

Kenny Burrell & John Coltrane 1958 (1963)

Written by bluesever

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1. "Freight Trane" (Tommy Flanagan) — 7:18 2. "I Never Knew" (Ted Fio Rito, Gus Kahn) — 7:03 3. "Lyresto" (Kenny Burrell) — 5:35 [play](#) 4. "Why Was I Born?" (Oscar Hammerstein II, Jerome Kern) — 3:11 5. "Big Paul" (Tommy Flanagan) — 14:13
Personnel Kenny Burrell — guitar John Coltrane — tenor saxophone Tommy Flanagan — piano Paul Chambers — bass Jimmy Cobb — drums

Albums in which one jazz great "meets" another jazz great hold a special fascination with listeners and usually the collaboration itself is enough of a selling point to include it as the title. Consider Gerry Mulligan, who tended to record his best playing in tandem with another, like Ben Webster, Paul Desmond, and Stan Getz. Another frequent collaborator was Coltrane, who recorded with Ellington, Hawkins, and Hartman; however, his brilliant quartet recordings for Impulse tend to overshadow recordings such as Kenny Burrell and John Coltrane, which has recently been remastered in 20 bit.

Both Coltrane and Burrell were at pivotal stages in their career at the time of this session. Coltrane, currently with Miles Davis, wasn't afraid to dine with the jazz giants but still couldn't stop putting his elbows on the table from time to time. Burrell was a highly respected sideman, able to fit seamlessly into any context, who also recorded sturdy sessions as a leader. However, what makes this record stand out is the contributions of all five members, who seem to have an equal amount invested in it; this record, which could easily turn into a showcase for the two leaders, ends up as a group effort where everyone gets a chance in the spotlight. Coltrane and Burrell frequently trade off the first solo chair, never hogging the spotlight, and on "Big Paul" the rhythm section is allowed to navigate the changes for a few minutes while the two leads sit out. The end result is a record in which the best is brought out in five musicians rather than three musicians helping two reach new heights.

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As you might expect, the soloing is fine throughout; Coltrane's bold tone, marked by dense arpeggios, is a harbinger of early classics like Giant Steps. Burrell, who plays with more of an edge than other guitarists of the era, pulls multiple riffs out of his bag of tricks. We get all this and a bowed solo from Paul Chambers. The highlight of the session is "Why Was I Born?", a duet between Trane and Burrell, which is intimate and beautiful. It's a treat to hear Trane accompanied solely by guitar, a setting that he only explored once. (In Coltrane's case, the answer to the question posed in the title is to record Kind Of Blue.)

Both artists went on to other things after this recording, but it would be interesting to hear what would happen had they recorded again a few years later. Both artists reached their most personal statements in 1964; Coltrane, the spiritual A Love Supreme and Burrell the criminally unrecognized Guitar Forms. In both albums each artist was branching out into new territory and another recording together would certainly have been rewarding. Still, though, we should be glad that we have this session as an example of what can happen when these two great minds came together. ---David Rickert, allaboutjazz.com

For his final Prestige-related session as a sideman, John Coltrane (tenor sax) and Kenny Burrell (guitar) are supported by an all-star cast of Paul Chambers (bass), Jimmy Cobb (drums), and Tommy Flanagan (piano). This short but sweet gathering cut their teeth on two Flanagan compositions, another two lifted from the Great American Songbook, and a Kenny Burrell original. Flanagan's tunes open and close the album, with the spirited "Freight Trane" getting the platter underway. While not one of Coltrane's most assured performances, he chases the groove right into the hands of Burrell. The guitarist spins sonic gold and seems to inspire similar contributions from Chambers' bowed bass and Coltrane alike. Especially as the participants pass fours (read: four bars) between them at the song's conclusion. The Gus Kahn/Ted Fio Rito standard "I Never Knew" frolics beneath Burrell's nimble fretwork. Once he passes the reigns to Coltrane, the differences in their styles are more readily apparent, with Burrell organically emerging while Coltrane sounds comparatively farther out structurally. Much of the same can likewise be associated to Burrell's own "Lyresto," with the two co-leads gracefully trading and incorporating spontaneous ideas.

While not as pronounced, the disparity in the way the performance is approached is a study in unifying and complementary contrasts. The delicate "Why Was I Born" is one for the ages as Burrell and Coltrane are captured in a once-in-a-lifetime duet. Together they weave an uncanny and revealing sonic tapestry that captures a pure and focused intimacy. This, thanks in part to the complete restraint of the ensemble, who take the proverbial "pause for the cause" and sit

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out. What remains is the best argument for the meeting of these two jazz giants. The performance can likewise be located on the various-artists Original Jazz Classics: The Prestige Sampler (1988) and Playboy Jazz After Dark (2002) and is worth checking out, regardless of where one might find it. In many ways the showpiece of the project is Flanagan's nearly quarter-hour "Big Paul." The pianist's lengthy intro establishes a laid-back bop-centric melody with his trademark stylish keyboards perfectly balancing Chambers and Cobb's rock-solid timekeeping. Coltrane's restraint is palpable as he traverses and examines his options with insightful double-time flurries that assert themselves then retreat into the larger extent of his solo. Those interested in charting the saxophonist's progression should make specific note of his work here. ---Lindsay Planer, allmusic.com

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