REVIEW

Une prière pour John Coltrane, by Jérôme Schmidt

by Benjamin Hoffmann

October 17, 2026 · On *Une prière pour John Coltrane (Éditions Noir sur Blanc)*

Why did John Coltrane's 1966 tour of Japan move its audiences so deeply? Jérôme Schmidt follows this mystery from Hokkaidō to the volcanoes of Kyushu.



A mystery hangs over Jérôme Schmidt's latest book, *Une prière pour John Coltrane* (Éditions Noir sur Blanc). A mystery that remains unsolved, because some questions resist every attempt to elucidate them, even when one pursues them for years from one end of an archipelago to the other, from the snowdrifts of Hokkaidō to the volcanoes of Kyushu.

Why did John Coltrane's 1966 tour of Japan move its audiences so deeply that a considerable number of them have kept the memory of those concerts alive to this day, raising churches called jazz kissa where the master's music plays on a loop?

Bootleg recordings give an idea of the power of that music, but something ineffable truly happened and, like witnesses to a supernatural apparition for whom reality loses all substance and color once it has faded, the audience became officiants, sharing in a cult that cares nothing for proselytism.

This cult is fragile. The Coltrane temples have aging priests who, with yet another cigarette in their mouths and a recording of *My Favorite Things* playing in the background, could pass away behind their counters at any moment. Sometimes these places are taken over by regulars who keep the flame alive for a few more years; but the author has few illusions: the cult of Saint Coltrane is under threat.

The Japanese have an expression for the melancholy that grips them before the spectacle of the ephemeral: *mono no aware*. This delicate feeling for the precariousness of things permeates the story of Jérôme as he roams Japan in pursuit of a ghost, of a fleeting experience that was also an epiphany. The story's Murakami-like notes are confirmed in a striking scene where the great Japanese novelist is there, in the background, before vanishing in turn. What remains of presences gone too soon? And how can we preserve them when everything conspires toward their disappearance? Jérôme Schmidt pursues these questions the way one chases shadows.

— Benjamin Hoffmann

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