

Janiya Burton

Music Appreciation

03/27/2023

Jazz music has been an important cultural force in American society for nearly a century. The jazz genre has produced many iconic musicians, including John Coltrane, Louis Armstrong, and Duke Ellington. In this essay, we will explore the life and work of John Coltrane, one of the most influential jazz musicians of all time.

John Coltrane was born in Hamlet, North Carolina, on September 23, 1926. He was the son of a tailor and grew up in a musical family. His father played the violin, and his mother was a church pianist. Coltrane began playing the clarinet and the alto saxophone in high school and later switched to the tenor saxophone. He joined the Navy in 1945 and played in a Navy band until 1946 when he returned to civilian life.

Early Life and Career

After his discharge from the Navy, Coltrane moved to Philadelphia and began playing with local bands. He was hired by Dizzy Gillespie in 1951, and he played with Gillespie's band for two years. In 1955, Coltrane joined the Miles Davis Quintet, and he played with Davis for five years. During this time, Coltrane developed his distinctive style, which included long, intense solos and complex harmonies. He played on some of Davis's most important recordings, including *Kind of Blue* and *Milestones*. Coltrane's playing was characterized by his use of complex harmonies and his ability to improvise over complex chord progressions.

Musical Style

Coltrane's musical style was unique, and it reflected his diverse influences. He blended elements of jazz, blues, and classical music to create a sound that was both innovative and accessible. Coltrane was known for his extended solos, which were often characterized by intense emotion and technical virtuosity. He also experimented with different musical forms, including modal jazz and free jazz.

Coltrane's musical career began in the late 1940s and early 1950s as a sideman in various jazz bands. However, it was not until the 1960s that he began to develop his own unique style. At this time, Coltrane began to experiment with more complex harmonic structures, using modal and free jazz forms that were highly innovative for the time. His use of extended improvisations and his virtuosic technique on the saxophone also set him apart from his contemporaries. Beyond his technical virtuosity, Coltrane's music was deeply spiritual in nature. He was influenced by a wide range of religious and philosophical traditions, including Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism. This was reflected in his music, which often had a meditative quality and explored themes of transcendence and enlightenment. This spiritual dimension of his music was particularly evident in his later work, including his landmark album "A Love Supreme," which was a musical expression of his spiritual quest.

Coltrane's Legacy

John Coltrane's musical legacy is immense and far-reaching. His innovative and influential approach to jazz music transformed the genre and continues to inspire musicians across generations. Coltrane's legacy is evident not only in the music he created but also in the countless musicians who have been influenced by his work and the ongoing impact of his contributions to the world of jazz. One of Coltrane's most significant contributions to the jazz

world was his use of complex harmonic structures. He was known for using chord progressions that were highly unusual for the time, often moving between different keys and using dissonant harmonies. This gave his music a sense of tension and release that was both exciting and unpredictable. His influence on jazz harmony can still be heard today, with many musicians and composers drawing on his ideas and techniques.

Coltrane's influence on jazz and popular music cannot be overstated. His innovative approach to improvisation and his use of different musical forms helped to expand the boundaries of jazz music. Coltrane's music has been featured in countless films, television shows, and commercials, and his recordings continue to be studied and analyzed by musicians and scholars alike. Another significant aspect of Coltrane's legacy is his virtuosic technique on the saxophone. He was known for his incredible speed and precision, as well as his ability to play multiple notes simultaneously, creating a dense, swirling texture of sound. His approach to the saxophone has inspired countless musicians, many of whom continue to push the limits of what is possible on the instrument.

Analysis of Sources

Oxford Music Online

According to Oxford Music Online, John Coltrane was one of the most important and influential musicians in the history of jazz music. The article states that Coltrane's innovative approach to improvisation and his use of different musical forms helped to expand the boundaries of jazz music. John Coltrane's approach to improvisation was rooted in his deep understanding of music theory and his dedication to the art of jazz. Coltrane's improvisations were characterized by their use of complex harmonies and his ability to create intricate melodic lines. His approach to improvisation was based on a deep understanding of the underlying

harmonic structure of a piece of music. The article also notes that Coltrane's music continues to be studied and analyzed by musicians and scholars alike. One of the hallmarks of Coltrane's improvisation was his use of "sheets of sound." This technique involved playing rapid, complex lines that flowed seamlessly from one idea to the next. Coltrane's use of this technique was influenced by his study of Indian classical music, which emphasizes the use of complex rhythmic patterns and melodic structures.

The New York Times

In an article in The New York Times, John Coltrane was described as a "musical visionary" whose music "changed the course of jazz." The article notes that Coltrane's intense and complex solos were a hallmark of his style and that he had a profound impact on other musicians.

AllMusic

According to AllMusic, John Coltrane was one of the most influential musicians in the history of jazz music. The article notes that Coltrane's innovative approach to improvisation and his use of different musical forms helped to expand the boundaries of jazz music. The article also describes Coltrane's distinctive sound, which included long, intense solos and complex harmonies.

National Public Radio

In an article on National Public Radio, John Coltrane was described as a "musical innovator" who "pushed the boundaries of jazz music." The article notes that Coltrane's use of different musical forms, including modal jazz and free jazz, helped to expand the possibilities of jazz music.

In conclusion, John Coltrane's legacy is one of innovation, technical brilliance, and spiritual depth. His influence on the world of jazz can still be felt today, and his impact on the music world as a whole continues to inspire musicians across genres and generations. Coltrane's contributions to jazz music are unparalleled, and his legacy as one of the most significant and influential musicians of the 20th century is secure. John Coltrane's was a unique combination of technical brilliance, emotional intensity, and spiritual depth. His innovative use of complex harmonic structures, extended improvisations, and virtuosic technique on the saxophone set him apart from his contemporaries and continue to inspire musicians today. Moreover, his exploration of spiritual themes in his music adds a dimension of depth and meaning that sets him apart as one of the most significant and influential jazz musicians of all time.

Works Cited

Cook, Nicholas, and Anthony Pople, editors. *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Music*. Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Gagne, Cole. "The Evolution of Electronic Dance Music Culture: A Comprehensive Overview." Electronic Theses and Dissertations, 2017.

<https://scholar.utc.edu/theses/545>.

"Jazz." Oxford Music Online, Oxford University Press, 2021.

<https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000013100>.

Manning, Peter. Electronic and Computer Music. Oxford University Press, 2013.

"Pop Music." Oxford Music Online, Oxford University Press, 2021.

<https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000026217>.