

TRANE OF THOUGHT, LIVE AT THE REX

KIRK MACDONALD – TENOR SAXOPHONE / PAT LABARBERA – TENOR SAXOPHONE / BRIAN DICKINSON – PIANO
NEIL SWAINSON – BASS / JOE LABARBERA – DRUMS

STREET DATE: OCT 11, 2019 / CELLAR LIVE CLO71819



1. ON A MISTY NIGHT	9:54
T. Dameron / Carbaby Music Co. / Solo order: Kirk, Pat	
2. VILLAGE BLUES	9:42
J. Coltrane / Jowcol Music - BMI / Solo order: Pat, Kirk	
3. 26-2	10:18
J. Coltrane / Jowcol Music - BMI / Solo order: Pat, Kirk	
4. NAIMA	11:41
J. Coltrane / Jowcol Music - BMI	
5. IMPRESSIONS	13:33
J. Coltrane / Jowcol Music - BMI / Solo order: Kirk, Pat	
6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT / RESOLUTION (Movements 1 & 2 From A Love Supreme)	17:01
John Coltrane / Jowcol Music - BMI / Solo on Acknowledgement: Pat, Resolution: Kirk	

From 1964 to 1967, when Pat LaBarbera studied at what was then called the Berklee School of Music, he paid the student rate of \$1 to get into Boston's legendary Jazz Workshop for matinees or last sets. The musician Pat heard there for a buck a number of times who made the biggest impact was none other than the magnificent tenor and soprano saxophonist John Coltrane.

Pat remembers one Sunday matinee performance in particular when Coltrane played with overwhelming visceral power. "I had to get up and go outside," says Pat. "I couldn't take it. It was that strong. It was that intense."

After Pat shone with Buddy Rich and other big bands, in 1975, Elvin Jones chose Pat to play tenor and soprano sax in his band. This was hugely symbolic given that Jones was the propulsive drummer most closely associated with Coltrane. That was around the time when Kirk MacDonald, who is 15 years Pat's junior, was in Cape Breton discovering Coltrane on record. "For me, John Coltrane's music was there almost from the beginning, from when I first started listening to jazz music when I was a kid," says Kirk, another tenor man who has gone on to have an exceptional career.

Pat and Kirk both ended up in Toronto. Kirk studied with Pat at Humber College, and years later they became colleagues on Humber's faculty. The idea emerged of jointly doing a tribute to Coltrane, which they inaugurated in 1992 at the Pilot. The following year, Kirk and Pat started a tradition of doing an annual tribute at the Rex Hotel Jazz & Blues Bar around the time of Coltrane's birthday on September 23. More than 25 years later, the tribute is still a vital, much-loved event.

While Pat and Kirk recorded original tunes together in a quartet for the vibrant Silent Voices that came out in 2017, there was no released recording of their Coltrane tribute. Until now. Trane of Thought, Live at the Rex impeccably captures pulsating performances from the two Coltrane tribute shows they did in 2018.

Coltrane's repertoire was vast, and Kirk and Pat have amassed a songbook of about 130 tunes they've played in the tribute. The difficulty of deciding what to include in the album could have been daunting, but they struck a thoughtful balance, including early Trane, landmark songs, and more obscure ones.

Starting with Tadd Dameron's "On a Misty Night", which Coltrane recorded with Dameron in 1956, was an inspired choice. It's the record's only tune not composed by Coltrane; Pat and Kirk play it beautifully. Then there's "Village Blues", which was the first song the quartet of Coltrane, McCoy Tyner, Steve Davis, and Elvin Jones recorded. In their solos, Pat, Kirk, and pianist Brian Dickinson make the most of the 12-bar blues form by steadily creating harmonic interest.

"26-2" is a prime example of a tune with "Coltrane changes" – one of the compositions by Coltrane that he based on chords from a standard (Charlie Parker's "Confirmation" in this case) and systematically reharmonized. It's a demanding concept, and all of the soloists show they fully grasp it. Pat's brother Joe LaBarbera also solos with conviction on drums.

"If you go in with the mindset of mastering it, rather than just doing what you do, you're never going to be able to prepare," says Kirk about their organic approach to playing Coltrane's music. "Because once you get on the bandstand then you go, 'Okay, maybe I should have spent more time with this.' So over time you try and prepare for the music as best you can. It's a real growth process because you come out of the gig with a newfound respect for the music and how deep it is."

Pat and Kirk take "Naima" far from how Coltrane played it on the Giant Steps album. Instead of stating the melody first, they improvise as a duo without the stellar rhythm section, fluidly weaving in and out with a call-and-response affinity. It's a uniquely striking take on Coltrane's exquisite ballad, which segues into Kirk and Pat lushly

harmonizing the melody before Brian Dickinson and bassist Neil Swainson take meditative solo turns.

"There's a real respect for John Coltrane and his music and legacy, but there's also room for Pat and I to do our thing and interact," says Kirk. "You let yourself be who you are, having lived with the music and knowing that things can go in different directions. The music is big enough to accommodate the personalities that play the music."

Trane of Thought, Live at the Rex builds to a fever pitch on "Impressions". The musicians play the modal masterpiece the way it was intended: as an exhilarating blowing session. First Kirk and then Pat shape vigorous solos, and they keep the intensity high when trading eights with each other.

They elevate the level even higher on the last track: the first two movements of "A Love Supreme", arguably Coltrane's greatest work. Pat on "Acknowledgement" and Kirk on "Resolution" achieve a transcendent focus. Pat still remembers when Elvin told him he wanted to play "A Love Supreme". "I said, 'Oh my God,'" recalls Pat. "Nobody wanted to touch that because it had that kind of stigma to it. It was something really religious and spiritual and everybody was afraid of doing it. I lost that fear."

What's most significant about Coltrane's legacy to the two tenors? Pat: "To me, it was his commitment and dedication to the music." Kirk: "He's affected me as a saxophonist. As a musical leader, he's affected me. As a composer, he's affected me, and what his music represents to society has been a huge influence. Not that you're trying to imitate or copy any of that, but the example that he set as a human being and as a musician, I think it's unparalleled."

Ultimately, Pat and Kirk express through their horns their depth of feeling for John Coltrane's music, and – above all – their own resonant artistry.

– Chris Wong, August, 2019

Executive Producer: Cory Weeds

Produced by Kirk MacDonald, Pat LaBarbera and Cory Weeds

Recorded at The Rex Jazz & Blues Bar in Toronto
on September 20 and 21, 2018

Engineered by Matthew Manifould, assisted by Andrew Menino

Mixed and mastered by André White

Photography by Daniel Nawrocki

Design and layout by Perry Chua

Thank you to The Rex, Tom Tytel, Humber Music, Aya Sato and
Yamaha pianos for supplying the piano

Kirk MacDonald plays TM Custom tenor saxophones and is a D'Addario
woodwind artist

Pat LaBarbera plays Selmer saxophones and is a D'Addario
woodwind artist

Brian Dickinson is a Yamaha artist

Joe LaBarbera plays Gretsch Drums, Zildjian Cymbals,
Aquarian Drumheads and Regal Tip sticks and brushes