

jazz

SONNY ROLLINS
Road Shows Vol.2

Sonny Rollins, tenor saxophone; Ornette Coleman, alto saxophone (track 3); Roy Hargrove, trumpet (tracks 4 & 5); Russell Malone, guitar (tracks 1, 4, 5, 6); Jim Hall, guitar (track 2); Bob Cranshaw, bass (except track 3); Christian McBride, bass (track 3); Kobie Watkins, drums (except track 3); Roy Haynes, drums (track 3); Sammy Figueroa, percussion (except track 3)
Doxy/Emarcy B0015949-02 (CD). 2011. Sonny Rollins, prod.; Richard Corsello, prod., eng. DDD. TT: 66:16
Performance ★★★½
Sonics ★★★★★

On the face of it, Sonny Rollins's *Road Shows Vol.2* is more noteworthy than *Vol.1* (2008) because four of its six tracks document the tenor giant's 80th-birthday concert in September 2010, at the Beacon Theater in New York City. Here was yet another Rollins watershed: the night he played blues with fellow living legend Ornette Coleman, and reunited with master guitarist Jim Hall, his partner on the 1962 album *The Bridge*. The question is whether live moments as galvanizing as these can be conveyed on record. Call it the you-had-to-be-there problem.

The centerpiece is the nearly 22-minute "Sonny-moon for Two," the one track to feature Rollins with bassist Christian McBride and drummer Roy Haynes. After four minutes, Rollins beckons an unnamed guest to the stage. Another four minutes elapse before Ornette Coleman appears, sparking riotous

applause. It's hard not to be amazed as two of the most influential, idiosyncratic figures in jazz history proceed to alternate lengthy solo statements. The rapport takes time, however. Rollins had begun the song leaving long gaps, unsure of his footing. By the end, Coleman's radical phrasemaking has Rollins thoroughly stirred up, full of invention. While it's neither definitive Rollins nor definitive Coleman, it's a special moment.

There's little to find fault with in the audio department—the recording is vivid and assertive—although one could argue that a player like Rollins takes care of sound quality by himself. His unaccompanied intro to "They Say It's Wonderful," the leadoff track, reminds us that there is no other tenor voice like his: the slight rasp, the bouncy rhythmic lilt, the flow of ideas, the sheer whimsy are all there.

Most tracks feature Rollins's working band, sans trombonist Clifton Anderson, with guitarist Russell Malone flourishing in the slot usually held by Bobby Broom. Bob Cranshaw's electric bass and Kobie Watkins's downbeat-heavy drumming tend to weigh down the swinging numbers, but both Beacon Theater ballads are crisp and spot on. "In a Sentimental Mood" features Jim Hall sketching subtle intervallic patterns and leaping suggestively out of key (much as Rollins does on occasion), while "I Can't Get Started" finds trumpeter Roy Hargrove in excellent form.

No, the warmth and one-off magic of an event like Sonny's 80th can't be fully experienced via CD, but *Road Shows Vol.2* is still a worthy keepsake. If jazz is "the king of all musics," as Rollins tells the Beacon Theater crowd, then he remains undoubtedly the king of jazz tenors.

—David R. Adler

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