, I experienced, by the grace of God, a spiritual awakening which was to lead me to a richer, fuller, more productive life. At that time, in gratitude, I humbly asked to be given the means and privilege to make others happy through music. I feel this has been granted through His grace.

ALL PRAISE TO GOD.

As time and events moved on, a period of irresolution did prevail. I entered into a phase which was contradictory to the pledge and away from the esteemed path; but thankfully, now and again through the unerring and merciful hand of God, I do perceive and have been duly re-informed of His OMNIPOTENCE, and of our need for, and dependence on Him. At this time I would like to tell you that NO MATTER WHAT . . . IT IS WITH GOD. HE IS GRACIOUS AND MERCIFUL. HIS WAY IS THROUGH LOVE, IN WHICH WE ALL ARE. IT IS TRULY - A LOVE SUPREME - .

This album is a humble offering to Him. An attempt to say "THANK YOU GOD" through our work, even as we do in our hearts and with our tongues. May He help and strengthen all men in every good endeavor . . .

After introducing the four movements and thanking all those who participated in the recording session, Coltrane ends, "ALL PRAISE TO GOD. *With love to all, I thank you,* - John Coltrane.¹¹³

A Love Supreme is a transitional composition for Coltrane that serves as both a summary of the ideas and experiences he had encountered and developed in the past, and as a precursor for his extended works in his final period. Lewis Porter demonstrates how a comparison of Coltrane's poem with his improvisation reveals that his saxophone solo is a wordless syllabic recitation of the poem.¹¹⁴ His solos frequently punctuate his musical recitation with the recurrence of the phrase "Thank you God." Porter also notes that this is the most extensive example of this practice in jazz and that Coltrane, like Lester Young, always showed a concern for a "vocal" articulation and phrasing in his performances of ballads. As noted earlier, Coltrane's *Alabama* was reportedly based upon a speech by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., but the words are unknown.

¹¹³ John Coltrane: A Love Supreme (New York: Impulse Records, December 9-10, 1964). Album notes by Coltrane.

¹¹⁴ A Love Supreme, p. 613.

A Love Supreme opens with an implied modality based on a pitch collection in F (Example 8). The theme sets up the conjunct fourths which are a primary feature of the composition *Acknowledgement* (Example 9), and which becomes a feature in much of the music Coltrane creates in his next period. Coltrane opposes both the implied tonality and the theme as stated in the bass.¹¹⁵ In *Resolution*, the second movement, eight-bar cadential periods in Eb unify the music (Example 10), while the next movement (*Pursuance*) applies modal treatment in Bb to a twelve bar blues framework (Example 11). *Psalm*, the final movement, is based on C and Coltrane finally succumbs to the strict modality of the transposed version of the original scale. Both the outer movements and the internal ones form movements from tonic to the dominant of that tonality (i.e., F to C in movements I and IV, and from Eb to Bb in movements II to III), with the corresponding scalar material demonstrating an even closer relationship (Example 12).

Within each of the four movements of the Suite a contrasting structural framework provides a different improvisational problem. The diversity between movements is counterbalanced by motivic ties between sections (Example 13); these motives

¹¹⁵ *Free Jazz*, p. 33.

are often developed sequentially within the individual movements through a wide variety of keys (Example 14) creating bitonal tension between the supporting instrumental parts and the solo saxophone. An ebb and flow occurs to propel the music forward, with Coltrane unwinding after reaching each climax. This process sets up the recapitulation in those cases where a specific theme launched the movement.¹¹⁶ The intensity that results from the extremely economical compositional means throughout *A Love Supreme* becomes a feature of much of Coltrane's music in his fourth stylistic period. It may be true, as Andrew White suggests, that Coltrane's standard tertian approach took on a different shape as he performed with pianists such as McCoy Tyner, Bill Evans, Cedar Walton, Wynton Kelly, and others who utilized quartal techniques in their playing. After *A Love Supreme*, however, Coltrane's music would make use of quartal harmony, large scale formal devices, and pentatonic scale structures more than ever before. McCoy Tyner mentions how these devices evolved naturally out of the music to David Wild.

Wild: One thing that's always interested me as a piano player- looking back, the changes you were playing behind John, those very open quartal voicings, seemed to fit so well. Where did they come from? I know Hindemith uses that kind of voicing.

¹¹⁶ *A Love Supreme*, p. 620.

Tyner: I don't know where. I think I was hearing this style. I had a collection of Debussy records when I was real young - I don't know where these records came from - but I liked his sound, his open whole-tone system. I don't think I was trying to copy that, though, it just interested me.¹¹⁷

Reviewing Coltrane's third period we see that he began with a desire to sort things out, to develop the harmonic devices he had been exploring, and with a strong interest in expressing himself on soprano saxophone in addition to his tenor. He made it clear that music was an expression of the human heart, to him, and stated that the next stage in evolution would involve "rhythmic aspirations" (possibly involving multiple percussionists).

The devastating affect that an ignorant and racist press can have on an African-American jazz artist's music was also witnessed. Eric Dolphy's and John Coltrane's professional musical relationship was apparently destroyed by individuals who were responding to adverse criticism. The press had concerned Dolphy and Coltrane to such an extent that they granted Don DeMicheal an interview to address the matter of inaccurate information having been disseminated to the public about their music. Coltrane had attempted to explain the purpose of his so-called "long" solos to

¹¹⁷ "McCoy Tyner," p. 19.

DeMicheal as well. These sincere efforts prove that Coltrane was concerned about the press his music was receiving and began to take charge in attempting to find remedies to the problem. He must have realized that the writings these critics produced, however erroneous and superficial they may have been, was the largest body of documentation that posterity would be left. Any African-American artist would recognize the potential danger that false information could have on the future; Western history has already proven that erroneous information could be utilized to construct myths and perpetuate racial prejudices. African and African-American authors and scholars such as Dr. Yosef A. A. ben-Jochannan, Rudolph R. Windsor, Ivan Van Sertima, William Loren Katz, J. A. Rogers, Cheikh Anta Diop, George G. M. James, Runoko Rashidi and others have contributed to an evolving effort to present information on African contributions to the development of both the ancient and modern worlds, and to dispel the myths, fabrications, and stigmas that Western society has perpetuated to serve its own racist agenda. It is therefore imperative that African-American musicians maintain control over the documentation of the various dimensions of their own history, to avoid the continuation of a similar misrepresentation of their music both now and in the future. This vigilance will remain necessary until such a time as the human race develops as a whole beyond the need to distort historical data in an effort to exploit a segment of the world community and to distort facts to compensate for malignant social insecurities.

FOURTH PERIOD (1965 to Coltrane's death on July 17, 1967)

All tones are born from the heart of man. Sentiment being stirred within manifests without as sound; when the sounds have become beautiful, they become musical tones. Therefore, the tones of a well-governed period are peaceful and joyful and the government is based on harmony. The tones of a troubled epoch are full of hatred and irritation, and the government is opposed to reason. The tones of a kingdom falling into ruins are sad and anxious, and the people mournful. Sounds and musical tones are in conformity with the government.¹

A few years after collaborating with Coltrane on the record album *John Coltrane: Coltrane Time* (United Artists 5638, October 13, 1958, also under the title *Hard Driving Jazz*), Cecil Taylor said that "Coltrane has a feeling for the hysteria of the times."² In March, 1965 the "New Black Music" concert was presented under the guidance of LeRoi Jones as a manifestation of a new black nationalism.³ Appearing with musicians such as Archie Shepp, Albert and Donald Ayler, Sun Ra's Myth Science Arkestra, and

¹ Dane Rudhyar, The Magic of Tone and the Art of Music. London: Shambhala, 1982). p. 170. From a French translation by the sinologist Edouard Chavannes of *The Historical Memoirs of Su-Ma-Tsien* (or Chou Ma Tchien) who flourished about 100 B. C. The *Memoirs* contain long sections about music, astrology, historical events, great rites, and the calendar. Dane Rudhyar is responsible for the translation into English.

² C. O. Simpkins, Coltrane: A Biography (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1989), p. 169. Hereafter cited as Coltrane.

³ Ekkehard Jost, Free Jazz (New York, Da Capo Press, 1981), p. 85. Cited hereafter as Free Jazz.

other members of the jazz avant garde was John Coltrane. Although his music had always aligned him with the free jazz community, this was Coltrane's first public appearance with the commercially less successful members of that community. He was contemplating other changes as well. That same year Coltrane told his friend, Nigerian percussionist Babatunde Olatunji, of his frustration.

I'm used to the critics complaining about me, and sooner or later they should understand my music. If they don't, there's nothing I can do about it. But really bothering me is the way I have to move around, New York today, Detroit tomorrow, San Francisco the day after that. It seems . . . I've been using up so much energy traveling from place to place that I hardly can find time for any writing any new music or even thinking about what I'm going to do next.⁴

Olatunji suggested that they work together to create an African cultural center to present their own concerts. Coltrane agreed and deposited a thousand dollars, jointly with Yusef Lateef, reserving Philharmonic Hall for a concert on January 14, 1968. Unfortunately, Coltrane died five months prior to the scheduled concert.

⁴ J. C. Thomas, Chasin' the Trane: The Music and Mystique of John Coltrane (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1975), p. 203.

John Coltrane's final stylistic period marks the culmination of his artistic growth, and stands as a compendium of his total prior achievements. From the beginning of 1965 to his death on July 17, 1967, Coltrane developed a progressively more abstract and hypermetrical approach to his spontaneous composing, while maintaining connections with his musical past by the continual development of the ideas generated in his earlier periods, and by retaining compositions such as *Naima* and *My Favorite Things* in his performance repertoire to the end of his career. Some scholars feel that his two final recordings, *Expression* and *Interstellar Space* "exhibit the crystallization of all of the earlier Coltrane traits, although used in an abstract context."⁵ The following chapter will attempt to substantiate a similar hypothesis.

In discussing a cross section of Coltrane's compositional output, Wendall Logan provides stylistic categories that can also serve as a convenient outline for the present examination in looking briefly at his contributions as a composer. These categories are: (1) arrangements of "standard" tunes (*My Favorite Things*, *Greensleeves*, *Summertime*), (2) original pieces which follow the structural format and are based on alterations of the harmonic framework of "standards (*Countdown*, *Giant Steps*)," (3) blues (4)

⁵ Andrew N. White III, Trane 'n Me: A Treatise on the Music of John Coltrane (Washington, D.C.: Andrew's Musical Enterprises, 1981), p.53. Cited hereafter as Trane 'n Me.

"modal" pieces (*Impressions, India*), (5) extended pieces consisting of several movements or sections - each consisting of contrasting "head" material (*A Love Supreme, Suite*, recorded in 1964 and 1965, respectively), and extended pieces which are motivically derived (*Selflessness, The Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, Ascension*).⁶

In the many recorded versions of *My Favorite Things*, we find the conflation of the Richard Rogers melody with Coltrane's modified modality becoming increasingly modified in terms of melodic, harmonic and rhythmic interpolations. These events take place over a formal structure that always remains basically as it was in the initial recording of the composition. Consequently, regardless of the differences in lengths of performances of the selection or the levels of abstraction that occur within the development of the composition, the basic shape of the unfolding of musical events remains constant. A similar metamorphosis and retention can be observed in the seven or eight known recorded versions of *Naima* that exist. This ballad was one of Coltrane's early experiments with bitonality (Example 1) in which the harmonic structure gradually loses control over the individual improvisations, that seemingly were played in complete abandonment of and opposition to the initial musical statements. The use of a pedal point (Eb in the first 3 measures and Bb in measures 5-12 of *Naima*) and the frequent employment of the minor third and its

⁶ Wendall Logan, "The Case of Mr. John Coltrane: A Compositional View" *Numus West*, 2/2, Spring 1975, p. 40. Cited hereafter as Mr. J. C.

inversion as a melodic interval, are qualities often found in Coltrane ballads. In addition to these features, *Naima* also utilizes perfect fourths, tritones, and major and minor seconds in its harmonic motion. Additionally, in a noticeable departure from the harmonic tendencies of either the song form or blues harmonies of Bebop⁷, *Naima* contains implied whole tone scale areas and displays an even greater range of distortion of the original model. Yet it too retains a prominent skeletal structure that unifies and molds each performance throughout Coltrane's later stylistic periods.

The music from the second category evolves in a different fashion. Within conventional structures, we can see that the arpeggiated "sheets of sound" are related to the rapid superimpositions and harmonic substitutions; both are vertical representations of chords expanded to the upper partials of a given root (i.e., 9ths, 11ths and 13ths). These more disjoint configurations still maintain their melodic function, although the leading part now seems more angular and less lyrical, in the vocal sense of the term. Traditional blues harmonies are also augmented to include most of the chromatic tones above a given root (Example 2), and remain a guiding force in all of his solo improvisations. Coltrane continued to alter and assimilate each of the musical elements he encountered throughout his career into a unified compositional

⁷ With the exception of the last four measures that are closely related to the final harmonic sequence in *Slow Dance*, a ballad by Alonzo Levister which Coltrane recorded with The Red Garland Trio in 1957 (*Traneing In*, Prestige 7651).

vocabulary without discarding any particular one of his experiments entirely in favor of a new one. Therefore, by combining his various harmonic innovations with a wide range of approaches to rhythm, then, again, with the "modal," pentatonic, and quartal tendencies (that are clear in *A Love Supreme* and later compositions) of his more horizontally oriented conceptions, Coltrane verges upon an ecumenical spontaneous compositional language. This results in a systematic route to improvisational freedom through which Coltrane expresses the mystical/spiritual zeal that the titles of his later compositions begin to suggest. Joe Goldberg mentions that Coltrane had expressed an interest in twelve tone music; but when asked about the seeming impossibility of improvising serially he replied, "Damn the rules, it's the feeling that counts. You play all twelve notes in your solo anyway."⁸

Both scholars and musicians argue opposing positions regarding the assertion that John Coltrane was the "Father of the Avant Garde." Because of the highly evolutionary nature of Coltrane's work, Andrew White feels that this title is unwarranted, basing his position on a definition of avant gardists as those who are involved in a radical departure from the status quo.⁹ David Baker points out that "As with many other jazz musicians, John Coltrane's compositions are in many respects crystallizations of his

⁸ Joe Goldberg, *Jazz Masters of the Fifties* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1965) p. 210. Hereafter cited as *Jazz Masters*.

⁹ *Trane 'n Me*, p. 52.

improvisational beliefs."¹⁰ Looking at Coltrane's written compositions as a microcosmic representation of his spontaneous compositions (macrocosm) may therefore prove to be insightful.

If a close look is taken at the entire history of jazz improvisation, it becomes evident that Coltrane stands alone in both the range of contrasts that can be found in his improvisational output, and in the range of deviation that can be found between his early music and the music at the end of his more than twelve-year career as a recording artist. As implied earlier, the systematic thread that traverses this composer's output and binds it together, may be found in the compositions of master composers such as Ellington and Mingus, but not in the evolution of their spontaneous improvisations. In the literal sense of the term, it would seem that such an accomplishment is certainly ahead of the musical status quo that has been documented, especially since the total abandonment of musical systems is much more commonplace in the twentieth century than attempts to obtain an individual artistic voice through an eclectic approach to fundamental musical problems.

The laconic melodic statements and structural simplicity of the later "modal" compositions, most of which are based on one tonal center (as opposed to the two or more modes involved in those

¹⁰ David Baker, "Profile of a Giant," Jazz Spotlight News, Feb-Mar 1980, p. 39. Jazz Spotlight Productions, 701 Seventh Ave., Suite 9 West, New York, NY 10036.

compositions influenced by Miles Davis¹¹), lead the way into Coltrane's use of ostinato, drones and his movement toward motivic development. The composer learned that reduction in both melodic and harmonic complexity allowed for the generation of free-flowing compositional invention; and that static devices like ostinati and metrical clarity provide a focal point inexorable enough to prevent the listener from becoming totally disorientated by the recalcitrant music that occurred above those functional devices. Referring to the David Wild interview mentioned earlier once again, Tyner discusses the affect the music had on him as a performer with Coltrane, as well as the affect the music had on many listener.

Wild: *Impulse* put out a version of the *Meditations* suite done by the quartet which is really interesting, really experimental, because you can see that transition between the sound when Elvin was playing and the sound after Rashied came in. There are three or four levels of rhythm going on at once, and you're playing chords that were getting away from any one tonality. One of those chords-it's a nice sound, it's got like a tritone in there somewhere, it's not straight fourths, it's got a nice bite to it. I'm going to sit down at the piano one day and figure out what the hell it was.

Tyner: When you find out, let me know, will you? (laughs) No, it's... I found out that a lot of it is intuitive, in the sense that when you're in a

¹¹ *MLJ.C.*, p. 42.

situation like that, you're sort of indoctrinated into the sound. You don't think about "What am I playing," you just play a chord that fits with whatever the sound is. I really feel very comfortable doing things like that.

Wild: In the early '60s the music that you were playing with John was changing and growing in different directions. Did you find any difficulty taking the audience along with you?

Tyner: No, because I learned something from John's approach which was very interesting. He always worked from a very fundamental foundation or element. He never lost sight of the nucleus of what we were trying to do. What made it such a vital force and also truly part of the lineage of the music was that it maintained certain elements; there was this firm foundation present. You could break it down to its bare fundamental elements-it wasn't just complex complex. It was something that built from simplistics, it was very simple but yet complex at the same time. Which kind of reminds me of life in itself (laughs). Being made up of simple elements but yet very complex in many ways.

I've found that music for complexity's sake doesn't seem like it really works. So therefore sometimes we'd play things that really would appeal to people of all age brackets, like *My Favorite Things*. We had people of 65,70 come in to hear that music, it's funny, and they would say, "Play *My Favorite Things*." I think that was very important in the group, its forms were very simple basically but lent themselves to more complex work.

Flexibility too was another thing I learned from playing with John and Elvin, flexibility of time and form. (Short silence). Learned a lot of things (laughs). Yeah, it was education, it really was.¹²

While the sectional spontaneous compositions *A Love Supreme* and the more continuous *Suite*¹³ are highly successful extended works for quartet, the music from the latter category outlined by Logan also demonstrates Coltrane's use of larger ensembles in an improvisational context. Before the recording of *Africa/Brass*, Coltrane had played some of Dolphy's compositions while they were practicing together and expressed a desire to create a big band in which everyone played freely and unrestricted by chord progressions.¹⁴ Within the uncluttered and often exotic moods and timbres of some of the extended works, Coltrane often played duets with Elvin Jones¹⁵ and began to feel even more restricted by the piano. In an interview with Frank Kofsky he expresses his concern.

¹² "McCoy Tyner," p.19.

¹³ John Coltrane: Transition (Impulse 9195), Recorded in May and June, 1955. *Transition, Suite - Prayer and Meditation: Day, Peace, and After, Prayer and Meditation: Evening, Affirmation, Prayer and Meditation: 4 AM.*

¹⁴ Coltrane, p. 134.

¹⁵ On the compositions *Vigil* and *Kulu Se Mama* from the album John Coltrane: Kulu Se Mama (Impulse 9106, June and October, 1965).

I still use the piano, and I haven't reached the point where I feel I don't need it . . . (but) when you're not playing on a given progression, you don't really need it to state these things. And it would get in your way to have somebody going in another direction and you are trying to go in another, there it would be better for you not to have it.¹⁶

The 1967 duet recording *Interstellar Space*, with drummer Rashied Ali, removed every scintilla of external harmonic restriction and provided a setting in which the exemplary rhythmic qualities of saxophone playing could be exhibited. Like the emphasis on ostinati during his late works, the percussive use of wind instruments is a distinct quality of African music. A focus on rhythm and the frequent departure from the more legato style of saxophone playing can be found in the simple motives and themes contained in the more traditional musical structures of compositions such as *One Up, One Down*¹⁷ and *Out of This World*¹⁸ as well. It is the extended spontaneous composition *Ascension*, however, that sets the tone at the beginning of Coltrane's most mature stylistic period.

On June 25, 1965, Coltrane created the approximately forty-five minute spontaneous composition in the Impulse studio. Augmenting the Coltrane Quartet were vigorous young musicians

¹⁶ Coltrane, p. 218.

¹⁷ *New Thing at Newport* (Impulse 94), July 2, 1965.

¹⁸ John Coltrane: *Live in Seattle* (Impulse 9202-2) September 30, 1965.

Marion Brown and John Tchicai on alto saxophone; Pharoah Sanders and Archie Shepp, tenor saxophone; trumpeters Dewey Johnson and Freddie Hubbard; and the additional string bass of Art Davis. The significance of this recording session lies in the intense emotional impact *Ascension* had (and continues to have) on the listener. The eleven piece ensemble collaborated on what a review by jazz theorist and critic Bill Mathieu of Down Beat magazine referred to as "possibly the most powerful human sound ever recorded."¹⁹ Marion Brown confirms the piquant effect of the music, "We did two takes, and they both had that kind of thing in them that makes people scream. The people who were in the studio were screaming."²⁰ Ornette Coleman's *Free Jazz* ²¹ is the obvious forerunner for this approach to spontaneous composition where the "emphasis was on texture rather than the making of an organizational entity," as Archie Shepp explains about the development of the new form created by Coleman's composition. He continues, "There was unity, but it was a unity of sounds and textures rather than like an A B A (ternary) approach."²²

It becomes apparent that, in spontaneous composition involving individual musicians free from melodic and harmonic constraints, the act of creating the music becomes at least as important as the physical recording that results as an end product of the

¹⁹ Free Jazz , p. 86.

²⁰ John Coltrane: Ascension (Impulse A 95), Liner notes by A. B. Spellman. Cited hereafter as Ascension.

²¹ Ornette Coleman, Free Jazz (Atlantic 1364), for double quartet.

²² Ascension.

experience. No effort can be found to placate outside interests and , to the musicians involved, it is of secondary concern as to whether or not the recording transcends the event of total intuitive communication during the process of spontaneous invention.²³ Archie Shepp discussed his perspective on the organization of this style of composition.

It achieves a certain kind of unity; it starts at a high level of intensity with the horns playing high and the other pieces playing low. This gets a quality of like male and female voices. It builds in intensity through all the solo passages, brass and reeds, until it gets to the final section where the rhythm takes over and brings it back down to the level it started at.

The idea is similar to what the action painters do in that it creates various surfaces of color which push into each other, creates tension and counter tension, and various fields of energy.²⁴

Ekkehard Jost points out that the thoroughly traditional elements, that are also present in the composition, may be obscured by the high level of intensity which gives some listeners the impression that each musician is playing exactly what he pleases. He continues to point out that the details of *Ascension* differ from Coleman's *Free Jazz* in the nature of involvement on the part of

²³ *Free Jazz*, p. 86.

²⁴ *Ascension*.

the individual performers, although these differences are merely "different dialects of the same language." As the musicians implied in their observations above, the session with Coltrane involved a process where, much of the time, the individual musical contributions were absorbed into the formation of an evolving texture. Finding musicians capable of handling the musical responsibility involved in having the kind of musical freedom the Coltrane ensemble was used experiencing is a difficult task, as McCoy Tyner discovered.

That's *another* point. I found it was very difficult at one point for me to find musicians to play with, because of my tenure with John. With John we could

come in, he would give us two notes and we could play a *whole* composition on two notes. We really could. I mean, sometimes he wouldn't bring in a tune, he'd bring in a scale, and we'd play the scale and everything would be right there.

We were familiar with each other, the musicianship was high. But then I ran into a situation where it was very difficult to find sidemen with the sort of experience and understanding to play like that. So I said, well, how can you allow that kind of freedom to someone who's not disciplined enough and not knowledgeable enough to handle it?²⁵

²⁵ "McCoy Tyner," pp.19-20.

The *Free Jazz* session, on the other hand, utilized the contributions of each improviser in a vital melodic role, with an independent life of his own, and guided entirely by the spontaneity on the moment. In the latter case, motivic connections and dove-tailing of the various parts create a polyphonic web of interaction.²⁶ Put another way, *Free Jazz* is a spontaneous polyphonic composition in which each melodic line maintains its own individuality, while *Ascension* is a spontaneous texture composition in which individual musical identities are merged. In addition to the structural framework imposed by the sectional divisions provided by the contrasting solo and ensemble textures, each collective improvisation is loosely based on different modal configurations.

The opening tonality is Bb Aeolian, which eventually transforms into D Phrygian when a concomitant change in rhythmic structure occurs. The collective improvisations, which end with transitions centered around F Phrygian, usually lead to solo sections in the Aeolian mode a perfect fifth below (Bb). Since both of the latter two modes share the same tones, an elastic and almost imperceptible modulation can occur, shifting only the placement of the fundamental tone of the mode. Other levels of contrast and surprise are presented by both solo and collective improvisational areas, in which the tonal focus is either completely opposed or obscured, and where the rhythm section alone provides clues as to

²⁶ *Free Jazz*, p. 89.

what an underlying tonal center might be. Yet we see again the division between soloist and rhythm section (accompaniment) becoming increasingly less defined in "free style" spontaneous composition.

Here, in the context of a larger ensemble with seven wind players, we again find Coltrane stressing the percussive qualities of wind instruments. As the individual rhythms of each wind player begin to interact and overlap with the others, the superimpositions form a conglomeration of hypermetric and polyrhythmic sonic layers that can only be framed, punctuated, and differentiated by the more periodic rhythmic accentuations coming from the rhythm section. Because this concept involved the engagement of another drummer (Rashid Ali), Elvin Jones was not completely satisfied with the musical situation. He discussed his position after his departure from the ensemble.

Let's just say he (Coltrane) has a unique conception of time, . . .

I don't really know why John brought him (Ali) in. There was some suggestion that it was to get an Eastern influence- but I don't see it. Those Indian drummers start learning drums as soon as the nipple is out of their mouth, and I don't think Ali has been further east than New York.

We have a mutual love and appreciation, and there has always been an understanding that when I wanted to leave, there would be no

difficulties. And if it comes to it, I would gladly go right back to John after a while.²⁷

Jones said he wanted to emphasize that Coltrane and he remain close friends as well as musical associates after his departure from the ensemble.

The motivic motivation that forms the nucleus of *Ascension* is played by Coltrane at the beginning of the initial collective improvisation. These short motivic cells are later treated sequentially and undergoes permutational development within the course of the composition. Jost notes that this motive is similar to the main theme of *A Love Supreme*, and suggests that the *Ascension* motive has a similar symbolic character as well. Knowing Coltrane's complete dedication to mystical/spiritual principles during his late periods would tend to confirm this hypothesis, just as knowing Mozart's affiliation with Masonic teachings substantiates the fact that *The Magic Flute* is filled with related symbolism. All of the compositions produced during Coltrane's fourth period bear mystical titles or exhibit the influence of either traditional Indian or African music.²⁸ The chronological position of *A Love Supreme* tends to indicate that it was the nexus between Coltrane's more mundane labels for compositions of the past and the arcane titles that are identified

²⁷ Mike Hennessey, "The Emancipation of Elvin Jones," *Down Beat*, March 24, 1966, p. 24.

²⁸ A glance at the discography in the appendix confirms this.

with his last stylistic period. In the September, 1965 interview with Michel Delorme and Claude Lenissois for the French magazine *Jazz Hot* referred to in the previous chapter, Coltrane mentions the importance of the emotions in his music at that time.

Even in the case of A Love Supreme I was satisfied with just running down the plan of work. It's simply twelve minor measures, developed, which form the texture of the last part, it's a minor blues. The first part doesn't call for a fixed number of measures, and the central section is composed of three groups of eight measures. For me, when I go from a calm moment to a moment of extreme tension, the only factors that push me are emotional factors, to the exclusion of all musical considerations. . .

I am searching for new territory to explore. Physically, I can't go any further than what I'm doing now in the form I practice. It always scares me a little to think that I'm still going to have to change. Very often, when I'm at a turning point, I put it off so that everybody can understand me before I've already changed.²⁹

The emotion that governs essential musical aspects of Coltrane's music during the present phase of development apparently also influenced his concern for his audience. Coltrane often expressed concern for and demonstrated munificence toward those with

²⁹ "Interview With John Coltrane," *Jazz Hot*, September 1965, p. 67.

whom his music came in contact. Although he aligned himself musically with the African-American musicians forming the jazz avant garde, he never became bellicose under even the most dire circumstances. From his universal perspective he maintained a holistic approach to music in particular and to life in general. When asked by his friend Folks why he always carried the Bible, John replied, it "brought him closer to God."³⁰ He also felt that "There is never any end. There are always new sounds to imagine, new feelings to get at, and always there is the need to keep purifying these feelings and sounds, so we can really see more and more clearly what we are. But to do that, at each stage we have to keep on cleaning the mirror."³¹ He seemed to be more concerned with continuing to grow spiritually than physically, and his music and his life as a whole seemed to have merged.

Evolutionary musical development is a microcosm of the evolutionary development that a mystic encounters along his or her path. An advanced student affiliated with the Rosicrucians, the oldest school of mysticism in the modern world founded upon ancient Egyptian principles, defines mysticism.

Mysticism, for our purposes, is the exploration of relationship, not merely horizontal relationship, as on this, the narrow plane of our mundane experience, but vertical relationships as well, as among the

³⁰ Coltrane, p. 177.

³¹ Ibid.

many various planes that comprise our mental experience. By planes of experience we are referring to planes or degrees of manifestation of the One, of the primal Word.³²

Coltrane's *Om* , another extended spontaneous composition recorded for Impulse Records,³³ may have been an expression of the composer's desire to intone the fundamental Tone of the universe (primal Word). Coltrane pointed out during a conversation with Nat Hentoff about this album:

Om means the first vibration - that sound, that spirit which set everything else into being. The Word from which all men and everything else comes, including all possible sounds that man can make vocally. It is the first syllable, the primal word, the word of Power.³⁴

In the liner notes to the album, Nat Hentoff points out that Om is the mystic equivalent of the name of the Deity in Hindu religion. It also connotes truth and goodness for some believers. In the

³² Mark Moulton, "Toward A Mystical Algebra," Rosicrucian Digest, November/ December 1988, p. 13.

³³ John Coltrane: OM, (Impulse 9140, October 1, 1965). Twenty-nine minutes in duration. Hereafter cited as OM.

³⁴ Ibid. Liner notes.

ancient Vedic writings the mantra Om constitutes an offering to Brahma and "It is said that sixteen suppressions of the breath accompanied by the recitation of a liturgy and of Om repeated daily after a month will even purify the slayer of a learned Brahman."³⁵ Purification of the soul is a constant theme throughout the early sacred Egyptian records as well.³⁶ During the last years of his life, Coltrane's musical/spiritual evolution had directed him toward an "increasingly insistent preoccupation in his music with the meaning of existence, the unity of all life, the absolute necessity for compassion and mutual understanding if life is to be more than simple blunt existence."³⁷

There are so many things to be considered in making music. The whole question of life itself: my life in which there are many things on which I don't think I've reached a final conclusion: There are matters I don't think I've covered completely, and all these things have to be covered before you make your music sound any way. You have to grow to know.³⁸

³⁵ Ralph M. Lewis, Mental Alchemy (San Jose: Supreme Grand Lodge of AMORC, Inc., 1979), p. 162.

³⁶ See The Egyptian Book of the Dead (The Papyrus of Ani), edited by E. A. Wallis Budge (New York:Dover Publications, 1967), p. lxiii, for one of numerous examples in this work.

³⁷ OM. Liner notes by Nat Hentoff.

³⁸ "Conversation With Coltrane," p. 7.

Dane Rudhyar addresses the function of the connecting link between the physical and spiritual realms of consciousness - the mind.

Mind operates at different ways at different levels of existence. At the biological level, mind is the servant of life . . . Feelings, emotions, and moods are overtones (as it were) of biology; though eventually these become differentiated and personalized, they can be traced back to their biological roots, even if they should not be entirely reduced to them. These "overtones" operate at the level of the biopsychic mind, which differentiates the personalities of tribesmen from one another but remains the servant of life.³⁹

Just as balance must be the underlying philosophy of personal development, it must also pervade all aspects of the musical growth of a composer on an evolutionary path. In addition to his individual aspirations aimed at balancing all the facets of his musical past, Coltrane hoped for a similar synthesis of musical elements in his band. In justifying his adding a second drummer he told Frank Kofsky, "I figured I could do two things: I could have a band that played like the way we used to play, and a band that was going in the direction that the one I have now is going

³⁹ Dane Rudhyar, The Magic of Tone and the Art of Music (London: Shambhala, 1982), p. 128. Hereafter cited as The Magic of Tone.

in.⁴⁰ This desire was not fulfilled for any length of time as the members of the quartet would begin to go separate ways shortly after The John Coltrane Quartet's 1965 European tour. Aware of this burgeoning and impending possibility, while in Paris for the July 26, 1965 Antibes concert, the saxophonist confided, "what I'm most afraid of, at this moment, is losing the musicians I have with me. Especially Elvin, in spite of his unpredictability."⁴¹ . It was Tyner who left first to form his own band, and, Jones left soon afterwards in December, 1965. Tyner shares his reasons for leaving with Michael Bourne.

I did a lot of recordings with John. I had my own particular direction I wanted to go into. I mean, as much as I dug being with my parents when I was a kid, I had to eventually leave. You reach the age where you just mature out of that environment, and you want to set your own identity.

Sometimes you have friends you grow up with in school, and when you reach high school, you say, "You go your way, I go my way," even though you are friends. You have to establish your own identity; that's very important. You pursue your own course in life; that's very essential.

Not that I knew everything about music, but I felt in order for me to learn any more I had to leave. There were certain physical things that

⁴⁰ Pauline Rivelli and Robert Levin. Giants of Black Music (New York: Da Capo Press, 1979), p. 31.

⁴¹ John Coltrane: Live in Paris (Affinity 94). Liner notes.

were very difficult. I'd play bad pianos, which is still the norm today. And John had two drummers and I couldn't hear what I was doing. He had Elvin (Jones) and Rashied (Ali) both. It became very difficult to hear.⁴²

This was extremely disconcerting to a spontaneous composer of a communal music. Pianist Alice McLeod (who eventually became Coltrane's second wife) replaced Tyner in the band. She met Coltrane in 1963 in a jazz club in Europe and married him the following year.⁴³ The Coltranes lived as husband and wife and created music together for the next four years. By the time Alice Coltrane joined the ensemble in 1966 she was totally aware of Coltrane's current quest.

We were both traveling in a particular spiritual direction, John and myself, so it seemed only natural for us to join forces. It was like God uniting two souls together. I think John could have as easily married another woman, though. Not myself and not because I was a musician, but any woman who had the particular attributes or qualities to help him fulfill his life mission as God wanted him to.⁴⁴

⁴² "McCoy Tyner," p. 19.

⁴³ Donloe, Darlene, "Living with the Spirit and Legacy of John Coltrane," *Ebony*, March, 1989, p. 49.

⁴⁴ J. C. Thomas, Chasin' the Trane: The Music and Mystique of John Coltrane (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1975), p. 172.

With Rashied Ali replacing Jones on drums, Coltrane was now composing for a new communal instrument. The element of polyrhythmic swing that could be found at the root of all his music with The Coltrane Quartet would now give way to vaguer metrical organization. As opposed to Tyner's fervid polyrhythms and vital accentuation that contributed to the foundation of the Coltrane quartet, Alice Coltrane approached the piano more as a timbre instrument than a percussive one. Her chords were often voiced in an open position with thirds omitted to remove any tonal implications, and abundant use of the pedal sometimes gave her arpeggios and tremolo chords a harp-like quality. In the liner notes to *Coltrane: Live at the Village Vanguard Again!* (Impulse A-9124), Coltrane said that her value to the group was that "she continually senses the right colors, the right textures, of sounds of the chords. And in addition, she's fleet. She has real facility."

Ali's drumming was not centered around the assiduous metronomic clock that was at the core of Elvin Jones's masterful polyrhythms over which Coltrane explored a variety of hypermetric groupings of scale and chord patterns. Coltrane felt that "Rashied is a multidirectional drummer. Any direction I go in, he follows right along with me." This is a crucial factor to Coltrane's approach to spontaneous composition at the end of his career and results in the creation of *Interstellar Space* (Impulse 9277), the only work in which the composer is freed from all responsibilities of responding to melodic and harmonic events

created by other members of a communal musical ensemble. In the same liner notes just cited above, Coltrane states that he feels Ali is "one of the great drummers."

The new ensemble would create textures in which all the individual voices took on a more elastic rhythmic orientation. The intermittent drone would become redefined and would take on a greater (if more elusive) role in the structuring of Coltrane's new musical directions. With harmonic and melodic constraints decreasing, his saxophone playing became increasingly more rhythmically inclined. Recalling Coltrane's drum fixation, Rashied Ali recalls:

He always played off the drums. He told me the drums freed him, he didn't have to worry about chord changes. He got the freedom to play what he wanted from working directly off the drums.⁴⁵

Similar to the reactions he received every time a definitive change occurred in his music, the music produced in his final phase of development was admired by some while it simultaneously received pejorative comments from others. An example of such conflicting positions can be found in a side by side review of the recording *John Coltrane: Meditations* (Impulse 9110) in the December 1, 1966 issue of *Down Beat* magazine. Bill Russo

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

awarded the album only one star (bottom rating), while Don DeMicheal gives the same album five stars (top rating) and says:

I do not pretend to understand this music. I doubt if anyone, including those playing it, really *understands* it, in the sense that one understands, say, the music of Bach or Billie Holiday. I *feel* this music, or, rather, as I said, it opens a part of my self that normally is tightly closed, and seldom recognized feelings, emotions, thoughts well up from the opened door and sear my consciousness.

DeMichael's listening posture is very much aligned with the basic premises upon which Coltrane's music is based and far removed from the analytic orientation that was evident in his earlier reviews. Other listeners to Coltrane's music of this period renew their assertions that the music doesn't swing, often claiming that it (swing) is the heart and soul of jazz. Conversely, musicians and listeners who have progressed with the inevitable changes in the music realize that , as Coltrane pointed out, swing can take many different forms and is not necessarily essential to the more contemporary forms of the music.⁴⁶ Ben Sidran remarks that "too often white critics have relied on their intellects rather than on their emotional responses." He feels that because African-

⁴⁶ Gregory E. Smith, "Homer, Gregory and Bill Evans? The Theory of Formulaic Composition in the Context of Jazz Piano Improvisation." Ph. D. dissertation. (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1983), p. 39.

American music is largely based upon the oral tradition, it is "not about analysis," and states that "Black culture recognizes no leader other than the music itself."⁴⁷ Dane Rudhyar makes an interesting analogy.

A holistic resonance differs from a chord of intellectually analyzed musical notes somewhat as a synthetic medical substance made by isolating definable chemical hormones differs from the direct extract from a whole endocrine gland - a chemical effect differs from a biological effect, even though the difference may escape scientific analysis.

The fact that the jazz innovator does not develop his or her abilities through analysis would tend to bear this point out. As Coltrane summed up in the concluding comments in the liner notes to the May 28, 1966 record album, *Coltrane: Live at the Village Vanguard Again!* . . . "You just keep going all the way, as deep as you can. You keep trying to get right down to the crux."

The influences of African and Eastern musics were still a part of the well- rounded education that Coltrane was seeking for himself. When I asked Alice Coltrane to comment on the ways she felt Coltrane's spiritual directions and his interests in African and Asian music were influential in his development, she said "The

⁴⁷ Ben Sidran, Black Talk (New York: Da Capo Press, 1981), p.98.

African and Asian music he listened to verified his own belief that spirituality is an important part of one's life, music, and artistic expression.⁴⁸ In a great portion of Oriental music (and African music as well) the manner in which a tone is approached and released is as important as the precise pitch of the note, and, like much of Coltrane's music, it is often expressionistic. Both traditional African and Indian music involve large proportions of spontaneous improvisation. Indian music does not modulate in the Western sense, and its classical music is based on melismatic vocal music. Music concerts in India are generally long by Western standards, and uninitiated Western listeners often complain as much about the length of Indian presentations as they did at some of Coltrane's later performances. Joe Goldberg visited Coltrane's Jamaica, Long Island home and found that the few records in his library at the time were almost all folk music from India.⁴⁹ In an interview that appeared in the July 11, 1964 *Melody Maker* Coltrane was asked if he agreed with the comments that had been published regarding the Eastern influences that were apparent in his music.

Yes, I find that my moods in music sometimes have that flavor, and I am often influenced by what sort of sounds I am listening to privately.

⁴⁸ September 4, 1990 letter to me from Alice Coltrane.

⁴⁹ Jazz Masters, p. 210.

At the moment, I am listening to records featuring an African drummer and a Chinese flute player - two different works entirely - different works entirely - but to me it sounds like they made the record together!

Right now I am concerned with African rhythms. But I do listen to all kinds of music all the time.⁵⁰

Coltrane's involvement with the music of India had led him to a brief period of study with Ravi Shankar. He was interested in the fact that Indian scales ascend differently than they descend. Coltrane felt that Shankar's sitar playing was comparable to the resonant sounds created by his favorite harpist, Carlos Salzedo.⁵¹ In November, 1965 the saxophonist asked Shankar how he was able to bend notes and he showed him. Shankar explained that Indian music contains 72 parent scales, 120 talas (time measures), 22 semitones, 66 microtones, and seven heptatonic scales, that are used for the six basic ragas from which the more than 700 ragas currently being played are derived. Shankar quoted from an ancient Sanskrit saying, "That which colors the mind is a raga."⁵² Coltrane was so moved by his playing and the experience that he invited Shankar to hear his new band.⁵³ At that time The Coltrane Quartet was augmented by Archie Shepp, Pharoah Sanders, alto

⁵⁰ Melody Maker, 7/11/64, p. 6.

⁵¹ Chasin' the Trane, p. 200. Goldberg mentions that Coltrane had a rented harp at his home that he was learning to play.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Jazz Masters, pp. 202-03.

saxophonist Carlos Ward, and Rashied. When he returned to New York in 1966 he invited Coltrane to visit him in India. Shankar recalls his first impressions of Coltrane's music:

The music was fantastic. I was much impressed, but one thing distressed me. There was a turbulence in the music that gave me a negative feeling at times, but I could not quite put my finger on the trouble.⁵⁴

Swami Satchidananda held a contrasting perspective, "When I heard John Coltrane on record, there was tranquility and serenity in his music. I do not recall the kind of restlessness in John Coltrane's music as I have heard in other types of music and from other musicians.⁵⁵ Shankar had exchanged many letters with Coltrane, but meeting him face to face for the first time was a pleasant surprise for him. He continues:

Meeting John was a great surprise. Most jazz musicians I have met were not interested in anything outside of their own musical world, but here was a humble and self-effacing man with an interest in other people and their cultures like few I have ever met.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Chasin' the Trane, p. 200.

⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 199.

⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 200.

Whereas Coltrane made no effort to duplicate any of the technical qualities of Indian music through analysis, he did apply some of the more affective qualities to his process of spontaneous composition. Some of the qualities of Indian music were discussed in a book printed in Northern India entitled *Indian Music* by Shahinda.⁵⁷ It tells how the idea of personifying all the forces of nature seems to be common in Hinduism. All of the rags and raginis, some of the favorite themes with old Indian artists, are portrayed in quatrains and verses that illustrate the form, color, symbolism, and significance which mark each tune. One of the traditions of Indian music⁵⁸ associates various characteristics and qualities with the seven basic notes (sur or *svara*) of the grama.

They are human in having temperament, costumes and color and, like products of nature, flourish in seasons. They are descended from Heavenly Bodies, and trace their lineage from above. Certain Surs are dominant at certain ages of mankind. They are produced from various parts of the body. The Surs occur in certain animals from whom they are taken. . .

The seven notes are under the protection of the seven Divinities who preside over them. . . *Kharaj Sa* . . . is prevalent in the voice of the human

⁵⁷ The Magic of Tone, pp. 174-75. The book was given to Dane Rudhyar by the author in 1923, but, unfortunately, it has been lost.

⁵⁸ This refers to the tradition that Shahinda followed; there are numerous different ones.

being of seventy years. . . *Rikhab Re* . . . is prevalent in the voice of a human being when three score years old . . . *Gandhar Ga* . . . is prevalent in the voice of a human being aged fifty . . . (etc.).⁵⁹

The composition *Out of This World* ⁶⁰ reveals that, as far back as 1962, Coltrane had substituted tone color, rhythm, and emotional tension for traditional cadential formulas. The transformation of his saxophone sound begins to introduce more non-traditional instrumental qualities that created a quality more akin to the sound of the human voice. During his last stylistic period, especially in the collaborations with saxophonist Pharoah Sanders, Coltrane's music involves an even greater percentage of humanistic sounds in the form of what has been described as "screams", "cries," and other intense emotional displays in his saxophone playing. As the traditional functions of the rhythm section are reduced to more static requirements (drones, ostinati, etc.), the drums are free to respond to the soloist in a more sympathetic fashion.

Like their African counterparts, Coltrane's spontaneous musical creations always result in a rhythmic predisposition to the use of hemiola and polyrhythms based upon a system of rhythmic organization where each individual line of music may contain its own beat pattern which may not coincide with the other

⁵⁹ The Magic of Tone, pp. 175-76.

⁶⁰ John Coltrane: Coltrane (Impulse 21, June 29, 1962).

complementary beat patterns. In terms of preferred tempos, David Baker observed that:

Coltrane runs the gamut from non-tempoed cadenza like explorations to tempos so fast that they tax the imagination. The greater body of his output falls in "groove" middle to fast tempos.

He has a penchant for double timing even at fast tempos. More often than not, the double time is extended rather than in spurts. He rarely uses half time, although long notes placed strategically in the context of his lines figure quite prominently except at the fastest tempos asymmetrical groupings comprise a large part of his rhythmic make up.⁶¹

Other shared features between traditional African music and that of Coltrane's later style are the shifting of accents, the changing of orchestral density, and the recurring rhythmic motives that serve to organize the music formally and achieve a wide range of orchestral contrasts and color. Coltrane's continued interest in African music is also absorbed into his music in a way that captures the essence of the tradition rather than making an attempt at any form of literal fusion of the musical elements into his own music. Olatunji mentions this interest.

⁶¹ "Profile of a Giant," p. 38.

John Coltrane is always trying to learn from others. He is so humble in his way of asking that others usually tell him everything he wants to know. For instance, he asked me about Africa. I gave him books on African culture and languages and records of African music, and then introduced him to my African friends. He told me, "I must go back to the roots; I'm sure I'll find what I have been looking for there. . .⁶²

I believe John Coltrane wanted to learn more about African music because our music plays a much larger role in the total culture than in other places. I offered to take him to Africa with me the next time I returned to Nigeria. He said "When?" and I suggested the following year. He said, "God willing, I will."⁶³

There is no one African scale that is more idiomatic than others among the tremendous variety of scale forms. As with Coltrane's later music, the ostinato (and multi-ostinati) are important instrumental devices. Chordal relationships in African music are usually a result of polyphonic combinations which do not coincide with the major-minor Western harmonic system. Their functions include tension - relaxation, dissonance - consonance, varieties of chord clusters, and some levels of harmonic patterning.⁶⁴ As Coltrane continues to emancipate the various elements of music in the spontaneous compositions of his last period, a divergence

⁶² Chasin' the Trane, pp. 202-03.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 221.

⁶⁴ Harvard Dictionary of Music, ed. Willi Apel (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), p. 20.

takes place from the metronomic characteristic of African music around which its polyrhythms are based. In African music, these polyrhythms have rhythmic points of reference which mark broader rhythmic phrases that serve as a common point of departure for each independent pattern. Whereas a similar situation occurred within the original Coltrane Quartet (with Jones, Garrison and Tyner), this too becomes transformed into more loosely defined rhythmic organizations in the music at the end of the composer's career. His music had a great impact on some African listeners and musicians.

Afro people in America are learning about their roots. Musicians like John Coltrane did so much to make this connection between African people and black people here in the states. Even if he didn't say it in words, he said it with his instrument. You know, in North Cameroon we have hautboy (African oboe) players who sound exactly like Coltrane, without ever having heard him.⁶⁵

Bearing in mind the influence of both African and Oriental music on Coltrane's thinking is important in developing an understanding of and appreciation for Coltrane's late compositions such as those contained on the record albums *John Coltrane: Live In Seattle* (September 30, 1965), *John Coltrane: Concert In Japan*

⁶⁵ Chasin' the Trane, p. 202. Comments by Manu Dibango.

(July 22, 1966), *John Coltrane: Interstellar Space* (February 22, 1967), *John Coltrane: Expression* (February 15 and March 7, 1967), and other related works.

Both *Expression* and *Interstellar Space* utilize openings or closings with sonorous incantations that give these and other late works a ritualistic or metaphysical air about them. These two works also show Coltrane's emphasis on the whole-tone sonority, a factor that is apparent in many of the musical examples in the following chapter. The composition *Offering* from the album *Expression* (recorded a week after *Interstellar Space*), displays some of these qualities and clearly suggests a movement away from modality. *Offering* might even be viewed as a type of sequel to the composition *Vigil* (from the album *Kulu Se Mama*) to some listeners which, like *Interstellar Space*, involves a saxophone and drum duet with Elvin Jones.

None of the technical observations made about Coltrane's music is not meant to imply that one needs a technical understanding of any sort to grasp the meaning of the music. A statement from the German philosopher Hermann von Keyserling's once very famous book *Travel Diary of a Philosopher*, a book written when he travelled through India, illustrates this point.

Hindu music lies, in what concerns its extreme individuality, in another sphere than ours. Our objective world scarcely exists for it. Tones

enchained one with another are not necessarily knitted together harmonically; there is no division into measure; tonality and rhythm are constantly changing. A Hindu musical composition, in its true character, is incapable of being recorded materially in our notation. The only determined objective quality of Hindu music is that which in Europe remains committed to subjective conclusions, expressions, interpretations, touch. . . only as rhythm is it in any way objectively comprehensible, for rhythm shows, as it were, the neutral point between the objective and the subjective.

Therefore this music is on one side understood by everyone, on the other by those spiritually developed to the highest degree, by everyone insofar as each one is a living being, and it embodies immediate direct life; only by the most developed, as the Yogi alone is able to grasp its spiritual meaning, who knows his own soul. The musician as such, in the presence of this art, with difficulty assumes a position of superiority. The metaphysician does this. He is indeed the man that mirrors the originality of life as such, in the spirit; and this is exactly what Hindu music does. Listening to it, he recognizes his own particular knowledge, gloriously born anew in the world of sonority.⁶⁶

For the innovative musician, jazz is a style of music which requires that the individual be a virtuoso performer merely as a

⁶⁶ The Magic of Tone, p. 178. Translation by Philip Hale in September 1914. The quotation was apparently use in literature entitled an "Announcement of the Boston Music Company."

point of departure. Having mastered that prerequisite, Coltrane proceeded to explore the basic concepts upon which all of the standard practice within the history of jazz has involved. In appraising his stylistic approach from a different angle, *Giant Steps* , one might argue, had marked a departure from the strictly academic approach to the mastery of the fundamentals of the jazz practice that had preceded it; *A Love Supreme* might be considered the beginning of Coltrane's strictly mystical approach to his music; while the music that occurred between these landmark compositions could be considered extremely comprehensive and elaborate transitional periods. As the composer's music approaches the later phase of its musical progression, it too, like the Hindu music described above, begins to grow far beyond the notational problems that even the simplest forms of classic African American music have encountered. As it moves farther away from the influence of Western musical concepts toward the kinds of complexities that enshroud the musics of certain "primitive" cultures, the more captious the criticism by those who insisted that the artist's work conform to their notions about music or the directions that music should take. Those developed practitioners within the art form traveling along a similar evolutionary path, as well as those who allowed themselves to engage the music on the subconscious level, seemed to understand Coltrane's music. This was Coltrane's intention.

I know that I want to produce beautiful music, music that does things to people that they need. Music that will uplift, and make them happy - those are the qualities I'd like to produce.⁶⁷

Jazz pianist Horace Silver said "We're now entering the Aquarian Age and musicians, who are quite sensitive to these things , are picking up these vibrations and getting attuned with the spiritual concepts of life through their music. I think we can thank John Coltrane for leading the way."⁶⁸ Jazz scholar Mark Gridley calls Coltrane "One of the greatest musicians in jazz history,"⁶⁹ while Joe Goldberg points that "Some felt jazz history ended with Coltrane, whereas today many feel it only started with Coltrane."⁷⁰ Jazz educator David Baker briefly summarizes Coltrane's achievements.

For the first time, Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians is going to list jazz musicians in the next edition. I'm writing about six, and one of them is John Coltrane. His major contributions, I think, are these: using multiphonics; playing several notes or tones simultaneously; creating asymmetrical groupings not dependent on the basic pulse; developing an incredible system of chord substitutions; and initiating a pan-modal style of playing, using several modes simultaneously. I've transcribed some of

⁶⁷ "Conversation With Coltrane," p. 7.

⁶⁸ Chasin' the Trane, p. 122.

⁶⁹ Mark C. Gridley, Jazz Styles: History and Analysis, Second edition (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1985), p. 279.

⁷⁰ Jazz Masters, p. 189.

his solos for teaching my students at University of Indiana. I think all musicians should study Coltrane solos the way we now study the etudes of Bach and Brahms.⁷¹

Baker's comments, while addressing many of Coltrane's technical contribution to music, neglects the expressive qualities. The number of times that Coltrane used the word "expression" in describing his music in an indication that this was very important to him. It is also important to recall Cecil Taylor's remark (cited in the chapter on Coltrane's second period) that "technique is not separate from its content in a great artist." Context cannot be ignored if one is to understand and appreciate Coltrane's music.

Guitarist Carlos Santana said "I haven't heard anything higher than *The Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost* (on the album *John Coltrane: Meditations*, Impuse 9110)," and mentions that he would play the composition at four in the morning, the traditional time for meditation. He continues, "I could hear God's mind in that music, influencing John Coltrane."⁷² After being admitted as a Huntington Hospital emergency patient, Coltrane died of primary hepatoma (cancer of the liver) at four in the morning (the traditional time for meditation).

⁷¹ Chasin' the Trane, p. 170.

⁷² Ibid., p. 217.

Coltrane extended the saxophone's range of musical expression by increasing the range of technical and tonal resources. Two of Coltrane's drummers also mention Coltrane's influence. Jimmy Cobb said Coltrane "changed the direction of saxophone playing forever;" and Elvin Jones confides that "He was just a spiritual man. . . He was like an angel on Earth. It struck me that deeply. I'm enough of a believer to think very seriously about that. I've been touched in some way by something greater than life."⁷³

I asked Alice Coltrane what she thought John Coltrane contributed to twentieth-century art music. She responded " . . . a spiritual expression over and beyond the technical, academic, and the artistic aspects of his music."⁷⁴

⁷³ Burrill Crohn, John Coltrane: The Coltrane Legacy (New York: Video Artists International, 1985), closing comments by both drummers.

⁷⁴ September 4, 1990 letter from Alice Coltrane.

INTERSTELLAR SPACE (1967)

The following stylistic analysis of John Coltrane's four-movement suite, *Interstellar Space*, will attempt to address the work's organization by examining the means through which its unity and coherence are achieved. References to the cultural context in which the work was created will be brief, since much has already been discussed in this area in preceding chapters. In this chapter, Coltrane's main purpose for this work will be examined primarily in terms of his own comments (that is, those related to the instrumentation and stylistic direction of *Interstellar Space*), and through an examination of the titles for the movements of this work.

In the general overview of Coltrane's stylistic periods that led up to the present analysis, several questions have been raised. One of these questions involves the distinction made between spontaneous composition and improvisation. A definition of a spontaneous composer was introduced in the Prologue at the beginning of this dissertation. The spontaneous composer, like the composer who prefers to write his compositions down, explores completely new musical territory or extends or refines an established musical style. An improviser, like an arranger or a performer who "improvises" his or her own cadenzas, uses an established style freely to embellish set musical forms or patterns. Arranging involves a highly creative musical process, that results in giving new meaning to pre-existing musical ideas (usually

composed by someone other than the arranger). It could be argued, therefore, that if Coltrane had continued to perform compositions like *Giant Steps* using a fixed reserve of melodic, harmonic, rhythmic, and formal devices, then he would have qualified as an improviser rather than a spontaneous composer. The difference in Coltrane's case being, of course, that by the end of his second period he had certainly provided jazz with enough innovations to qualify as a spontaneous composer; and the "fixed reserve" of musical devices were of his own making. McCoy Tyner's thinking contributes to this definition.

You cannot develop anything you copy from somebody else. There's no way you can really do that. I had heard this sound a long time, when I was real young, and it just took me a while to develop it out. I had to work with somebody and that group was the natural vehicle.¹

Jazz performers who create music in the style of Charlie Parker, John Coltrane, or Cecil Taylor are improvisers and not spontaneous composers (according to the proposed definition) if they fail to extend those stylistic vocabularies. As noted previously, Coltrane saw creativity as a process that brought the artist increasingly closer to nature and wanted his music to be uplifting.

¹ David Wild, "McCoy Tyner: The Jubilant Experience of the Classic Quartet," Down Beat, July 12, 1979, p. 19.

Maybe when I'm sixty I'll be satisfied with what I'm doing, but I don't know...I'm sure that later on my ideas will carry more conviction.

I know that I want to produce beautiful music, music that does things to people that they need. Music that will uplift, and make them happy- those are the qualities I'd like to produce.²

As with European composers who wrote music utilizing tonal harmony, borrowed from other composers, and composed in sonata form, jazz composers do not have to annihilate the twelve bar blues or song form (or re-invent the wheel) in order to qualify as spontaneous composers. They need only to express their own ideas spontaneously, as opposed to memorizing, rearranging, and performing musical patterns created by others. Therefore, all jazz innovators are spontaneous composers.

Another question relates to the ability of a listener to substantiate the emotional, spiritual, or expressionistic intent perceived in a given musical work. In the preface of his biography, *John Coltrane*, Bill Cole states that "John Coltrane as a musician, and John Coltrane as a religious person" were the main things he wanted to "get at" in his book. He follows this statement by reminding us that "both these aspects of Coltrane are intimately bound up with being an African-American."³ Both aspects are salient features of

²"Conversation With Coltrane," p. 7.

³ Bill Cole. *John Coltrane* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1976), p. v. Cited hereafter as *John Coltrane*.

traditional African culture as well. Coltrane wanted to investigate this fundamental resource (his African heritage) further, as he indicated to Frank Kofsky in mid-August, 1966: "I intend to make a trip to Africa to gather whatever I can find, particularly the musical resources."⁴ Among a great diversity of cultures, thought, and customs, finding atheists among indigenous African people is an extremely difficult task.

In an effort to gather more authoritative information regarding Coltrane's interest in African music, his thoughts on the individuals who make a living off the work of African-American musicians, and on some of the directions he was heading with his musical career around the time *Interstellar Space* was composed, I asked M. Babatunde Olatunji for comments that might shed light on these questions. According to my findings, Mr. Olatunji appears to be the person Coltrane confided in candidly.

April 13, 1990

Dear Mr. Hester

Pursuant to receipt of your written inquiry relative to John Coltrane, his personal association with me, and his interest in

⁴ Pauline Rivelli and Robert Levin, Giants of Black Music (New York: Da Capo Press, 1979), p. 29. Cited hereafter as Giants of Black Music.

African music, I have prepared the following responsive paragraphs:

To the best of my knowledge, John Coltrane's interest in African music dates back to the early 1960's. He first came to my attention when I discovered that he was present at most of my appearances in theatres and night clubs in the metropolitan New York City area: especially at Birdland and at the Village Gate. He always found the time not only to congratulate me and the band, which included Yusef Lateef on saxophone and Chris White on bass, but to repeatedly express both his interest in African music and a desire to study with me.

The driving force in Coltrane's music can easily be identified as being African derivative when you listen to his unique style of phrasing, his dynamics, and the intensity he generates when playing his instrument. There is a distinctly African rhythm and timing in his improvisation. His instrument becomes the voice of a traditional town crier who, through the controlled use of his own natural voice (from its highest to its lowest pitch), informs the villagers of what is happening or is going to happen. His music, like African music, is captivating, pulsating and energizing.

As my dream to establish a Center For African Culture became a reality because of the money saved from my appearances at the 1964-65 World's Fair in New York, John Coltrane's interest in both my work and in the Center's plan to disseminate information about

the rich and vital cultural heritage of Africa was reflected not only in his monthly financial contributions, but by his plans to study the Yoruba language and to visit the Motherland with me. He believed that this visit would provide him with a spiritual rebirth and help exorcise from his own mind some of the myths and stereotypes about all Africans: native, expatriate, and those whose families had lived for generations on foreign soil. He wanted to trace his African heritage and establish a lasting relationship with his ancestors: particularly those from West Africa.

Coltrane believed that side-men should be paid more money than the generally accepted standard fees. He believed that Booking Agents did not do enough to promote the Artists they represented. He was also generally unhappy with the management of Recording Companies because of their policy of paying little or no advance monies to their artists: except for a very select few personalities.

Because of these predispositions, Coltrane approached Yusef Lateef and me and suggested we form our own company and promote our own efforts. In those days, Yusef, as great as he was, could hardly get any bookings for work until he became the musical director of my Afro-Jazz Band: A band that enjoyed twelve to thirteen weeks of work each year just at Birdland alone. We met, the group was formed, and I was elected its Secretary/Treasurer.

The first concert was booked for January 1968 at Avery Fisher Hall, in New York. The concert was to feature three groups: One led by

John, one by Yusef, and one by me. We had organized to subsequently tour the United States, Canada, Japan, and Europe. The money raised from these concerts was to be used to help establish African Cultural Centers in major cities in the United States. The purpose of these centers would be to educate, promote cultural exchanges, and create research programs for those interested in the study of African languages, history, music, art, and dance. It was our hope that these Centers would become channels to bridge the gap between Africans at home and those abroad, and that they would also serve to promote a better understanding of Africans and their contribution to world culture.

John Coltrane was a visionary: a quiet, determined, courageous man. He was and still is an irresistible force.

I truly hope that my comments on John Coltrane, and on my past relationship with him, will be of service to you.

Sincerely

M. Babatunde Olatunji

It is difficult (or impossible) to translate most subconscious musical concepts into meaningful objective language, even for the composer of the music. Expression of heartfelt emotions is an

example. The subconscious and subjective levels of consciousness, nevertheless, are the source of inspiration for many artists. Philosophers and intellectuals often ponder questions related to these aspects of the human nature, but rarely has this area been explored in jazz scholarship. Such matters cannot be easily quantified, yet an understanding of their influence on the creative process is especially important in the study of spontaneous composition. When asked about the meaning of the title to Coltrane's composition *Alabama*, the composer replied "It represents, musically, something that I saw down there translated into music from inside me."⁵ Coltrane would provide no lectures on his compositional intent. The titles of his compositions and the music proper, therefore, carry essential information that he cared to instil upon the minds of the listeners. When Frank Kofsky asked him, at the beginning of his final stylistic period, if he felt a need to educate his audience about his music, Coltrane responded:

Sure I feel this, and this is one of the things I am concerned about now. I just don't know how to go about this. I want to find out just how I should do it. I think it's going to have to be very subtle; you can't ram philosophies down anybody's throat, and the music is enough! That's philosophy. I think the best thing I can do at this time is to try to get myself in shape and know myself. If I can do that, then I'll just play, you see, and leave it at that. I believe that will do

⁵ Leroi Jones, *Black Music* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1968), pp. 66-67.

it, if I really can get to myself and be just as I feel I should be and play it. And I think they'll get it, because music goes a long way - it can influence.

. . . there are things which as far as spirituality is concerned, which (are) very important to me at this time, I've got to grow through certain phases of this to other understanding and more consciousness and awareness of just what it is that I'm supposed to understand about it; and I'm sure others will be part of the music. To me, you know, I feel I want to be a force for good.⁶

A certain esthetic is present, a different attitude assumed, and an intuitive awareness seems to take place when one enters a cathedral, mosque, or any sacred place of worship. Likewise, music created for a sacred ritual (a Bach church cantata or Ellington's *Second Sacred Concert*, for instance) yields a distinctly different effect in any environment than music with secular intent (say, *The Harmonious Blacksmith* by Handel or Ellington's *Satin Doll*). The composer is conscious of the musical ingredients necessary to elicit the desired effect, and the listener intuitively knows the attitude to assume to fully appreciate the music. Like most composers, Coltrane realized that both the proper music and setting are needed to create the most convincing musical

⁶ Giants of Black Music, pp. 37-38.

experience. Nightclubs, as he told Kofsky in the same interview cited above, were certainly not the proper places for his music bearing spiritual and metaphysical titles, or otherwise.

Now there was a time when it felt all right to play clubs, because with my music, I felt I had to play a lot to work it out, you see. But now I don't think that that was absolutely where it was at; but I had to find it out myself. It is a matter of being able to be at home and be able to go into yourself. In other words, I don't feel the situation in clubs is ideal for me.

. . . we don't play the set forty-minute kind of thing anymore, and it's difficult to always do this kind of thing now. The music, changing as it is, there are a lot of times when it doesn't make sense, man, to have somebody drop a glass, or somebody ask for some money right in the middle of Jimmy Garrison's solo. Do you know what I mean?

Whereas pleasant and unpleasant experiences can be transmitted by the composer/performer and perceived by the sensitive listener, it is impossible to quantify this subjective quality in any form of music. Nevertheless, expression is one of the primary forces in spontaneous composition as well as in most other world musics; the composer's expressed intent is, therefore, the strongest evidence we have to determine the importance of various subjective elements to their music. The record liner notes

to *A Love Supreme*, as well as the various interviews in which this subject is addressed, present Coltrane's position on these issues clearly.

Finally, this final chapter will hopefully avoid the anachronistic analysis that one can also overuse with a subject of eclectic nature. Archie Shepp characterized Coltrane's significance when he said, "John . . . straddles the old and new like a colossus, . . . Coltrane is the most important saxophonist in jazz."⁷ His tonal language employed various modes as well as diminished, whole-tone, pentatonic, chromatic, and blues scales. He rarely quoted another musical source in his playing, and his use of harmonic substitutions are generally restricted to the interval of a tritone in his first three periods.

Although Coltrane's compositions of his last period retain many of the characteristics of the music created in earlier stylistic periods, a spontaneous composer who modifies his style as frequently as Coltrane did must have the music of each period examined with an emphasis on and awareness of the changes that have taken place in the later music. Therefore, to examine *Interstellar Space* in terms of swing, chord changes, meter, etc.(in the usual senses of the terms), will often be totally inappropriate, since here Coltrane is experimenting with relatively new music materials and structures. Along with the scientific, philosophical, and social ideas

⁷ John Coltrane, p. 163.

of the "Age of Reason," music criticism is one of the forces that have molded the modern world.⁸ The earlier music critics were the elite of musical society; many of them were either composers or theoreticians. Informed criticism is, therefore, a valid component of the process of music making when it transmits accurate and cogent information about the subject to the reader. This is a difficult task in any art form and those who take on such a responsibility of criticism should be well prepared for the task.

This particular approach to Coltrane's compositional style will take strongly into account the fact that *Interstellar Space* actually defies Western notation. The inferences established by grouping rhythmic units according to short and long values to arrive at a metrical scheme (regardless of whether these individual metrical patterns combine with opposing patterns to form polyrhythms, hemiola, "swing" patterns, or various forms of simultaneous meter), break down with this style of music. Rhythmic sets containing large quantities of notes of similar durations that modulate gradually in speed in a setting that lacks an underlying point of rhythmic reference create a notational quandary.

A frequently overlooked advantage to spontaneous composition is the fact that an aural score always results when the music is recorded, and this type of score represents the composer's intent (if the composer is satisfied with the results) to a degree that can

⁸ Max Graf, Composer and Critic: Two Hundred Years of Musical Criticism (New York: Kennikat Press, 1969), p.30.

never be duplicated by the printed page alone. With the advances that have taken place (and will continue to take place) in sound reproduction in the late twentieth century, the clarity of this type of complete aural score can not be surpassed in any written form. Coltrane's approach to *Interstellar Space*, within a duet setting operating on independent rhythmic fundamentals, also allows for acceleration, deceleration, and the execution of other contrasting rhythmic changes rapidly without fear of clashing with surrounding parts. If the importance of notation lies in presenting a fully developed system designed so as to indicate pitch and its duration,⁹ then the symbols required to accommodate the many levels of polyrhythmic stratification that occur between the saxophone and drums during *Interstellar Space*, in addition to the flexible execution of rhythmic patterns and the total resistance of each individual line to metrical organization, have not been invented. Along with my own drum transcriptions, Andrew White's transcription of the saxophone part to Coltrane's composition (which have been of tremendous value to me and certainly many others) is obviously based upon this understanding. They will be used to facilitate this analysis along with my own transcriptions. Although I do not consider transcribing someone else's composition a creative endeavor for which I can claim credit, I have indicated which works are White's in the musical examples for the sake of clarity. Because of our slightly different approaches, White's transcriptions offer a

⁹ Willi Apel, The Harvard Dictionary of Music, second edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 578.

greater range of expressive markings than mine. White's method indicates graphically such things as irregularities in performance¹⁰ My approach is to notate the music in a fashion resembling that used in writing jazz composition as much as possible. I don't feel that , in spontaneous jazz composition, anyone except the artist can know for certain whether a note involved indeciveness, faulty breathing, etc. I assume that all things placed on the musical "canvas" are intentional.

The title *Interstellar Space* , taken quite literally, refers to the space between and among the stars within the universe (macrocosm), while the movements of the suite denote individual planets within our own solar system (microcosm). These appellations imply relatedness and systematic order, and may also contain an element of Coltrane's conception of the syntactical relationship between the four movements and of the individual musical parts to the whole. In most African music the performances have more than one level of meaning or purpose, as African music specialist Francis Bebey explains.

¹⁰ This includes irregularities "due to any number of reasons including faulty articulation, faulty breathing, faulty intonation, freak fingering, fingered liason, poor fidelity, off microphone, indeciseness, partial of harmonic or whatever. The degree of irregularity can be measured by the degree of boldness in the symbol. Symbols apply to phrases and sentences as well as notes." These comments are made in Andrew White's Treatise Supplement for The Works of John Coltrane Volume Six (Definitive Coltrane) (Washington D. C.: Andrew's Music).

(A) simple lullaby, like almost all African music, conveys a number of ideas simultaneously. Outwardly, it is intended to soothe the baby and lull him to sleep, but at the same time, it expresses his mother's gratitude toward Nature - or God - for having given her a child, a privilege denied to so many other women.¹¹

This was evident in the original country blues titles and lyrics as well as in the earliest African-American spirituals and work-songs. Since Coltrane and other jazz composers rarely provide program notes for their compositions, the archetypal qualities of the planets chosen to represent each movement may have strong descriptive bearing on the musical disposition of the music. The astrological concepts that follow will hopefully serve as tools that aid in differentiating between the four distinct compositions involved in *Interstellar Space*, and serve to demonstrate ways in which Coltrane's suite is perhaps unconsciously related to archetypal or metaphysical principles of life and creativity.

Astrologers Marcia Moore and Mark Douglas, in their book *Astrology, the Divine Science*, arrange the planets in our solar system according to stages of elevation, based on seven-year cycles in the life of humankind. Venus represents the third stage of evolution (ages 14-21) in which the emotional nature of the

¹¹ Francis Bebey, African Music: A People's Art (Westport: Lawrence Hill & Co., 1980), p. 6.

individual begins to mature. As young adults gain in self-assurance, they also become more discriminating in their appraisal of people and situations. The varied experiences of childhood are weighed, judged, and assimilated to provide the foundation for future taste and standards of behavior. Its principle is attraction, and its quality is beauty. The positive expression of its quality manifests as grace, while its negative expression is sensuality. This is an age for falling in love with art, culture, esthetic ideals, as well as with members of the opposite sex.¹²

The principle for Mars, the planet representing physical strength, is projection. Its forceful quality has a positive expression of vigor which occurs as a negative aggressive quality. It is the fifth life cycle (ages 28-35) and inaugurates a departure based on the outcome of the previous cycle of personal unfoldment. The personality begins to stabilize, wielding a "percussive" influence that serves as a dynamic element in his or her community and asserts its capacity for leadership. Since maximum effort is expended to initiate new projects and to overcome obstacles, ambition can often exceed necessary resources.¹³

The sixth cycle (ages 35-42), Jupiter, is the stage of purposefulness. If the Mars cycle was completed successfully, the

¹² Marcia Moore and Mark Douglas, Astrology. The Divine Science (York Harbor, Maine: Arcane Publications, 1978), p. 46.

¹³ Ibid. p. 47.

rewards of this effort can be reaped here during the prime of life. A person is experienced enough to enjoy one's gains and is guided by ideals he or she has espoused. It is a time in which the individual often undergoes a process of reformulating his or her religious faith and developing a viable philosophy of life. The principle here is expansion and the quality is foresight. Optimism marks the positive expression of this quality, and extravagance expresses the negative aspect.¹⁴

The last planet in Coltrane's cycle, Saturn, represents the stage of establishment and is the seventh cycle of human development (ages 42-49). It marks the end of one's natural growth. The principle is limitation with restraint serving as its quality. The positive expression is discipline and the negative expression is repression. One's individual path in life is determined and has either become a rut that leads towards the grave, or a clearly defined track up the mountain of personal attainment. The person now knows the difference between right and wrong, and if suffering is encountered, the individual has some idea why.¹⁵

With *Interstellar Space*, Coltrane makes several unusual choices that create a unique set of compositional problems. His choice of instrumentation (tenor saxophone and percussion), the experimentation with new music materials and structures, and the decision to pursue these problems within an extended multi-

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

movement work, set extremely ambitious goals for what would appear to be limited instrumental resources. Yet the resultant music stands as an exemplary model of spontaneous composing; its effect is that of pure spontaneity organized with clear logic, unity, and variety. Most of all, it is highly original.

The reasons for Coltrane's choice of tenor saxophone and drums for *Interstellar Space* (35 minutes and 54 seconds in length) must be speculated upon, since he wrote no record liner notes or other forms of documentation that specify any such intentions. Drum duets had occurred at significant places earlier in Coltrane's career. The multi-chordal composition *Countdown*, recorded in 1959 on the album *Giant Steps*, begins in a highly original fashion with a duet between Coltrane and drummer Art Taylor. The incessant walking bass pattern that was recorded on the original recording of the "modal" composition *Impressions* by the Coltrane Quartet on November 5, 1961, eventually led to various later versions of that music which feature duets between Elvin Jones and Coltrane.¹⁶ This could stand as some form of circumstantial evidence that *Interstellar Space*, which is conceived in Coltrane's most free style of spontaneous composition, represents a culminating third of a series of evolutionary drum duets that span his later developmental periods. Coltrane's drum "fixation" (mentioned in the previous chapter) resulted in the addition of

¹⁶ Examples can be heard on John Coltrane: Live in Paris (Affinity L6 AF96, July 28, 1965), and on the video tape by Burrill Crohn, John Coltrane: The Coltrane Legacy (New York: Video Artists International, 1985).

Rashied Ali to his basic ensemble, and led to effective drum collaborations between Jones and Ali on the album *John Coltrane: Meditations* (Impulse 9110, November 23, 1965). This same emphasis on the drums apparently contributed to both McCoy Tyner and Elvin Jones's decision to leave the band.¹⁷

A second conjecture can be formed from the latter portion of the first. The drums and saxophone configuration placed Coltrane in a musical setting where he was free from all conventional constraints and avoided any possibility of adapting to the limitations of the style of any individual musician, with the exception of Ali, of course, who blends perfectly with the composer's approach. Tyner "was a pillar in the foundation of Trane's ideas"¹⁸ and was like a son to him. He had complained for some time, however, about the drums. Jones had been Coltrane's "tower of strength" for five years and his impeccable percussion contribution to the saxophonist's music is well documented through recordings; but he made the transition away from a metronomic pulse, that was now being incorporated into Coltrane's compositional style, with resistance. Since the composer didn't have another five years to build a new ensemble, Coltrane was never to obtain the level of total equilibrium that was contained in The Coltrane Quartet with any of his later ensembles. He was no longer interested in the musical proficiency of his colleagues alone, but, as Bill Cole suggests, "Trane completely gave up his ego

¹⁷ *John Coltrane*, pp. 186-87.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 187.

to music in every way. He gave up his individuality wholly to music and tried to develop in all of his players a sense of submission, making music the objective of their meditation."¹⁹ Due in part to Ali's flexibility as a drummer, *Interstellar Space* represents the only recording in Coltrane's final period within which his personal expression could be presented in a form that did not require that he accommodate the melodies, harmonies, and rhythms of other performers within the ensembles. The musical vocabulary Coltrane uses in *Interstellar Space* requires this kind of freedom.

The importance of *Interstellar Space* is partly due to the fact that it contains a greater range of expressive dynamics, musical approaches, innovative devices, and saxophone vocabulary, than any other individual composition for saxophone in the saxophone repertoire at the time of its creation. Coltrane's "sheets of sound," multiphonics, harmonics, his "three in one" chordal superimpositions, altissimo range extensions, and other devices developed earlier in his career, are all transformed into evolved forms that create a highly expressive and resilient new language. Most of these stylistic features are introduced in *Mars*, the opening movement which acts as an exposition of the various musical subjects that are to be developed in the subsequent movements. *Venus*, the most lyrical and tranquil of the movements, has the strongest sense of a central tonality and

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

makes ample use of motivic development within its development section. *Mars* and *Venus* each begin with whole-tone based ideas. Both the "sheets of sound" and the "three in one" chord superimpositions dominate the third movement, *Jupiter*. *Jupiter's* ferocity of temperament and striking ascending thematic motion is somewhat reminiscent of the composition *Offering* (from the album *Expression*). The concluding movement, *Saturn*, is the only one of the set of four that has any lasting sense of meter and is also unique in its employment of the blues in its primary statement. Dynamic tension is maintained, however, through the rhythmic groupings that react against the feeling of familiarity conveyed by the regularity imposed by the opening metrical orientation, and by the use of arpeggiated figures (many of which are whole-tone derived) that oppose the blues harmonic orientation.

In the earliest days of Egyptian dynasties when there were special rites in the temples, a mood would be induced by the smell of incense and the coarse ringing sound of the sistrum, accompanied by instruments of the musicians who took part in the great temple procession. This "satisfied the hearts of the gods."²⁰ All of the of the first three movements are individually framed by the sound of sleigh bells. This tend to group the movements together in an internal cycle, possibly implying that the final movement, *Saturn* , is representing the beginning of a new cycle. Just as the

²⁰ Rodman R. Clayson, Egypt's Ancient Heritage (San Jose: Supreme Grand Lodge of AMORC, 1971), p, 46.

superimposed groupings of three (set off by bells) and four (total movements) have obvious mystical implications, the fact that Coltrane's life span lasted only into the cycle framed by the first three movements could lead to various metaphysical interpretations. More relevant to the current investigation, however, is the fact that although each movement has a strikingly different musical character and mood, a portion of the pantonal/panrhythmic feature of the opening music invades each of the other movements at some point. Thus variety and contrast is achieved in the construction of the fundamental features of each movement, while continuity is a part of the more subtle internal organization.

Mars - Coltrane demonstrates from the beginning that there is to be an equal partnership between the tenor saxophone and the drums by beginning and ending the opening movement with solo drums and percussion. This particular sonority is a logical choice if the intent of the music is indeed to create a ritualistic ambiance, a factor Gilbert Rouget discusses in his book *Music and Trance*.

For a variety of reasons the drum is surrounded by such a particular aura that not only the man in the street but also, very often, the man of science readily lends it special powers. The often explosive, violent, and brutal nature of the sounds it produces, and the frequently dramatic or obsessive use to which it is put, indisputably confer upon the drum a particularly strong emotional impact. Its

sound can be a truly aggressive force, and its vibrations can have an almost palpable impact.²¹

After the sounding of the "ritual bells" (sleigh bells), the drums enter for Ali's first featured solos. The slow open-roll on the snare drum superimposed over the unusual sound of very deliberately executed four stroke ruffs in the bass drum (that are articulated in fanfare-like flourishes), creates a dialogue between the individual drums that establishes from the onset that flexible polymetric ordering is to be the norm (Example 1-M). The snare drum expands upon the ruffs, turning them into assorted short rolls, then, after incorporating the head toms and floor toms into its expansion, an exploitation of every imaginable variety of roll begins. The bass drum, in the meantime, begins to fragment the ruffs it introduced until it creates a foundation based on a steady broken pattern that is never predictable. During this brief rhythmic introduction, the ride cymbal and high-hat enter unobtrusively, and begin to establish characteristic rolls for themselves. The high-hat will provide a more intermittent pattern, more widely spaced and even less regular than that of the bass drum, while the ride cymbal functions to create long, shimmering tones in contrast to all the shorter and quicker rhythms that surround its sounds. The crash cymbal is usually

²¹ Gilbert Rouget, Music and Trance: A Theory of the Relations between Music and Possession (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp. 169-70.

used to punctuate the internal climactic drum rolls that occur in varying degrees of frequency throughout the movement. Each role established by the various members of the drum kit becomes an identifying function (Example 2-M) that recurs throughout the movement despite the variety of other elements that interact with the primary ones.

Once a high level of intensity and rhythmic density is obtained, it is maintained. A wide range of dynamic devices are used flexibly to interlock with the shape of Coltrane's fluctuating music on tenor saxophone. This dynamic oscillation is easily recognized in the intensification of the bass drum music, the most stable of the metrically independent drum parts. The concluding drum solo brings back some of the rudimentary drumming that opened the movement, as the patterns begin to form shorter compressed rolls and patterns. As the bells signal a short codetta-like section, a bass drum roll is heard near the end, balancing with the long open-roll of the snare drum in the beginning. The bells that opened the movement have the final word.

Coltrane enters with the same fanfare flourish as that introduced by the three grace notes and principle note of the initial bass drum ruffs (Example 3-M). These flourishes are similar to the characteristic glissandi, rips, and slurred groupings of notes that can be found in much of Coltrane's earlier work (which is most clearly evident in compositions performed at moderate or slow tempos). The intervals introduced in his first four notes of this

short lyrical opening section (an ascending perfect fourth, a descending whole-step, followed by a descending minor third), are predominant during this saxophone opening and identify each of the subsequent lyrical (low density) sections. Coltrane's three relatively low density areas frame the two saturation density areas within which expanded "sheets of sound" approaches occur in the first movement. The saxophone is metrically out of phase with all drum parts, but represent a function that is closely related to the long rolls that dominate Ali's snare drum and tom-tom contributions in *Mars*. Coltrane's music in the first area of saturation density contains wave-shaped scales and arpeggios that present fragments of most of the tonal jazz language (Example 4-M). These fragments modulate continually creating a pantonal unfolding that displays a large variety of note groupings. These wave-shaped groupings begin in the low register (Example 5-M), ascend gradually to the first note of long duration in the section on an altissimo register Eb, then, after reaching down dramatically to the bottom of the saxophone register, resumes the wave shaped patterning. Now short melodic interpolations serve as a type of character "Vorimitation"²² signaling the eventual return of the more lyrical mood (Example 6-M). Harmonics and multiphonics permeate this section adding additional color and dramatic emphasis to the music. A more gradual descent leads

²² In this context, the term Vorimitation is used to describe the imitative passages in diminution that are based upon and precede the lyrical theme.

once again to the low Bb before the actual change of character occurs that ushers in the second lyrical section (Example 7-M).

Coltrane's second lyrical section allows interpolation from the previous section to occasionally interrupt the huge leaps and disjunct lines that form this angular music (Example 8-M). While Ali's drums and cymbals continue to build upon the speed and intensity that accumulated in the preceding section, Coltrane's tenor provides contrasting counterpoint through an augmentation of note values in this highly quartal sonority. The first two intervals of the initial tenor saxophone fanfare are explored at great lengths within a more legato style that no longer features rhythms of a percussive nature (Example 9-M). Grace notes and other dramatic flourishes decorate notes of longer duration in a manner reminiscent of Coltrane's opening "ruff-like" rhythm (Example 10-M). The range of the pitches in this section extends three and a half octaves above the low Bb that began the transition into this section, and the altissimo harmonics and multiphonics continue to contribute a quality that suggests human emotional ululations.

In contrast, the second saturation density area is characterized by conjunct descending patterns that imply the Coltrane type of flexible modality evident in his earlier styles (Example 11-M). If the ear has been drawn to the music of the woodwind instrument, Ali's unrelenting intensity forms a hyperpolyrhythmic foundation of percussion under the tenor saxophone's spiraling sound that, by

this point in time, functions in the mind of the listener much like a droning function or ostinato pattern in other Coltrane works. The transition from the previous lyrical section involves a gradual diminution of note durations that eventually forms compressed rhythmic groupings that again resemble drum rolls; but this time they are of the shorter variety - five, seven, nine, eleven strokes, etc. (Example 12-M). Coltrane ends suddenly during the execution of these descending patterns, without a transition, leaving Ali to perform a cadenza (his second solo). Now, if the mind did indeed place the percussion in the background, they are jolted into the foreground surprisingly, where their own melodic character, innovative elasticity, and complexity are clearly revealed.

Coltrane begins his final statement with another lyrical section, this time filled with large leaps that create a disjunct texture of hocket and dialogues between the lower, middle and upper registers of the saxophone (Example 13-M), framed by the persistently vehement statements created by Ali's inspired hyperpolyrhythmic textures. The perfect fourth and whole step from Coltrane's first three notes again are significantly involved in this lyrical section, but this time the third interval (the minor third) is also prominent (Example 14-M). These principal intervals occur in various permutations and involve larger intervallic leaps than before, which set off the short dialogues and hocket that the saxophone invents in a way that maintains the emotional intensity despite the elongation of note values. The

saxophone's individual rhythmic statements in each register again resemble the opening ruffs and fragmented drum roll and patterns that opened the movement. After descending to the lowest Bb on his saxophone, contained within a hocketing figure (Example 15-M), Coltrane brings his contribution to *Mars* to a close. Ali remains subtly involved in the emotional contour that Coltrane shapes throughout this movement while preserving distinctly contrasting musical features concomitantly. The emotional character established early on in the drums is tirelessly and appropriately expressive of the "god of war" to the very end. The sleigh bells suggests the beginning of the coda section and have the final word.

Venus - The sistrum (sleigh bells) again begins *Venus*, named for the planet of love, as the second movement provides sharp contrast to the mood and musical vocabulary of the first. Whereas the level of emotional intensity was consistently greater in the drums than in the saxophone music in *Mars* (the assertiveness of the drum statement is unbroken from beginning to end, for instance), the situation is now reversed. Ali's percussion (now utilizing brushes) establishes a transparent, spacious and malleable backdrop for the subdued ballad that is Coltrane's opening statement (Example 1-V). Both tonal centers and polyrhythmic patterning can be discerned now, near the beginning of the movement, suggesting that a much greater degree of stability exists here than in *Mars*. Coltrane's music in

the opening musical proceedings utilizes F# as the central pitch, and a cadence on the dominant of that note (on the note of longest duration in the movement) reinforces its importance (Example 2-V). In defiance of the influential role of the F# in this movement, the aural perception is that D-major is the tonality, in the opening and closing sections of this movement, even though the music never gets beyond a feeling of being in the dominant of that key (A-mixolydian) all the way to Coltrane's final note.

Between the tonal framework suggested above, patterns involving the repeated two-note motive (a descending minor second - F# to E) propel the music forward into a series of chromatic modulations (through pitch levels Ab-A-Bb-B-C-C#) composed of asymmetrical spiral patterns (Example 3-V). Coltrane increases his range of control over his fluctuating dynamic levels through changing his proximity to the microphone, as the clear chromatic motion of the ascending and descending patterns dissolve progressively into more obscure relationships. The shapes of these patterns resemble the wave shaped ones from the first area of saturation density in *Mars* (Example 4-V). These patterns are frequently interrupted by melodic interpolations reminiscent of the opening tonal statement. Eventually, this leads to a second chromatic ascent, this time beginning on the tenor saxophone's middle-A, that climbs gradually and dramatically, in modulating chord formations, for the span of a minor 10th, to altissimo-C (Example 5-V).

The grace notes that filled in some of the larger leaps near the beginning of *Venus's* opening section serve a related function in one of the recurring passages that occur in this section (Example 6-V), binding this developmental music even more firmly to its point of departure. The altissimo register of the saxophone, avoided in the music that occurred before the long chromatic ascent, continues to build tension beyond the altissimo-C to a climactic altissimo-F, before the descent begins that forms the closing section (Example 7-V). Multiphonics (Example 8-V), grace notes (Example 9-V), staccato motives (Example 10-V) and lofty intervallic leaps (Example 11-V), contribute to the accumulation of emotional intensity as the drums again parallel Coltrane's emotional outline as previous patterning becomes increasingly more unpredictable.

In the final section of *Venus*, the wave-shaped "sheets of sound" are replaced by descending cascades, most of which are centered upon the F# and E from Coltrane's initial musical gesture in this movement (Example 12-V). With the exception of a few momentary interruptions, the original tonal center is restored and maintained to the end of the movement (Example 13-V). As the rhythms of the opening music return, the opening gesture returns in its original form (Example 14-V), but the root to the implied tonal area is never clearly revealed.

Jupiter - The qualities of expansion, optimism, and purposefulness expressed earlier in this chapter to characterize the planet Jupiter

seem appropriately suited for this concise movement. The ritual bells again signal the beginning of the music and introduce Ali's drums, which enter with triplet figures on the head toms in parallel fifths that create an unusual portamento as the heads of the drums are depressed with one hand while being struck (this time with drum sticks) with the other. The pensive mood that is established is abruptly altered when Coltrane enters with his vigorous three-note motives, composed of an ascending minor third followed by a descending half-step, that are stacked a perfect fourth apart (Example 1-J). This motive becomes a binding force throughout the third movement as it gradually becomes less legato and more percussive in nature.

As the description of the planet Jupiter again suggests, the ideas cultivated in the first two polar opposite movements have now reached their prime and are confidently elaborated upon by both Coltrane and Ali. While refraining from the long rolls of the opening movement, most of the other elements of rudimentary and patented drum patterns return in various forms along with the fluttering bass drum foundation. Coltrane brings back the descending cascades with heavy accentuation and grace notes (Example 2-J); the hocketing figures composed of even greater exaggerated skips (Example 3-J); and the lyrical eighth-notes that are filled in with connecting grace notes as in both the preceding movements (Example 4-J). The variety and irregularity of rhythm, harmonic movement, and timbre is even more pronounced than before. The tenor saxophone again climbs

three octaves and a perfect fifth in *Jupiter* and Coltrane's multiphonics occur in their most advanced stages of development in this movement (Example 5-J).

The formal layout of this movement is less symmetrical than those of *Mars* and *Venus*. After the opening section (based on the three note motive), accented cascades occur on both sides of a hocketing intersection. Following the final set of spiraling cascades, the closing section enters, basing most of its developmental music on the opening motive (Example 6-J) and radical shifts in register. *Jupiter* ends with the head of the opening motive, transposed down a whole step (Example 7-J), followed by a short drum codetta. The bells have the concluding statement, for a third and final time.

Saturn - The "sistrum" does not frame this movement as it has all previous ones, indicating that there is possibly something that sets this music apart from the rest of the suite. Ali's solo initiates the musical action with free thematic drumming in beautifully staggered phrases, comprised of short motives, that create assorted new rhythmic shapes in a dialogue between all the instruments in his drum kit (Example 1-S). The interjection of rests provides space in the drum solo that highlights the rich variety of sounds and techniques being used, and the resultant clarity makes the ear aware of the enormous pitch range that exists between the bass drum and Ali's highest cymbal sound.

Coltrane generates a completely novel mood and approach when he enters with an Eb pentatonic blues riff that can be heard as a two bar phrase in 5/4 meter (Example 2-S). Ali immediately locks in with this metrical feeling without abandoning his rhythmic flexibility. The blues theme is based upon the intervals that composed the two opening intervals of the suite (a whole step and a perfect fourth). For the first time in the suite a steady pulse is implied and syncopated relationships replace the polyrhythmic and polymetric ones momentarily. As a dissolution begins, with the introduction of quartal motives and polymetric patterning (Example 3-S), rhythmic elasticity aggravates the initial stability producing an accelerating transition. The saxophone and drums maintain their close rhythmic relationship throughout the changes that occur, and Ali frequently refers back to aspects of blues feeling as Coltrane expands his musical patterns into free wave-shaped scalar patterns. The fragmentary motives that mark the beginning of the colorful development section, are replaced by Coltrane's legato "sheets of sound" (Example 4-S).

The saxophone's note values become elongated in the subsequent music, but what initially appears to be a lyrical section with a recurring low-C pedal point, soon becomes Coltrane's longest and most complex developmental music in the suite. References to the original blues theme can be heard occasionally at the beginning of this section in brief fragmented statements. Most of the primary features of the entire suite make an appearance here: (1) the

hocketing figures (Example 5-S), (2) the lyrical eighth notes with their chromatic grace-notes (Example 6-S), (3) the huge shifts in register (Example 7-S), etc., as the tone color of the saxophone varies constantly from legato melodic fragments to more percussive qualities. In *Saturn*, however, the impressive range of the saxophone is extended another semitone (from low Bb to altissimo F#) at the climax of the development section, as the multiphonics and harmonics that have been a part of Coltrane's language become augmented with fall-offs²³ from notes in the altissimo register. Now no trace of the blues or any tonal center remains until descending cascades, once again (as in *Mars* and *Jupiter*), lead into the recapitulation of the blues pattern (Example 8-S). With Coltrane and Ali reunited in a syncopated relationship, a ritard in the brief codetta quickly slows the music to a halt.

Although the final two movements of *Expression* (Impulse 9120) were recorded on March 7, 1967, *Interstellar Space* was the last complete work that Coltrane recorded. It is important because it demonstrates the spontaneous composer's mind at work in a setting completely devoid of the limitations that were imposed upon his music when more musicians were involved in the process. Although the demands of maintaining compositional clarity, interest, continuity, and other esthetic factors become

²³ A decoration used in jazz and some African music involving a drop in pitch during a tone's decay.

problematic as the length of a composition increases and its instrumentation decreases, Coltrane seems to possess an intuitive awareness of balance that addresses these problems at the structural level as well as in the finer details of the work. The structural design of the suite (Example 1-I) confirms his ability to spontaneously create long range structural form while utilizing a musical palette that contains all the basic instrumental colors, conceptual ideas, and emotional levels that were explored throughout his prolific and richly endowed musical career. Regardless of the level of emotional intensity reached during *Interstellar Space*, the elements utilized show clear organization and are composed entirely of traditional musical ingredients. Coltrane's spontaneous compositions from his final period often contain quartal passages involving perfect, augmented, and diminished fourths (Example 2-I). His music here, therefore, merely appears completely abstract because of the expressive manner in which Coltrane presents these basic elements, just as the scientist examines the various phenomena in the universe from the exploration of a relatively few basic elements.

The artist . . . is exploring his environment, and his responses to it, no less than is a scientist in his laboratory; he is ordering his perception and making a model of reality. . .

Art is thus, notwithstanding its devaluation in post-Renaissance society, as vital an activity as science, and in fact reaches into areas of activity that science cannot touch . . .

The reality of experience . . . is inaccessible to scientific method, and . . . it is this reality that art proclaims and explores.²⁴

It is difficult, as scientists have always recognized, to reduce living things to empirical formulas, and *Interstellar Space* is such a living phenomenon that will possibly never be reduced to a form of notation that can be accurately interpreted by musicians seeking to express every note of the composition as "the composer intended." Some elements of the music are simply emotional expression that defies any symbols in common practice. Some notes Coltrane played during the recording present timbres that lie beyond the harmonics, multiphonics, and other woodwind techniques that have been codified by twentieth-century composers and theorists. Such passages are notated with diamond-shaped note heads in the examples.²⁵ Artistic expression supersedes a desire for traditional technical clarity and seems to

²⁴ Christopher Small, Music, Society, Education; quoted in Paul Rinzler, "Preliminary Thoughts on Analyzing Musical Interaction Among Jazz Performers," Annual Review of Jazz Studies Volume 4, Ed. Dan Morgenstern, Charles Nanry, and David A. Cayer (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1985), p. 154.

²⁵ Harmonics, multiphonics, and other personal expression saxophone techniques overlap and blend into each other in Coltrane's performance of this work. A harmonic, for example, played with slightly less intensity (wind velocity) can be changed into a multiphonic.

be the guiding force throughout. Coltrane continued to experiment with new means of expression.

But I've got to keep experimenting. I feel that I'm just beginning. I have part of what I'm looking for in my grasp but not all.

I'm very happy devoting all my time to music, and I'm glad to be one of the many who are striving for fuller development as musicians. Considering the great heritage in music that we have, the work of giants of the past, the present, and the promise of those who are to come, I feel that we have every reason to face the future optimistically.²⁶

When we turn from the art music of the West to the art music of other cultures, we see that most of the non-Western musical forms involve improvisation. Even when a type of notated score is involved, it usually only serves an outline, that is elaborately embellished and expanded upon, for the music to be performed. Often the style of embellishment or ornamentation is part of a long and complex tradition, but all involve a balancing of the emotions and intellect in the process of musical self expression.

As with non-Western music from around the world, Coltrane's music always contained sounds that can have different meanings

²⁶ "Coltrane On Coltrane," p. 53.

in different contexts. Yet this spontaneous composer defies all traditions in his final years while continuing to incorporate elements of music from all cultures. His later music often reaches saturation density. Saturation arouses a strong expectation, especially when intensity is accumulating, and Coltrane inevitably rewards the patient listener with beautiful musical contrasts. As he matured as a spontaneous composer, his diversity became more subtle. The last works display a disturbance of the metrical organization that surpasses the complex polyrhythmic explorations of The Coltrane Quartet; but the vigorously forceful music always maintains a rhythmic drive that cannot be denied even if it does baffle the theorist or musicologist. This can be most disconcerting to listeners who approach music from basically an analytic perspective, since many of the elements of Coltrane's final works work against the duple and triple (major and minor) memory patterns that many people's expectations are based upon. By the time *Interstellar Space* was created, Coltrane no longer seems concerned about the assumptions of those around him, but rather seems to want to communicate spiritual pleasure, suspense, and wisdom to those open to receive such messages. It is unfortunate that the album was not released until after Coltrane's death.

Coltrane's music was always sustained with tremendous drive, imagination, and musicality. Throughout his career he proved to be both musically empathetic with and inspiring to the musicians he performed with. His musical explorations led him in a direction

similar in many ways to that travelled by other twentieth-century composers of Western art music. After all, art music of all traditions generally aspire to similar artistic goals, utilize similar music vocabularies, and the creators often arrive at related artistic conclusions. Scriabin's experiments with unequal fourths and Milhaud's leaps of more than an octave (*Violin Concerto No. 2*); the pentatonic scales and oblique configurations found in earlier Stravinsky compositions (*The Rite of Spring* : "Adoration of the Earth" - "Dance of the Earth"); and the quarter-tone experiments of Alois Haba (*Fantasy for Violin Solo in Quarter Tones*) are all related to compositional problems encountered during Coltrane's musical evolution that have been discussed in this chapter. Archie Shepp mentions other contributions.

I see him as one of the important musical innovators of the 20th century, as well as Parker and Hawkins and Young, people like that. He is one of the formidable synthesists of our craft. I think he's one of the people who merged black art into black science. A great musical scientist, which is why so many people of all races and colors have rushed to explore his work and try to understand it because he has concretized certain scientific elements, particularly in the way of melody.

I'm talking about melodic construction and his almost *reinvention* of the saxophone. People are doing things with it now that wouldn't have been dreamed of a few years ago. From the point of view of the African Diaspora here in the new world, he turned a basically

Western instrument into a non-Western instrument. He took the saxophone and he did fundamentally non-Western things with it the way the harmonica players used to jackknife keys to get those twelve tones and flat that third, like that. His use of field hollers in his sound really connotes a thorough and passionate understanding of tradition. I'm deeply affected both as a musician and a person deeply interested in the political struggle of my people.²⁷

Perhaps each readers will feel somewhat aware of the problems of racism and sexism in our society, and therefore fail to see the need for connecting this social malady so strongly with Coltrane's music. It seems that the fact that this connection has not been strongly emphasized in the past suggests that clear representation of the social environment in which Coltrane worked and lived may be, like witch-hunts, slavery, and the Ku Klux Klan, embarrassing vexations and nightmares we would prefer to disassociate positive memories from. Hopefully, nevertheless, its relevance is to this research is clear and meaningful. Media coverage near the end of the Viet Nam War did show us that people are less likely to tolerate gross injustices when vividly reminded of the gory details that are a part of the complete picture.

I asked Alice Coltrane what direction she felt African-American music is headed. She felt that "Today, in these present times as

²⁷ Archie Shepp, "Musicians Talk About John Coltrane," Down Beat, July 12, 1979, p. 20.

music becomes more and more commercialized for monetary gain, what can one speak of in terms of the future."²⁸

History clearly demonstrates that America has been highly resistant to embracing opportunities to acknowledge excellence in any field or endeavor in which its African-American citizens (as well as certain other oppressed people) have excelled. It is understandably difficult for any people who claim superiority over another to acquiesce or concede to even the most palpable evidence, especially if that evidence destroys the myths created to perpetuate such sophistry. In the future, when Coltrane's music (as well as the music of other African-American innovators) will be acknowledged as great classic music, *Interstellar Space* will surely be appreciated in the spirit in which it was created. That spirit was concerned with being "a force for good" and expressing a universal musical message that stems from lucid insight into the process of creativity and teleology, and forms a legacy of musical knowledge from which all humankind can benefit. As Valerie Capers points out, "John's music is not about melody, rhythm, and harmony alone. It extends far beyond that and becomes something that is spiritual, philosophical, and intellectual."²⁹ A comment by Coltrane scholar Andrew White reveals that those individuals who have taken the time to investigate Coltrane's music thoroughly, know this to be true.

²⁸ In her September 4, 1990 letter to me.

²⁹ Valerie Capers, "John Coltrane: Bringing Verismo to Jazz," Village Voice, June 24, 1986 (in the *Tenor Madness* supplement), p. T8.

I claim that in the 421 transcribed Coltrane solos that I have published there is clear evidence of the distillation process of artistic deduction at work. I claim that there is evidence of a man trying to play the antithesis of himself. This means that this man worked hard enough and long enough to avoid sounding like just another saxophone player who improvised solos based on a substantial frame of reference. But instead he tried to make a unique individual statement each time he played. These 421 solos show the work of an organized craftsman who hand-picked each phrase for optimal effect in the shape of each solo. Evidence of vast resources of predisposition in the sequence of events stated in each solo. Evidence of handpicked thematic language. Not a language that was haphazard, frivolous or spontaneous. . .³⁰

John and Alice Coltrane's children, John Jr., Michelle, Ravi, and Oran have followed in their parents musical footsteps (John Jr., the eldest, died in 1982). Oran and Ravi performed on the Fourth Annual John Coltrane Festival for the Performing Arts (playing tenor and soprano saxophones respectively) on September 22, 1990 in Los Angeles. Ms. Coltrane says that The John Coltrane

³⁰ Andrew Nathaniel White III, Trane 'n Me: A Treatise on the Music of John Coltrane (Washington, D. C.: Andrew's Musical Enterprises, 1981), p. 38.

Festival has structured its programs for the preservation of this American cultural heritage.³¹

Indeed, the personal language Coltrane codified over a lifetime was not purely spontaneous. The unique manner in which he utilized his compositional vocabulary for artistic and spiritual self-expression was and is inspiring, novel, and exciting. Coltrane expressed his personal musical code.

Keep listening. Never become so self-important that you can't listen to other players. Live cleanly...Do right...You can improve as a player by improving as a person. It's a duty we owe to ourselves.

. . . music is the means of expression with strong emotional content. Jazz used to be happy and joyous. I'd like to play happy and joyous.³²

³¹ Sept. 4, 1990 letter from Alice Coltrane.

³² "Trane on the Track," p. 17.

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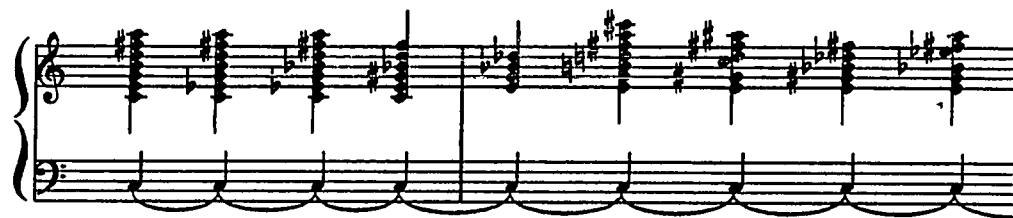
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Example 1, Pitch Complex

SECOND PERIOD



Any of these chords (and others) might be played by a performer in response to the chord symbol C7 in a progression in modern jazz.

Example 2, 'Relaxin' at Camarillo'

SECOND PERIOD

The musical score consists of two systems, each with a piano part (grand staff) and a melody line (single staff). The piano part is divided into three measures per system, with various chords indicated below the staff. The melody line features eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together, and rests.

System 1:

- Measure 1: Chords C7, B $\flat$ 7 $\sharp$ 9. Bass line: C7, Fm7.
- Measure 2: Chords A7, 3. Bass line: C7, E $\flat$ 7 $\sharp$ 9.
- Measure 3: Chords Dm7, D[$\sharp$]. Bass line: C $\sharp$ 9, D $\flat$ 7, C9, D $\flat$ 7, Gm7, Dm7.

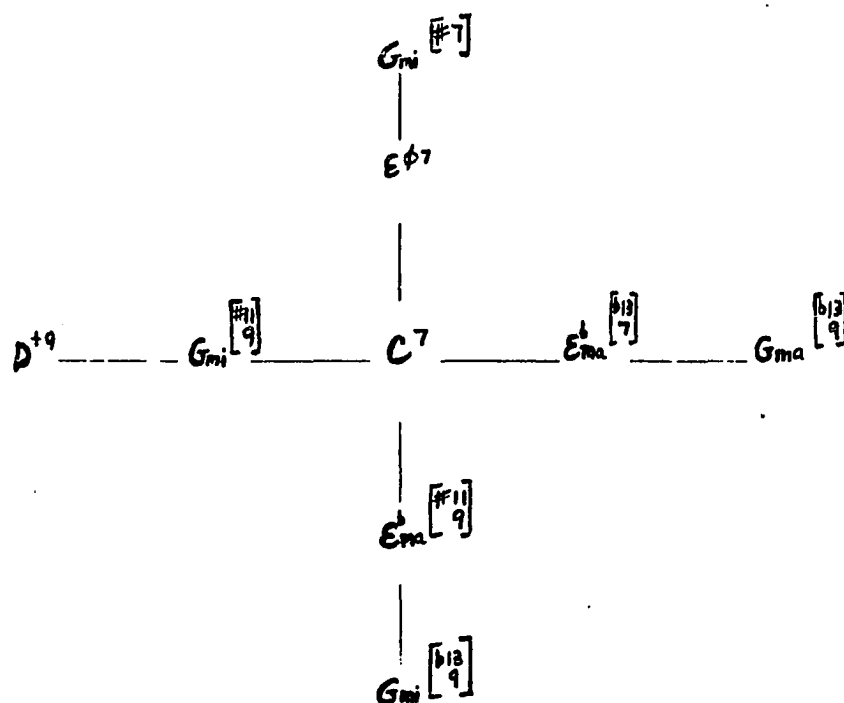
System 2:

- Measure 1: Chords B7, B[$\sharp$]. Bass line: Gm7, C7.
- Measure 2: Chords C7, F7, A7. Bass line: C7 $\sharp$ 9, F7 $\sharp$ 9, D $\flat$ 7.
- Measure 3: Chords Dm7, C $\sharp$ 7 $\sharp$ 9. Bass line: C7, Gm7.

This melody is harmonized with three different sets of chord changes that might occur in subsequent solo choruses. Possible chord substitutions can be noted by observing some of the harmonic simultaneities.

Example 3

SECOND PERIOD



Matrix for a blues C7 chord shows some of the primary and secondary chords used to provide a sense of extending (stretching out) the tonal center. Tritone substitutions are also commonly employed.

Example 4, 'Giant Steps'

SECOND PERIOD

Chord progression for Example 4, 'Giant Steps' (Second Period):

Staff 1: B D7 G B^b7 E6 Am17 D7 G B^b7

Staff 2: E^b F[#]7 B Fm17 B^b7 E^b Am17 D7 G

Staff 3: C[#]m17 F[#]7 B Fm17 B^b7 E^b C[#]m17 F[#]7

Example 1, Elvin Jones

THIRD PERIOD

The musical notation is organized into two systems, each with four staves representing different drum parts. The first system includes staves for Ride Cymbal, Snare Drum, Hi-hat, and Bass Drum. The second system continues the notation for the same four parts. The notation uses various rhythmic symbols including eighth notes, quarter notes, and rests, with triplet markings (a '3' over a bracket) indicating complex polyrhythmic patterns. The Ride Cymbal part features a steady eighth-note pulse. The Snare Drum part has a more complex pattern with triplets. The Hi-hat part provides a steady quarter-note accompaniment. The Bass Drum part features a pattern of eighth notes and quarter notes, also including triplet markings.

An example of the infinitely varied types of polyrhythmic stratification to be found in Jones's drumming.

Example 2, McCoy Tyner

THIRD PERIOD



A typical hemiola pattern from this period.

Example 3, Tyner 'Afro Blue'

THIRD PERIOD



Tyner's rhythms create a sense of duple meter that opposes the syncopated triple meter outlined by the melody.

Example 4, 'Impressions'

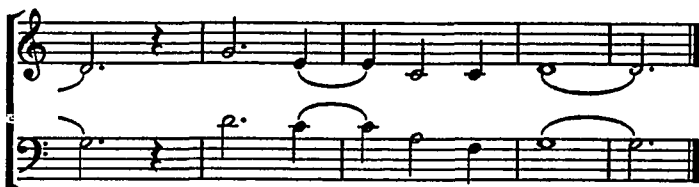
THIRD PERIOD



An excerpt from an Andrew White transcription.

Example 5, 'India'

THIRD PERIOD



Theme as played by Coltrane (top) and Dolfy (lower).

Example 6, Dolphy

THIRD PERIOD



Example 7, Rhythmic Stratification with Dolfy

THIRD PERIOD

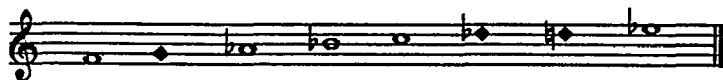
Dolfy

Snare Drum

Polyrhythmic tension is heightened by Dolfy's predisposition towards duple subdivision here.

Example 8, 'A Love Supreme' (pitch collection)

THIRD PERIOD



As cited by Lewis Porter, "John Coltrane's A Love Supreme: Jazz Improvisation as Composition." Journal of the American Musicological Society, vol. 38, 1985, p. 602.

THIRD PERIOD

Theme



Example 10, 'Resolution'

THIRD PERIOD



Transcribed by Lewis Porter

Example 11, 'Pursuance'

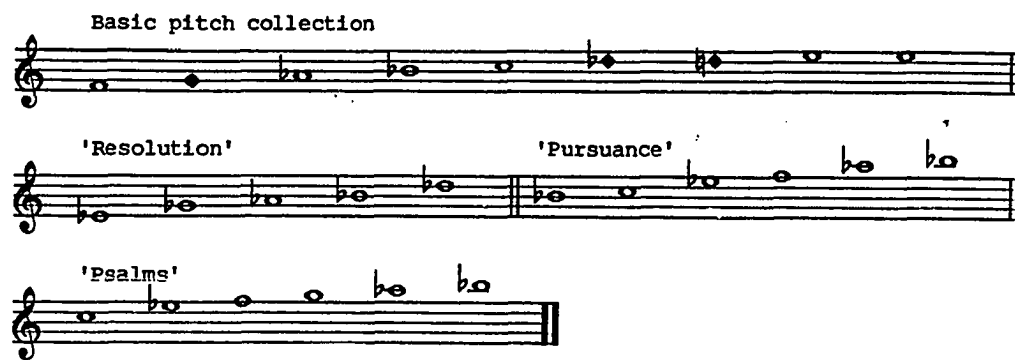
THIRD PERIOD



Transcribed by Lewis Porter

Example 12, Basic scales

THIRD PERIOD



As cited in Lewis Porter's "John Coltrane's A Love Supreme: Jazz Improvisation as Composition."

Example 13, related motives
Acknowledgement

THIRD PERIOD

'Pursuance'

'Psalms'

I have seen un-god-ly; none can be

Lewis Porter transcription.

Example 14, Coltrane's solo on 'Acknowledgement' (end)

THIRD PERIOD

The musical notation is presented in three systems, each with a treble and bass staff. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The first system shows a melody in the treble staff and a bass line in the bass staff. The second system continues the melody and bass line. The third system shows a change in the melody, with some notes marked with a sharp sign (#).

Coltrane's melody with ostinato bass pattern.

Example 1, 'Naima'

FOURTH PERIOD

The musical score for 'Naima' (Fourth Period) is presented in three systems, each with a treble and bass staff. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 4/4. The score features various chords and melodic lines with triplets.

System 1:

- Chords: B^bmi9 , E^bmi9
- Triplet markings: 3

System 2:

- Chords: $B9/13$, $A9/13$, A^bma7 , $Bma7$
- Triplet markings: 3

System 3:

- Chords: $B^b7[13]$, $Bma7$, $B^b7[13]$
- Triplet markings: 3

Example 1, 'Naima'

FOURTH PERIOD

Musical score for 'Naima' (Fourth Period). The score is written for a single melodic line and a piano accompaniment.

Melodic Line:

- Staff 1 (Treble Clef):
 - Measure 1: E¹³ (E¹³11) - Quarter note, G#4.
 - Measure 2: C^bma7 - Quarter note, F#4.
 - Measure 3: Fm13 - Quarter note, E4.
 - Measure 4: Ema7/6 (DS) - Quarter note, D4.

Piano Accompaniment:

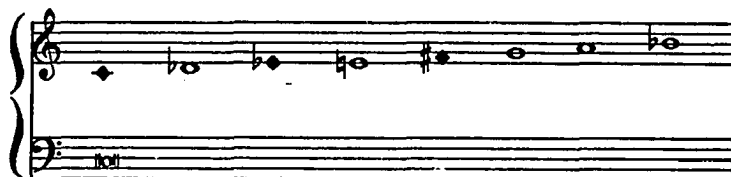
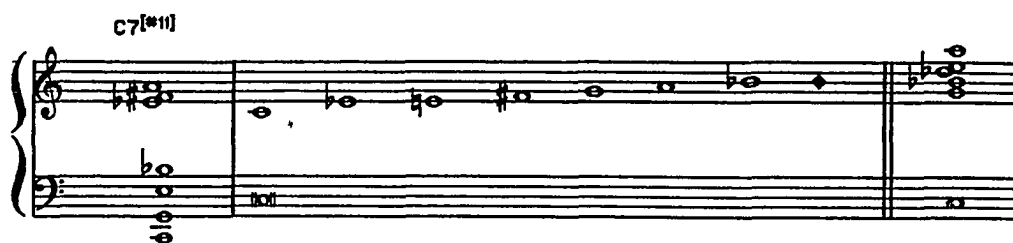
- Staff 2 (Treble Clef):
 - Measure 1: Chord (Bb4, D5, F#5) - Quarter note.
 - Measure 2: Chord (Bb4, D5, F#5) - Quarter note.
 - Measure 3: Chord (Bb4, D5, F#5) - Quarter note.
 - Measure 4: Chord (Bb4, D5, F#5) - Quarter note.
- Staff 3 (Bass Clef):
 - Measure 1: Chord (Bb2, D3, F#3) - Quarter note.
 - Measure 2: Chord (Bb2, D3, F#3) - Quarter note.
 - Measure 3: Chord (Bb2, D3, F#3) - Quarter note.
 - Measure 4: Chord (Bb2, D3, F#3) - Quarter note.

Chords and Fingerings:

- Measure 1: E¹³ (E¹³11) - Chord: E4, G#4, B4, D5, F#5, A5. Fingering: 3 (under G#4).
- Measure 2: C^bma7 - Chord: Cb5, Eb5, F#5, Ab5. Fingering: 3 (under F#5).
- Measure 3: Fm13 - Chord: F4, Ab4, Cb5, Eb5, Gb5, A5. Fingering: 3 (under Gb5).
- Measure 4: Ema7/6 (DS) - Chord: E4, G#4, B4, D5, F#5, A5. Fingering: 3 (under G#4).

Example 2, Blues

FOURTH PERIOD



Horizontalization of C7 blues chords.

Example 1-M

Snare Drum

Tom-toms

Cymbal

Hi-hat

Bass Drum

Sleigh Bells

S.D.

Toms

Cymb.

B.D.

S.B.

Example 1-M

Drum notation for Example 1-M, measures 1-4:

- S.D.** (Snare Drum): Measures 1-2 have eighth-note patterns. Measure 3 has a quarter rest. Measure 4 has two eighth notes.
- Toms**: Measure 1 has a quarter rest. Measure 2 has a quarter rest. Measure 3 has a quarter rest. Measure 4 has a quarter note.
- Cymb.** (Cymbal): Measure 1 has a quarter note. Measure 2 has a quarter rest. Measure 3 has a quarter rest. Measure 4 has a quarter note.
- B.D.** (Bass Drum): Measure 1 has a quarter rest. Measure 2 has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 3 has a quarter note. Measure 4 has a quarter note.
- S.B.** (Sub-Bass): Measure 1 has a quarter note. Measure 2 has a quarter rest. Measure 3 has a quarter rest. Measure 4 has a quarter rest.

Drum notation for Example 1-M, measures 5-8:

- S.D.** (Snare Drum): Measures 5-8 have eighth-note patterns.
- Toms**: Measures 5-8 have eighth-note patterns, including triplets in measures 5 and 7.
- Cymb.** (Cymbal): Measures 5-8 have eighth-note patterns.
- B.D.** (Bass Drum): Measures 5-8 have eighth-note patterns, including a triplet in measure 6.
- S.B.** (Sub-Bass): Measures 5-8 have eighth-note patterns.

Example 2-M

Snare Drum

Toms

Cymbals

Bass Drum

Sleigh Bells

etc.

etc.

Hi-hat

etc.

etc.

etc.

Example 3-M



Example 4-M

Example 4-M is a musical score consisting of four staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). It contains two measures of music, with the first measure labeled B^bmi9 and the second measure labeled $B^b7(Blues)$. A curved line connects the end of the first staff to the beginning of the second staff. The second staff continues the melody and includes three measures labeled B^baug , $Gma7[*11]$, and $F^\#O$. A curved line connects the end of the second staff to the beginning of the third staff. The third staff contains two measures labeled $Fma7$ and $Cma9$. A curved line connects the end of the third staff to the beginning of the fourth staff. The fourth staff contains five measures labeled $F7[*11]$, $Cmi9$, $C7[*11]$, $C\emptyset7$, and $D9$. The music is written in a style that suggests a blues or jazz influence, with various chord extensions and alterations.

Example 5-M



etc...ascending gradually

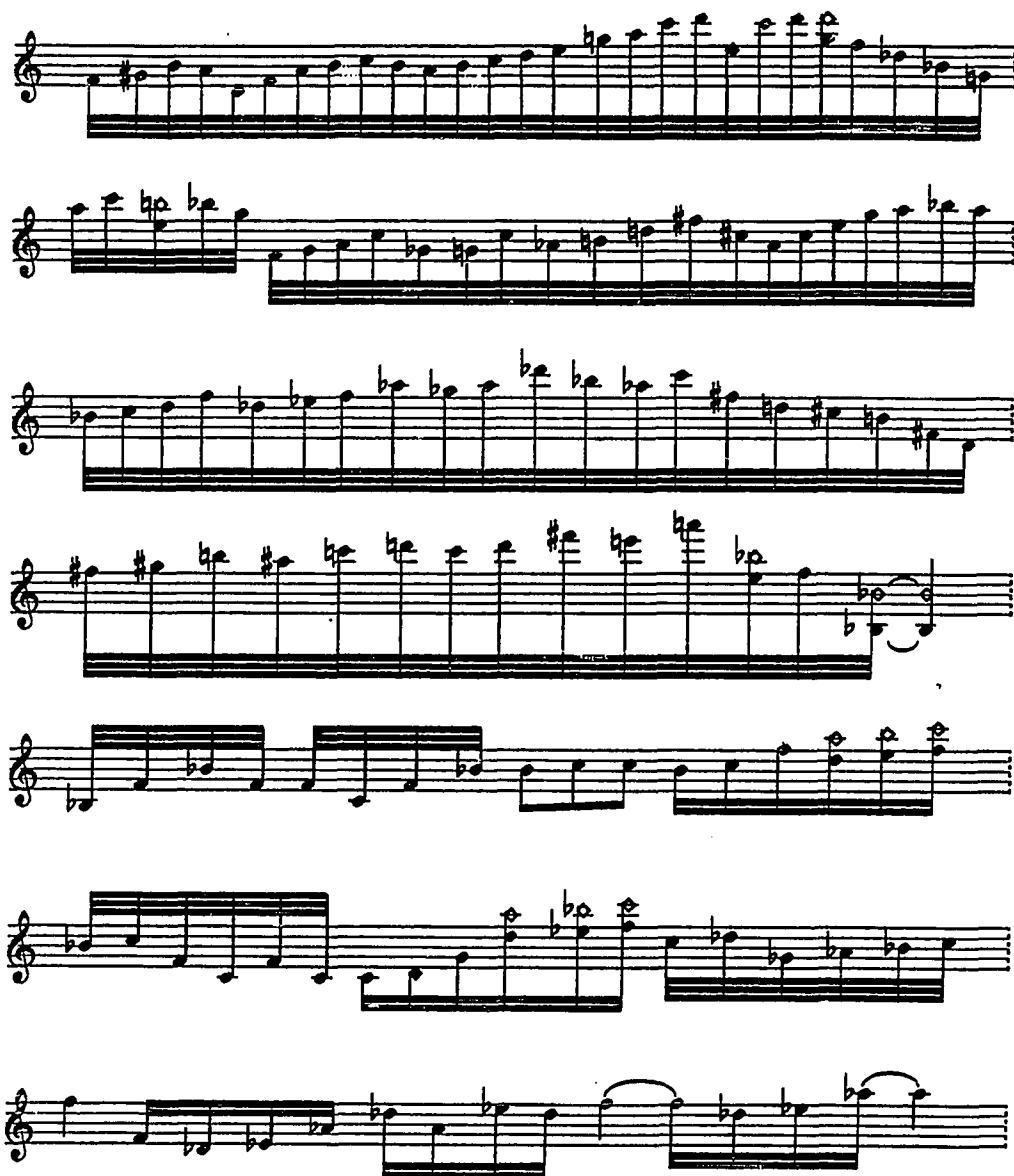


Andrew White transcription

Example 6-M

The musical score for Example 6-M consists of four staves of music, all in treble clef. The first staff contains a single melodic line with a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, including a trill-like figure. The second staff begins with a bracket labeled "8va" above it, indicating an octave transposition. It contains a melodic line with various accidentals (sharps and flats) and a final phrase with a double bar line. The third staff also has an "8va" bracket and contains a melodic line with mostly whole and half notes. The fourth staff contains a more complex melodic line with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes, ending with a double bar line.

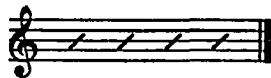
Example 7-M



Example 7-M



Simile



Andrew White transcription

Example 8-M

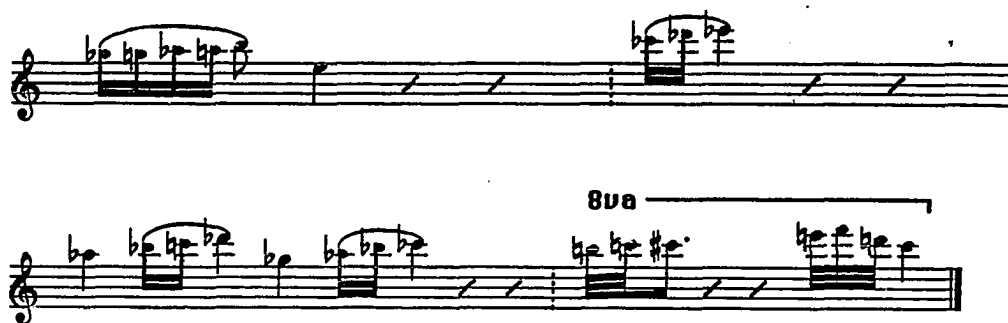


Andrew White transcription

Example 9-M



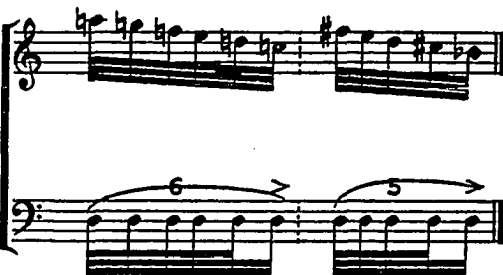
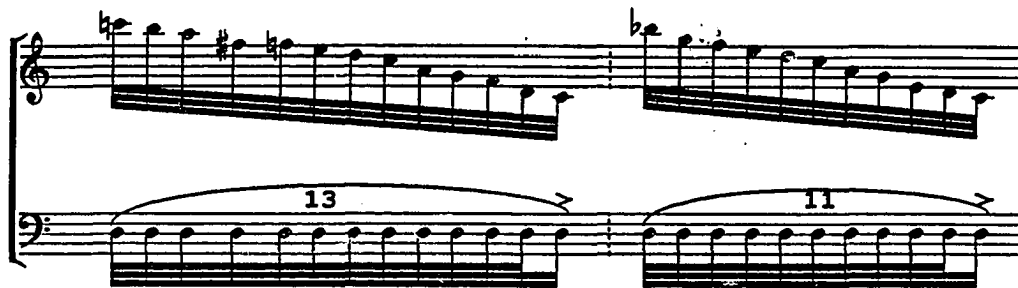
Example 10-M



Example 11-M



Example 12-M



Example 13-M



Andrew White transcription

Example 14-M

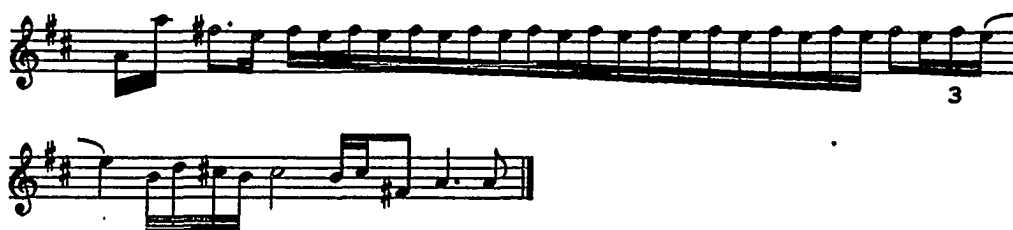


Example 15-M



Andrew White transcription

Example 1-V



Example 2-V



Example 3-V



Example 5-V

The musical score for Example 5-V consists of seven staves of music in G major (one sharp). The notation includes various rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and several triplet markings (indicated by a '3' below the notes). The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. The music progresses through several measures, with some measures containing multiple beamed notes. The second staff continues the melodic line. The third staff features a series of triplet markings. The fourth staff also contains triplet markings. The fifth staff shows a change in the melodic line. The sixth staff includes a measure with a fermata. The seventh staff concludes the piece with a final measure and a double bar line.

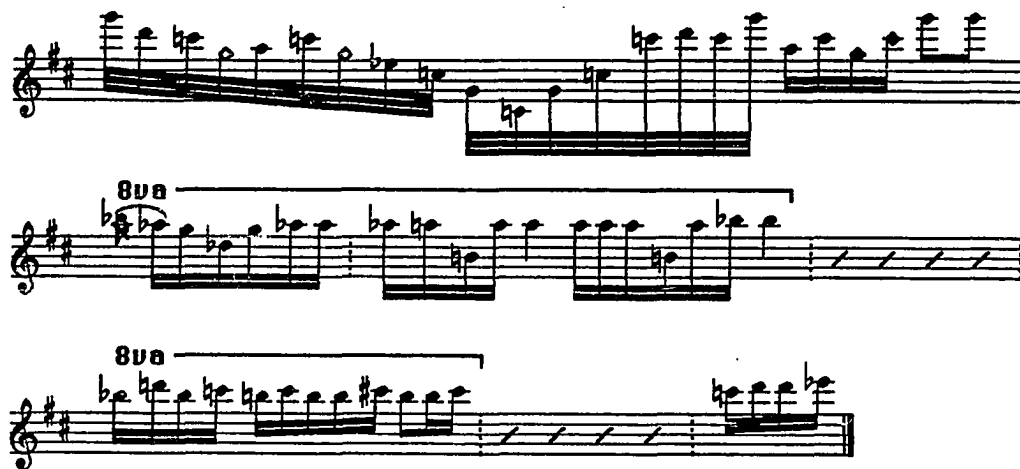
Example 5-V

The musical score for Example 5-V consists of eight staves of music, all in G major (one sharp). The notation is as follows:

- Staff 1: A series of eighth-note chords, mostly triads, moving in a descending sequence.
- Staff 2: A series of eighth-note chords, mostly dyads, continuing the descending sequence.
- Staff 3: A series of eighth-note chords, mostly triads, continuing the descending sequence.
- Staff 4: A series of eighth-note chords, mostly dyads, continuing the descending sequence.
- Staff 5: A series of eighth-note chords, mostly triads, continuing the descending sequence.
- Staff 6: A series of eighth-note chords, mostly dyads, continuing the descending sequence.
- Staff 7: A series of eighth-note chords, mostly triads, continuing the descending sequence.
- Staff 8: A series of eighth-note chords, mostly dyads, continuing the descending sequence.

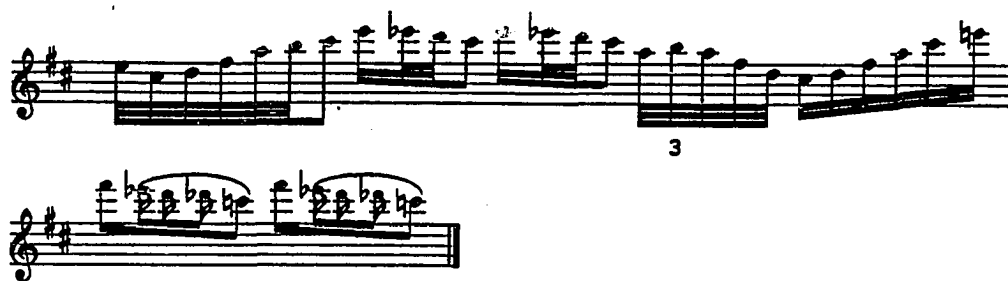
The score is written in a single system, with each staff containing a series of eighth-note chords. The chords are mostly triads and dyads, and the sequence is descending. The key signature is G major (one sharp).

Example 5-V



Andrew White transcription

Example 6-V



Example 7-V

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It contains a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, some with accidentals (flats and naturals). A bracket labeled "8va" spans the final portion of the staff. The bottom staff is also in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp. It begins with three notes (B4, D4, F#4) marked with "8va" and a bracket, followed by the text "gradually descending to". The staff ends with a single note (F#4) marked with a sharp sign.

Example 8-V



Example 9-V



Example 10-V



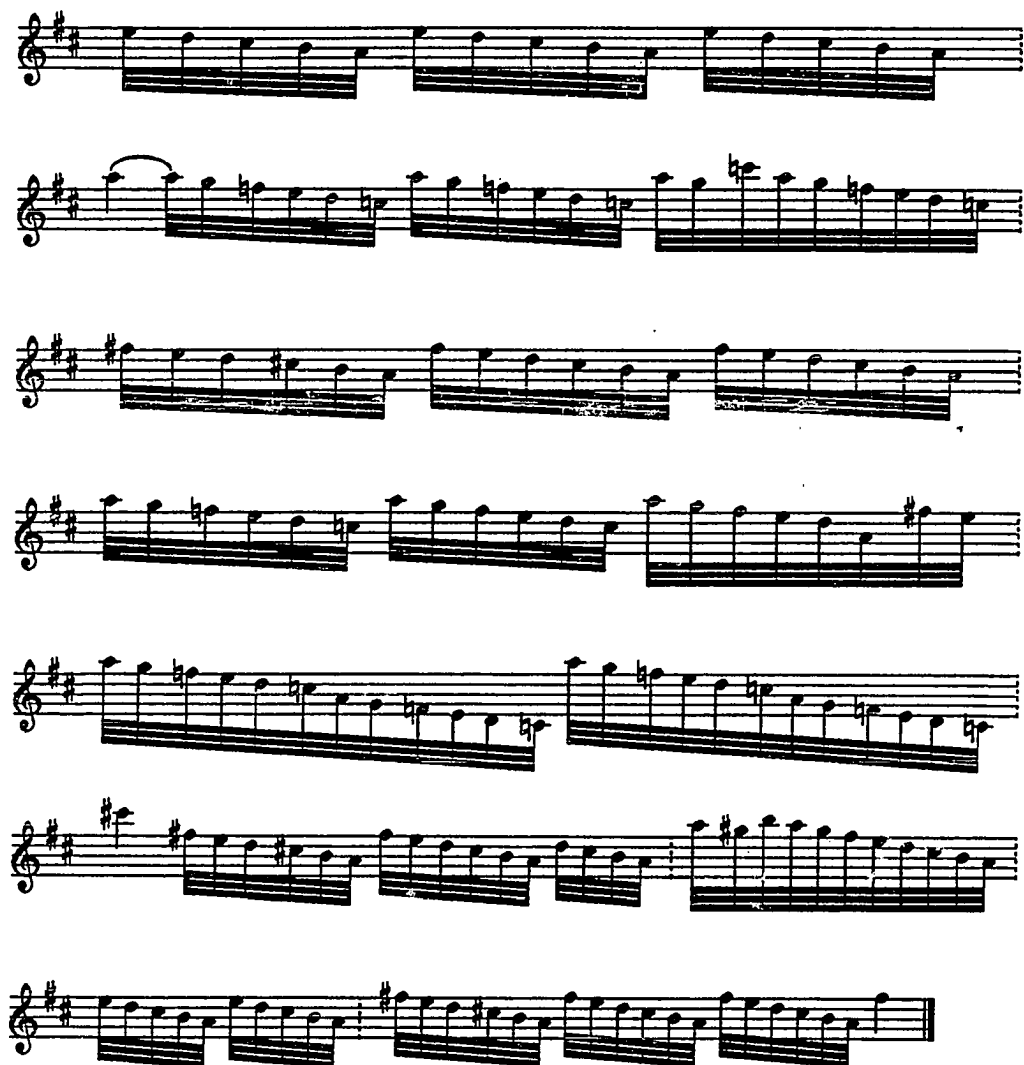
Example 11-V



Example 12-V



Example 13-V



Example 14-V

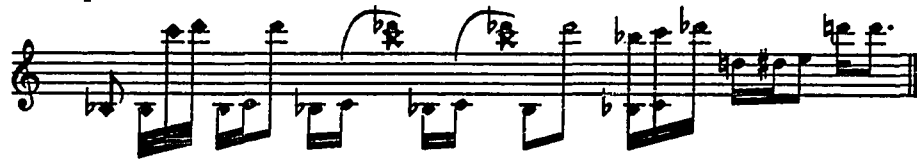


Example 2-J



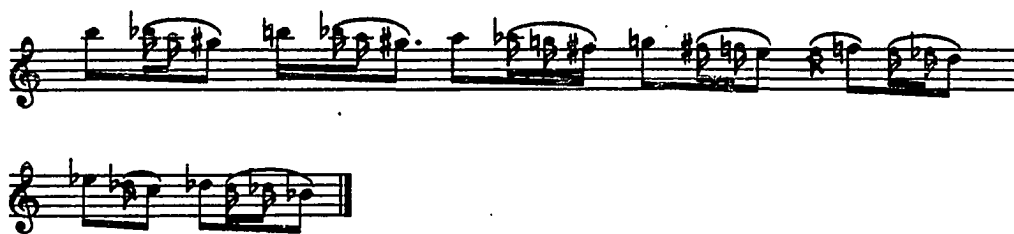
Andrew White transcription

Example 3-J



Andrew White transcription

Example 4-J



Example 5-J

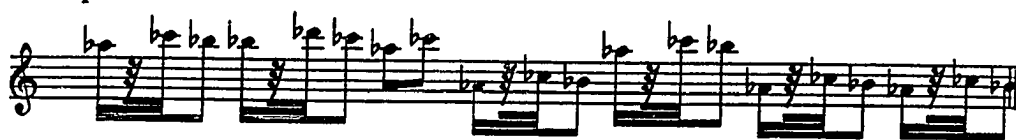


Andrew White transcription

Example 6-J

The musical score for Example 6-J consists of four staves. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). It contains several measures of music, including a triplet of eighth notes and a measure with a slur over a group of notes. Above the first staff, the text "8va" is written with a line extending to the right, and another "8va" is written above a later measure. The second staff continues the melody with various notes and rests. The third staff features a series of eighth notes with slurs, and the fourth staff concludes the piece with a final measure and a double bar line.

Example 7-J



Example 1-S

The musical score for Example 1-S is written for four percussion instruments: Snare (Sn.), Toms, Cymbal (Cymb.), and Bass Drum (B.D.). The notation is in bass clef with a 3/4 time signature. The first system shows the initial measures, with the Toms part featuring a triplet of eighth notes. The second system continues the piece, with the Toms part featuring four triplet markings over eighth notes. The score concludes with a double bar line (//) at the end of the second system.

Example 1-S

The musical score for Example 1-S consists of four staves, all in bass clef and 3/4 time. The first staff begins with a quarter rest, followed by an eighth note, a quarter note, and a half note. The second staff starts with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note, an eighth note, and a quarter note. The third staff begins with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note, an eighth note, and a quarter note. The fourth staff starts with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note, an eighth note, and a quarter note. The score includes various musical notations such as eighth notes, quarter notes, and triplets, along with a 'Hi-hat' section.

Example 2-S

The first system of the musical score consists of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef with a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and a 3/4 time signature. It contains a melody with eighth and quarter notes, including a triplet of eighth notes marked with a '3' below. The bottom staff is in bass clef with the same key signature and time signature, providing a harmonic accompaniment with eighth and quarter notes.

Example 3-S



Example 4-S

A musical score for the song 'The Rose Tree'. It consists of four staves of music. The first staff is the melody, written in treble clef with a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and a common time signature. The second staff is a vocal harmony or accompaniment, also in treble clef with the same key signature and time signature. The third and fourth staves are piano accompaniment, written in bass clef with the same key signature and time signature. The music features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some rests and a final double bar line at the end of the fourth staff.

Example 5-S



Example 7-S

The musical score for 'The Rose Tree' is presented on two staves. The top staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat), and a common time signature (C). The melody is written in a simple, folk-like style. The bottom staff also begins with a treble clef and the same key signature and time signature. It features a melodic line with a prominent interval of an octave, indicated by a bracket and the text '8va' above it. The score concludes with a double bar line.

Example 8-S



Example I-1

Structural Outline

The loosely structured formal skeleton is articulated by a carefully applied and skillfully conceived spontaneous arrangement clearly defined by balancing of contrasting musical colors and textures, sonic events, and levels of dynamic intensity. Tracing such musical events demonstrate the tremendous variety, continuity, and control that is maintained throughout the suite.

MARS (fast): inaugurates a new departure
Bells - Drum solo (dense, intensity maintained throughout)
Key and pulse obscured
intervals and "sheets" unify [during]
intro-wave "sheets"-lyrical-descending "sheets"-lyrical
Drum solo - Bells

VENUS (More relaxed): implies a stage of evaluation and Love
Bells - Drum solo (spacious, translucent textures throughout)
Mode related to D major (long chromatic ascent) serves as center
Rhythmic organization implies pulse at times [during]
intro-ballad-wave "sheets"-lyrical-wave "sheets"-descending "sheets"
Bells

JUPITER (Fast, brief): yields purposefulness
Bells
Clear motivic development throughout [while]
motive-elements from earlier movements developed-motive
Bells

SATURN (More relaxed): is the stage of establishment
Drum solo (free-flowing)
Strong metrical scheme and key (Eb minor)
Mode and meter are opposed by Coltrane; always implied by Ali
[while]
blues-elements from earlier movements further developed - blues

Example 2-I

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