



2017

## Glenn Wilson Sound Ideas Interview September 5, 2017

Jon Norton

*WGLT Radio, Illinois State University*

---

### Recommended Citation

Norton, Jon, "Glenn Wilson Sound Ideas Interview September 5, 2017" (2017). *Interviews for WGLT*. 38.  
[https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/wgl\\_t\\_interviews/38](https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/wgl_t_interviews/38)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by The Ames Library, the Andrew W. Mellon Center for Curricular and Faculty Development, the Office of the Provost and the Office of the President. It has been accepted for inclusion in Interviews for WGLT by The Ames Library faculty at Illinois Wesleyan University with thanks to WGLT. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@iwu.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@iwu.edu).

©Copyright is owned by the author of this document.

## WGLT Sound Ideas Interview with Glenn Wilson, September 5, 2017

Jon Norton: How has there never been a documentary on John Coltrane?

Glenn Wilson: That's an interesting question! Yeah--

Norton: Yeah.

Wilson: There has—there have been several biographies, of course, there's four- five biographies of Coltrane ... No one's ever done a movie though...and I'm not sure if it's because they didn't want to do a dramatization like the Miles Davis movie that came out recently or something like that and this is really a doc ... more of a documentary, so I don't know – that's a good question.

Norton: Have you seen the film?

Wilson: No, I haven't. I've been trying to get a screener copy so I can see it, so I can plan the program around what's in it but the interesting thing that I've read about – the reviews is that it's more of a commercial movie for people who don't know – didn't know jazz, than a movie for jazz aficionados, which is going to be good in this case.

Norton: What is someone who is maybe not a musician, not a jazz aficionado even--- what can they get out of this film?

Wilson: Yeah, they're gonna get a lot out of this film because a lot of people talk about Trane. He had almost a mystic quality to him, especially toward the end and after he found religion and recorded *A Love Supreme* and he was very involved in the civil rights movement in the '60 – died in '67 but in '65 and '66 he became a sort of a center piece for musicians and the civil rights movement and at that time his music was pretty crazy, it was getting pretty out there, so he had a very short recording career, really – from '54 to '67 but his music changed several times during that period and he was always on sort of the cutting edge of jazz during that period. Of course, when he first came out, people hated him and they thought he was terrible and he played too many notes and he had terrible sound and there's all these—you know, early reviews of his music.

Norton: Well there's even the story of when he was in the Navy. He played in the Navy band and people say, if you would have heard him back then, no one would have gone, “boy there—there's something there,” right?

Wilson: Yeah, I think he played alto in the Navy band.

Norton: So, where does that come from, Glenn? How do you go from someone or no one would say, “This guy is gonna be something or I can hear something,” to what John Coltrane became?

Wilson: Well, he was in that seminal Miles Davis quintet with Paul Chambers and Philly Joe Johnson, Red Garland and they recorded a bunch of records in ... in '55 and '56, then Miles fired him for, apparently, for drug abuse. He didn't like his habits, but in '57 he got a six-month gig with

Thelonious Monk at the Five Spot, can you imagine? Today a six-month gig at one club (Norton laughs)... You're lucky if you get a six nights in one--

Norton: -- no kidding!

Wilson: But anyway, that was really I think seminal in his development because Monk's music is very skeletal and he didn't comp a lot and he just kind of left things open and that's when Trane really started exploring the sheets of sound type of thing that -- that led to giant steps in some of his 1959 recordings that were, you know, seminal in his -- in his career.

Norton: Glenn Wilson is who we're talking to. This is GLT Sound Ideas. I'm John Norton. The movie is Chasing Trane -- it's playing at the Normal Theatre on Sept. 9 and is this your non-profit for--

Wilson: Yes!

Norton: --Jazz inc.?

Wilson: Yes, for the Jazz inc. is my non-profit. We produced last year the Thomas Chapen concert at Normal Theatre and I thought we had such fun with that -- that maybe we could do something like that again, so I received another grant from the town of Normal --Harmon Arts Grant, which I'm very grateful for and that's gonna pay for the musicians for four concerts -- we're gonna do September, October, November, December and hopefully, the Normal Theatre would like to keep this going after that, so -

Norton: - Wait, for separate films or just new, new-

Wilson: - four separate films --

Norton: - Okay!

Wilson: In October, we're gonna do- *They Call Him Morgan*, which is about Lee Morgan-

Norton: - Oh, cool!

Wilson: Gonna play some Lee Morgan music and in Oct--in November, it's not set in stone yet but I've the U of I Latin Jazz Ensemble booked and we're gonna maybe do the -- what was that Cuban movie -- the *Buena Vista Social Club*...

Norton: -oh yeah!

Wilson: - Volume 2 came out and -or some other Latin movie. There's a bunch of great movies about Latin musicians but I really wanted to bring the U of I Latin Jazz Ensemble here because we have nothing like that in this town and they're amazing group of students that play their authentic music and led by Tito Cario, a trumpet player so-

Norton: Yeah – yeah. Well, I wanna ask you an alternative to a question I asked you before about what can non-jazz aficionados get out of this movie. You play saxophone—when you first heard Coltrane, how did it hit you? Because so many people say, you know, it changed their lives.

Wilson: Yeah, a lot of people say that. I think what changed their lives for non-saxophone players is different than for saxophone players—what changed for saxophone players-

Norton: - yeah, did it change your life?

Wilson: Yeah, I mean his playing – he plays more notes than anybody and he also changed the way jazz played in that – of course, in the early days you could only fit three and a half minutes on a disk so the solos had to be short. Later on, when albums came out, you know, you would have four tunes on a side maybe, of a 20-minute record but Coltrane used to play one song for 20 minutes...

Norton: Mm-hmm

Wilson: ...and so, he – he was just an incessant practicer. He practiced—the legend has it that on the breaks he was practicing and when he was in the hotel he was practicing and he was always trying to work out stuff on the saxophone so he was just an incessant practicer and ... and he spoiled a lot of saxophonists— as I think, he sort of ruined it because everyone wants to be Trane and nobody is and so a lot of people play too long and a lot of people play too many notes because they think they're being Trane and you know and – and – and a lot of jazz historians look to his music and say, that's kind of where we lost it in this far as jazz, when he started playing some of his avant-garde stuff in sixties...late '65,'66.

Norton: People started following him into that order (overlapping)

Wilson: People started – a lot of people started following into that avant-garde type of playing, and you know, I was listening to “Interstellar Space” the other day, which is just him and Rashid Ali on the drums, you know. Well, it's a whole record of that, so I'm listening to it and I'm thinking, there's no one else I would ever listen to play this with just saxophone and drums other than Coltrane. And the only reason it holds my interest is because I'm a saxophonist, then I hear all he's doing and I hear, okay—you know, he used to say I have to practice 5 hours to get to something I don't know. So it took him the first five hours to play everything he knew and after that he'd get to something new. So, that's why he had to practice so long. But he was an incessant studier of the music – a very serious man—you know, jazz musicians – most of jazz musicians have a sense of humor in their playing – you can – you can hear it and Coltrane really did not have a sense of humor—he was very serious—very forthright, very upfront about what he was doing.

Norton: Was that his upbringing if you think?

Wilson: It could've been (overlapping)

Norton: - He grew up in the Jim Crow South and you know, had to deal with a lot of different things.

Wilson: Yeah, and I think it was in his father a preacher or left his family early -

Norton: - yeah I think so. Yeah!

Wilson: - or something—I'm trying to remember—yeah, I don't know – that's just his personality. When you listen to him talk, I have on my website like 7 interviews with Coltrane that I've managed to call over the years and you listen to him talk and he – he just sounds like he's very serious about his music and you know, people called him an angry tenor and angry sax player and you know, he didn't feel angry at all, you know, he wasn't trying to express anger through his instrument but people -

Norton: -it was just intense...

Wilson: -heard that – yeah, it was intense, yeah –and they heard it as anger.

Norton: And Denzel Washington voices the words--

Wilson: Yeah-

Norton: -of – of Coltrane in this film too—that's kind of cool.

Wilson: Yeah, that's cool.

Norton: Saxophonist Glenn Wilson who is bringing Chasing Trane- the documentary. The very first documentary on John Coltrane, at least visual documentary on John Coltrane coming to the Normal Theatre September 9<sup>th</sup>. You brought in Thomas Chapen, you referenced that earlier- the Thomas Chapen movie...

Wilson: Mm-hmm.

Norton: Thomas passed away way before his time as did Coltrane and I don't think I asked you at the time, I think I asked the movie producer at the time if Chapen had lived longer, where would his music be today? Let me ask you similar about Coltrane. Where do you think he would've taken music?

Wilson: I really don't know because he took it as by as far as he could in the short career that he had.

Norton: Would he have come back maybe a little bit?

Wilson: I really don't think he would have. He's not the kind of person that would do what Miles Davis did, you know, when he came back with that – at the end—last six years of his life playing pop tunes and things like that. I think what he might have done is maybe expand it into symphonic music or some other kind of music that allowed him to explore more sounds and sonic qualities other than just a quartet setting. He probably would have done a lot of writing and composing. Most of his writing and composing was for a small group, for a—you know, quartet and stuff like that so, probably, he would've gone into more into compositional aspects of jazz but I can't imagine playing-wise. It's almost like a perfect dark, you know, his career and it ended when it had to end – almost, so – I—I really don't know. I don't know what he would've done. It would've been interesting to see.