# John Coltrane

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John Coltrane

John Coltrane, musician and composer, was the most influential innovator of modern jazz—a genius on the tenor and soprano saxophones. He was born on September 23, 1926 in Hamlet, North Carolina. His father, a tailor by trade, was also a musician, his mother a fine singer, and his grandfather was a minister.

Coltrane began studying E-flat alto horn, clarinet and alto saxophone in high school, and he continued his studies at Granoff Studios and the Ornstein School of Music when his family moved to Philadelphia in 1939. He started on tenor saxophone rather late, at age eighteen. It was during this time that he decided to make music his career and turned professional.

During World War II, Coltrane played with the U.S. Navy Band in Hawaii. He then returned to Philadelphia and played with Jimmy Heath, Eddie Vinson and then with Dizzy Gillespie in the early '50s, with whom he initially played alto. Later he played with groups fronted by Earl Bostic and the powerful yet subtle player, Johnny Hodges.

He reached his first major musical milestone when he joined the Miles Davis Quartet in 1955. Throughout the year and a half he played with Miles, he continually worked on developing his style, describing it as "...starting in the middle of a musical sentence and moving in both directions at once." The result was a confluence of arpeggios spiraling out from the line—a style dubbed "sheets of sound."

The next move for Coltrane was to Thelonious Monk's group in 1957. With Monk there were wholly original harmonic structures and unique time patterns. He played more extended solos, and they
were thematically rather than harmonically organized. His range on the instrument grew markedly. Coltrane then went out on his own beyond bebop and into new realms, including discovering the totally different modal (rather than chordal) and rhythmic organization of Indian music. An example of this is his playing on Miles Davis’ album *Kind of Blue*.

Two classic albums marked 1959, *Giant Steps* and *Coltrane Jazz*, with the contrasting tunes of “Naima,” “Mr. P.C.,” and “Giant Steps” soon to become jazz standards. Later, Coltrane’s use of soprano sax on the album *My Favorite Things* brought that instrument into the mainstream of jazz.

In 1960, Coltrane formed his famous quartet consisting of McCoy Tyner on piano, Elvin Jones on drums and Jimmy Garrison on bass, and they began creating some of the most unique and expressive music in jazz history. Quoting from Leonard Feather, “This innovation of Indian and modal ideas led to greater freedom for jazz soloists in the ’60s, taking the music away from improvisations on songs or song patterns and allowing it to move toward a wholly new musical feeling.”

Yet the music Coltrane recorded in the early ’60s covered a wide range of styles—blues, ballads, standards and Indian. Full recognition of his talents came in 1961, when he won the *downbeat* Critics’ Polls for “Tenor Sax,” “Miscellaneous Instrument” (soprano sax) and “New Star Combo.” He continued to win at least one *downbeat* award a year from thereon. He was consistently lauded for his sensitivity and intensity, for his ability to change and experiment, and for his absolute mastery of his instrument.

Critics acclaimed many albums such as *Lush Life, Giant Steps, Live At The Village Vanguard, Africa Brass, My Favorite Things, Impressions, Black Pearls, Transition, and Meditations*. However, it was the profoundly spiritual four-movement suite, *A Love Supreme*, that received the most accolades, including *downbeat*’s “Record of the Year.” That same year, 1965, Coltrane simultaneously received *downbeat*’s “Hall of Fame,” “Jazzman of the Year” and “Tenor Sax” awards in the *Readers’ Poll*.

Coltrane embraced the concept of free jazz, but sought unifying elements for it within his own group. However in ’65, Coltrane began to experiment and augment his quartet, seeking a freer and denser sound. Over the course of time, he was joined by various talents
that included Pharoah Sanders (their collaboration produced the album Meditations) with Elvin Jones. Freddie Hubbard and Stan Getz.

Ali, Tyner and Jones left the group to be replaced by Alice McLeod [Coltrane] (of whom Coltrane said, "...she continually senses the right colors, the right textures of the sound of the chords.") and the looser, mobile Ali on drums. These changes ushered in yet another experimental phase in the Coltrane sound.

John Coltrane died on July 17, 1967 at age 40, leaving a wealth of his ingenious music. The music Coltrane created is deeply spiritual and emotional and evokes a similar response in those who appreciate its significance. Coltrane felt we must all make a conscious effort to effect positive change in the world and that his music was an instrument to create positive thought patterns in the minds of the people. He had a continual quest for growth and expansion of his music. He said on the liner notes of Live At The Village Vanguard, "I've really got to work and study more approaches to writing, I've already been looking into those approaches to music, as in India, in which particular sounds and scales are intended to produce specific emotional meanings. I've got to keep probing. There's so much more to do."

"In 'Giant Steps,' I feel like I can't hear but so much in the ordinary chords we usually have going in the accompaniment," Coltrane said. "I just have to have more of a blueprint. It may be that sometimes I've been trying to force all those extra progressions into a structure...I have [a] whole lot of things I'm working on, sometimes I find that I am playing them all at once."

His philosophy and musical dedication led him to encourage and influence many musicians—a legacy that remains as strong today as it was in the past. His influence on jazz and contemporary music has been critically acclaimed throughout the world.

age and influence many musicians—a legacy that remains as strong perimeters around his creative genius, a man often recognized as being ahead of his time.

Ronny Schiff

* excerpts were taken from the First and Second Annual Coltrane Festival programs, courtesy of Alice Coltrane
Notation Guide

+ • Alternate Fingering (see chart)

× • Lip Down from previous note

H.T. • Half Tongue

(b) (#) • Note is slightly sharp or flat

\( \uparrow \) • Bend note using jaw

• • Special Alternate Fingering (see chart)

BVA • Play note up an octave

BVA • Finger Bva, sounds as written

F • • Finger note 1/2 step higher and lip down (actual pitch is given)
SUGGESTED ALTERNATE FINGERINGS*

T. = OCTAVE KEY  ⊗ = FRONT F KEY  ⊕ = SPECIAL ALTERNATE FINGERING

*Suggested by Carl Coan
GIANI STEPS (alternate take), NAIMA, (a/k/a NIEMA), LIKE SONNY (SIMPLE LIKE)—Recorded in New York City, April 1, 1959 by the John Coltrane Quartet: Coltrane on tenor, Cedar Walton on piano, Paul Chambers on bass, Lex Humphries on drums.

ALL BLUES—A Miles Davis composition recorded April 22, 1959 in New York with the Miles Davis Sextet including Davis on trumpet, Cannonball Adderley on alto sax, Coltrane on tenor, Bill Evans on piano, Paul Chambers on bass, Jimmy Cobb on drums.

COUSIN MARY, SPIRAL—Recorded in New York City at the Atlantic Recording Studios, May 4, 1959 by the John Coltrane Quartet: Coltrane on tenor, Tommy Flanagan on piano, Paul Chambers on bass, Art Taylor on drums.

SYEEDA'S SONG FLUTE, COUNTDOWN, GIANT STEPS, MR. P.C.—A continuation of the May 4th session on May 5, 1959 with the same personnel. All of the above songs on the landmark recording Giant Steps.

SOME OTHER BLUES—Recorded at the Atlantic Recording Studios, New York City, November 24, 1959 with Coltrane on tenor, Wynton Kelly on piano, Paul Chambers on bass, Jimmy Cobb on drums.

CENTRAL PARK WEST—Recorded in New York City at the Atlantic Recording Studios, October 24, 1960 by the John Coltrane Quartet: Coltrane on tenor, McCoy Tyner on piano, Steve Davis on bass, Elvin Jones on drums.

EQUINOX—Recorded in New York City at the Atlantic Recording Studios, October 26, 1960 by the John Coltrane Quartet: Coltrane on tenor, McCoy Tyner on piano, Steve Davis on bass, Elvin Jones on drums.

MY FAVORITE THINGS—Rodgers and Hammerstein's composition; many recordings by Coltrane. This cut recorded in New York City at the Atlantic Recording Studios, October 21, 1960 by the John Coltrane Quartet: Coltrane on tenor and soprano saxes, McCoy Tyner on piano, Steve Davis on bass, Elvin Jones on drums.

IMPRESSIONS—Recorded on tour at Koncruthuset, Stockholm, Sweden, November 23, 1961 (originally a private tape) by the John Coltrane Quintet: Coltrane on tenor and soprano saxes, Eric Dolphy on alto sax, bass clarinet and flute, McCoy Tyner on piano, Reggie Workman on bass, Elvin Jones on drums.

LONNIE'S LAMENT—Recorded at Van Gelder Studios, Englewood, New Jersey, April 27th, 1964 by the John Coltrane Quartet: Coltrane on tenor, McCoy Tyner on piano, Jimmy Garrison on bass, Elvin Jones on drums.

BESSIE'S BLUES, CRESCENT—Recorded at Van Gelder Studios, Englewood, New Jersey, June 1, 1964 by the John Coltrane Quartet: Coltrane on tenor, McCoy Tyner on piano, Jimmy Garrison on bass, Elvin Jones on drums (apparently had been recorded earlier, on April 27th, and these takes were not used and have been lost).

PERSUADE (from A LOVE SUPREME)—Recorded at Van Gelder Studios, Englewood, New Jersey, December 10, 1964 by John Coltrane Sextet: Coltrane and Archie Shepp on tenor saxes, McCoy Tyner on piano, Jimmy Garrison and Art Davis on basses, Elvin Jones on drums. The recording that received the most accolades for Coltrane.
GRAND CENTRAL

BY JOHN COLTRANE

STRAIGHT AHEAD (L = 258)

Copyright © 1977 JOWCOL MUSIC
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LIKE SONNY
(SIMPLE LIKE)

By JOHN COLTRANE

For Head Only: High Bb Θ = 7.5 above Ab
High E Θ = 7 above Bb

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* FINGERED AS Eb, OVERTONE SOUNDS AS Bb
COUNTDOWN

STRAIGHT AHEAD (d = 350)

(TENOR)

By JOHN COLTRANE
* Fingered as D, overtone sounds as A*
* FINGERED AS D, OVERTONE SOUNDS AS A
SOME OTHER BLUES

By JOHN COLTRANE

* DURING THE SOLO THE BAND IS PLAYING STANDARD BLUES CHANGES.

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Fours = 4 bars of tenor, 4 bars of drums
*High F# = Play using front C key, 2 and side B♭-
No 1 in rt. hand as in regular high F#
MY FAVORITE THINGS
from THE SOUND OF MUSIC
Lyrics by OSCAR HAMMERSTEIN II
Music by RICHARD RODGERS

STRAIGHT AHEAD (d = 168)

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B7(b13) Em7 B7(b13) A7(b13) Dm7
Gm7 C7 Fm7 F#m7(b5)
B7(b13) E7 Em7
A7sus4(b9) NO TIME
Pursuance
Part III of A Love Supreme
By John Coltrane

Straight ahead (b = 280)

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As both a musician and a composer, John Coltrane was the most influential innovator of modern jazz. This collection showcases Coltrane's genius on the tenor and soprano saxophones in note-for-note solo transcriptions. Also included are a biography and detailed session information.

All Blues
Bessie's Blues
Blue Train (a/k/a Blue Trane)
Central Park West
Blue Train (a/k/a Blue Trane)
Crescent
Equinox
Giant Steps
Giant Steps (alternate take)
Grand Central
Impressions
Lazy Bird
Like Sonny (Simple Like)
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