



Summer 9-16-2022

## Glenn Wilson on Jazz and His Nonprofit "Further Jazz"

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### Recommended Citation

Warnecke, Lauren, "Glenn Wilson on Jazz and His Nonprofit "Further Jazz"" (2022).  
*Interviews for WGLT*. 93.

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WGLT Interview with Glenn Wilson, September 16, 2022

Ryan Denham: Glenn Wilson is a saxophonist with a serious resume. The recently retired director of jazz ensembles at Illinois Wesleyan University worked with Tito Puente, Bruce Hornsby, Frank Sinatra Jr and Doc Severenson to name a few. Academia brought Wilson and his wife to Normal in one of the things arts correspondent Lauren Warnecke really wanted to ask him was Bloomington-Normal a jazz town?

Glenn Wilson: Not really (Lauren laughs).

Lauren Warnecke: Yet there are a growing number of opportunities to hear really good jazz in the twin cities. Thanks to no small part in Wilson and his nonprofit called Further Jazz. The group hosts movie screenings at the Normal theater and stuff like chasing train, a documentary about John Coltrane's life. And this week his ensemble will be playing as part of a five band line up at the Further Jazz festival at Connie Link Amphitheater. Look for a tall drink of water on the bari saxophone along with some of Central Illinois most distinctive players and scholars.

Wilson: I think we have six doctors of jazz and about twelve masters of jazz studies on the stage that day so a lot of local jazz educators, players that can really play and teach the music so it's kind of a unique situation you don't get to hear. Usually when you go to a jazz festival you'll hear one jazz band and then some other band that's not really jazz and everything's called jazz now-a-days so...

Warnecke: I know your overall goal is to kind of promote both the history of jazz and the living history of jazz right and making people understand that it's not something that's locked in the past in the big band era. Um but you know so this festival other than it being a fun night at Connie link you know to what end uh what's kind of the larger goal there?

Wilson: yeah well the larger goal is always to expose people to good jazz. Funny you should mention jazz as it is now not in the old days but the octet is going to be re recreating the music of the Dave Pell octet was a very famous band in the fifties. It had uh eight pieces of course which is why it's an octet and its interesting instrumentation and they were hugely popular they played short numbers like four minutes and everybody had a short solo here and a little solo there and it wasn't—sometimes you hear somebody goes on for a long time and then somebody else goes on for a long time, um this was specifically designed to not lose the audience. (Jazz music plays) And to help people understand a little bit about jazz so those arrangements were published a year ago so I was able to get those and were going to play some of those. The Latin jazz group has people in it that have played with Afro-Cuban groups. Uh Carlos Vega played in Florida with a bunch of Latin groups I was in the Arc with Tito Puente and Machito and a whole bunch of different Latin bands so we've all played this music even though most of us are gringos. (Warnecke laughs, Jazz music plays)

Warnecke: Give us a little bit more of the flavor of what's going to be on tap

Wilson: Well, the ISU ensemble big band is going to leave off at four o'clock and that's Tom Marco and the ISU band they'll be playing big band music and I really appreciate the fact that they were able to participate because it's so early in the semester to try and get any music together with the students so uh I know that's a big sacrifice so we were really excited to have them playing. Um a few male bassist Crystal Rebone has a trio with Thaddeus Toups on the vibes and Jim Breunig on the saxophone, so they're going to be playing some original music and things that they enjoy playing. Uh Reggie Lewis, saxophonist, is the person that took my place at Wesleyan, and uh so he's going to have a quartet and I'll be sitting in with him on a few numbers as that's sort of a blue note sixties type of sound. Then the Latin jazz group is going to cover the whole gambit of music with a Latin flavor and then the octet will close out the show. (Jazz music plays)

Warnecke: So it sounds like this is a flavor of Jazz that's pretty easy on the ears

Wilson: I think so, I hope so, we have to be at a certain decibel level too over there, they don't like it to get too loud so you might have to move your chairs a little closer to check us out but uh

Warnecke: I wanted to take a bit of a left turn because you've had another project in the works here with this uh albums of Sinatra covers by Mark Tremonti from the band Creed. What was your involvement in this album project?

Wilson: Well I uh Mike Smith who uh used to direct Sinatra's band and saxophone player and a good friend of mine from Chicago, Mark wanted to do these tunes so he wanted to put a bunch of people together that had played with either Frank or Frank Jr, I played a lot with Junior never played with Senior but uh a lot of the guys did in the band so funny thing is we were called the surviving members of the Frank Sinatra band so we had hats made that said surviving member (Warnecke Laughs). Anyway he wanted a real Sinatra type band so we went in the studio and he uh he recorded these tunes and they are just amazing. He's a great singer I mean I knew him as a guitarist but I had no idea he could sing like that. (Sinatra, Fly Me to the Moon Plays). He does a great job on the tunes the arrangements are some of the originals Sinatra arrangements and some are new arrangements and uh it was released in May and it went straight to the top of the jazz charts.

Warnecke: Yeah from what I understand there's really a special story behind this album in related to his daughter that has down syndrome

Wilson: Right the whole album is a benefit for down syndrome society and uh he has a young daughter with down syndrome and he uh created something called take a chance with charity which he feels he is doing here by stretching out and doing some Sinatra music for a slasher guitarist you know (Laughs) (Sinatra music plays).

Ryan Denham: That was band leader Glenn Wilson from Further Jazz talking with arts correspondent Lauren Warnecke. You can catch the Further Jazz festival this Saturday from 4 to 9 PM at Connie Link Amphitheater. More information about Mark Tremonti's album is available at [marktremontisings.com](http://marktremontisings.com) with all sales benefiting the national down syndrome society.