

Hi Gogo-

This is the piece I'll put in this week at Athens News. Take a look at it if you like.

Talk this week, P

Ornette Coleman: Jazz Icon Still Sounding Fresh

Pallas Theater, Athens , Greece

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Outside the Pallas theater on Voukourestiou street, around 9:00 o'clock in the evening, they started to collect: cognoscenti, illuminati, grad-school crackpots, bearded cyber-geeks, late-middle aged groovers, consumptive-looking nihilists, curious and cute jazz neophytes and almost anyone who has trouble dealing with consensus reality came to pay a pilgrimage to Ornette Coleman at this classic, restored venue.

Ornette Coleman's music, for the last half century, has always appealed to the artistic and fringy element of society. His start as a be-bop saxophonist in New Orleans was constraining to his ambitions and soon afterwards he began his more avant-garde style of playing. 50 years of professional performance and 51 musical LP and CD releases later, his recordings still appeal to a small, but wildly dedicated audience.

With the beatific presence of a Tibetan monk, Ornette and his three piece ensemble quietly took the stage. The audience anticipation for the upcoming musical proceedings was palpable. For some, it was almost an unendurable wait. And then, for the next 90 minutes or so, perfectly-crafted, euphoric, polychromatic musical pandemonium ensued.

He stretched alto-sax notes to the breaking point and skittered through choppy, tight, half-note runs. Ominous dirges transformed into semi-permeable, toe-tapping riffs which tweaked the last ganglia of the brain's occipital region while still having a teenage dance party with the frontal lobes.

The members of his band are all musicians on the Homeric level of skill and performance. Acoustic bassist Tony Falanga lays down the primary, foundational between-the-molecular-shelves riffs while electric bassist Al MacDowell snakes through musical spaces with mid-range and high-end soloing. Denardo Coleman, drummer and son of the icon, lays down imperceptibly slick, glandular mid-tempo to sprinting beats that are humanly impossible to count, but are still lively, witty and seductively appealing to the ear.

Ornette, in the center of the cyclone, sits with Gandi-esque implacability and alternatively plays alto-saxophone, trumpet and violin. Quick as a cat, he noodles, chirps, honks, tweets and squeals perfectly aligned and cohesive counter-point melodies and accents to all the proceedings and round him, while still being the anchor of the situation.

All players are everywhere at once and in perfect harmony with each others' contribution to the musical construction in progress. This is free-jazz at its highest level of achievement; the Parthenon of the free-style movement in music.

This current group of musicians claims the fewest members of any group he has played with in years. Often in the past his on-stage performing group included two drummers, two electric basses and two electric guitars.

Many of the evening's pieces, including *Turnaround, Matador and Song X*, came from his 2006 CD release "Sound Grammar." His playing on this live recording is as lively and fresh as ever and is a must-hear for anyone interested in his musical oeuvre. The classic track, *Theme from a Symphony, Variation 1,* was the final song played before two heart-felt encores were demanded by the standing-ovation audience.

The Pallas Theater must be praised for its sound and light system and operations during the performance. The live sound was as crisp and clean as a starched white shirt and the minimalist lighting effects blended perfectly with the band's cerebral style of playing. With simple, slight chromatic-lighting adjustments the stage changed atmosphere and look from David Lynch movie-fauvism to high school gymnasium loneliness and sterility.

Ornette Coleman plays music that is simultaneously Dionysian in its complex underlying structure and Apollonian in its joy and celebration of life and happiness. The combination of these two elements is a masterpiece reflection of the human condition with all its foibles, triumphs and tragedies.

The inimitable musician was inducted into the Downbeat jazz hall of fame in 1969 and was given the Grammy award in 2007 for Lifetime achievement in Jazz.