**Reggie Workman**

***Evenings at the Village Gate***

John spent a lot of time in Philadelphia even after he got with Miles and moved to New York, and especially later when he was starting to get his own band together. I was there in those transition years and when he came to town, I was always sitting there under the bandstand. I used to catch Miles and listen to John's solos—every note he played. Night after night after night after night after night I would hear his voice coming out of that instrument on whatever level he happened to be at at that particular moment. These were clubs in my neighborhood and I was hanging with the same people John was with. Many of our friends were mutual.

It was February 1961 when I first joined John's group. Very soon after that, he started experimenting with a second bassist. It happened a few times, like in Chicago with Donald Garrett (who also subbed for me when I got blisters on my right hand from playing so hard) and at the Cork N' Bib and then at the Village Gate with Art Davis. I believe his idea of using two basses was an extension of a number of things, including what was happening with Chicago musicians, and mainly from listening to African music a lot. He would say, "We're going to have you and Art play like a drum choir"—so diatonically in tune, the way drums have overtones but not necessarily in tune with the horns. One of us keeping the groove, the other exploring and complementing what was happening with the horns. Being a classical player, Art would be at the top of the bass, playing in the thumb position, while I was keeping the groove, the foundation.

During 1961, John was following a different concept as far as his harmonic approach. He was giving more room for the solos and coming from a different place in the way he was constructing his tunes—or motifs I should call them. The band was able to function differently within those parameters from what we had all played before.

It was an exploratory time for John. He was always reaching for new sounds and Eric being in the group was part of that. John really respected Eric a lot. They were very close in concept. Listening to the recording from the Gate, you can hear how Eric would take long solos and John would come after him and take a much shorter solo than he would normally take and let Eric's voice be prominent. I remember John sitting off to the side of the stage, listening to him doing a lot of different things. He loved Eric's sound on the bass clarinet.

"When Lights are Low" is a great example of that, John giving the stage to Eric. That was one of the tunes that was played a lot around New York. Miles had recorded it and made it famous. Every musician played it. You'd hear it at all of the jam sessions. But when Eric jumped into it, he was very free with it. I can hear it on this recording. We were supposed to play through the bridge and it got a bit hazy as to where we were in the structure of the song. But Eric was pretty strong at dealing with that and would play some lines that were neutral, so it would be OK even if we were in a different place.

John appreciated the Village Gate. It was a comfortable place to be and to hang out. The dressing room was right there off the back of the stage where he was always practicing his horn. At that time the Village was exploding with all kinds of music—Café Wha? was right around the corner. Clubs were on Houston and on Thompson Streets. Small clubs where they had just singing and playing guitars, folk music and coffee shops featuring people like Bob Dylan and Buffy St. Marie. Jazz was really prominent then.

After the Gate, we went on the road, came back to New York and played the Village Vanguard with a lot of musicians sitting in, and then we went to Europe—my first experience overseas. That was a powerful bill over there with Dizzy's band and John's band, with Elvin and Mel Lewis all in the same evening! That was a hell of a tour.

When we returned to the States at the end of December. That's when Jimmy Garrison came into the band, on Ornette Coleman's suggestion. Jimmy had been playing with Ornette at the time and had sat in at the Vanguard. John noticed how Jimmy and Elvin communicated well. It was a good feeling between them.

During this period, I was busy taking care of my mom in Philadelphia while my dad was having issues with cancer, so John went with Jimmy. I think it was a great choice. John was evolving and the band was too, and he wanted people around him who could conceive and think the same way. John made the switch, moved forward and Jimmy and Elvin became the nucleus of the group—which is very important to have. John was constantly growing from one stage to the next. At first, he chose Paul Chambers to play with him, and later Steve Davis. And after Steve, he chose me, which I'm very thankful for.

When we worked together, people would ask him to play tunes they had heard on a recording he had done two or three years before, while his musical concept had moved forward. I used to ask him questions about that. He said, "By the time people get hip to what I'm about today, my mind's going to be somewhere else." That's how he worded it. I've kept those words with me as a lesson. He let me know that he was constantly willing to give up things that he did yesterday and move on to the next phase. He realized that it was very necessary for the music to be recorded and come out very, very quickly, for the people to hear where he was today, so he started to put that in his recording contract.

I'm sure if it were completely up to him, John would have been moving a lot faster. He knew that if the people didn't hear what he was doing, they'd still be asking him to play "My Favorite Things." But notice he was the type of person who would reach out and grab people by the hand and give them some kind of key to what he was doing—some familiar melody, or familiar mode, or familiar raga. Something that people could relate to. John took "My Favorite Things" and put a vamp on it and was able to give people enough of the melody so that he could then give them a message in the open section of the tune. It worked so well that he said, "Maybe I'll try that again later on, with some other things." And he did, with tunes like "Greensleeves," "Inch Worm" and "Chim Chim Cheree."

When we were on the road, there were times when we had rooms next to each other and I'd hear him all night because I used to stay up and practice. He'd be blowing into his instrument, not making any sound but working the keys. There were times I would knock on his door, and he would be reading books while practicing—books about philosophy, the universal aspects of life, the spiritual aspects of existence. He understood a lot about celestial orchestration.

Often John used to tell me: "Listen, don't ever stop growing. Don't ever stop moving. Don't ever stop creating." John was a man of few words, so every word weighed a ton. You had to mostly figure him out by how he was living, by what he was creating. You can hear it in his music. You can realize it by the way he titled his compositions. This is a person to pay attention to. Then you will get the message if you're ready for it, as Hindu philosophy teaches us. If not, you've got to go back and prepare and come that way again, OK?