

# THE AUSTRALIAN

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## Ravi Coltrane: a little too much force for good



*Saxophonist Ravi Coltrane... PHOTO CREDIT EMMANUEL SANTOS*

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### **MUSIC**

Ravi Coltrane

The Basement, Sydney

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### **ERIC MYERS**

The opening performance in Sydney by Ravi Coltrane's quartet was met with thunderous applause from a capacity audience at one of the city's most prestigious music venues. But, without wishing to rain on their parade, I wonder why their one set — a marathon effort of two hours — had to be so one-dimensional.

Coltrane's sidemen Glenn Zaleski (piano), Dezron Douglas (bass), and Johnathan Blake (drums) are technically impeccable and play at a blistering level of virtuosity.

Coltrane (tenor saxophone), in the shadow of his legendary father, John Coltrane, is a fine player. On the evidence of this performance, he is primarily influenced by one aspect of his father's substantial legacy: what one writer has called the "transcendent freneticism" of the elder Coltrane's late career.

There is a role for catharsis in jazz, but a catharsis in every tune can be alienating, especially when the double bass and drums provide a wall of sound that often disguises the essential element of jazz: pulse. This was not so much the “sound of surprise”, to use Whitney Balliett’s elegant definition of jazz, as the sound of relentless high energy.

The music was such that one delighted patron told me after the performance that he had, for the first time, enjoyed so-called “free jazz”. I don’t believe it was free jazz — the tunes were structured, to my ears — but it was played with such overwhelming force that it could be perceived that way.

Two lovely compositions, Ravi Coltrane’s *Marilyn and Tammy*, and Charlie Haden’s *First Song*, so beautiful in earlier versions, were inexplicably transformed into full-blooded convulsive experiences.



*Pianist Glenn Zaleski: the real star of the night...*

*First Song* provided one of the few opportunities for the players to relax and play quietly, and the superb Zaleski on piano — the real star of the night — gave the music shape with a beautiful solo. It engendered just as much applause as the more turbulent pieces. But even this sensitive ballad was taken over the top, losing much of the essential spirit of Haden’s exquisite work.

It was brave of Coltrane to attempt *Countdown*, one of his father’s most extraordinary achievements. It has been played by all serious students of the tenor saxophone. While Ravi’s version could hardly be an improvement on his father’s masterly recording of 1960, it was a vigorous interpretation, and energised the adoring audience.

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*Ravi Coltrane and his group perform tonight, tomorrow, and Saturday at Bird’s Basement, Melbourne*