

Ravi Coltrane - Blending Times (2009)

Written by bluesever

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Shine 5:50 *First Circuit* 3:47 *A Still Life* 6:17 *Epistrophy* 7:48 *Amalgame* 4:18 *Narcined* 4:49 *One Wheeler Will* 7:30 *The Last Circuit* 4:20 *Before With After* 2:46 *For Turiya* 9:06
Acoustic Bass – Drew Gress (tracks: 1 to 9) Acoustic Bass - Charlie Haden (track 10) Drums – EJ Strickland (tracks: 1 to 9) Harp - Brandee Younger (track 10) Piano – Luis Perdomo (tracks: 1 to 9) Tenor Saxophone, Producer – Ravi Coltrane

Ravi Coltrane's second CD as a leader for the Savoy label (his fifth overall) is balanced between improvisation based on spontaneous themes and compositions that have a certain direction, both concepts blessed with a purpose and vision. *Blending Times*, as its title implies, signifies his coming of age, his dedication to finding his own voice on the tenor saxophone, and his use of a free-form approach much like his famous parents, John Coltrane and Alice Coltrane, in their later years. Armed with a skilled band of pianist Luis Perdomo, bassist Drew Gress, and drummer E.J. Strickland, Ravi Coltrane is quite able to utilize his dual stylistic persona in ways that work in terms of accessibility and freshness, blending the roots of his heritage and bloodlines into his own hard-fought and compelling mannerisms. Perdomo, who has worked with the saxophonist for a number of years, is particularly brilliant and close to amazing, wending his way in and out of stated short phrases or motifs on the improvisations and contributing the opener, "Shine," a saintly spiritual tune gliding -- although free of a time signature -- beyond beauty. Ralph Alessi's "One Wheeler Will" is the singular piece cemented in distinguishable phrases -- albeit in a choppy and kinetic 13/8 ostinato -- rooted in the N.Y.C. neo-bop that defined contemporary jazz in the 1980s. The nine-minute "For Turiya" was written many years ago by Charlie Haden for Alice Coltrane, and here it is revised, with Brandee Younger on harp, Haden on his ever stoic and soulful bass, and Ravi Coltrane's somber and remorseful tenor sax echoing an ultimate elegy epilogue prayer. The band stretches Thelonious Monk's "Epistrophy" via a quick, cleverly executed waltz in a 4/4 framework with a lopped-off beat at the end of each completed phrase, further emphasized by Perdomo's picture-perfect swaths and swipes. Five of the free-form pieces are credited as improvisations conceived and directed by Ravi Coltrane, and all have a similar but non-threatening quality of patience, virtue, and sharing, merging from various duo settings to the full band eventually joining in. "First Circuit" is a free bop jam, while "A Still Life" has a two-note bass call from the ever present

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Gress merging into currents and torrents à la John Coltrane's sheets of sound concept. "Amalgams" is another floating/spiritual combine, "Narcined" is an unforced funky butt dance, and "Before with After" is a somber prelude to "For Turiya." Where Ravi Coltrane's sound may not be immediately identifiable, he has for sure made his craft a viable and attractive sound in a marketplace where there are many players who closely imitate his legendary father. This is a very fine effort, understated overall, and one that can easily be recommended to all modern jazz lovers who find room for unconventional music not branded by academia, the so-called tradition, or overt commercial considerations. ---Michael G. Nastos, AllMusic Review

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