



**Tribute to Coltrane**  
Paul Dunmall/Tony Bianco  
(SLAM)

**Together Again**  
Alvin Fielder/Ike Levin  
(Charles Lester Music)

**A Night in November (Live in New Orleans)**  
Kidd Jordan/Hamid Drake  
(Valid)

by Jeff Stockton

INVCOR BEST  
OF 2013

Pegging John Coltrane's duets with Rashied Ali on 1967's *Interstellar Space* as the beginning of saxophone/drum improvisational recordings, this instrumental pairing has enjoyed continuous popularity over the years: Ali and Frank Lowe; Jimmy Lyons and Andrew Cyrille; Peter Brötzmann and Han Bennink; David Murray and Milford Graves, to name but a few. Usually one of the performers takes the lead, by virtue of the fact that one is better known, or his personality tends to be complemented by the other. Three recent CDs, however, don't quite conform to this rule of thumb.

*Tribute to Coltrane* is a follow-up to last year's *Thank You to John Coltrane*, recorded by tenor saxophonist Paul Dunmall and drummer Tony Bianco. In this case, it's the compositions that are the star, with the tandem exploring even later-period Trane than on the first outing. The result is some of Dunmall's strongest blowing to date (supported by Bianco's nonstop travels around his kit) on what amounts to a fantastic Coltrane sampler. In its original form, "Ogunde" was relatively brief, but here it unfurls to double its length with Dunmall meeting and extending the tune's spiritual arc. Likewise for the one-two punch of "Sun Ship" and "Ascent", where Dunmall's authoritative playing and Bianco's maniacal drumming pull off the niftiest trick of all: they make an original statement all their own.

What comes across listening to *Together Again*, a CD of seven spontaneous improvisations by Ike Levin (tenor and bass clarinet) and Alvin Fielder (drums), is balance. Neither horn nor percussion ever gets the upper hand when these two perform. Levin plays with great conviction and command, but his sound is free yet gentle, forceful yet restrained. His feature on bass clarinet is a welcome seasoning in the midst of his

tenor playing and amplifies the correctness of his creative choices. For his part, Fielder is all taste and restraint, imbuing every beat and lick with a lifetime of experience on his instrument. In a genre that can lend itself to self-indulgence or unwelcome abstraction, the lyricism on *Together Again* comes as a pleasant surprise.

Hamid Drake is no stranger to duetting with horn players, having produced celebrated work with Brötzmann, Joe McPhee and, most notably, Fred Anderson, who served as Drake's mentor and arguably his most sympathetic collaborator. Kidd Jordan was also a friend, admirer and compatriot of Anderson's and *A Night in November* serves as subtle tribute to the late master. The session took place in the moment and in front of an audience at Piety Street Studios in New Orleans, and the clarity of the recording heightens the effect of the musicians' interaction. Jordan is liable to rely on his horn's upper register, but here in the midst of the screams and squalls, his playing has a thread of reflection and contemplation running through it, supported perfectly by the drummer's subtle shadings and rhythmic pulse. Drake remains a marvel, the mark of quality anywhere he appears.

For more information, visit [slamproductions.net](http://slamproductions.net), [charleslestermusic.com](http://charleslestermusic.com) and [validrecords.com](http://validrecords.com). *Hamid Drake* is at Judson Church Jan. 10th with Peter Brötzmann as part of *Winter Jazzfest*. See Calendar.



**Grace**  
JD Allen (Savant)  
by Joel Roberts

INVCOR BEST  
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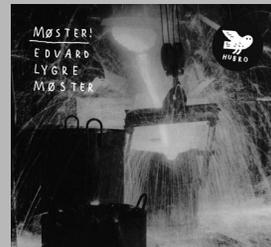
JD Allen has risen to the top of the heap of young tenor saxophone players over the past few years on the strength of a series of explosive trio albums and crucial sideman roles with fellow rising stars like Jeremy Pelt and, more recently, Jaimeo Brown. But Allen's latest release is a departure from his recent efforts. For one, he's debuting a brand new band, this time a quartet of bassist Dezron Douglas, drummer Jonathan Barber and, for the first time in many years, a piano player, Eldar Djangirov. In addition, Allen is writing longer, freer, less-structured compositions than the generally short and direct tunes he's focused on in the past.

*Grace* is organized into a narrative structure, split into two "acts" and several of the song titles reflect Allen's interests in art ("Chagall"), literature ("Cross Damon", after a character in Richard Wright's *The Outsider*) and film ("Papillon 1973", "Luke Skywalker"). While all is explained in the liner notes, it's not necessary to grasp in order to relish the music.

The album showcases a different side of Allen, more introspective and spiritual, less aggressive and reliant on furious, high-velocity blowing (though there's still some seriously intense saxophone work here, as on the opening "Mass"). He's at his best on the bluesy "Detroit", on which his playing recalls Coltrane in its mix of earthiness and abstraction. Djangirov is a revelation too, serving as an inspiring foil for Allen while providing his own swirling, ruminating, Chick Corea-inspired solos. It's a much different pianist than is heard on the former prodigy's solo efforts, which sometimes played up his formidable technique at the expense of individuality and spirit. Sax and piano come together in a gorgeous colloquy on "Selah (My Refuge)".

For more information, visit [jazzdepot.com](http://jazzdepot.com). Allen is at *Smoke* Jan. 10th-11th with Orrin Evans. See Calendar.

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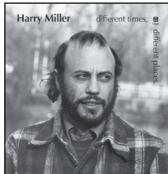
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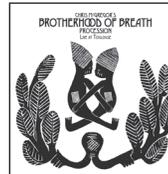
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