

STEVE KUHN

REVIEWS

Life's Magic

Steve Kuhn Trio (Black Hawk-Sunnyside)

by Donald Elfman – The New York City Jazz Record – May 2013

This reissue of a 1986 live Steve Kuhn set from the Village Vanguard is a stunning demonstration of the pianist's abilities. With intelligence, passion, wit and more, Kuhn has fashioned a brilliant set of music that underlines the power of his trio with bassist Ron Carter and drummer Al Foster and builds a narrative the completion of which is an artistic marvel.

Kuhn, Carter and Foster are an ideal trio: each player deftly and supportively complements the work of the others. Kuhn's ideas are fluid and both delicately sensitive to the needs of every musical moment.

The selection of tunes and the progression they form is exceptional: three strikingly different Kuhn originals; a glorious take on Fats Waller's "Jitterbug Waltz"; "Yesterday's Gardenias", a popular tune for Glenn Miller and his Orchestra; the ballad favorite "Never Let Me Go"; a rare Hoagy Carmichael number, "Little Old Lady", and the Romberg-Hammerstein chestnut "Softly as in a Morning Sunrise".

Kuhn has great technique and his choice of the Carmichael tune as an opener gets the set off to a dynamic start, the trio in powerhouse mode but never losing the charm of the original melody. The most dazzling interpretation is of "Jitterbug Waltz", beginning ever so delicately with Kuhn lightly tickling the famous theme. Carter is up first as a soloist and he is both dextrous and ever so soulful, Kuhn then slowly barrels in with a sense of old jazz world and blues.

The originals are just as compelling, none more than "Ulla/Trance", which opens as a melancholy waltz and morphs into something darker, a kind of trance in which the time becomes more hypnotic. And, speaking of hypnotic, "Mr. Calypso Kuhn" grows in power and pulse, with Carter and Foster laying down a moveable carpet of island groove.

Life's Magic is one of the finest live recordings made at the Vanguard - and consider what constitutes that list - retaining, to quote Kuhn, its "freshness and vitality", almost 30 years later.

Kuhn, Steve, Trio: Mostly Coltrane

More than forty years after his passing, the timeless and inspiring music of legendary jazz saxophonist John Coltrane continues to garner him loving tributes such as the one pianist Steve Kuhn has assembled on his latest ECM release entitled *Mostly Coltrane*. The direct link to Coltrane for Kuhn goes back to 1960, when as a young man of only twenty one, he was

fortunate enough to work with Trane for approximately eight weeks at the Jazz Gallery in New York City. It was a period of transition for both musicians as the young Kuhn was still searching for his own voice, while Coltrane was in the midst of trying out different musicians as he prepared to step out on his own as a bandleader. Although their parting was mutual, as is often the case when one has been touched by the hand of greatness, the man and his music definitely left a lasting impression on Kuhn.

Accompanied by longtime bassist David Finck, along with drummer Joey Baron and saxophonist Joe Lovano, Kuhn has put together a fitting, balanced tribute that touches on practically every facet of Coltrane's career. He guides the group through versions of songs that he played during his time with the saxophonist, such as "I Want To Talk About You", "The Night Has A Thousand Eyes" and "Central Park West", a lesser known song in the Trane songbook, but one that is also familiar to Lovano who also covered it on his *From The Soul* album back in 1992.

"Welcome" begins with a brief but sublime piano introduction before Lovano's warm and rich tenor glides effortlessly into the mix, taking the composition into the main theme. He briefly drops out to allow Kuhn to take a short solo, before returning with a crisp and peaceful sounding solo which floats lightly overtop Baron's delicate brush strokes. This track imparts such a peaceful feeling that it subsequently sets the tone for the rest of what's to come. They get inside the music to really invoke the spirit of the master, especially when they interpret some of the more transcendent compositions from Coltrane's back catalogue like "Song Of Praise", "Crescent" and "Spiritual". This sentiment is also maintained on Kuhn's two original compositions, "With Gratitude", which is a solo piano piece, and the album's final song "Trance". What's also interesting about *Mostly Coltrane* is Kuhn's decision to tackle two songs from one of Trane's last sessions before his death in 1967. "Configuration" and "Jimmy's Mode" represent the final stage of his career, which at the time saw him pushing the sonic envelope even further into the realm of the dissonant avant-garde. That being said, out of the two original compositions "Configuration" was more of a barnburner. Although not as intense as the original, this version does allow Lovano to turn it up a notch.

Mostly Coltrane is an absolute gem from beginning to end, and although I've heard plenty of versions of Trane's music over the years, I can honestly say few compare to what's offered here. Steve Kuhn definitely selected the right musicians (especially with regards to Lovano) to respectfully interpret this music, because the obvious chemistry that exists between these seasoned players definitely produced some truly magical results. Even after repeated listens the music takes you to a different place each time. I can't help but think that somewhere up there amongst the stars the master must be smiling.

Track Listing

- 1) Welcome
- 2) Song Of Praise
- 3) Crescent
- 4) I Want To Talk About You
- 5) The Night Has A Thousand Eyes
- 6) Living Space
- 7) Central Park West
- 8) Like Sonny
- 9) With Gratitude

- 10) Configuration
- 11) Jimmy's Mode
- 12) Spiritual
- 13) Trance

Added: November 4th 2009

Reviewer: Ryan Sparks

Score: 4.5 stars

Related Link: [ECM](#)

Hits: 23

Language: english

Mostly Coltrane, Entirely Kuhn

Written by Andrea Canter, Contributing Editor, Jazz Police

Monday, 19 October 2009

Once a sideman for John Coltrane and protégé of Bill Evans, pianist Steve Kuhn has been a virtuosic performer since his first gigs around Boston in his early teens. His lengthy and distinguished discography as well as collaborations with Kenny Dorham, Stan Getz, Art Farmer and Steve Swallow notwithstanding, he remains somewhat under the radar in the U.S. His long affiliation with ECM Records may account for his popularity in Europe, but his talent alone should be sufficient on this side of the Atlantic. Mostly Coltrane, his new release with working trio mates David Finck and Joey Baron and special guest Joe Lovano, pays homage to his eight-week run with the late sax legend in early 1960.

Unlike much of Kuhn's ECM output of largely original repertoire, Mostly Coltrane is, indeed, mostly Coltrane, and a set that extends well beyond the brief period of Kuhn's affiliation. The seeds of the recording came from an annual series of birthday salutes to Coltrane, led by Lovano over the past five or so years at Birdland, featuring Coltrane's early 60s Atlantic repertoire as well as his late, more experimental period. But the more direct impetus was an appearance of the Steve Kuhn Trio at the 2008 Baltica Festival in Salgau in Northern Germany, where Lovano was artist in residence. "So they arranged that the trio would do a concert by itself, and then there would be a concert with Joe that would feature essentially the music of John Coltrane. That's the genesis of that particular quartet," explained Kuhn in an interview for Jazz.com. ECM producer Manfred Eicher recognized the opportunity, and ultimately brought the quartet into the studio in New York in December 2008. In addition to the nine Coltrane compositions, the recording includes two pieces Kuhn played with Coltrane ("I Want To Talk About You" and "The Night Has A Thousand Eyes"), and two written by the pianist, a spontaneous tribute ("In Gratitude") and an earlier tune, "Trance."

Tribute albums often fall into the easy trap of imitation, yet that never seems to be an issue for Steve Kuhn. Until the Birdland sessions, he had played very little of Coltrane's music over his career after those remarkable eight weeks in 1960. Notes Kuhn, 71, "I worked with John in 1960, almost fifty years ago, and although his influence carries over to this day, and always will, of course, there really was no conscious effort to emulate... It's just the way it came out... Joe Lovano is obviously influenced by John, but also he plays the way he plays... I've

played these pieces at Birdland for the last five or six years, and I play them the way I play them, with whatever voice I have. I'm interested in what he wrote, but the curiosity pretty much ends there. I think what I recorded is reflective of John, of course, but it's also reflective of what I am doing these days." It's this attitude that makes this not only an atypical tribute-to-a-legend album, but a uniquely personal interpretation. Kuhn only sounds like Kuhn, Lovano only like Lovano, even to the degree that he sticks with tenor rather than switching to Coltrane's choice, the soprano, save one track where Lovano uses the Hungarian reed, the taragato.

Like another who has uniquely interpreted Coltrane, pianist Marilyn Crispell, Steve Kuhn can create stunning music with a mere single line, as he does in introducing the opening "Welcome." It could not be more welcoming as Lovano joins in with his own ethereal phrasing over subtle bass and drum accompaniment. Kuhn then weaves a magical verse, setting the stage for the sweet interaction with Lovano that follows. It's an opening prayer for a mystical suite.

"Song of Praise" adds layers and raises the tempo, Kuhn's off-kilter passages giving Lovano a launching pad for this incantation (first recorded on Coltrane's 1962 Live at the Village Vanguard). The trio swings under Kuhn's ebullient interpretation-his touch and articulation might whisper Evans, his harmonic imagination might hint at Tyner (even at times suggesting at least two pianists on the loose), but there's an abstract complexity that denies the former, a softer attack that refutes the latter. Lovano sustains a melodic undercurrent, not Coltrane's "sheets of sound" but his own twisty modal explorations. With Finck's assertive counterpoint and Baron's storm and splash, it all merges into a glorious recitation.

One of the most familiar Coltrane compositions on this recording, "Crescent" starts out with Kuhn's chiming introduction in support of Lovano's mournful tenor. The pianist's exquisite passion slides over a similarly reverent Baron, a delicate song without words. With hollow mallets pounding, the drummer rises higher in accompanying Lovano, two soloists in tandem. Kuhn introduces "Living Space," yielding to Lovano to worship at the alter of Coltrane as the service is constructed by the trio. Finck's dark tones create an undertone of awe, while Baron's turbulence adds a sacred tension. "Central Park West" is one of Coltrane's most lyrical compositions, here a stunning piano/sax duet. Relatively brief at under four minutes, the track is long enough to showcase two imaginative artists who display as much reverence for each other as for their muse. (What about an all-duet album?)

Finck leads into the swirling delight of "Like Sonny," suggestive of Middle Eastern markets and shifting sands. Lovano's agility plays well against Baron's often subtle, sometimes brightly assertive percussion. Kuhn's lively solo is mirrored by Finck's upbeat, extended statement. Sounding decades removed, (dating from 1967), Coltrane's fiery "Configuration" starts with Baron soloing aggressively, soon joined by Lovano at his most abstract and exploratory, the duel pushed further by Kuhn's sweeping ascents of dissonance. Baron finishes the experiment with one of his few explosive moments. From Stellar Regions, "Jimmy's Mode" finds Lovano paying tribute to Coltrane without releasing his tether on form. Finck's solo provides a fitting prelude to Kuhn's "interstellar" journey, while Baron paints in translucent watercolor. Lovano returns, singing high praise as Kuhn retreats with deepest bass notes. The soprano-like pitch of Lovano's taragato flavors "Spiritual" with a wistful soul-searching, Kuhn adding some of his most assertive musings. While a thumpy Baron takes no prisoners,

Lovano's second solo segment is triumphant, assured of its destination.

Of the two standards, Billy Eckstine's "I Want to Talk About You" features Kuhn's gentle, cleanly articulated phrases, Baron's cymbals rising and receding like an ocean tide, while Finck provides an elegant pulse. This ballad highlights the sympathetic collaboration among Kuhn's trio, as Lovano sits this one out; surely he enjoyed just listening. "The Night Has a Thousand Eyes" starts with an abstract conversation between Finck and Kuhn that soon dissolves into the familiar film theme, the pianist's jaggedy rhythm and uptempo engaging Finck and Baron in another trio tour de force before Lovano joins the fray halfway in. And it is a grand and boisterous entry, an exhibition of the saxophonist's more straight-ahead flights of fancy and slippery gymnastics. Kuhn seems particularly inspired here, dancing around, over and under Lovano's lines, swinging all the way.

Two solo compositions from Steve Kuhn complete the set and provide "new and old dreams." "With Gratitude" was improvised in the studio, its rich and mildly dissonant harmonies presented in a gracefully linear homage that grows in complexity over its three-plus minutes. The closing "Trance" is a reconsideration of Kuhn's 1975 ECM title track. A Chopinesque tapestry, silken threads are woven and braided; strings, harp, and woodwinds are all expressed through the keyboard. The most definitive melody emerges late before dissolving in a shimmery, delicate finish.

Alone, in trio, or in quartet with a collaborative soulmate such as Joe Lovano, Steve Kuhn manages a tribute eloquently befitting John Coltrane without losing the unique musicianship that has informed his long career. While his brief stint with Coltrane provided the material and inspiration for *Mostly Coltrane*, this new release is nevertheless "Mostly Kuhn," further gilded by the partnership with Lovano, Finck and Baron. One can hope that this quartet will seek other opportunities to come together.

Steve Kuhn Trio With Joe Lovano
Mostly Coltrane
by Jon Regen, Keyboard Magazine

Steve Kuhn's stunning new disc *Mostly Coltrane* opens with the master pianist starkly stating the theme to John Coltrane's "Welcome." Like church bells ringing out across a town square, Kuhn's plaintive, single-note melodic call is the perfect beginning to an album full of serenity and surprise. As the original pianist in the Coltrane Quartet, Kuhn has a perspective on 'Trane's repertoire that few others possess. Here, accompanied sympathetically by saxophonist Joe Lovano, bassist David Finck, and drummer Joey Baron, Kuhn breathes new life into familiar tunes. On "Crescent," his assured touch and orchestral use of the piano impart the music with a cinematic sense of drama. And on "The Night Has A Thousand Eyes," his dynamic comping and motivically-charged solos lift Lovano and company to new heights. Coltrane would approve.

Coltrane Revisited
by JIM MACNIE - Village Voice September 19, 2009

Mostly Coltrane, pianist Steve Kuhn's recent nod to his ex-employer's sublime book, manages to glisten with spirit while throwing some punches. In July, he and Joe Lovano kicked a one-nighter at this club, bringing plenty of physicality to their genuflection. Kuhn's boppish nature was way up front, and the saxophonist waxed incisive on tunes that stretched from romantic to rowdy. Four more evening's worth of action should turn rumbles such as "Configuration" and prayers like "Welcome" toward some kind of enraptured zenith, a place where Coltrane himself was always headed.

A Onetime Sideman, Now Front and Center **Phillip Lutz - The New York Times**

AFTER 50 years as a darling of the cognoscenti, the pianist Steve Kuhn is expanding his reach among the jazz public. Mr. Kuhn - a sideman for luminaries like John Coltrane and a leader of pioneering trios - is gaining notice for a new CD on the ECM label, "Mostly Coltrane," and a striking run of performances in Manhattan.

Last month, he played for a packed house at Birdland, leading a quartet in support of the CD's release. This month, his trio attracted enthusiastic crowds at the Jazz Standard. Next month, in one of the most anticipated events of the fall, he will appear again at Birdland, this time with a quintet in honor of Coltrane's 83rd birthday.

"Steve is an original stylist," said Dan Morgenstern, the director of the Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers. "He's one of the finest pianists out there today, and should have a bigger name. He's got a following, though, and this Coltrane thing will bring some new fans to his tent."

By his own account, Mr. Kuhn was a rebellious young man. Among Harvard music majors, he said, his predilection for jazz marked him as a black sheep. A decade later, his love for the tragic diva Monica Zetterlund left him broke and brokenhearted. But now, at 71, he lives quietly in a town house in Dobbs Ferry, watching sports on television, playing his Baldwin grand and entertaining his companion of more than nine years.

"Hopefully, I'm a little older and wiser," he said. "I've mellowed in many ways."

Mellow he may be, but Mr. Kuhn's playing retains a restless spirit. Last month at Birdland, as he worked his way through the Coltrane repertory - from "Fifth House," a late-1950s piece based on "What Is This Thing Called Love?," to "Configuration," a late-'60s exercise in chromaticism - he served up the tension-filled silences, anxious tremolos and abbreviated glissandi that have helped define his keyboard personality.

That personality was far less mature in 1960, when Coltrane hired him at age 21 for an engagement, now seen as historic, at the Jazz Gallery, a barnlike club that sat at the end of St. Marks Place in the East Village. It was Coltrane's first job as leader of his own quartet, and his revolutionary explorations generated an ecstatic response. Mr. Kuhn acquitted himself admirably, said Mr. Morgenstern, who was there.

But for Mr. Kuhn, the blessing was mixed. Coltrane complimented his playing, he said, but did not offer guidance. As he wavered between providing a harmonic bed for Coltrane and holding an improvisatory dialogue with him, Mr. Kuhn said, the job became a nightly roller coaster that ended when he was replaced by McCoy Tyner, an old friend of Coltrane's from Philadelphia, 10 weeks into the run.

The Coltrane engagement was not Mr. Kuhn's only mixed blessing. He was constantly compared to the piano giant Bill Evans, a mentor and friend. Critics noted their shared lyrical and harmonic sensibilities, and described Evans's touch the way Joe Lovano, the saxophonist in the Coltrane project, recently described Mr. Kuhn's - as having a "ringing quality." What started as a compliment became tiresome, Mr. Kuhn said.

Mr. Kuhn began building his own legacy long before Evans died in 1980. Mr. Kuhn's trios raised interplay between the musicians to levels that rivaled - and these days may even exceed - those of the Evans groups. At the Jazz Standard this month, the communication between Mr. Kuhn, the bassist Steve Swallow and the drummer Al Foster seemed complete, whether they were segueing from Debussy to Billy Strayhorn or digging into up-tempo Sonny Rollins.

Whatever the format, Mr. Kuhn has slyly avoided clichés. In particular, his piano-with-strings efforts - "October Suite," recorded in 1966, and "Promises Kept," recorded in 2004 and performed at the 2006 Caramoor International Music Festival - have been noted for their subtle swing and lack of saccharine sentiment.

With the Coltrane project, Mr. Kuhn has come full circle. While his crowds this summer may not recall the near-hysteria that greeted Coltrane five decades ago, Mr. Kuhn said that they - and the popularity of the CD, which made its debut last month at No. 12 on Billboard's traditional jazz chart - could lead to a duo booking with the saxophonist Ravi Coltrane, John's son, next year.

Meanwhile, Mr. Kuhn is looking to the fall with anticipation, and the jazz world is looking at him.

Steve Kuhn Trio with Joe Lovano: *Mostly Coltrane* by Cathy Gruenfelder

"In January, February and March of 1960, I was privileged to work with John Coltrane at the Jazz Gallery in New York City. I will always cherish those eight weeks. This music reflects my deep respect for him," writes Steve Kuhn. From the very first notes he plays on the opener, "Welcome," you can feel the eulogistic spirit in his touch. 'Welcome' seems more like 'goodbye.' In December of 2008, Kuhn and his trio with David Finck and Joey Baron teamed up with Joe Lovano at Avatar Studios in NYC to record a CD of ten tunes that Coltrane either wrote or made legendary and two Kuhn originals. It is nice to have a Coltrane tribute record where the tenor player is not a Coltrane disciple. Lovano has definitely incorporated an influence of Coltrane into his sound, but it is only one of many elements to what is a very distinct sound of his own. On this record, you will not find anyone trying to re-create anything.

The opener, "Welcome," originally appeared on Coltrane's record *Transition* from 1965 and it has a strikingly beautiful melody. It is treated like a precious flower, with the utmost delicacy by these veteran musicians. Lovano and Kuhn play with a peaceful and serene affection, and Baron and Finck simply accentuate the efforts of the soloists, creating textures and making exclamation points, allowing the rubato tempo to be controlled by Lovano and Kuhn. When the tune finished, I felt like I had just finished meditating.

Things get a little darker with "Song of Praise." The tune begins with an unsettling introduction from Kuhn before Lovano states the deep minor melody. Joey Baron reaches a climax of drum effects before suddenly dropping into a swing groove as the solo section begins. Kuhn's solo is as rich as can be, full of tension and release, and superimposing different time signatures over the 4/4 structure. Finck is on his every move, seeming to almost think along with him-great ears. When Lovano begins his solo, Kuhn lays out. Lovano then gets back into to melody as Kuhn creates un-structured textures behind him and Baron builds to a climax.

"Crescent" also begins with a beautiful introduction from Kuhn. His touch and harmonic sensibilities make your eye lids droop in a sort of ecstatic sense of calm. Lovano plays the song with love and care, and the abandon that love requires to truly be expressed. Baron is playful and adventurous.

The band continues with their gentle and meditative exploration of Coltrane's music with the ballad "I Want To Talk About You." It becomes very clear on this tune, perhaps because Lovano isn't playing on it, that Kuhn is approaching this project from a deeper place than trying to give tribute to the sound and style of Coltrane. You can feel the dedication to the man and his spirit. Kuhn plays with a gorgeous melodicism and a very open but acute sense of time.

Things really brighten up with an up-tempo version of "The Night Has a Thousand Eyes." The band plays it with a very straight forward and up-lifting sense of harmony, and they swing their tails off. Toward the end of the tune, Kuhn and Lovano improvise together and push each other on before going back into the head.

Making a stark contrast to the previous tune is "Living Space," the title track of Coltrane's 1965 release. It is a searching and free modal piece with an evolving sense of tempo. Lovano and Kuhn play off each other beautifully and Baron creates weather patterns with the drums-alternately thunderous, oceanic or clear and breezy.

"Central Park West" is played as a duo between Lovano and Kuhn. The two play the tune with such ease and freedom. Lovano's playing is completely reflexive, yet he is always allowing himself to truly be confronted by the call to action that each moment brings, so his reflexes are always extremely active-his virtuosity, spontaneity and personality are an incredible combination.

"Like Sonny" is given a Latin tinged treatment and Kuhn really shines on this one with his hand independence, and the way his hands interact. Finck takes a very tasty solo. The first of the two Kuhn originals is "With Gratitude," which he plays solo. Through it, he tells an incredibly rich and profound story of love, loss, life and death. It has the quality of seeming to be composed and improvised at the same time.

"Configuration" is approached with complete freedom and abandon, and Baron and Lovano jump on the opportunity. After a minute or so, Kuhn joins the action with equal intensity. At Lovano's free-est moments, there is almost a primitive flamboyance, but there is always a sense of joy in his playing. I will only make a comparison because this is a tribute album, but Coltrane's playing is much darker.

The group approaches "Spiritual" in a free context for the first two minutes, before settling into a classic Jones/Coltrane/Garrison/Tyner sense of swing. Lovano plays a tarogato on this tune, which has a sound somewhere in between a soprano sax and a clarinet. Kuhn takes a very innovative and varied solo with one incredible idea after another. Baron's drumming really has that classic Elvin Jones vibe, with its rolling explosions of rhythm. The album ends with another incredibly personal solo original from Kuhn entitled "Trance."

What is most wonderful about this album is that each player fully asserts their own identity, yet in reverence to John Coltrane. They are not playing like him or imitating the music and interplay of his great bands, but they are playing for him and in tribute to the spirit of the man and his music. You can feel the love and gratitude emanating from the speakers.

**Steve Kuhn Trio with Joe Lovano: *Mostly Coltrane*
by Karl Stark - Philadelphia Inquirer**

(ECM *1/2)**

Pianist Steve Kuhn explores the lyrical side of tenor saxophonist John Coltrane.

Kuhn holds a direct link to the tenor titan, having served as the pianist in Coltrane's first quartet just before McCoy Tyner.

Kuhn here takes an approach far different from Tyner's. Kuhn's quartet - with tenor saxophonist Joe Lovano, bassist David Finck, and drummer Joey Baron - comes to the Coltrane songbook with soft gloves and candlelight. Much of the set is sweet without fawning, mystical without being New Age.

Even "The Night Has a Thousand Eyes," studded with audio fireworks, exudes a simpatico nature, while Coltrane's classic "Crescent" is deep and gorgeous and Kuhn's "Trance," a solo piano piece, proves to be full of elegant reverie.

Just when the set could begin to sound safe, it veers into later Coltrane, with slashing modernist tendencies on "Configuration." But here, too, "Jimmy's Mode" provides some peace, and on "Spiritual," Lovano plays the Hungarian, oboe-like tarogato, on which he eerily conjures up Coltrane's sound on soprano saxophone.

All in all, a nourishing set.

New CDs highlight skills of Allyson, Broom, Kuhn by Jon Poses - Columbia Daily Tribune - Notes and Tones

We focus on a trio of releases here - pianist Steve Kuhn's "Mostly Coltrane" (ECM), guitarist Bobby Broom's "Plays For Monk" (Origin) and vocalist Karrin Allyson's "By Request" (Concord), which is a "Best of" retrospective of her 11 years with the label - as well as some of the highlights of the just-announced 2009 Jazz Journalist Awards, which is the international media-driven organization that gathers each June in New York to announce their constituents' results.

Kuhn, now amazingly 71, is a gifted keyboardist - and has been for many, many years. A Brooklyn native, he started playing piano as a child studying with Margaret Chaloff, who schooled him in the "Russian Technique." Through her he met her son, baritone saxophonist Serge Chaloff. As a result Kuhn, still in his teens, found himself playing as part of a rhythm section that backed the likes of Coleman Hawkins, Chet Baker and Vic Dickenson.

Kuhn hooked up with classmates such as Ornette Coleman and Don Cherry; then he met trumpeter Kenny Dorham two years before being asked to join John Coltrane's newly formed quartet. After working with 'Trane, Kuhn continued to enjoy a string of high-profile assignments, including work with Stan Getz and Art Farmer.

By the end of the 1960s Kuhn had formed his own trio - the format he is probably most associated with. He's led a string of great ones. One edition included bassist Steve Swallow and drummer Pete LaRoca; another, in the mid-1980s, involved Ron Carter and Al Foster.

His "Mostly Coltrane" effort employs longtime associate bassist David Finck and Joey Barron, the incredibly gifted and inventive percussionist. This date has one measurable added attraction - saxophonist Joe Lovano, who contributes on almost all of the cuts to "Mostly Coltrane."

The trio plus Lovano drive through a variety of Coltrane material, including real classics such as "Welcome," "Crescent," "Central Park West" and "Like Sonny." The 13 tracks include a pair of Kuhn originals.

There have been, of course, a lot of Coltrane interpretations; however, Kuhn and company's work rings both true and original; each member is well-schooled and knows what he is doing - it ain't an easy deal to pull off.

• • •

Guitarist Bobby Broom, now a fixture on the Chicago scene, is as well-known for his periodic work as a member of many of Sonny Rollins' groups during the past two decades as he is for his own efforts as a leader and accomplished guitarist.

Broom, who can be seen and heard in Chicago quite regularly, has issued, of late, a series of very good recordings. The newest, "Bobby Broom Plays For Monk," was released this week and continues the string of satisfying discs he's issued. This is a date with his regular working

trio: bassist Dennis Carroll and drummer Kobie Watkins.

Broom is both an extremely fluid soloist and someone steeped in the traditions of Wes Montgomery and early-era George Benson. He plays chunks of chords and simultaneous notes octaves apart.

It's a perfect fit here given how stylistic Monk and Montgomery could be. On this date Broom peels through a number of interpretations of the pianist's compositions, including "Ruby My Dear," "Work," "Rhythm-a-ning," "Lulu's Back in Town," "Beshma Swing" and the one and only "In Walked Bud."

I'm not sure "soothing" is the best word for these 10 tunes, but Broom really lays out a relaxed and, like Kuhn, authentic session from classic start to modern finish.

• • •

Area favorite, singer and pianist Karrin Allyson has put together a retrospective of her years with Concord Records. I was surprised when I learned she has issued 11 titles - certainly a significant body of work - for the label since she first landed there. Allyson contributed personal comments in the liner notes that are quite fitting and add to the proceedings.

She's selected a wide variety of material. What's consistent here is the level of musicianship. For instance, on piano, we have Mulgrew Miller in the band on her reading of Bobby Timmons' "Moanin'," and the late James Williams performs on "What's New." There's also the work of a third great pianist and arranger - Bruce Barth - who is heard on "Life is a Groove" ("Jordu").

Allyson mixes in some of her Brazilian work, as well as selections such as Cole Porter's "Night & Day." In that instance she employs many of her pals, whom she met and worked with while she carved out her career in Kansas City, including pianist Paul Smith, guitarists Rod Fleeman and Danny Embry, bassist Bob Bowman and drummer Todd Strait.

Allyson has long since moved to New York, but she still makes her way back to the Midwest regularly. She has a number of dates scheduled in June. She was actually back home in Kansas City just a few days ago, but if you are headed to Minneapolis, you can see her at the Dakota Tuesday and Wednesday and next weekend in Chicago at the Green Mill. If you can't make it to those dates, then "By Request" might be the way to get your Allyson fix.

• • •

The Jazz Journalist Awards are worth mentioning simply for the fact that the voting party - writers, authors, photographers and broadcasters - is a varied bunch that is spread out around the globe. Though not without the potential for conflict of interest - for instance, I'm a member but I don't vote because I feel too directly involved with a number of the nominated artists each year - JJA has always struck me as quite altruistic and nonpartisan. Then again, the same could be said, I suppose, about the Downbeat Critics Awards.

There are a great many categories - every instrument common and less common, writing and arranging capability, ensembles small and large, up and coming talent, etc. - but here are a

few listings: Lee Konitz, Lifetime Achievement Award; Sonny Rollins, who performs with more frequency, including a mid-September date in St. Louis, Musician of the Year; and Maria Schneider took home several awards, among them Composer of the Year, Arranger of the Year and Large Ensemble of the Year. Visit www.jazzjournalists.org.

**Steve Kuhn Trio with Joe Lovano: *Mostly Coltrane: "Like Sonny"*
by Ralph A. Miriello - Jazz.com**

Rating: 94/100

In one of those rare, once-in-a-lifetime convergences, pianist Steve Kuhn got a call to play with John Coltrane for a gig at the Jazz Gallery in New York City in 1960. Kuhn had been playing with trumpeter Kenny Dorham and was well on his way to establishing himself as a player with a unique voice. The ever-searching Trane was still formulating the next stage of his musical development. The collaboration only lasted for three months but it made an indelible mark on the twenty-one year old Kuhn. Coltrane's dedication to his music influenced the young pianist, not so much by altering his developing style, but by strengthening his resolve toward following his own path. With this tribute album, Kuhn has carefully chosen songs that demonstrate where he and Coltrane have some common ground.

On "Like Sonny", a Coltrane composition dedicated to Sonny Rollins, Kuhn has followed his natural instincts to use a memorable melody as a vehicle for improvisation. Kuhn's technique is burnished with classical undertones that bring an elegance and grace to his playing. Kuhn creates a sound that utilizes the full range of the keyboard, bespeaks of a mastery of touch and evokes a haunting beauty that is never self-indulgent.

Bassist and long-time collaborator David Finck has developed a truly intuitive language with Kuhn. Baron's deft polytonal touch is reminiscent of Elvin Jones but more delicate and spidery than his predecessor. Lovano's controlled cool delivery is appropriately more deferential to Rollins than to Coltrane and has a beautiful rich tonal quality that is very compatible with Kuhn's own natural lyricism on this song. Together this quartet has created a worthy homage to the Kuhn-Coltrane experience.

**Steve Kuhn Trio with Joe Lovano: *Mostly Coltrane*
by Doug Ramsey - RiffTides**

Steve Kuhn, *Mostly Coltrane* (ECM). Kuhn pays homage to John Coltrane, who briefly employed him in 1960 when the pianist was on the doorstep of his career. His tribute encompasses elegiac, earthy and wildly exploratory facets of the great saxophonist. It may remind listeners that, despite a relatively low profile, Kuhn is a major pianist of our time. His grasp of the nature, or natures, of Coltrane's music is evident throughout. His keyboard touch, his fluidity, the flow and density of his harmonies, the way he supports Joe Lovano, make that plain. Lovano is a saxophonist drenched in Coltrane's spirit who has the technique to summon it without resorting to either mindless direct imitation or the thrashing about that render so many Coltrane acolytes sterile. Bassist David Finck and drummer Joey Baron are

connected with Kuhn and Lovano as if by neural attachment. Their accompaniment consists of not merely a carpet of rhythmic support underneath the piano and saxophone, but threads woven into the music.

When I was in New York last month, one of my unanticipated treats was being taken to the ASCAP Jazz Wall of Fame Awards ceremony at Lincoln Center. The posthumous inductees included Coltrane. The artists ASCAP chose to represent his music were Kuhn and Lovano. Their exquisitely slow "Central Park West" was so mesmerizing that when it ended it kept the audience in suspended animation for what seemed a full minute before applause erupted. Judi Silvano, Lovano's wife, was sitting behind me. She leaned over and said, "You see why I married him." The "CPW" here is shorter, marginally faster and doesn't weave quite the spell of the duet that night in the Allen Room, but it is a lovely interpretation of one of Coltrane's most affecting pieces. In addition to "Crescent," "Like Sonny," "Spiritual" and six other Coltrane compositions, Kuhn provides two new pieces, the glistening unaccompanied piano solo "With Gratitude," and "Trance," with an appropriately hypnotic Lovano solo on the Hungarian instrument known as a tárogató.

To represent Coltrane's final days, when he was searching for what he called a "universal sound," Kuhn chose "Configuration," from the 1967 album *Interstellar Space*. Coltrane's recording was a chromatic exercise that developed into startling bursts of energy exchanges with drummer Rashied Ali. Kuhn's version follows the pattern, with Lovano approximating Coltrane's unbridled free will and passion and Baron demonstrating the full range of technique that he often keeps in reserve. Kuhn contributes a new element, a whirlpool of a piano solo. He is breathtaking in his technical control while taking advantage of the freedom to impose self discipline. Following a few bars of simultaneous improvisation with Lovano, Kuhn makes a spontaneous composition that has form and logic. Elliott Carter, George Crumb or any other modern concert composer might have spent weeks writing it and been happy to have done so. Kuhn creates it on the spot. Art Blakey was fond of saying, "Jazz musicians are the greatest musicians in the world." Kuhn's solo on "Configuration" is supporting evidence for that argument.

Steve Kuhn Trio with Joe Lovano: *Mostly Coltrane* by John Kelman - All About Jazz

Although he's spent most of his career focusing on interpreting the music of others, pianist Steve Kuhn's albums for the ECM label have largely been about his small but significant repertoire of original music. Which makes *Mostly Coltrane* a real anomaly by comparison to earlier works like those reissued in the three-CD box set *Life's Backward Glances - Solo and Quartet* (ECM, 2009). Still, Kuhn has a perhaps little-known connection that makes this set of, well, mostly material either composed or covered by John Coltrane a stronger fit than might be expected. Kuhn gigged briefly with the iconic saxophonist in the early months of 1960, a transitional time for Coltrane. But instead of focusing on the repertoire Kuhn played with him, the pianist addresses a bigger picture, ranging from the more mainstream standards Coltrane was performing at the time of Kuhn's employment to the extreme experimentation so definitive of the saxophonist's later years, prior to his untimely death in 1967 at the age of 40.

Kuhn reunites his trio from *Remembering Tomorrow* (ECM, 1996)-ubiquitous drummer Joey

Baron and bassist David Finck, a longtime partner who also appeared on the pianist's last release for ECM, 2004's string-driven *Promises Kept*. But to make the connection to Coltrane complete, Kuhn also enlists saxophonist Joe Lovano. The beauty of *Mostly Coltrane* is that while the album is, indeed, reverential to the spirit of Coltrane, stylistically it's all Kuhn and his quartet.

Kuhn plays with a more delicate touch than Coltrane's longest-standing pianist, McCoy Tyner, so even when he heads into the swinging modal territory that Tyner carved out so singularly on "Song of Praise," first heard on Coltrane's *Live at the Village Vanguard* (Impulse!, 1962), it possesses none of Tyner's forceful, block-chord attack. Instead, with Lovano similarly eschewing Coltrane's infamous "sheets of sound" without sacrificing any of the passion, Kuhn plays it more impressionistically, although there's nothing implicit about the turbulent underpinning created by Finck and Baron.

Still, even Baron mainly plays it less hard-hitting than his Coltrane counterpart, the late Elvin Jones. While Jones would boil over on the title track to *Crescent* (Impulse!, 1964), Baron largely opts for a simmer on Kuhn's rubato arrangement, with greater power only occasionally demonstrated and, instead, more left to implication. Even when the quartet shoots for greater extremes on "Configuration," from *Stellar Regions* (Impulse!, 1967)-including an incendiary opening duet between Baron and Lovano-it feels somehow more truly collaborative and less a pure vehicle for Coltrane's by then truly out-of-this-world explorations.

Kuhn's motivic ability to build solos from the smallest of building blocks has always been a strength, and here he excels at taking music so strongly associated with Coltrane that it's difficult to imagine anyone else playing it, not just making it fit within his overall discography, but specifically within his ECM work. His own compositional contributions-the new "With Gratitude" and a retake of the title track to *Trance* (ECM, 1975), both solo vehicles for the pianist-fit just as comfortably in the overall program as do the two standards. These are Billy Eckstine's gentle ballad, "I Want to Talk About You" and the enduring Bernier/Brainin classic "The Night Has a Thousand Eyes," taken here at a fast clip.

Lovano is in equally fine form, capturing Coltrane's shimmering intensity on "Spiritual," but playing it on the Hungarian tarogato rather than the soprano saxophone towards which Coltrane became so disposed in his later years. He shines in the most understated of ways on a short but sweet duet with Kuhn on Coltrane's often-recorded and elegant ballad "Central Park West," from Coltrane's *Sound* (Atlantic, 1960), the two seemingly joined at the hip.

Baron's ability to be both subtle and powerful-sometimes instantaneously-makes him an equal partner and superb foil for Kuhn's interpretive and sometimes sparse approach. Both players are capable-as is Lovano-of fervent energy and expansive dynamics, but they avoid the relentlessness that Coltrane was demonstrating by the time of *Stellar Region's* "Jimmy's Mode," which also features a rare but impressive solo from Finck.

Mostly Coltrane is the ideal homage. There's no shortage of the intrepid exploratory spirit (and spiritual inspiration) that's made Coltrane a cultural icon for generations of musicians and fans, but equally there's no missing the personal qualities that define Kuhn and his group. A rare opportunity to hear Kuhn outside the trio setting he's largely preferred for most of his career, *Mostly Coltrane* may not appear, on first glance, to jibe with his original composition-focused discography for ECM, but in its absolute retention of the markers that have defined

his work for the label, it's nothing short of a perfect fit.

**Steve Kuhn Trio with Joe Lovano: *Mostly Coltrane*
by Stuart Broomer - All About Jazz**

When John Coltrane left Miles Davis' band at the end of 1959, the first working quartet he formed had Steve Kuhn on piano for gigs at the Jazz Gallery over the first three months of 1960. Here Kuhn pays deeply affecting tribute to Coltrane and his music with Joe Lovano on tenor and tarogato and Kuhn's regular trio members, bassist David Finck and drummer Joey Baron.

Kuhn and Lovano have both been shaped in part by Coltrane's music and the two play some of Coltrane's compositions that aren't frequently heard, from the relatively early "Central Park West" and "Like Sonny" to "Jimmy's Mode" and "Configuration," which didn't appear until 1994's *Stellar Regions* (Impulse!). Coltrane was an elegiac composer and Kuhn emphasizes that dimension in his own homage. Only "Configuration" explores the expressionist Coltrane of rapid runs and overblown multiphonics. The compositions are more often reflective, even regal in their emotional depth and melodic simplicity, including the opening "Welcome" and the gorgeous "Crescent." Others, like "Jimmy's Mode," can suggest gospel music with their open harmonies.

There's a distinctive gravity to Lovano's sound that emphasizes the weight of memory while Kuhn's musical imagination has a certain Russian caste (he studied with legendary Bostonian piano teacher Margaret Chaloff as a child). He develops this material in a highly distinctive way, effectively combining harmonic density with a light touch and singing melodic lines. He can bring new life to a standard Coltrane played-like Billy Eckstine's "I Want to Talk About You"-or find new possibilities in the modal "Spiritual." It's a well-integrated band, with Finck and Baron contributing much to the music's tone. Kuhn also plays two beautiful unaccompanied solos of his own composition, a moody "With Gratitude" and the luminous conclusion, "Trance."

**Steve Kuhn Trio with Joe Lovano: *Mostly Coltrane*
by Ken Dryden - AllMusic.com**

Steve Kuhn was the original pianist in the John Coltrane Quartet, though he was replaced by McCoy Tyner after two months, as Tyner had been Coltrane's initial choice. Though he never recorded with Coltrane, he is steeped in the late saxophonist's music; this tribute covers music from many phases of his career. With tenor saxophonist Joe Lovano, bassist David Finck, and drummer Joey Baron (the latter two being part of the pianist's working trio), Kuhn had the challenge of tackling mostly well-known Coltrane compositions and standards without sounding like a clone, even though he was utilizing the same instrumentation. Fortunately, Kuhn's approach to playing is very distinctly different from McCoy Tyner, while any hints of Coltrane's influence on Lovano are brief. Billy Eckstine's "I Want to Talk About You" shimmers in the pianist's reserved, lyrical trio setting (omitting saxophone), while "The Night Has a Thousand Eyes" bursts with energy, with Lovano making a delayed entrance well into the

piece. One of the most unusual tracks is "Spiritual," with Lovano playing the tárogató, an Hungarian reed instrument that is related to the oboe, sounding a bit like a soprano sax but with a warmer, less shrill sound. Their extended workout of this Coltrane favorite is more reserved than the composer's several recordings, but here the quartet is at its most adventurous. Kuhn also explores late-period Coltrane songs, such as the meditative "Jimmy's Mode" (showcasing Finck) and the turbulent avant-garde-ish "Configuration," both of which remained unissued until 1994. Mostly Coltrane easily stands out as one of the best CDs among the countless tributes to John Coltrane and is one of Steve Kuhn's essential recordings within his extensive discography.

**Steve Kuhn Trio with Joe Lovano: *Mostly Coltrane*
by Fred Kaplan - blog.stereophile.com**

Steve Kuhn's new CD, *Mostly Coltrane* (on the ECM label), has no business working, but it does, for the most part really well.

Trane-tribute albums are risky enough; most of them inspire only the desire to spin the originals. Kuhn at least has some bona fides, having played piano in a quartet that Coltrane led in the first few months of 1960 before forming the "classic quartet" that consisted of McCoy Tyner, Jimmy Garrison, and Elvin Jones (or, as an occasional sub on drums, Roy Haynes).

The album's most compelling tunes are those that Kuhn played with Coltrane himself, most of them ballads—"Central Park West," "The Night Has a Thousand Eyes," "I Want to Talk About You"—and they possess a spirit at once gentler but no less urgent than the versions Trane wound up recording. Kuhn doesn't pound out block chords, as Tyner did, or bebop riffs, as Tommy Flanagan did during his brief stint in the band. Rather, he coaxes tone clusters and colors, a bit reminiscent of how Bill Evans backed Trane when they were both in Miles Davis' late-'50s sextet, though harder-edged.

Joe Lovano plays the tenor sax, another bit of derring-do, and he's in top form, his brusque tone a fine fit for this music. His cover of the opening tune, "Welcome," is gorgeous, and on "Central Park West," he's exceeded only by David Murray's rendition on his out-of-print 1994 album, *Saxmen*. Joey Baron, on drums, may pull off the most eye-widening feat: beating the polyrhythms like Jones and spreading the rhythm outward like Haynes. How does he do that? Bassist David Finck, a longtime Kuhn sideman, holds down the fort with firm flair.

Only on the album's last few tracks, which come mainly from Coltrane's late-'60s era, does the spirit sag. Trane was going farther out into interstellar space, and these tunes may need higher-energy backup. Otherwise, it's a riveting album, and James Farber's engineering is superb.

**Steve Kuhn Trio with Joe Lovano: *Mostly Coltrane*
by Greg Barbrick - BlogCritics.org**

For those who may be unaware of ECM stalwart Steve Kuhn's connection to John Coltrane, they actually played together for a few weeks in 1960. The first three months of 1960 saw Kuhn as Coltrane's pianist at the Jazz Gallery in New York City.

They never played together again afterwards, but Kuhn was deeply influenced by the experience. Kuhn's *Mostly Coltrane* is one of the finest of the many John Coltrane tributes to have emerged over the years. Kuhn's longtime trio, which includes bassist David Finck, and drummer Joey Baron is supplemented by tenor saxophonist Joe Lovano.

Lovano acquits himself admirably in the Coltrane role, which is kind of a no win proposition really. You never mistake his phrasing for actually being Coltrane. But the arrangements and execution are done so respectfully as to make it a moot point.

One of the many impressive aspects of this set is the songs Kuhn chose to use. "Central Park West," "The Night Has A Thousand Eyes," and "I Want To Talk About You" were all part of the Jazz Gallery sets he played back in '60. They reflect the hard bop era that Coltrane was just transitioning out of.

Of the remaining ten tracks, eight are Coltrane originals recorded between 1964, and his final year, 1967. I like the fact that Kuhn began when he played with the man, and then followed JC's journey through to the end.

"Welcome" from the 1965 album *Kulu Se Mama* opens things up perfectly, setting just the right tone for what is to follow. "Living Space," also originally recorded in '65, but unreleased until the posthumous '98 disc of the same title, is another highlight.

Kuhn's interplay with the band is so spot on, yet so different from what Coltrane's pianists usually did. It begs the obvious question, what if Kuhn had stayed on?

The two remaining cuts are by Steve Kuhn. "With Gratitude," is a beautiful piano meditation featuring some of his most reflective playing. It was a stroke of genius to close *Mostly Coltrane* with "Trance" though.

This amazing piece lays bare just how profoundly Kuhn has been influenced by his one-time band leader, and where those influences have taken him. "Trance" is a piano improvisation that works in captivating ways, and surprises like no other.

For this listener, Steve Kuhn's *Mostly Coltrane* is about as good as it gets in paying tribute to a legend.

**Steve Kuhn Trio with Joe Lovano: *Mostly Coltrane*
by Bob Weinberg - Examiner.com**

As a young up-and-comer, pianist Kuhn had a chance to work for three months with John Coltrane soon after the iconic saxophonist left the employ of Miles Davis. Kuhn has since gone on to a stellar career, his recordings for the ECM label prized among heavy jazz fans. No question, his short tenure with Trane left a mark. On *Mostly Coltrane*, the pianist

acknowledges the depth of that influence, as he interprets a handful of Trane's more melodic offerings, and taps the spiritual essence that fueled everything the saxophonist played. Joined by trio mates David Finck on bass and Joey Baron on drums, and the great Joe Lovano on tenor, Kuhn nimbly and emotionally dives into Trane's songbook. The opening tracks, "Welcome," "Song of Praise" and "Crescent," make for a particularly adept portrait of an ever-questing artist, which is filled out with some covers that Trane made his own and some of his later, more-abstract works. Lovano is simply masterful, never falling into slavish imitation of one of jazz's most distinctive tenor voices, but evoking his presence with lush, bluesy lines and occasional tour-de-force overblowing, all of which is played with immense feeling. Kuhn's crystalline tone and emotional complexity prove once again why he's so revered, and his two originals, the solo-piano pieces "With Gratitude" and "Trance," seem like heartfelt odes to the master.

Steve Kuhn Trio with Joe Lovano: *Mostly Coltrane* by S. Victor Aaron - Jazz.com

For his John Coltrane tribute album *Mostly Coltrane*, Kuhn primarily chose songs that are optimal vehicles for group interplay, a Coltrane Quartet hallmark. The relatively little-known but deeply spiritual "Song Of Praise" exemplifies that trait. Kuhn's highly elongated phrases cast the appropriate, meditative mood. As he solos, he conserves his power for the peak of some well-conceived crescendos, revealing the classical traits of his early training. Part of Lovano's artistry lies not in his unique tenor voice, but his unmatched ability to adapt his voice optimally to any given setting. In contrast to, say, his highly punctuated playing on his own Folk Art album, here he puts in very liquid lines. When he improvises, Kuhn all but lays out, leaving Lovano to create while remaining tethered to the melody. Joe delivers without breaking a sweat.

However, it's Baron who is the biggest star of this show. He propulses this song into a wide orbit with shimmering cymbals, subtle fills, well-timed rumbles and bombs. And he does this without sounding much at all like Elvin Jones, perhaps because his tonality is brighter and his touch a tad lighter. Kuhn was briefly Coltrane's pianist at the beginning of the saxophone legend's solo career, but the sensitive reading of "Song Of Praise" he provides to one of his old boss's later songs proves that he's no less aware of the character of the music that came after his early time in that band.

Steve Kuhn Trio with Joe Lovano: *Mostly Coltrane* -Midwest Record Recap

STEVE KUHN TRIO/*Mostly Coltrane*: This piano man was Coltrane's original piano man and that certainly bears some weight as it was a weighty place to be. Playing music that reflects his love of Coltrane's music, Kuhn and his hand picked crew are doing much more than a tribute band thing here and this is simply another division of soul music. Reaching back 50 years and finding quite a lot to discover by reaching within, Kuhn makes a work that can proudly stand toe to toe with the originals. Smart jazz for smart listeners.

**Steve Kuhn Trio with Joe Lovano: *Mostly Coltrane*
by Pico - SomethingElseReviews.com**

Brooklyn-born Steve Kuhn has not only enjoyed a long and fruitful career as a pianist of acclaim, but an interesting one as well. He studied classical piano under Margaret Chaloff, who also educated other jazz pianist luminaries like Herbie Hancock and Keith Jarrett. At thirteen, he comped for Madame Chaloff's son Serge, the great baritone player. Barely in his twenties, Kuhn played in Kenny Dorham's combo in the late fifties, Stan Getz in the early sixties and later in Art Farmer's band before making a name for himself as a leader. And then there was his two month stint in the John Coltrane Quartet.

By the beginning of 1960, Coltrane was finally moving to establish himself outside the shadow of his boss Miles Davis and assembled his own quartet, a unit that under varying guises would go on to create some of the most mind-blowing music of this uncompromising decade and redefine the jazz combo as a more tightly-defined unit. Kuhn didn't even get to record with Coltrane before he was eventually replaced by another unknown at the time, McCoy Tyner, later in 1960. But it was long enough to make an impression on the young Kuhn, who witnessed up front the flowering of a gargantuan talent in the immediate aftermath of the tenorist's first masterpiece, *Giant Steps*.

Nearly fifty years later, Kuhn is paying tribute to the long-departed master with a collection of recordings that Coltrane played and composed (with a couple of Kuhn originals tossed in). The plainly titled *Mostly Coltrane* went on sale this past Tuesday. With there being probably more Coltrane tribute albums now out there than Coltrane albums, Kuhn's stab at this concept merits more than the usual attention for a couple of reasons.

First, it provides a glimpse of what Coltrane's songs might sounded like had Kuhn remained in the band for all those years instead of Tyner. There's no arguing that Tyner's powerful, percussive attack and unique chordal expressions was a critical component in the sound makeup of the classic version of this Quartet. But Kuhn's less-fussy, fluid approach contains a spirituality of its own. Furthermore, Kuhn did play some of the songs included in this set with Coltrane, before Coltrane had committed them to wax. Now for the first time, we get to hear these songs from the piano player who originally performed them before live audiences. It's not very likely that the approach Kuhn is using for these songs today is much like it was back then when he was still finding his footing. But he clearly knows these songs from a first-hand perspective.

The other reason for this not being your run-of-the-mill Coltrane tribute is because Kuhn augmented his trio (David Finck, double-bass, and Joey Baron, drums) with a guy who is a pretty good saxophone player himself: Joe Lovano. For this meeting, Lovano even dares to stick with tenor sax almost entirely throughout. But Lovano is so firmly established with his own voice on the horn, there's really no need for him to try to measure up to the legend; Lovano only needs to be himself.

Kuhn's selection of Coltrane songs makes it clear that he chose only songs that hold special meaning to him; there's a few familiar cuts like "Crescent" and "The Night Has A Thousand Eyes," but stays clear of anything from *Giant Steps*, *My Favorite Things* or *A Love Supreme*.

As aforementioned, some compositions come from the time Kuhn was in the band, but a couple ("Jimmy's Mode" and "Configuration") weren't even released to the public until 27 years after Coltrane's death. For the most part, the songs chosen possess either extended, mystic melodies, or tight, crisp harmonics.

The "spiritual" songs abound on this record. "Welcome" comes and goes like a gentle breeze; Lovano plays long notes in a singing voice and Kuhn takes a brief solo that's mellow and contemplative. This is followed by the quicker tempo and free-flowing gait of "Song Of Praise," an epic piece where Kuhn and Lovano seem to dispense with formal solo construction and play to the aura of the tune.

It's here when the drummer, Joey Baron, begins to make his presence known, as he does throughout much for the album. He is an explosive drummer who is less thunderous and more brisk than Elvin Jones, but like Elvin, succeeds in supplying a each song with energy and unpredictability. You could say he is a third reason why this isn't just any Coltrane tribute record. Baron, in fact, is soloing right underneath Lovano on the contemplative ballad "Crescent."

For "Spiritual," first unveiled on Trane's Live At The Village Vanguard 1961 performances, the song seems almost harmonically inverted. Lovano switches to a tarogato (a Hungarian clarinet-type woodwind instrument) that approximates the sound of Coltrane's soprano sax. Kuhn stretches out here more than usual, and his right-handed meditations at times even sounds like Tyner.

"Central Park West" is one of the prettiest Coltrane tunes, and dates from the time Kuhn had played in his group. While this rendition is performed without any flaws, it doesn't quite possess the magic of the other time Lovano covered it, either. "Like Sonny" is a Coltrane song that really should be covered more. It's got a delightful, ascending melody that Lovano plays counter two on the second go around of that chord progression.

"Configuration," from Coltrane's convulsive final period, almost seems out of place here, as it's balls-to-the-wall atonal free improvisation. To be sure, it's decent whack jazz and Kuhn is no stranger to the avant garde, but it's a rare instance on the album where it feels like Kuhn is trying to fill in a square. More successful is the other cut sourced from Stellar Regions, "Jimmy's Mode," where Finck gets to solo with searching, doleful lines, followed by moody musings of their own from Kuhn and Lovano.

The closing solo piano "Trance," a Kuhn-composed tune, is also a Kuhn-styled tune, so it doesn't really fit in with the Coltrane songs. But with the beautifully sweeping classically-inclined paths it takes, that hardly matters; it's would be a fine way to end most any album.

Since he had actually played for the man, an album celebrating the music of John Coltrane should be a natural concept for Steve Kuhn to take on. And, it does comes across that way. Then again, he goes against presumptions in many of the songs he chose, and in several instances, the manner in which he chose to play those songs, and that's a welcome surprise. Combined with the other distinct personalities in Lovano and Baron, as well as the steadiness of Finck, Mostly Coltrane is mostly a standout Coltrane tribute record.

**Steve Kuhn Trio with Joe Lovano: *Mostly Coltrane*
by Nate Chinen - The New York Times**

STEVE KUHN QUARTET (Tuesday) The pianist Steve Kuhn has a casually engrossing new album, "Mostly Coltrane" (ECM), that plays up a brief but memorable affiliation from early in his career. His partners on the album, and on this one-night-only release celebration, include the Coltrane-literate tenor and soprano saxophonist Joe Lovano and the bassist David Finck; Billy Drummond fills in here for Joey Baron on drums. At 8:30 and 11 p.m., Birdland, 315 West 44th Street, Clinton, (212) 581-3080, birdlandjazz.com; cover, \$25, with a \$10 minimum. (Chinen)

**Steve Kuhn Trio with Joe Lovano: *Mostly Coltrane*
by Tim Niland - jazzandblues.blogspot.com**

Pianist Steve Kuhn certainly has the pedigree for a John Coltrane tribute album. During a short period in 1960, when the saxophonist was completing his tenure with Miles Davis, Coltrane led a band of his own on the side at The Jazz Gallery in New York City with Kuhn as the pianist. Fifty years on and Kuhn returns the favor with a thoughtful if somewhat reverential album of songs written by or composed in honor of the great saxophonist. On the hot seat is Joe Lovano playing tenor saxophone (and torogato on "Spiritual") and rounding out the group are David Finke on bass and Joey Baron on drums. The songs that I enjoyed the most were the fast paced bebop of "Like Sonny" where Lovano is truly in his element, moving quickly through the shifting composition and playing with quick facility. "Configuration" takes the band into freer territory and is a very exciting performance with Lovano digging deep and recalling his early days in the loft jazz scene. "Welcome" and "Crescent" have a slower pace and are taken with an air of great humility, the group seems to be using the music to venerate and cherish the compositions and they perform them in a manner of utmost respect. Staying close to the melodies, they bow in homage to the legacy of the music. If there is anything negative to say about the recording, it can only be that the group seems deferential and a little hesitant to take things too far afield. But that is really a minor quibble and overall this is a well done and sincere appreciation of the music of John Coltrane, which moves through examples from each phase of his career with grace and humility.

**Steve Kuhn Trio with Joe Lovano: *Mostly Coltrane*
by Jim Macnie - The Village Voice**

It's one-nighter to acknowledge that the pianist's new *Mostly Coltrane* is on the streets, but it's also a great chance to hear what saxophonist Joe Lovano does with the master's more sublime nuggets, which stretch from romantic to rowdy. Kuhn, who worked in Trane's quartet a half-century ago, has insights into the material. His designs on "Central Park West" and "I Want To Talk About You" stress radiance and, even in the woollier moments, there's a calm that comes from ensemble unity. In a word? Gorgeous.

Steve Kuhn at Birdland - July 7, 2009
by Christian Carey - signaltonoise.blogspot.com

Early in his career, Steve Kuhn performed with tenor saxophonist John Coltrane. Though there have been countless gigs and recordings since then, and Kuhn is far more often in the role of leader these days, the pianist revisits his experience as a sideman to 'Trane on his latest ECM CD *Mostly Coltrane*.

On the disc, Kuhn deftly negotiates the jazz equivalent of a tightrope act: interpreting classics by one of jazz's greatest figures while still maintaining his own musical personality. Happily, none of Kuhn's singular soloing style and hallmark voicings are subsumed by homage.

Joined by saxophonist Joe Lovano, bassist David Finck, and drummer Billy Drummond, Kuhn plays a CD release party tonight at Birdland in New York City. Sets are at 8:30 and 11; \$25 for music.