



NIGHTS OF
BALLADS & BLUES
McCOY TYNER

As the title implies, this McCoy Tyner release is a low-key, after-hours affair. Far removed from the intensity of work with then-boss John Coltrane, Tyner stretches out on a fine mix of standards and bebop classics. The pianist, of course, always had his own fleet and rich way with ballads, in spite of the galvanizing marathon solos he became known for on live dates and his later experimental recordings with Coltrane. His ballad style is even touched with a bit of sentimentality, which thankfully is kept in check by a bevy of tasteful lines. Backed by the topnotch rhythm tandem of bassist Steve Davis and drummer Lex Humphries, Tyner finds the room to develop classic statements on highlights like Monk's "Round Midnight," Ellington and Strayhorn's "Satin Doll," and Parker's "Star Eyes." On more easeful tracks like "For Heaven's Sake," Tyner utilizes his block chord approach to meditative and romantic effect. Rounded out by solid blues sides like "Blue Monk" and Tyner's own "Groove Waltz," *Nights of Ballads & Blues* qualifies as one of the pianist's most enjoyable early discs.

It is to McCoy Tyner's great credit that his career after John Coltrane has been far from anti-climatic. Along with Bill Evans, Tyner has been the most influential pianist in jazz of the past 50 years, with his chord voicings being adopted and utilized by virtually every younger pianist. A powerful virtuoso and a true original (compare his playing in the early '60s with anyone else from the time), Tyner (like Thelonious Monk) has not altered his style all that much from his early days but he has continued to grow and become even stronger.

Tyner grew up in Philadelphia, where Bud Powell and Richie Powell were

neighbors. As a teenager he gigged locally and met John Coltrane. He made his recording debut with the Art Farmer-Benny Golson Jazztet, but after six months left the group to join Coltrane in what (with bassist Jimmy Garrison and drummer Elvin Jones) would become the classic quartet. Few other pianists of the period had both the power and the complementary open-minded style to inspire Coltrane, but Tyner was never overshadowed by the innovative saxophonist. During the Coltrane years (1960-1965), the pianist also led his own record dates for Impulse.

Jazz Roots After leaving Coltrane, Tyner struggled for a period, working as a sideman (with Ike and Tina Turner, amazingly) and leading his own small groups; his recordings were consistently stimulating even during the lean years. After he signed with Milestone in 1972, Tyner began to finally be recognized as one of the greats, and he has never been short of work since. Although there have been occasional departures (such as a 1978 all-star quartet tour with Sonny Rollins and duo recordings with Stephane Grappelli), Tyner has mostly played with his own groups since the '70s, which have ranged from a quartet with Azar Lawrence and a big band to his trio. In the '80s and '90s, Tyner did the rounds of labels (his old homes Blue Note and Impulse! as well as Verve, Enja, and Milestone) before settling in with Telarc in the late '90s and releasing a fine series of albums including 2000's *Jazz Roots: McCoy Tyner Honors Jazz Piano Legends of the 20th Century* and 2004's *Illuminations*. In 2007, Tyner returned with the studio album *McCoy Tyner Quartet* featuring saxophonist Joe Lovano, bassist Christian McBride, and drummer Jeff "Tain" Watts.

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1. Satin Doll 5:35
 2. We'll Be Together Again 3:35
 3. 'Round Midnight 6:22
 4. For Heaven's Sake 3:45
 5. Star Eyes 5:00
 6. Blue Monk 5:17
 7. Groove Waltz 5:26
 8. Days Of Wine And Roses 3:16
- Total Time: 38:16

Engineer – Rudy Van Gelder Producer – Bob Thiele
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