

## Charles Tolliver Big Band - With Love (2007)

Written by bluesever

Thursday, 12 January 2012 09:42 - Last Updated Thursday, 14 August 2014 13:35

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1. *Rejoicin'* [play](#) 2. *With Love* 3. *Round Midnight* 4. *Mournin Variations* 5. *Right Now*  
6. *Suspicion* 7. *Hit The Spot* Personnel: Craig Handy (flute, clarinet, soprano saxophone, alto saxophone); Howard Johnson (bass clarinet, baritone saxophone); Charles Tolliver (trumpet); Robert Glasper, Stanley Cowell (piano); Cecil McBee (upright bass); Victor Lewis (drums).

With Love, Charles Tolliver's first official Blue Note session as a leader, brings the under-sung trumpeter's career full circle. His recording debut on Jackie McLean's '64 Blue Note classic *It's Time*, led to fruitful partnerships with many of the era's finest bandleaders, culminating in his formation of the Strata-East label with pianist Stanley Cowell in '71. Tolliver was one of the few artists to lead a progressive big band in the '70s, a fertile decade which is only now getting a critical re-evaluation.

His recent sideman appearance on *Time Lines* (Blue Note, 2006), pianist Andrew Hill's momentous return to the venerated label, and a recently reissued collection of his '70s Strata-East recordings on Mosaic, helped set the stage for Tolliver's reappearance. Leading a big band once again, he tackles a mix of charts both old and new with infectious enthusiasm.

While the heyday of the classic big bands is long gone, Tolliver demonstrates the raw power and primal force a large ensemble can muster. Eschewing moody atmospherics, aleatory free jazz diversions and nostalgic remembrances, Tolliver's group delivers some of the most impassioned playing in recent memory. Unveiling a series of sophisticated charts that brim with knotty counterpoint and dynamic arrangements, the session is fueled with an irrepressible momentum.

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Overflowing with energy, the record is a riotous outburst of soaring trumpets, serpentine saxophones and blustery trombones driven by a fearless rhythm section. Only the title track and a radically re-arranged "Round Midnight" provide a temporary lull in the breakneck pacing.

While there are a number of stellar solo spots from a bevy of notable sidemen, it's Tolliver's dedication to the form that makes the strongest impression. Solos are concise and to the point, with punchy arrangements taking the lead. Tolliver proves his mastery of an idiom many have prematurely written off.

Young up-and-comer Robert Glasper alternates with original band-member Stanley Cowell at the piano. Both dive headlong into the angular rhythms and snappy cadences. Glasper, seemingly inspired by the collective energy, unveils an adventurous side unheard on his recent solo work. Saxophonists Craig Handy, Howard Johnson and Bill Saxton make memorable appearances, but Billy Harper virtually steals the show with a post-Coltrane tenor melt-down on the soulful opus "Mournin' Variations."

While Tolliver's intonation on trumpet has been called into question by some critics, he sets forth with the same degree of passion and intensity that marks his finest work. That spirited dedication to pure expression, despite potential physical limitations, is what makes With Love such a profound listening experience. ---Troy Collins, [allaboutjazz.com](http://allaboutjazz.com)

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