

# The Golden Age of Non-Idiomatic Improvisation

FYS 129

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## Various Quotes

These slides contain a collection of some of the quotes largely from the musicians that are studied during the course.

The idea is to present “musicians in their own words”.

# John Coltrane

**American  
saxophonist  
& composer**

**(September 23, 1926 – July 17, 1967)**



## **Coltrane on the ability of music to change people**

**Coltrane:** I mean I want to be a force for real good. In other words, I know that there are bad forces. I know that there are forces out here that bring suffering to others and misery to the world, but I want to be the opposite force.

Interview with Frank Kofsky conducted in November 1966.

## Coltrane on what is expressed in music

**Coltrane:** I think that music, being an expression of the human heart, or of the human being itself, does express just what is happening – the whole of human experience at the particular time that it is being expressed.

## Coltrane on the ability of music to change people

**Coltrane:** In any situation that we find in our lives, when there is something that we feel should be better, we must exert effort to try and make it better. So it's the same socially, musically, politically in any department of our lives. I think music is an instrument. It can create the initial thought patterns that can change the thinking of the people.

Interview with Frank Kofsky conducted in November 1966.



## Coltrane on his own Spirituality

Coltrane states that, in 1957: I experienced, by the grace of God, a spiritual awakening which was to lead me to a richer, fuller, more productive life. At that time, in gratitude, I humbly asked to be given the means and privilege to make others happy through music.

In the liner notes of A Love Supreme, 1965.

## Coltrane on the Length of Solos

### **Cannonball Adderly:**

Once in a while, Miles [Davis] might say,

“Why did you play so long, man?”

and John [Coltrane] would say,

“It took that long to get it all in.”



## Coltrane on an Intrinsic Purpose of Jazz

**Coltrane:** Many thanks for sending me Aaron Copeland's [sic] fine book, "Music and Imagination". I found it historically revealing and on the whole, quite informative. However, I do not feel that all of his tenets are entirely essential or applicable to the "jazz" musician. This book seems to be written more for the American classical or semi-classical composer who has the problem, as Copeland [sic] sees it, of not finding himself an integral part of the musical community, or having difficulty in finding a positive philosophy or justification for his art. The "jazz" musician (you can have this term along with several others that have been foisted upon us) does not have to worry about a lack of positive and affirmative philosophy. It's built in us. The phrasing, the sound of the music attests to this fact. We are naturally endowed with it.

[from a June, 1962 letter to Don DeMichael, editor of Down Beat.]

## Coltrane on Ornette Coleman

**Coltrane:** The person with whom I would have the most pleasure in making a record is Ornette Coleman. I only played with him once in my life and he asked me to join him. We played two pieces—twelve minutes to be exact—but I know that that was most intense moment of my life.”

[November, 1961]

Coltrane: *The Story of a Sound*, Ben Ratliff, Picador, 2007, p. 64.

## Coltrane on Thelonious Monk

**Coltrane:** Working with Monk brought me close to a musical architect of the highest order. I felt I learned from him in every way—through the senses, theoretically, technically. I would talk to Monk about musical problems, and he would sit at the piano and show me the answers just by playing them. I could watch him play and find out the things I wanted to know. Also, I could see a lot of things that I didn't know about at all.

Monk was one of the first to show me how to make two or three notes at one time on tenor. (John Glenn, a tenor man in Philly, also showed me how to do this. He can play a triad and move notes inside it—like passing tones!) It's done by false fingering and adjusting your lip. If everything goes right, you can get triads. Monk just looked at my horn and “felt” the mechanics of what had to be done to get this effect.

I think Monk is one of the true greats of all time. He's a real musical thinker—there's not many like him. I feel myself fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with him.

Coltrane on Coltrane, Downbeat, 1960.

## Coltrane on the Future

**Coltrane:** I want to broaden my outlook in order to come out with a fuller means of expression. I want to be more flexible where rhythm is concerned. I feel I have to study rhythm some more. I haven't experimented too much with time; most of my experimenting has been in a harmonic form. I put time and rhythms to one side, in the past.

But I've got to keep experimenting. I feel that I'm just beginning. I have part of what I'm looking for in my grasp but not all.

I'm very happy devoting all my time to music, and I'm glad to be one of the many who are striving for fuller development as musicians. Considering the great heritage in music that we have, the work of giants of the past, the present, and the promise of those who are to come, I feel that we have every reason to face the future optimistically.

Coltrane on Coltrane, Downbeat, 1960.

## Coltrane on the Gradual Understanding of Music

**Coltrane:** You have to come to the music, gradually. Not everything must be received with open arms.

A Love Supreme: The Story of John Coltrane's Signature Album, Ashley Kahn, Penguin Books, 2002, p. xix.





## ST. COLTRANE

Coltrane is a recognized saint in the African Orthodox Church. The St. John Will-I-Am Coltrane African Orthodox Church, incorporates Coltrane's music and his lyrics into their services.

Church Founders Archbishop Franzo King and Reverend Mother Marina King were inspired after they saw Coltrane perform live in San Francisco in 1965. Franzo King "knew the presence of the Lord when it came through the power of the Holy Ghost."