Sonny Fortune - In The Spirit Of John Coltrane (1999)

1.Trane And Things (5:38) 2.Hanging Out With J.C. (3:44) 3.Africa (6:22) 4.In The Spirit (7:14) 5.Mr. Jones (5:31) 6.Hanging Out With J.C. Again (4:20) 7.Ole (5:47) 8.Say What (5:17) 9.For John (6:22) Artists: Sonny Fortune-soprano,alto,tenor saxes John Hicks-piano Santi Debriano-bass Ronnie Burrage-drums Rashied Ali-drums (# 9) Reggie Workman-bass (# 9) Steve Berrios-bata drums (# 7) Julio Collazo-bata drums (# 7)

A native of Philadelphia, where John Coltrane grew immeasurably as a musician, Sonny Fortune is one of those relentless, tireless saxophone improvisers who fell under the spell of Trane early and has manifested that spirit throughout his career. Inspired by his participation in a superb District Curators concert tribute to Coltrane in '98 at Washington, D.C.'s Lincoln Theatre that had the audience hollering, Fortune goes deep in the shed for this tribute to the master. The specter of Coltrane has consistently enveloped Fortune's horns, even when serving his late '60s Latin jazz apprenticeship with Mongo Santamaria.

Coltrane's influence came into sharper focus during Fortune's stints with McCoy Tyner (recall the blisters he put on the Sahara date) and alongside Elvin Jones' roiling, cursing, thrashing drum machine, where Fortune raised the hairs on the backs of more than a few necks during Jones' residency at Umbria Jazz in summer '98. In the company of those two powerhouses he lived the dream of many a saxman, warming his chops in the ferocious company that upped the ante for so many of Coltrane's historic forays. So it's not as a novice, familiar with Coltrane's oeuvre solely through the magic of stereophonic sound, the tributary writings of spellbound scribes or the hushed recollections of other acolytes, that Fortune travels down this well-journeyed path of homage to Trane.

To accompany him on this trek Fortune recruited the able hands of pianist John Hicks and bassist Santi Debriano. For further immersion in the quintessence of Coltrane, Fortune engaged

two of J.C.'s associates, drummer Rashied Ali and bassist Reggie Workman, to authenticate his piece "For John." And for a dose of Afro Cuba, Fortune enlisted the bata drums of Steve Berrios and Julio Colazo for Coltrane's Castillian classic "Ole." The latter is one of two selections from the Coltrane book, the other being "Africa." The remainder of the tunes are Fortune's writings, largely composed as convenient launching pads towards the meat of the matter: saxophone improvisations. "Hangin' Out with JC" is given two readings: first as a high-speed quartet number, later in the manner of Coltrane's blistering dialogues with Rashied Ali, pairing Fortune with Burrage. While the achievement of energy is significant, this type of repeat suggests a paucity of real compositional ideas. But then, I imagine, composition wasn't an issue in Sonny's plans.

For this date, Fortune engages three of his four axes: soprano, alto and tenor saxophone. It is on the alto that Fortune is most distinct and at home, as evident on "Ole" (though the engineer responsible for that tune's egregious fade-out should have his knuckles rapped-hard). The percussive build-up to "Ole" lays down a thick bed of Spanish moss over which Fortune's alto dances determinedly. The closing "For John" is Sonny's exploration of free-period Coltrane as he takes the trio route with Workman and Ali, engaging the nether-reaches of his tenor in heroic fashion. --- Willard Jenkins, jazztimes.com

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