



## Preface from the Guest Editor

This special issue of *Jazz Perspectives* grew out of a fiftieth-anniversary special session on John Coltrane (1926–1967), which was presented at the 2017 annual meeting of the Society for Music Theory in Arlington, Virginia. The articles presented here highlight the multifaceted nature of Coltrane’s career by utilizing a wide scope of methodologies, including transformational, set-theoretical, reductive, rhythmic, textual, historical, statistical, and computational analytical approaches.

The essays in this collection represent the efforts of six scholar-performers – half of them saxophonists – who are committed to advancing our understanding of Coltrane and his music. In 1991, David Demsey noted that “for many improvising jazz musicians, the decades of the seventies and the eighties are the ‘post-Coltrane’ era, since today’s jazz performers and theorists are still attempting to assimilate much of his music over twenty years after his death.”<sup>1</sup> It is now over fifty years since his death, and many of us in the jazz community continue to be engaged in this same process. Fifty years is an extraordinary milestone, not only for the number of decades itself, but also for this length of time relative to the history of jazz overall: nearly half of jazz history has now occurred after Coltrane’s death, and for many we are still in a “post-Coltrane era.”

This is striking to consider. It is remarkable, for example, to realize that *Interstellar Space* marks the halfway point in the development of jazz (or will soon, depending when one chooses to identify the birth of jazz). Yet this album – which itself contains a vast range of expression – no more encapsulates Coltrane’s art than does *Giant Steps*, *A Love Supreme*, or the myriad lesser-known recordings that show Coltrane in various stages of transition. Despite the debates that have dominated popular jazz discourse since (and during) the time of Coltrane – mainstream vs. avant-garde, uptown vs. downtown, tonal vs. atonal – and despite the artists who have challenged these dichotomies, Coltrane still stands as a shining example of what is possible, the astonishing breadth of his output transcending categorization.

The first three articles in this issue provide detailed analyses of music from each of Coltrane’s three major style periods. The issue begins with my own essay, “Motive, Collection, and Voice-Leading in John Coltrane’s ‘Giant Steps.’” As its title suggests, the article explores motivic aspects of the piece (presenting my composition “Dual Duel” as a foil), the use of hexatonic and nonatonic collections, and zero-sum voice leading, by realizing its progressions using different chord voicings. The article also includes a section that investigates mathematically the probability that the nonatonicism of “Giant Steps” could have resulted by chance rather than by compositional design.

Brian Levy’s article on “Harmonic and Rhythmic Opposition” tackles Coltrane’s middle period, focusing on recordings of “Pursuance” and “Miles’ Mode.” Using original transcriptions, he investigates the complex rhythmic and harmonic interactions among the members of the Coltrane Quartet. Much of Coltrane’s late work is often assumed to

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<sup>1</sup>David Demsey, “Chromatic Third Relations in the Music of John Coltrane,” *Annual Review of Jazz Studies* 5 (1991): 158.

be “free.” However, John O’Gallagher’s essay investigates music from this period through the lens of set theory, demonstrating how pieces such as “Saturn” and “Iris” are in fact highly organized. On “Iris,” John Coltrane’s melodic lines and Alice Coltrane’s chordal accompaniment both employ the [013] set class exclusively, strongly evidencing its purposeful utilization.

The next pair of articles employs new and original software to observe, analyze, and illustrate numerous subtleties of Coltrane’s music. Klaus Frieler approaches Coltrane’s work by comparing it computationally and statistically with that of Miles Davis – a figure often cited informally as being antithetical to Coltrane. While some commonly held views about Coltrane and Davis are empirically evidenced by this research, other unforeseen findings are also revealed. The data and methodologies presented stem from the Jazzomat Research Project, a multiyear endeavor at the Hochschule für Musik Franz Liszt Weimar that is nationally-funded by the German Research Foundation.

Micro-rhythmic expressive devices constitute vital components of jazz expression, but previous work in this area often lacks clarity, precision, or practicality. Milton Merikides’s contribution “Straight and Late” analyzes micro-rhythmic aspects of Coltrane’s music via his own original software, which capitalizes upon recent developments in digital technology and rhythmic perception research.

Coltrane was directly influenced by a number of music-theoretic sources, especially the Slonimsky *Thesaurus*. But his work was also often driven by extra-musical concerns. The final article in this special issue, Barry Long’s “Black Blowers of the Now,” examines Coltrane’s utilization of text as musical device and the impact this had on subsequent black activism. Central to this discussion is his recording of “Alabama,” which uses a eulogy delivered by Martin Luther King, Jr. as source material.

I would like to thank the other guest editors of this issue for their expert reviewing and editing work: Keith Waters, Daniel Shanahan, and Keith Salley. Many others offered feedback on individual essays, as acknowledged by the authors. I am grateful to Lewis Porter for his input and for contributing a foreword to the issue. I would also like to thank the editorial team at *JP* for their assistance with this project, especially Ken Prouty.

Rich Pellegrin  
*Executive Guest Editor*