



Tenor Conclave  
Grand Central

Ravi Coltrane • Craig Handy  
Billy Childs • Dwayne Burno  
Cindy Blackman

A Tribute to Hank Mobley

1. This I Dig Of You 4:59
2. Hank's Waltz 7:45
3. If I Should Lose You 5:06  
(Ralph Rainger-Leo Robin)
4. Hank's Symphony 5:03
5. Hanksville 6:37  
(Craig Handy)
6. Take Your Pick 5:34
7. East Of The Village 6:30
8. Soul Station 6:07
9. Tenor Conclave 10:24

All songs written by Hank Mobley  
except where noted.

Ravi Coltrane • tenor & soprano saxophones  
Craig Handy • tenor saxophone  
Billy Childs • piano  
Dwayne Burno • bass  
Cindy Blackman • drums

Produced by: Todd Barkan  
Executive Producer: Satoshi Hirano

Cindy Blackman appears courtesy of Muse Records  
Billy Childs appears courtesy of Stretch Records  
Craig Handy appears courtesy of Arabesque Records



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ECD 22175-2 TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 58:16

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Hank Mobley recently made history, albeit of a rather parochial sort, at a record store I frequent in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The place is made for jazz collectors, with all kinds of rare vinyl (including 78s), as well as new domestic and imported CDs; and on a recent weekend, a shipment of Japanese Blue Note CDs featuring music from the '50s never released in the United States was grabbed up by fans before the discs could settle in the bins. The clear champ was Poppin', a highly coveted Mobley session from 1957. All 10 copies were gone in two days, and the proprietor was lamenting his decision not to order more; but then he had never sold 10 copies of *any* title in two days.

Take this event for what it's worth. The store is not a big chain, and Hank Mobley is not suddenly topping Billboard's Hot 100. In the realm of jazz "catalogue" sales, however, the rush to obtain rare Mobley is one more indication that he has risen permanently from the ranks of second-echelon saxophonists to the realm of jazz's true classic players. You may not find that reflected in the history books yet, although I have already heard two authors who had previously dismissed Mobley between hard covers recant. Hank Mobley (1930-86) has been gone for over a decade, yet his time is now.

Grand Central, the two-sax quintet that debuted on Evidence with Sax Storm (ECD 22136), adds its voice to the congregation with this collection of Mobley music. The band, which once again features Ravi Coltrane and Cindy Blackman but now has Craig Handy in the second sax chair (in place of Antoine Roney) and pianist Billy Childs and bassist Dwayne Bumo in the rhythm section, successfully avoids a couple of pitfalls common to such projects. It interprets Mobley's music rather than merely imitating the originals, and the performances glisten with intelligent variety. There is welcome contrast in the approaches of Coltrane and Handy, and a heady passion shared by all five players.

Three of the compositions were first heard on Soul Station, the 1960 Blue Note masterpiece considered Mobley's personal Saxophone Colossus. *This I Dig of You*, one of four originals Mobley wrote for that date, is also his MPC (Most Popular Composition), and featured jubilant solos in its original version by Wynton Kelly, Mobley and Art Blakey. In Grand Central's version, both tenor players and the rhythm section strike an affirmative hard groove on the lyrical melody. Coltrane has the first solo and nods to Rollins with a *Sonnymoon For Two* quote. After a probing statement by pianist Billy Childs, who works with Coltrane regularly in a collective combo that also includes drummer Gerry Gibbs, Handy puts his own positive spin on the inspiring chord changes. After a chorus, Handy moves into a series of eight-bar and four-bar exchanges with Blackman.

*If I Should Lose You* is a pop song that gained jazz currency when Charlie Parker recorded it with strings. As heard on Soul Station in an arrangement that made productive use of stop-time figures, the tune was something of a Mobley tribute to Parker, with several Bird references contained in one of Mobley's

most exceptional recorded solos. Here, the track is Coltrane's tenor feature, and the mysterious vamp arrangement recalls how another under-appreciated saxophonist, Charlie Rouse, approached *If I Should Lose You* on Sphere's 1983 album, *Flight Path*. Coltrane's careful statement of the theme and measured variations return the composition to the ballad realm, and set a mood that Childs and Bumo sustain in their shared half-chorus.

While not 12 bars in length, *Soul Station* is about as blue as it gets. The original recording featured bar-walking tenor by Mobley over a supreme example of the Blakey shuffle beat. Grand Central captures the groove, with Childs delivering one of his most in-the-pocket performances, yet there is a conversational feeling established on the opening chorus that avoids rigid imitation. Coltrane's keen sense of pacing is well displayed in the first tenor solo while Handy (who follows Childs) gently jostles his way into his choruses. The exclamatory conclusion indicates just how deeply the quintet was feeling the music.

Another great Mobley album from 1960, *Roll Call*, added trumpeter Freddie Hubbard to the Soul Station quartet. Among its high points was *Take Your Pick*, which has recently started to give *This I Dig Of You* a run in terms of cover versions. The tenors state the memorable theme in unison, then give way to Childs. The pianist's solo here, with a couple of sparkling allusions to Wynton Kelly embedded within a more angular concept that derives from later stylists like McCoy Tyner, is indicative of the respectful yet searching approach that characterizes all of these performances. The tenor solos that follow offer an illuminating comparison between Coltrane, who is quite lyrical and sustains his ideas, and the more oblique and rhythmically aggressive Handy.

*Hanksville*, one of two compositions on the album not written by Mobley, is Handy's self-penned feature track. The original blues, clearly in the Mobley spirit, finds Handy linking unusual ideas together to form a larger, coherent statement. The dramatic momentum in the tenor solo suggests that Joshua Redman, like Handy a graduate of Berkeley (Ca.) High School, has been paying attention to his fellow alumnus. Childs pushes his solo into some challenging corners before a break figure brings Bumo into the spotlight.

The remaining titles examine earlier and later Mobley tunes. Two songs date from 1956 albums that featured Mobley as a key sideman. *Hank's Symphony* premiered on the Jazz Messengers' self-titled Columbia album, which featured edition 1-A of Blakey's hard boppers (Donald Byrd had replaced charter Messenger Kenny Dorham). The majestic theme was one of the most dynamic drum features ever designed for Blakey, and serves the same function here after being stated in unison by soprano and tenor saxes. Blackman, whose complex style usually reflects later innovators like Tony Williams, stays in a Blakey mood with powerful tom-tom patterns.

This album's title track harkens back to a leaderless Prestige jam session of the same name that

brought Zoot Sims, Al Cohn, Mobley and Ravi Coltrane's father together for a meeting that proved more fraternal than combative. Given that the melody is based upon the familiar chord changes of *I Got Rhythm*, it is not surprising that our two tenors bring other variants to mind—Coltrane quotes Charlie Parker's *Steepchase* in his opening solo and Handy, who begins with a break, makes passing reference to Thelonious Monk's *Green Chimneys* (which Handy can be heard playing with Roy Haynes on *Homecoming*, Evidence 22092). After Childs' solo, Coltrane, Blackman and Handy trade eights for two choruses and fours for one; then the two tenors take two choruses each of fours and twos, with their lines converging before the theme returns.

Mid-60s Mobley is represented by *East Of The Village* and *Hank's Waltz*. The former is a 1963 masterpiece that was played to death by Mobley, Donald Byrd, Herbie Hancock, Butch Warren and Philly Joe Jones. (It appears on the original LP *The Tumaround* and the CD reissue of *Straight No Filter*.) Childs has an unaccompanied introduction before Blackman introduces the Afro vamp and soprano and tenor saxes play the theme in unison. Coltrane's soaring, swooping soprano chorus, which locks in so perfectly with the rhythm section's tension and release, is one of the young saxophonists best on record, and Handy's "back at ya" tenor solo is an inspired response. The rich imagination Childs displays also helps make *East Of The Village* an album highlight.

*Hank's Waltz* was recorded at the 1965 session that produced the bulk of *The Tumaround* (and is included on the CD reissue of that album), yet was not released until 1986, when it appeared on the *Straight No Filter* LP. The 6/8 blues line, with its deceptive accents and swaggering momentum, inspired a fine Mobley tenor solo in his later incantatory style on the original. Here, Handy's tenor is heard first, coming up under the rhythm section in a solo with typically daring rhythmic ideas. Coltrane's soprano choruses begin by extending Handy's concluding thought, then open up in a heated statement that takes the music in a different direction. Childs keeps the pressure at boiling-point during the piano solo, which sets up the arranged chorus Mobley included in the original that quickly gives the drummer some.

Hank Mobley had a gift, which is coming to be appreciated by a growing number of listeners. The quality of Grand Centrals playing on this tribute album will help ensure that Mobleymania will continue.

—Bob Blumenthal

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Billy Childs (p)

Ravi Coltrane (ts,ss)

Dwayne Burno (b)

Craig Handy (ts)

Cindy Blackman (ds)



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