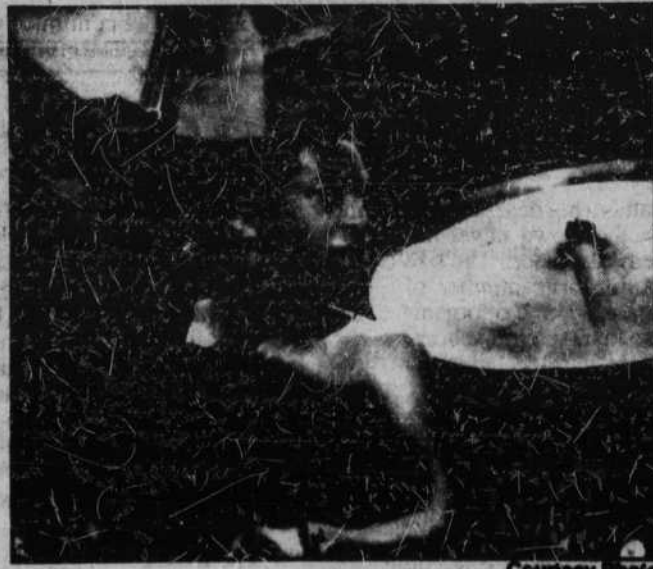


Courtesy photo

Sam Rivers



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Norman Connors



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# Reviewer rates classic, avant-garde jazz albums

By Kelly Anders  
Staff Reporter

When it comes to jazz, there's nothing quite like the pre-techno stuff, the real stuff. The following three albums fit into the "real" category quite nicely. Not like David Sanborn's or Kenny G.'s "jazz" by any means, these works are classic (often a bit avant-garde) and well-executed.

Mingus once said it's a musician's job to report what he (or she) has "seen and lived" in his or her music. Perhaps this belief explains the emotional quality to his tunes.

His love for the big band sound also is reflected in the pieces. He leads the ensemble of ten with rarely tiring control.

Although the entire album is pleasurable, several songs are exceptional sore thumbs.

"Theme for Lester Young" is a slow, sexy piece. Also known as "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat," this mellow tune is full of moody horns and bass.

"Better Get Hit in Yo' Soul" is just the opposite. Despite its title, this sassy song has no religious undertones. Rather, it's up-tempo controlled, with Mingus strong on bass and has a slightly unusual flavor. The background clapping was a refreshing touch.

"Hora Decubitus" (At Bed-time) is another quick-tempo cut. The sax makes a great backdrop for the light percussion and finger-tapping horns.

All this praise must be getting tiring, so let's move on to the next album.

Sam Rivers -- "Streams: Recorded in Performance at the Montreux Jazz Festival" (1973)

The French/English introduction is pretty hot, as is the feeling of being in Switzerland for a spell. Everything is within earshot: the instruments, announcer and loud applause.

This is an interesting listening experience. There are no pauses between tunes; sounds and tempos change within a single beat.

The "experience" commences with an intense exchange between Rivers' tenor sax and Norman Connor's percussion. Thinking music at its best.

The enjoyment lapses here. With all of the drastic changes in tune and tempo smashing into each other, the peaceful jazz turns downright noisy. How unfortunate.

Side two is a slight improvement. Rivers' blend of flute and voice is pretty original; the transition is uncharacteristically smooth and gradual.

As the trio continues to jam, Rivers starts banging on the piano in a rather chaotic and unmelodic fashion. How annoying. Then he blows a few nice notes out of the soprano sax, but ruins it with seemingly endless monotony.

The audience's ear-shattering claps, screams and whistles at the LP's end either shows pleasure or politeness.

## album

John Coltrane -- "Om" (1965)

Coltrane's music is a true extension of this fascinating fellow. One has to wonder what was going on in his mind when he made this one. Completely avant-garde, the sound is a mix of 1960s mainstream and sounds with an East Indian flavor.

Especially odd is the desperate droning that starts and finishes the album. The moans are religious and frightening. Then the music starts (if it should be so called).

Coltrane's tenor sax is lost among the Hindu background most of the time, but resurfaces every now and again for a breath of fresh air. Noteworthy is the great Pharoah Sanders' tenor sax solo on side two.

Coltrane was into "free jazz," which means he would get a group of people together for a jam session and they would sit around and play anything with no set tempo or key. Needless to say, the stuff is not always the most calm and pleasant listening material. Total chaos.

But, as is common knowledge, the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement caused deep effects, which sensitive artists like Coltrane felt and reacted to in their works. "Free jazz" was his way of expressing the turbulence of the times and trying to further widen the realm of his craft.

He expands it, all right -- to places where one must be in a certain frame of consciousness to travel. Yet it remains worthwhile listening; one could listen to the album hundreds of times and still hear different nuances. So with "Om," Coltrane seems to have reached his goal: limitless music. Charlie Mingus -- "Mingus" (1963)

The music of Mingus is expressive and aesthetic. There's no avant-garde to be found on this LP; it's '60s mainstream all the way.

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