

JOE LOVANO, DAVE LIEBMAN AND RAVI COLTRANE RECONVENE AT THE SAXOPHONE SUMMIT

Seraphic Light explores the music of late Coltrane; dedicated to Michael Brecker

When Michael Brecker, Dave Liebman and Joe Lovano – arguably the greatest jazz saxophonists of their time – first assembled in the mid-1990s as Saxophone Summit, their mission was to explore the outermost edges of jazz, most notably through the experimental avenues originally paved by saxophonist John Coltrane a few decades earlier. When Saxophone Summit released their debut album, *Gathering of Spirits*, in 2004, the critics raved. *JazzTimes* called the recording “ridiculously good,” while *Amazon.com* suggested that the album invoked “the collective vision and apocalyptic energies of John Coltrane’s 1960s meetings with...Eric Dolphy and Pharoah Sanders...”

Unfortunately, with the death of Michael Brecker in early 2007, a followup album featuring these three titans was never to be. But in keeping with the forward-thinking and forward-moving spirit that both Brecker and Coltrane embodied – not just in jazz but across the entire musical landscape – Saxophone Summit reconvenes with the June 3, 2008, release of *Seraphic Light*, an album that continues to celebrate and explore Coltrane’s later body of work. Liebman and Lovano return for the followup recording, while saxophonist Ravi Coltrane – heir to the elder Coltrane’s incalculable legacy – steps in and more than fills the void created by Brecker’s passing.

Seraphic Light, dedicated to Brecker, is in many ways two different projects in a single recording, says Liebman. “The original idea was to follow up where *Gathering of Spirits* left off,” he explains, referring to the previous album’s emphasis on some of the characteristics of Coltrane’s later period: simultaneous solos, abandonment of specific tempo and melodies and harmonies that ranged from diatonicism to dissonance. “The Coltrane compositions we chose for *Seraphic Light* reflect those directions... On the other hand, we wanted everyone in the group to have a compositional voice represented. So in essence we have two albums in one. The original tunes are, to my ears, quite accessible and compact in their performances, offering a needed contrast to the weightier Coltrane material.”

By tragic coincidence, Alice Coltrane – Ravi’s mother and John’s widow – passed away within 24 hours of Brecker’s death in January 2007, a turn of events that adds another layer of emotional resonance to *Seraphic Light*, says Lovano. “In the wake of Mike’s untimely passing and also with the loss of one of our spiritual leaders and inspirations, Alice Coltrane, this project took on a very personal life of its own,” he says. “Ravi Coltrane’s voice and presence gave us all a solid, warm feeling, and the music speaks for itself.”

“Dave and Joe both inspire me greatly, and it’s a thrill to play with them,” says Coltrane. “I admire Dave’s commitment and passionate drive in bringing the late period of Coltrane’s music to people’s attention. His scholarly exploration of these compositions is so important. And Joe’s expressive, elegant spirit emanates through everything he does. I simply look forward to any opportunity to play music with him.”

Each track on *Seraphic Light* is a journey into the limitless potential of jazz. The set opens with “Transitions,” a piece that is both melodic and yet sonically challenging at the same time. Further in,

“Message To Mike” is written and arranged by guest trumpeter Randy Brecker as a way of reaching out across the void to his late brother. “Having Randy’s contribution on this recording brought Mike’s energy, inspiration and aura into the room in a real way,” says Lovano. The surviving Brecker reappears with additional solo work in the closing track, John Coltrane’s “Expression.”

In keeping with the original Saxophone Summit philosophy, the three final tracks – “Cosmos,” “Seraphic Light” and “Expression” – all focus heavily on Coltrane’s later period. “There are some tunes on this record that are a little more accessible than the last record,” Liebman explains. “But at the same time, we’re not getting too far from the core aesthetic or the founding principles of the group. That’s why we bunched the late Trane tunes in the last three tracks. When you get to that final part of the record, you know you’re in that part of the voyage that reflects his later years. There’s nothing more that needs to be said after that.”

The title *Seraphic Light* is a reference to angels of the highest order who stand in the presence of God. Like the angels, great artists enter the world and then leave it all too quickly to ascend to a higher plane, but their immortality lies in their ability to inspire those they leave behind.

“Michael would have wanted us to keep moving and play the music,” says Liebman. “This project certainly was different without him, but Ravi more than filled in. We’ve been able to keep this project alive after ten years, two recordings and the loss of one of its founding members. I think the music itself reflects the commitment by the surviving members to keeping Saxophone Summit special in the world of jazz.”

Stand in the *Seraphic Light* and catch a glimpse of the divine.

Saxophone Summit’s *Seraphic Light* (CD-83673) is due at retail on June 3, 2008.