

# THELONIOUS MONK

## with John Coltrane

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STEREOPHONIC  
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Certain combinations of men have been leaving indelible marks on the music called jazz since its beginning. Some formed a lifetime association; others were together only for a brief period. Some actively shaped the course of jazz; others affected it more osmotically. All have had one thing in common; they produced music of lasting value.

One historic teaming was that of Thelonious Monk and John Coltrane at New York's Five Spot Cafe, beginning in the summer of 1957. Although the group remained together for only a half-year, those of us who heard it will never forget the experience. There were some weeks when I was at the Five Spot two and three times, staying most of the night even when I intended just to catch a set or two. The music was simultaneously kinetic and hypnotic. J.J. Johnson has compared it to the mid-Forties union of Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie. "Since Charlie Parker, the most electrifying sound that I've heard in contemporary jazz was Coltrane playing with Monk at the Five Spot. . . . It was incredible, like Diz and Bird," Jay said.



Coltrane (left), Monk and Wilson on the bandstand at the Five Spot.

Monk and Coltrane complemented each other perfectly. The results of this successful musical alliance were beneficial to both. In this setting, Monk began to receive the brunt of a long-overdue recognition. On the other hand, Coltrane's talent, set in such a fertile environment, bloomed like a hibiscus. "Trane's comments in a *Down Beat* article (September 29, 1960), clearly describe how he reveres Monk. "Working with Monk brought me close to a musical architect of the highest order. I felt I learned from him in every way — through the senses, theoretically, technically. I would talk to Monk about musical problems and he would sit at the piano and show me the answers by playing them. I could watch him play and find out the things I wanted to know. Also, I could see a lot of things that I didn't know about at all," he stated.

Later in the piece, "Trane added: "I think Monk is one of the true greats of all time. He's a real musical thinker — there're not many like him. I feel myself fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with him. If a guy needs a little spark, a boost, he can just be around Monk, and Monk will give it to him."

*Side 1, #1 and 2; Side 2, #1:* JOHN COLTRANE, tenor sax; THELONIOUS MONK, piano; WILBUR WARE, bass; 'SHADOW' WILSON, drums.

*Side 1, #3; Side 2 #2:* COLTRANE and COLEMAN HAWKINS, tenor saxes; GIGI GRyce, alto sax; RAY COPELAND, trumpet; MONK, piano; WARE, bass; ART BLAKEY, drums. Side 2, #3 is an unaccompanied piano solo by MONK.

### SIDE 1

1. Ruby, My Dear (6:17)
2. Trinkle, Tinkle (6:37)
3. Off Minor (5:10) \*

### SIDE 2

1. Nutty (6:35)
2. Epistrophy (3:07) \*
3. Functional (9:46) \*

(\*alternate master)

All compositions by THELONIOUS MONK.

Monk certainly brought "Trane out beautifully. It was in this period that John began to experiment with what at the time I called "sheets of sound." Actually, he was thinking in groups of notes rather than one note at a time. Monk's practice of "laying out" allowed "Trane to "stroll" against the pulse of bass and drums and really develop this playing attitude on his own. Pointed examples of this can be heard here in *Trinkle Tinkle* and *Nutty*.

Toward the latter part of '57, Ahmed Abdul-Malik took over Wilbur Ware's bass post. But in the three selections here, the original quartet is intact. Ware and Monk had played together on one of Thelonious' visits to Chicago, and when Wilbur migrated to New York he was Monk's choice for the group. I find no coincidence in Martin Williams' statement that Ware "... has something of the same basic interest in displacement of accents and rhythmic shiftings and in unusual sequence of harmonics that one hears in Thelonious Monk." Listen to Ware's solo on *Trinkle Tinkle* for evidence.

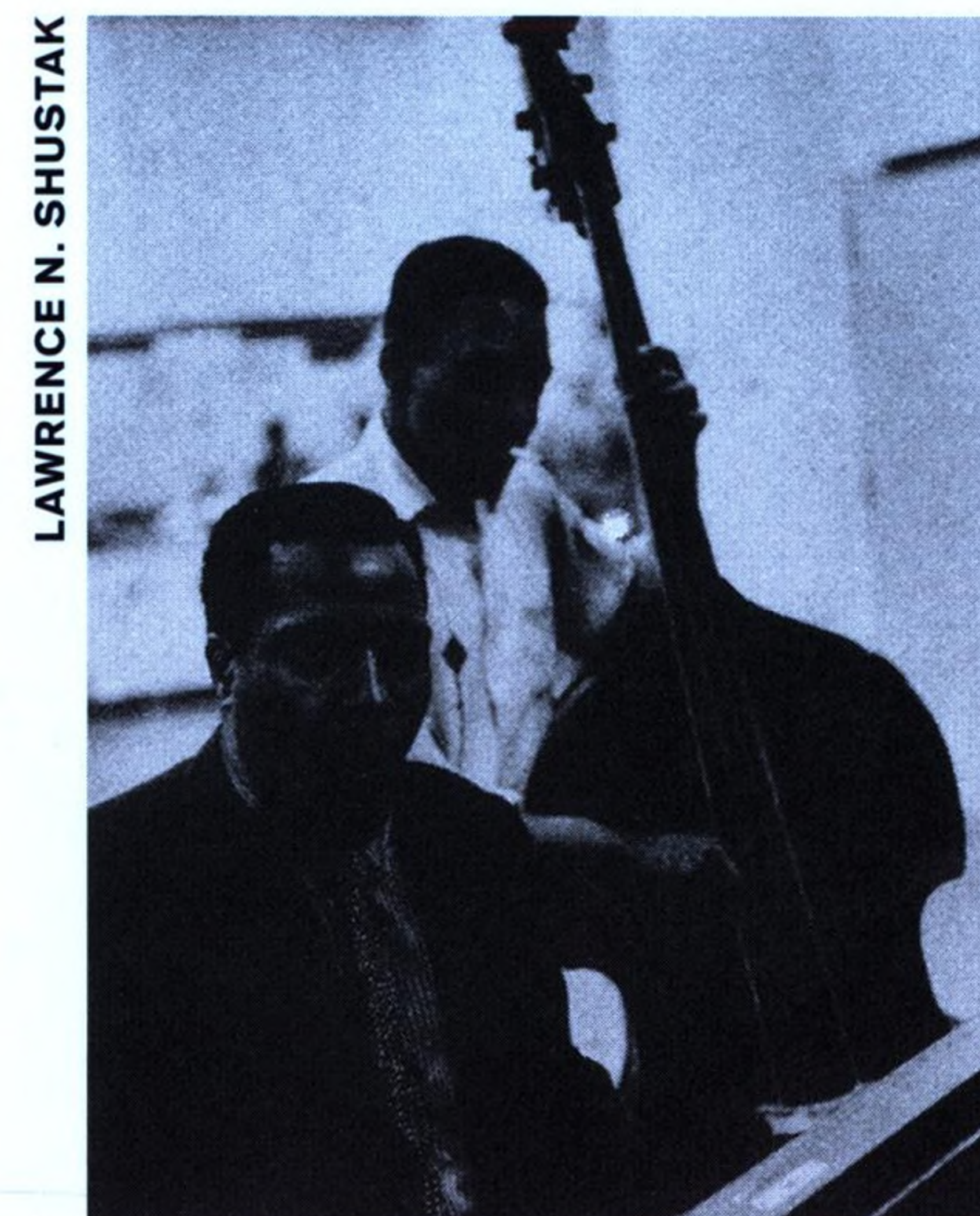
Shadow Wilson was about 2½ months short of his 40th birthday when he died on July 11, 1959, and another of jazz's tremendous talents had left the scene far too early. A great big-band drummer, Wilson had performed most notably with Count Basie and Woody Herman (the Herman band once voted for him, *en masse*, when a replacement was needed for Dave Tough), but he was equally capable of ministering to the specific needs of a small group. His aware accenting on *Trinkle Tinkle* shows how well he understood Monk's music and his nourishing beat, here and on *Nutty*, is a rare combination of swing and taste.

As we were to regret the passing of Shadow Wilson in 1959, many of us, in a different way, bemoaned the demise of that particular Monk quartet at the end of 1957. The fact that the group had presumably not been recorded was especially distressing. Now we have three gems to hold in our hands and enjoy, facet by facet. All are Monk compositions and it is interesting to note that they were originally recorded in trio contexts by him:

*Ruby My Dear*, which I once described as "sentiment without sentimentality", was first done around 1948, although it was probably written several years before. Coltrane states its tender beauty with a tone that helps transmit the sadness pervading the melody. Monk's half-chorus says more than most pianists do in a whole LP.

*Trinkle Tinkle* originated in 1952. There is some fascinat-

ing interplay between piano and tenor in "Trane's first improvised chorus. This is followed by some fantastic Coltrane in the "strolling" section. If you close your eyes, it is easy to imagine a cello or viola being bowed by a demonic force of vivid imagination. Thelonious rephrases his own melody in his inimitable manner before Ware's solo.



Monk and Ware.

*Nutty*, written in 1954, swings relaxed in an optimistic mood. Coltrane spins out his amazingly long-lined offerings, hanging them together with shorter bursts and an overall personal sense of logic. Monk again divides and subdivides his own theme, paraphrasing from one of his earlier speeches, as it were.

To round out the album, three alternate masters from previously released Monk sessions are included. *Off Minor* and *Epistrophy* were heard on "Monk's Music" (Riverside RLP 242). It is stimulating to compare the different versions and how the solos vary and coincide from take to take. *Off Minor* has solos by Hawkins, Copeland and Monk, but the bits by Ware and Blakey are not as developed as on the original issue. *Epistrophy*, in the original version, featured all the horns of the septet and Monk. Here, only Coltrane and Copeland are heard in solo.

The first *Functional* is on "Thelonious Himself" (Riverside RLP 235). This version is as different in individual idea and, at the same time close in spirit to the other, as two takes can be. It almost deserves a title of its own. I only wish I had two turntables. I think the two *Functionals* might make a wild duet for four Monk hands.

But, as intriguing as these alternate masters are, the main attraction here is the unearthing of the quartet tracks. These are milestones in jazz history and important to every serious listener.

Steve Lacy, the soprano saxophonist who worked with Monk for 16 weeks in 1960, has said of Monk's music: "Monk has got his own poetry and you've got to get the fragrance of it."

It is obvious that in 1957, Coltrane was doing some deep breathing.

— IRA GITLER

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(THIS RECORDING IS ALSO AVAILABLE IN MONAURAL FORM ON JLP 46.)

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