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The Tiberi Tapes

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John Coltrane, whose middle name, William, is usually left unmentioned, would have celebrated his hundredth birthday on 23 September. To mark the occasion, Impulse Records released *The Tiberi Tapes* as a music album on vinyl and CD in early November.

Different tracks were selected for the two formats from more than 80 audio tapes. Both the record and the CD feature essays by Ashley Kahn, Lauren du Graf, Lewis Porter and sound engineer Kevin Reeves. Numerous rumours surrounded the Tiberi Tapes, culminating in the question of whether the recordings actually existed or were merely a myth. Frank Tiberi, two years younger than Coltrane and a star soloist with the Woody Herman Herds, met Reeves through their shared admiration for Coltrane. Tiberi played Reeves his recordings of Coltrane's Classic Quartet, which he had secretly made using the Concertone TR-100 tape recorder – a state-of-the-art device for its time.

Tiberi, himself a recognised soloist and, at times, bandleader of the Woody Herman Herds, was fascinated by Coltrane's improvisations, by his harmonic illusions – as he once put it in an interview – by his impressionism, and by the contrast between Coltrane's studio recordings and live performances. He acquired the portable Concertone recorder and, from 1960 onwards, began recording Coltrane's concerts with a small directional microphone – for study purposes, not for publication, as he emphasised. The quality of the recordings, which total more than 26 hours, is what one would expect, as can still be heard today. It differs significantly from other live recordings of the same period.

In this way, Tiberi was able to document Coltrane's musical development over a period of five years, beginning with *Giant Steps*, his first attempt at a studio album recorded on 1 April 1959, whilst still accompanied by the pianist Cedar Walton. The highlight of the 1965 recordings is undoubtedly the Impulse! masterpiece "A Love Supreme", which, as a standalone album, ranks among Coltrane's most important works. As already mentioned, there had been countless speculations about the existence of these historic recordings. Impulse! Records finally decided to release the tapes to mark Coltrane's centenary this year.

Kevin Reeves, the sound engineer who has since won a Grammy, spent two years meticulously restoring Frank Tiberi's 'amateur recordings'. What is impressive about Reeves' work – and also when listening to the recordings – is the removal of distracting background noise without any loss of the original sound.

Redaktioneller Programmdienst:
European News Agency

Annette-Kolb-Str. 16
D-85055 Ingolstadt
Telefon: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.660
Telefax: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.661
Email: contact@european-news-agency.com
Internet: european-news-agency.com

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Indeed, to use Kevin Reeves' own words, on the occasion of Coltrane's centenary and 60 years after the recordings were made, it is possible 'to bear witness to this chapter in jazz history'.

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Redaktioneller Programmdienst:
European News Agency

Annette-Kolb-Str. 16
D-85055 Ingolstadt
Telefon: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.660
Telefax: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.661
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