

# **Spiritualizing the City**

Agency and Resilience of the Urban  
and Urbanesque Habitat

**Edited by Victoria Hegner and  
Peter Jan Margry**

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## 10 A saxophone divine

### Experiencing the transformative power of Saint John Coltrane's jazz music in San Francisco's Fillmore District

*Peter Jan Margry and Daniel Wojcik*

Although raised in a white Protestant milieu, Oriah Vaughn (age 44) from Virginia no longer attends church services or identifies as a Christian, explaining that she has “cobbled together my own spiritual beliefs from a variety of religions . . . I believe every religion has something to teach us.” Like many other urbanites, her spiritual pursuits connect to self-realization and reflect the worldwide process of the subjectivation of present day “believing” (Heelas and Woodhead 2005). As a jazz enthusiast, Oriah visited the Saint John Coltrane Church in 2011 during a trip to San Francisco and described her immersion in the soundscape of Coltrane's music as

. . . an expression of worship that was moving beyond any other experience I've ever had during any other church experience. Everyone was filled with joy and expressed that to everyone who walked in the doors. I felt spiritually lifted and elated . . . I left the sermon in a slightly altered state of consciousness.<sup>1</sup>

Oriah is not alone in her spiritual experience of Coltrane's music, as many other devotees of jazz are familiar with the religious and transcendent feelings evoked by Coltrane's numinous “sheets of sound.” The relocation of the Saint John Coltrane Church into a hip and increasingly gentrified part of the Fillmore district now accommodates increasing numbers of tourists and jazz enthusiasts in a safe and inviting environment. The Coltrane celebrated in this context is not only the legendary jazz saxophonist as the world knows him, but John Coltrane as an incarnated divine musician creating sacred and transformative soundscapes. Through the efforts of some devotees, he was later proclaimed a “saint,” and was embedded in a dedicated Christian church affiliation that centers on him and his music. This fusion of jazz and religion is not as strange as it may seem at first. A long-standing connection exists between music—jazz in particular—and religion, and their commonalities and mutual links have been noted by various scholars (Leonard 1987; Sylvan 2002; Bivins 2015). Some writers even claim that religion is the primary source for jazz music (see Cox 1993; Floyd 1996; Stowe 2010). In the case of the Saint John Coltrane Church in San Francisco, the connection seems an apparent Christian one, although the history of the church and

the diversity of its practices and membership complicate such a simple equation. Our research focuses on the extent to which Coltrane's music is to be regarded as a self-standing spiritualizing force or movement, an implicit form of religiosity, and how the movement has been influenced by the urban context in which it is created and performed.

### **Jazz, religion, and the urban**

Before going into detail about the religious dimensions of Coltrane and his music, the reputed link between jazz and religion requires some explanation, as it is usually not self-evident. To understand this relationship, we briefly examine the origins of jazz during the times of the struggle for emancipation by African Americans until its incorporation into subjectified present-day religious or spiritual cultures.

Jazz initially became a vehicle for solace and hope in the midst of racism and oppression. As jazz theorist John Gennari notes:

Jazz was forged in the cauldron of Jim Crow segregation by the descendants of slaves, who transformed antebellum spirituals, work songs, hollers, and ring shouts into the witness-bearing, intensely expressive truthfulness of the blues, as well as the effervescent spirit of ragtime. (Gennari 2005: 1167; cf. Peretti 1992: 14–21)

These conditions are usually taken as the biotope for the connection of jazz and religion, and scholars such as Harvey Cox, David Stowe and Jason Bivins have pointed out that jazz always has been entangled with religion and spiritual eclecticism, reflecting the influences of gospel, folk spirituals, the “black church” and other sacred music traditions (Cox 1995: 139–57; Stowe 2010; Bivins 2015).<sup>2</sup> This relationship is particularly evident in Pentecostalism that, as a form of revivalism with an important emphasis on ecstatic expression, became the primary religious practice for many African Americans, its musical traditions and expressive styles intersecting with the development of jazz. Both Pentecostalism and jazz, as eclectic vernacular movements, were born in heterogeneous urban environments at the beginning of the twentieth century (Pentecostalism in Los Angeles and jazz in New Orleans), and were similarly condemned and ridiculed at the time. As Cox asserts, both jazz and Pentecostalism “sprang from the same womb,” emerging from the African American experience of resisting oppression through enthusiastic worship and performative expression, and there are parallels between possession and trance states, speaking in tongues, and forms of jazz singing and performance (Cox 1995: 145–6; Cox 1993). Furthermore, both jazz and Pentecostalism are characterized by a synthesis of expressive styles, and neither would have developed if not for the open, free-spirited atmosphere and the cultural and racial intermingling of the urban milieu in which they were practiced. Jazz began as a uniquely urban phenomenon and was able to expand and flourish because it developed in these urban locales and spread throughout the American cityscape (New Orleans, Kansas City, Chicago, Memphis, St. Louis, New York,

Detroit, Los Angeles, etc.). The growth of jazz also coincided with the migration of millions of African Americans who moved from rural areas and sought employment in the cities at a time when there was increased demand for industrial labor. It was in the cities where black musicians found each other and where an urban culture existed that allowed for the exposure to and experimentation with varied musical styles, resulting in the emergence of new musical communities, as well as affording the venues and the necessary audiences for the "counter" communitarianism that became jazz.<sup>3</sup>

Like rock'n'roll and other forms of popular music, jazz was from its beginnings often depicted as the antithesis of religion, expressing and evoking the hedonistic pleasures of Saturday night in contrast to the holiness of Sunday morning worship services (Murray 1989; Stowe 2010: 312–13), a notion that reflects an overly simplistic binary concept, analogous with the Bakhtinian idea of inversion and the functionality of a carnivalesque Shrove Tuesday celebration prior to the austere religious cycle of Lent. In reality, the religious and secular expressions of jazz were and are intertwined, influencing and riffing on each other, as musicians and audiences often embraced both contexts equally. As Zora Neale Hurston observed in her WPA folklore documentation in the 1930s, the spirited jazz played at parties and at sanctified church services, sometimes by the same performers, often were musically indistinguishable (Hurston cited in Levine 1977: 180). The emergence of jazz, regarded as a quintessentially American and archetypically modern art form, is also celebrated as the first major black American art form, infused with the religious traditions and rural vernacular culture of African Americans, creatively transformed into a music of the city, an expression of urbanization and social change, resistance and freedom, the power of improvisation and pluralistic sensibilities, the vitality of urban life, and the desires of modernity.<sup>4</sup>

Research on the relationship between jazz and religion generally focuses on the following four variations of this connection: (1) religion as an inspirational source for jazz musicians; (2) jazz music composed and written for religious goals or having a (historical) religious context (for example, gospel music); (3) jazz as musical expression functioning or used within formal religion or religious contexts (performing jazz musicians), and (4) jazz music and/or its performer as having a sacred stature as a religious phenomenon in and of itself (cf. Stowe 2010: 313–14). In the academic literature on jazz, such categorizations are sometimes obfuscated by the omnipresent insertion of religious metaphors: "jazz as a religion" or jazz music or jazz musicians depicted as a sect or cult, with the musicians referred to as "high priests" or "prophets," professing "myths," singing "sacred texts" and practicing "rituals," whether directly in the presence of their devotees or not.<sup>5</sup> In this chapter, we would like to move beyond such metaphorical descriptions, as well as the notion of jazz as a surrogate religion, and explore by means of ethnographic data the religious meanings of the music performed and experienced in the Saint John Coltrane Church. This is a performance of jazz that appears unique in its expression and that needs to be understood and researched emically and in its own way, apart from

the previously mentioned categorizations of jazz and religion. Although the Saint John Coltrane Church is one of the few affiliated churches in the world that includes jazz as a central part of its formal services, we explore the ways that the church also may be a framework to allow Coltrane's music to independently perform its salvational and transformative meaning. As a hybrid and alternative religious phenomenon, how is the church's musical expression particularly viable in modern urbanity, and what is its enduring appeal and meaning for congregants and visiting jazz enthusiasts? Does the "urban magic," as Bivins (2015: 145–6) puts it (a specificity of the urban musical and social communitarianism that enabled jazz), work in this context for creating new modes of sociality and religious experience? The broader issue of jazz as an interface between religion and the urban is hence explored in our essay: in particular, to what degree has the forced relocation of the Coltrane Church and the urban renewal and gentrification of the San Francisco Western Addition district where the church was originally situated affected this religious movement and ongoing formation, and how has this specific expression of jazz been shaped, influenced, or stimulated by the urban habitat in which the Coltrane movement arose and evolved?

### **Urban renewal and the Coltrane movement**

The cityscape of San Francisco has been rapidly changing during the last two decades and this transformation has impacted the Coltrane Church. The economic effect of the high-tech businesses of "Silicon Valley" has accelerated urban renewal and a massive construction boom has transformed the city and the entire Bay Area. Researcher Rebecca Solnit documents the impact of this urban makeover on San Francisco's various districts in her book *Hollow City: The Siege of San Francisco and the Crisis of American Urbanism* (2000). From her at times nostalgic and moralistic perspective, she describes the city's urban outward change. She points out how old neighborhoods and communities that were once "authentic" and unique to the city have become "hollow" and soullessly "siliconial" through gentrification and urbanization. Whether or not one agrees with Solnit's judgment, this transformation has strongly affected the Western Addition and Mission districts of San Francisco. The result of urban renewal and the applied architecture that one now finds there is often of a rather prosaic kind, with relatively low buildings of an unassuming style in clean and neatly renovated blocks, reflecting new forms of habitation and social structures. There is little left here that refers to the historic blocks where a vibrant African American community known as the "Harlem of the West" once thrived as a center of black culture—its barely visible remnants now marked by plaques scattered on the sidewalk. The bland redevelopment of the area is exemplified by the modern low-rise building near the corner of Fillmore and Eddy Streets, not the setting one would connect to an area previously famous for its jazz scene and nightlife. It is here that Saint John Coltrane Church was situated until 2016, in a drab annex to the West Bay Community and Conference Center.<sup>6</sup>



*Figure 10.1* The modern John Coltrane storefront church at Fillmore. A poster with crossed saxophones is displayed to attract the attention of passers-by, August 2011. Photo by Peter Jan Margry.

The church was not always located here. Formalized in 1969 by hairdresser Franzo Wayne King<sup>7</sup> two years after Coltrane's death, the movement began in King's apartment in a Potrero Hill housing project in 1967 and then relocated to an after-hours jazz club in the Bayview-Hunters Point district, where part of an apartment was converted into a chapel in which people could gather at midnight once a week and devote the next 24 hours to prayer, fasting and sound immersion by listening to Coltrane's album *A Love Supreme* (Boulware 2000). Realizing he needed more room for those devoted to Coltrane's music, in 1971, King and his wife Marina rented space in a commercial building in the Fillmore neighborhood and transformed it into a storefront "church," a phenomenon common in poor African American urban communities. The location was only a few blocks away from Haight-Ashbury, in a historically black district developed by African Americans who emigrated there in the 1940s to escape racial segregation laws and to take shipbuilding jobs during World War II. During the 1950s and 1960s, the Western Addition was the epicenter for a brutal urban redevelopment plan that demolished much of area's historic architecture, displaced thousands of residents, and decimated the community and local black culture.

For nearly three decades, the Coltrane Church was located in a surviving historic Victorian-style structure on Divisadero Street (no. 351), a popular and well-known venue, due in part to its social programming and activist work, with space for community participation, free hot meals and food programs (some in collaboration with the Black Panther Party in the 1970s), shelter and clothing for the homeless as well as counseling, music lessons and other types of community outreach. Over the years, the church developed into a community institution, providing an impetus to the neighborhood and offering opportunities to the poor and needy, as one of the last remaining grass-roots African American jazz venues in San Francisco and as a community-based institution committed to issues of social justice and local outreach. As King explains it:

We have been a vibrant part of this community since 1971 in large part due to our social activism; speaking out against violence, racism, police brutality, and other important issues of equality. We are here in this community as a spokesperson that speaks truth to power. (MacDonald 2015)

On many Sundays, the storefront space was packed, the enthusiastic congregation of musical devotees sometimes overflowing onto the sidewalk. However, in the year 2000, rent increases pushed the church out of the neighborhood.<sup>8</sup> This expulsion was a consequence of the social and cultural changes in the Western Addition district, the result of a second wave of urban renewal and gentrification that began in the 1990s (an ongoing process of gentrification and “de-race-ification” referred to as the “negro removal” by some local residents; see Solnit 2000: 43; Klein 2008: 6). Capitalizing on the strong economy and the dot-com and commercial real estate boom, high-tech firms, social network companies and other businesses persistently invaded the area, purchasing property, raising rents, evicting tenants and making housing too expensive for many of its predominantly African American and Latino residents, wiping out what remained of the former “character” and ethnic cultures of the old district. The overall gentrification of the area and the eviction of the Coltrane Church not only upset community members and cultural critics such as Solnit, but even the city’s mayor Willie Brown expressed his regrets about the relocation of the church, stating, “Do I care? Yes, I do. I wish I could have it like it was, many years ago” (Brown cited in Boulware 2000). The changing demographics of San Francisco are indicated by US Census Bureau figures that reveal among other things the dramatic decline of the city’s African American population, showing a steady decrease in the community from 13.4 percent in 1970 to 10.9 percent in 1990, and then shrinking further to 6 percent by 2013, a reduction of nearly 60 percent since the 1970s.<sup>9</sup>

These changes in demographics and the ongoing gentrification of the neighborhood did not leave the Coltrane movement unaffected, and after the church moved to an affordable but more distant site, local attendance declined further. By the time the church relocated in 2007 to a storefront space in the heart of the Fillmore district, even more long-term local residents had been forced to move away because of rent increases and evictions.<sup>10</sup> In 2015, Reverend King expressed

his dismay about the exodus of the African American community and the loss of local culture: "What's happening is just short of genocide. It's a crime, pre-meditated with malice and forethought, to drive the African-American community out of San Francisco. We've tried to stand up against this fact with very little success" (MacDonald 2015). Even today's visitors to the Coltrane Church have commented on the effects of these demographic changes. For instance, Hanna Morjan, from Scotland, recalled her experience at a Sunday service in April 2015:

I have very mixed feelings, the music was great and being invited to join and given a tambourine to play helped me to feel part of it, to feel the music in my body. But I was disappointed by the lack of people, and hardly any African Americans. . . .<sup>11</sup>

Ironically, the Fillmore and Western Addition areas are now promoted and advertised as "the chic and trendy Fillmore Jazz Preservation District of San Francisco's classic Western Addition/Alamo Square area."<sup>12</sup> This recent sales pitch and branding of the neighborhood further reflects how this once distinctively African American district is being marketed and reenacted in a safe and heritagized way, with an increasingly gentrified, tourist and cool yuppie vibe. These changes have affected attendance at the church, as those in audience shifts from regular members who once were from the local community to growing numbers of visitors and tourists. In this way, urban gentrification has disrupted and decreased the local community involvement, and as more outsiders and jazz tourists visit, the audience and context changes from a "Church" experience for regular weekly devotees into a more implicit expression of religiosity for one-time visitors and jazz aficionados for whom the performance of Coltrane's music alone provides the transformational experience. Or, as Coltrane expressed it himself: the experience of the divine *realized* through sound.

### **Sanctifying John Coltrane**

Time and again, the relationship between jazz and religion is exemplified by the musical and spiritual legacy of John William Coltrane (1926–67). Considered one of the single most influential jazz musicians of the twentieth century, Coltrane is revered by many as part of a "holy trinity" of jazz performers—a religious metaphor anew—alongside Louis Armstrong and Charlie Parker, Duke Ellington or Miles Davis, depending on one's favored consecrated trio. While Ellington and Mary Lou Williams are acknowledged for creating new sacred music, and Sun Ra's cosmic Afrofuturistic mysticism inspired a cult following, it is Coltrane and his musical legacy that over time have been most frequently and reverentially situated in a wider spiritual domain (cf. Brown 2010; Nisenson 1995; Saul 2003: 254–60; Whyton 2013: 60–68; Woideck 1998: 47–8, 66–7). Reflecting on the religious representations and enduring adoration of Coltrane, writer Francis Davis proclaims "More than any other performer of his time or ours, he is a god we create, if not in our own image, then according to our desires and beliefs"

(Davis 2001: 33). Coltrane's own religious awakening occurred in 1957, at a time when he was struggling with alcohol and heroin addiction, and the experience transformed his life and musical aesthetic. As he later wrote in the liner notes for *A Love Supreme*:

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.<sup>13</sup>

While Coltrane was raised in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion tradition, he later adopted a broad, non-sectarian eclectic view of the divine that was accepting of all faiths and he viewed his music as an expression of a universalist spirituality: "I'd like to point out to people the divine in a musical language that transcends words. I want to speak to their souls" (Coltrane cited in Porter 1998: 232). As a result of the enormous success of his album *A Love Supreme* (recorded in December 1964 and released in 1965), his concept of multicultural musical transcendence became extremely popular in the late 1960s. His early adoption of Eastern spiritualities is evident in recordings such as *Om* (1965) and *Meditations* (1966), while his *Ascension* album (1966) shows his move towards the incantatory and the shamanistic, bringing in the "magical powers of repetition" (Santoro 1992: 499). His second wife Alice played an active role in the ways Coltrane started to explore non-Western spiritualities and to look for his "authentic self," as he was influenced by the Bhagavad Gita, Theosophical texts, the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, Krishnamurti, Yogananda, the Kabbalah, yoga, astrology and Sufi mysticism; he was also meditating daily and began experimenting with LSD in 1965 (Berkman 2007: 44–5, 55; Nisenson 1995: 166–7). The spiritual universality he wished to realize through music was an intentional path to religious pluralism and away from the institutionalized religious traditions, an attempt to use jazz music as a universal vehicle for modern spiritual self-realization (Berkman 2007: 56). The album *Universal Consciousness* released in 1971 by his widow Alice Coltrane after his death in 1967 is a later example of that spiritual quest.

As a result of the emotive power and spiritual status of his music, many Coltrane enthusiasts consistently have transposed him from the secular to a sacral realm. Why and how did this happen? Was it due primarily to his own deep spiritual commitment and pursuit of God, or the legendary accounts of him having a charismatic and "holy" presence when he performed? Or is this sacralization due to his pluralistic and universalist approach to religiosity or to an "independent," transformative agency of his music in particular that evokes transcendent and sublime experiences of the divine?

In the case of the Coltrane Church, the movement was inspired and influenced by all of the above. When the church initially developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the small congregation adopted various names, including the "One Mind Temple Evolutionary Transitional Body of Christ," reflecting the belief that Coltrane was an evolved manifestation of Christ and that all of humanity is of

one mind, one connected consciousness, with the potential to evolve into Christ-like beings as well, guided by Coltrane's music and wisdom.<sup>14</sup> At that time, King (who for a while called himself Ramakrishna Haqq) and his congregation worshiped Coltrane as "an earthly incarnation of God" and a second coming of Christ, but also considered him a manifestation of Hindu Lord Krishna ("the enchanted player of the flute"), as they studied Vedic scriptures and sacred texts from various religious traditions, and were influenced by black liberation theology and their interactions with Alice Coltrane and her devotion to the popular Indian guru Sathya Sai Baba. Vestiges of these influences are still evident on the church's website, which refers to the "mighty mystic" Coltrane as Sri Rama Ohnedaruth, the Hindu spiritual name given to him by Alice Coltrane after his death.<sup>15</sup> During this time of spiritual exploration in the 1970s, King's One Mind Temple was located a few blocks away from another temple, the Jim Jones Peoples Temple. After the Peoples Temple relocated to Jonestown (Guyana) and ended there in 1978 in an apocalyptic mass suicide, various alternative religious movements flourishing in San Francisco were scrutinized and condemned. The Coltrane temple also was seen as "alternative" and criticized by some for its "cult" worship of Coltrane (Boulware 2000). Indeed, scholars have argued that since the 1950s, San Francisco became known for the "weakness" of its traditional churches, and that became in some ways a social laboratory, establishing an "authentic" open urban platform for the development of new religious movements and "cults" (see Stark and Bainbridge 1981).

Around the same time of the trauma of Jonestown, Alice Coltrane sued the church for \$7.5 million, accusing it of exploiting her husband's name and violating copyright laws; the case received national attention after the *San Francisco Chronicle* covered the dispute with the headline "Widow of 'God' Sues Church" (Boulware 2000). Amid this controversy and under increased scrutiny, the Coltrane Church was approached by members of the African Orthodox Church, a small denomination searching for new membership and the expansion of their fledgling organization. In response to these overtures and offers of support, King pursued a somewhat more legitimate status in religious territory and in 1982, the previously informal or "lay" Coltrane movement was incorporated into the African Orthodox Church. Coltrane was subsequently canonized on September 19, 1982 by Archbishop George Duncan Hinkson and called Saint John.<sup>16</sup> Coltrane was not the first saint in the AOC, as he joined other important African American political leaders and civil rights activists such as Marcus Garvey and Martin Luther King, Jr. who were canonized before him. It is impossible to know how the humble Coltrane would have felt about this sanctification, but in his quest to live a truly religious life, sainthood was a status he alluded to in 1966: when asked by an interviewer what he would like to be in the future, he replied, "I would like to be a saint" (Porter 1998: 260).

Within the formal exegesis of the Saint John Coltrane Church, the consecrated Coltrane is often addressed with his two first names as "Saint John Will-I-Am," which is a reference to Exodus 3:14 in which God says to Moses from the burning bush: "I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children

of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.” The nicknaming of Coltrane as the “Risen Trane,” is a reference to the transformed John Coltrane “post-1957,” after he emerged from drug and alcohol addiction, and points equally to a specific Christian context—on the one hand to Coltrane’s resurrectional success as a person overcoming human vices, while at the same time suggesting an analogy with the resurrected Christ. However, in line with the doctrines of African Orthodox Church, as Archbishop King explains, Coltrane has been accommodated to the formal Christian teachings and downgraded to a saintly figure, not a prime godly figure: “We demoted Coltrane from being God. But the agreement was that he could come into sainthood and be the patron of our church” (King quoted in Freedman 2007). Yet, the sacred and godly status of Coltrane still seems prominent, a synthesis of beliefs, as explained on the Church’s Facebook webpage in a somewhat hybridic manner:

Our primary mission . . . is to bring souls to Christ; to know sound as the preexisting wisdom of God, and to understand the divine nature of our patron saint in terms of his ascension as a high soul into one-ness with God through sound.<sup>17</sup>

In this way Coltrane is referred to both as a divine and ascended godly person and as a saintly mediator to bring people to Christ, with Coltrane’s musical sound described as a direct expression of God, even as the “pre-existing wisdom” of God.

Throughout its 45-year history, the Coltrane movement has been led by Franzo King and his wife Marina King as pastors and church founders, who later were appointed Archbishop and Reverend Mother within the context of the African Orthodox Church. Numerous other individuals have been appointed reverends, deacons and sub-deacons, including the King family members Wanika King-Stephens, Makeda King Nueckel, Franzo Wayne King, Jr., and Marlee-I Mystic, among others. Musicians in the church ensemble Ohnedaruth (Sanskrit for “compassion” and as mentioned, one of Coltrane’s spiritual names) have been appointed reverends and clergy as well. There are various other members of the ministry who assist in the services and participate in the jam sessions, including two ministers of tap dance. According to King, this church “is born out of music, a gift of God,” working to “strip down the dogma” and “bring the people in an enlightened state, to a love supreme.”<sup>18</sup> As the group is now established formally as the Saint John Will-I-Am Coltrane African Orthodox Church, God is worshipped through sound and saintly Coltrane is honored by them as an enlightened being who attained mystical union with God and conveyed this through his music. In this context, improvised jazz itself becomes the vehicle for transformative experiences of the sacred. Coltrane’s compositions, venerated as holy and divinely inspired, have been elevated to a level of sacred song conventionally reserved for more traditional forms of devotional music. Officially, the primary principle of the church is now defined and limited to the worshipping of the Christian God, with a mission to “bring souls to Christ.”<sup>19</sup> Or as King once phrased it, “when you listen to John Coltrane you become a disciple of the anointed God” (Freedman 2007).

But this assertion begs the question: who now attends the services and how connected is the audience to the official (“Christian”) rhetoric, and what do people profess to experience there? Do the musical experiences of the increasing numbers of new visitors and jazz enthusiasts supersede the formal liturgy and instead connect to the perceived and experiential sacred power of Coltrane’s music as expressed earlier by the Coltrane movement prior to its formalization as part of the AOC in 1982? As a case in point, the description provided by Oriah Vaughn, quoted at the opening of this article, shows an eclectic religious-spiritual stance that is familiar for a person of her background in the present day, and one that seems to connect clearly to the universalist Coltrane spiritual setting as it originally emerged, before its AOC affiliation. Characterizing her approach to non-institutional spirituality and her inclination toward Coltrane’s jazz incantations, Oriah further explains:

I pick and choose my personal beliefs from a variety of religions. It’s more of a synthesis of “truths” drawn from a broad base. I believe every religion has something to teach us. Religions are meant to be dynamic and incorporate new knowledge; unfortunately, they don’t get updated too often. I think a lot of times people say they are “spiritual, but not religious” to cover the fact they don’t have a strong or well developed system of beliefs that ground their spiritual practice.<sup>20</sup>

Oriah’s views clearly express an approach to religion that is widespread and meaningful for many individuals outside an institutional religious framing, who seek and adopt other forms of spirituality.

For those who visit the church and are immersed in Coltrane’s sublime soundscape, what are the possible religious contexts and ways to consider the personal spiritual encounters and experiences that occur? More broadly, how does religion manifest itself in other forms and expressions in addition to the obvious church forms? In pursuit of such questions, we take the approach that religious and spiritual experiences need to be understood synonymously as common and culturally created expressions of religiosity. In this regard, the music of John Coltrane itself also may be considered a religious phenomenon and be regarded as an expression of “implicit religion.”<sup>21</sup>

### **Jamming jazz as sacred soundscape**

From the street, St. John’s is easy to miss, situated in a plain office building, its nondescript glass front door looking like an entrance to a business. The church is identifiable only by a window poster of a cross formed from two tenor saxophones and a small sign that says “Coltrane Lives,” although on the days of worship services, a larger sidewalk sign is put out on the street. The church is housed in a simple and rather small space that may contain up to fifty people, with rows of blue banquet chairs facing the combined stage/altar that is cluttered with a full drum set, keyboards, a standup bass, saxophones, amplifiers,

microphone stands and other instruments. The walls are decorated with large colorful Eastern Orthodox-style icons created by church Deacon Mark Dukes, with images of the tree of life, fiery-winged red angelic beings, the Blessed Virgin Mary and child, and a dreadlocked Jesus sitting on a throne, all depicted as dark-skinned in the aesthetic tradition of the African Orthodox Church.<sup>22</sup>

To the left of the altar is an eight-foot tall image of patron saint Coltrane sitting on an African throne, wearing white religious vestments, framed with a golden halo, holding a saxophone blowing holy fire and a scroll with words from the liner notes of *A Love Supreme*. There are batik depictions of Coltrane and assorted African motifs hanging from banners along the ceiling and against the walls, and an image of Che Guevara prominently displayed on a conga drum. A small table in the back of the church contains a guestbook, a pamphlet with the title "Are You an Addict?" and a few items for sale, such as Coltrane Church T-shirts, incense,



Figure 10.2 Icon painting of John Coltrane entitled "Saint John the Divine Sound Baptist" by Deacon Mark C. E. Dukes, ca. 1989. This is a frequently reproduced icon of Coltrane, with his tenor saxophone ablaze with the flames of the Holy Ghost, while the scroll in his right hand quotes the liner notes from *A Love Supreme* and the lyrics to the fourth movement. Photo by Dan Wojcik.

prayer cloths and icon postcards. Hanging above the table is a frequently reproduced icon of Coltrane—holy, intense and otherworldly in expression—in a green velvet jacket, gripping his flaming saxophone.

The brightly lit converted office space has no resemblance to a conventional jazz venue as it might be experienced now or as imagined in the jazz clubs of yore—this is no dimly-lit, smoke-filled, lush life refuge “where one relaxes on the axis of the wheel of life, to get the feel of life, from jazz and cocktails..<sup>23</sup> Within the newly gentrified, renovated district, this open-door sanctuary frames jazz within the modern Coltrane paradigm of a global, more gentrified audience, a sacred space that is presented in an accessible way to be easily experienced by all those longing to be taken away on the musical waves of Coltrane’s music.

The worship services at St. John’s are scheduled to begin at noon (to accommodate the late-night schedules of musicians), but rarely start on time. Prior to the service, the atmosphere inside the church is relaxed, as congregants socialize, the musicians set up and then warm up, and the international visitors and tourists trickle in, usually sitting towards the back of the room and snapping photos until a church member walks over and politely tells them that photography is not allowed. Upon entering the storefront space, the visitors are often greeted at the door by one of the parishioners, or sometimes welcomed by Archbishop King himself, his gold tenor sax and the gold cross hanging from his neck competing in religious symbology. The core congregation is made up of a mix of young and elderly African Americans and a few white musicians and multi-ethnic parishioners, many casually dressed, a few in suits or African attire, some of whom bring their entire family to the service, and children freely wander about the room and participate in the service. These regular members are joined each Sunday by a potpourri of jazz enthusiasts, hipsters, spiritual pilgrims, curious locals and travelers from all over the world who have heard of the worship services, known and promoted by enthusiasts globally for their lively style and enthusiastic performances of Coltrane’s music.<sup>24</sup> Marlee-I Mystic, a deacon in the church, informed us that weekly attendance is typically somewhere between ten and twenty people, including local and international visitors. During our fieldwork at the church,<sup>25</sup> we observed a similar number of those present, with the church’s musicians, choir and regular members sometimes outnumbering others in attendance, many of whom were travelers and Coltrane devotees from afar.<sup>26</sup>

Whatever their religious intention, regular church member or not, those participating at St. John’s are encouraged to bring their own instruments to contribute to the service, and members of the audience are handed tambourines and asked to participate as the spirit moves them, with dancing and personal “witnessing” equally encouraged as well. The church’s ensemble, Ohnedaruth (also referred to as the “Ministers of Sound”) and a small choir called the “Voices of Compassion” (formerly the “Sisters of Compassion”) lead the congregants in what they call the “Coltrane Liturgy,” which begins with a nearly two-hour jam session that combines the liturgy of the African Orthodox Church with the harmonies, melodies and rhythms of Coltrane’s musical sermon or “prayer,” *A Love Supreme*,

as well as other Coltrane works.<sup>27</sup> On the occasions that we attended the services, Coltrane's "Africa" was played during the processional and the soulful ballad "Lonnie's Lament" performed during the Introit. When the ensemble played "Acknowledgment" from *A Love Supreme*, the choir sang the words to Psalm 23 ("The Lord is my shepherd . . ."), and those present were encouraged to say (or pray) the words "A Love Supreme" at the appropriate moment in the performance, with the core congregation and visitors alike chanting in unison. In a similar synchronization of formal liturgy with Coltrane's music, the choir sang The Lord's Prayer when the composition "Spiritual" was played. After the musical performance, additional traditional Christian liturgical elements are introduced, such as readings from the Epistles and the Gospels, the Apostles' Creed, the offering, and then the sermon. While the church follows in a formal way the creeds of the African Orthodox Church (a blend of Eastern and Western liturgies and traditional Catholic doctrine),<sup>28</sup> the services also are strongly influenced by Pentecostalism, with an emphasis on the presence of the Holy Spirit, spontaneous shouting-out, clapping, the exorcizing of demons (through music), and Archbishop King's own fiery preaching. After the service, as the musicians pack up their instruments, Archbishop King and other church members mingle, shaking hands and chatting with those still in the audience, the friendly and informal mood similar to having just participated in a jam session in someone's living room. On one occasion, homemade pumpkin pie was shared with everyone, and another time, Archbishop King, who observed that we had stayed for the entire three-hour jazz mass, walked over, greeted us, and in his familiar down-to-earth manner, laughingly said, "You cats ate the whole thing!!"

In 2015, at 70 years of age, the Archbishop King continues to guide the Coltrane worship as he has for more than 45 years, with a welcoming style and openness that accepts all who attend the services. As an accomplished saxophone player, each Sunday he energetically performs his religious calling, playing his horn much of the time but also preaching, sometimes drenched in sweat after an hour or two of passionate saxophone praise for St. Coltrane. The Pentecostal roots that he embraces infuse the performance, and each Sunday event is improvisational in its orchestration, flowing in the way that the spirit moves him and other members, and infused with his jazz expertise and aesthetic: he dances slowly with his saxophone or with Mother Marina and other members of the swaying, full-voiced choir; he blasts his horn hard with ecstatic abandon to create elevated squalls of sound, and then slides smoothly into soft solos of soulful worship. Throughout the ceremony, he moves about the room in tune with other members of the congregation and in sync with the holy noise, shouting out in tribute or holding his hand over the head of another enraptured soloist as if to feel the ascension of the sacred harmonies, raising his arm high to the sky and pointing to the heavens in rhythm with the hallowed sounds. King is accompanied by equally enthusiastic performers, who sacrifice themselves on the altar of sound praise to produce illuminated layers of inspired music each Sunday, with some musicians dropping in for a portion of the service, while others are present for the duration, with regulars Reverend Sister Wanika ever elegant on the upright and electric

bass and Reverend Max Ha'qq on alto sax, blowing with such furious intensity that he looks as though he might explode. As the musicians and choir pour their souls into the creation of the exalted tones, jamming in lengthy and unrestrained solos, parishioners sway with the music, some dancing in the aisles, clapping or clasping hands together in prayer, and shouting "Amen!," "That's right!" and "Hallelujah!." Tambourines in hand, throughout the service many of those present participated in this spiritual Coltrane jazz fest, as the friendly, communal vibe welcomes and includes everyone, curious visitors and tourists, ethnographic observers, jazz pilgrims and longstanding devotees alike, all grooving in tune to the sacred sounds.

While the later portion of the service is highlighted by the sermons of Archbishop King or the Reverend King-Stephens, the Coltrane Church experience is dominated by the music and its claim to redemptive power, emphasized and performed almost non-stop for nearly two hours. Describing the worship services, participant and local resident Kevin K. stated that "The first two hours or so are taken up with what the pastor calls 'exorcism of the demons,' but to me are some of the most intimate and uninhibited jazz jams I've ever encountered" (2006).<sup>29</sup> This observation, supported by our fieldwork and the comments of other visitors, touches directly upon the question we pose here. What is the "church" in its institutionalized forms and what is the Coltrane musical spirituality in its own "implicit" expression, as an independent and non-churched experience? In other words: is this religious expression to be seen as an idiosyncratic but formal Christian parish, or is it better understood as a religious movement based on Coltrane's musical aesthetics and sacral sound, and only facilitated within the formal framework of a "sectarian" branch of the small African Orthodox Church? As explained above, the eclectic and grass-roots St. John Coltrane movement started outside of any formal Christian institution and it was only in 1982 that external pressures compelled King to join the African Orthodox Church and pursue training in order to be ordained a bishop by the AOC.<sup>30</sup> As a result of this formal Christian incorporation, the idea that Coltrane himself was God had to be seen a fallacy and King reluctantly accepted a demotion of Coltrane into "just" sainthood in order for him to continue to be patron of the church (Washington 2001: 394; Freedman 2007).

In a related manner, this particular St. Coltrane branch of the AOC is strongly independent and conveys a double message: the Christian and Coltranist. And the mission of the Coltrane Church remains international in scope: "to paint the globe with the message of *A Love Supreme*, and in doing so promote global unity, peace on earth, and knowledge of the one true living God."<sup>31</sup> While this mission is presented within its orthodox Christian dogma of monotheism, it also promotes a pluralistic and holistic spiritual dimension that also integrates curious tourists, jazz devotees and individuals from other religious traditions into its broader sense of purpose. As Archbishop King proclaimed recently in one sermon we attended, "We are part of the African Orthodox Church, but we [Coltranists] are a universal church, a revolutionary church," and the sermons by King and Reverend King-Stephens repeatedly emphasized the church's activist

and inclusive nature, with references to Buddhism, Hinduism, Bob Marley, the Dalai Lama, Plato, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Coltrane's own personal search for "religious truth" beyond one particular spiritual tradition.

In addition to the inclusive and interfaith subject matter of the sermons, the weekly services at the Fillmore parish are distinctly different from that of a "regular" or mainstream Episcopalian or Catholic Orthodox service, a sharp contrast indeed as the Coltrane Church's informal and improvisational style is laced with Pentecostal gusto and spontaneity, as congregants and visiting tourists dance, shout out, play instruments and interact with the ministry in a jazz-infused and close-knit context. In June 2012, Kyle M. from San Francisco gave a more or less typical depiction of how spiritual and "unchurched" visitors perceive the service and participants present:

The Church of St. Coltrane, though, is all about acceptance. And when I say acceptance, I mean EVERYONE is welcome . . . Basically, the place was lightly organized chaos. Perhaps that's why I didn't meet any regulars. Everyone who came to church was coming for the first time. Most were foreign. . . .<sup>32</sup>

A similar ratio of those in attendance also came to the fore when on a Sunday in January 2000, one of the church leaders asked the audience how many of them were local residents. Of the approximately sixty people present, just three raised their hands, with more than 90 percent of the congregation from somewhere else, with visitors from Texas, Arizona, France, Spain, New Zealand, Denmark, Sweden and Ireland (Boulware 2006). Similarly, every time we attended services, Archbishop King made a point during the sermon to ask people where they were from and it was clear that there were always more travelers than regular congregants. The number of formal members of the Coltrane Church is in fact relatively few, with the core congregation varying from 15 to 25 parishioners over the years.

Still, the weekly audiences not only show a global geographical representation of jazz lovers and votaries, but a wide range of believers from assorted religious and spiritual currents and agnostics as well. Although now formatted in the frame of the AOC, the Archbishop King and other members of the church simultaneously put forward an open spiritual paradigm, in a way that almost any religiously inspired person or lover of jazz may be accommodated. In an interview in 1999, King reflected on the expansive spiritual dimension of Coltrane and his meanings: "I realized that the music of John Coltrane was representative beyond culture . . . And it wasn't just a cultural or ethnic thing. It was something that was higher." King views the church and particularly the soundscape of St. John's as the "genesis" of an autonomous Coltrane belief system. As he states it, at some moment

. . . you begin to see God in the sound. It's a point of revelation, it's not something that happens with absolute clarity, but it begins an evolution, or

a transition, or process. The consciousness level, that opening, is evolving. Baptism is what it is.<sup>33</sup>

This “baptism in sound” clearly plays with the other baptizing John in Christianity, but refers here to the possibility of Coltrane’s music to touch and capture the hearts and minds of the listeners and to realize transformation.<sup>34</sup> And so, at St. Coltrane’s storefront church two realities of religious experience can be perceived at the same location, representing actually a *simultanaeum* of the formal services of the African Orthodox Church and at the same time the open spiritual Coltrane domain that provides the experience of the musical sublime, creating spiritualizing effects among the majority of visitors who know nothing about the doctrines of the AOC.

Franzo and Marina King’s own personal “sound baptism” and spiritual transformation occurred in 1965 during a live performance by Coltrane at a popular club in San Francisco that changed their lives forever, an experience that they equated with the presence of the Holy Ghost, filling their hearts with the love of God. Other individuals have described comparable transformative experiences occurring because of Coltrane’s music. For instance, saxophonist Robert Haven (aka Roberto DeHaven), who became minister in the church, states that

For me, Coltrane had this very powerful influence in that he was like me, he was using heroin and drinking, but then he quit. Then he went on to devote his music to God. I would sit in my room and cry listening to Coltrane solos . . . I was completely under Coltrane’s spell.

For congregant Jon Ingle, Coltrane’s music restored his religious belief:

I grew up in Texas, and for a long time I had this little war going on with God . . . I turned away from myself and my spirit. John Coltrane has led me back. So I feel like the spirit of John Coltrane has led me to being more fulfilled in my life than I ever could have imagined.<sup>35</sup>

Franzo King is clear about Coltrane’s non-denominational and open sacral and spiritual qualities:

We don’t hold a monopoly on John Coltrane. John is a saint among Buddhists; he is a saint among Moslems. He is a saint among Jews. And I think there are even a few atheists who are leaning on that anointed sound.<sup>36</sup>

And so the church is a shared locus for both views, as King himself recognizes that there are indeed different religious expressions present: the non-mainstream but more or less formalized African Orthodox Church, and the open and more “implicit” Coltrane musical expressions perceived by non-AOC-churched Coltrane devotees from all over the world who are able to have transformative experiences brought up solely by the performance of Coltrane’s music.

That open spiritual domain connects well to what Coltrane himself professed about religiosity in general: "I believe in all religions."<sup>37</sup> As a spiritual seeker, his religious eclecticism was related to his conviction that music had the power to expand consciousness in positive ways and transform people as a force for good, and that the divine could be more strongly expressed through music than through words. In this spirit, the Coltrane movement embraces a tolerant and respectful pluralism, based in part on Coltrane's own religious awakening and expansive approach to spirituality and also due to the religious diversity of its congregation and that of San Francisco's social variety and the visitors attracted to the city year-round. As Deacon Marlee-I Mystic characterizes it:

The Coltrane Church's approach to spiritual expression allows for a New Age-style of fellowship that is democratic and non-proselytizing, using the universal language of music as a platform to praise, meditate and fellowship with a galaxy of kindred souls from all walks of life . . . and fashions a home for Bay area residents and the world community of travelers seeking a cosmic religious experience.<sup>38</sup>

Do the beliefs and spiritualities associated with John Coltrane represent then one sort of future for religion in the urban sphere—acceptance of religious diversity, pluralism and ecumenicity, while at the same time being eclectic and implicit? This seems indeed to be the case, as an inclusive and expansive approach to urban religiosity that can be qualified as a modern stance, appropriate for the highly individualized and varied religious practices one finds in a metropolitan area. Western urban culture provides open and unrestricted possibilities for new forms of spirituality: from more cognitive-oriented reflective environments for self-actualization through Zen or meditation or mindfulness centers, for example, to more communal, participatory and corporeally related forms of religion in which the senses and emotions are more intensely addressed. An example of such new, open religious expressions is the Sunday Assembly movement. This is a global network of people—"a godless congregation that celebrates life"—that wants "to help everyone find and fulfill their full potential," which has been described as a utopia-like (or heavenly) existence.<sup>39</sup> The creation of "Urban Ashrams" is another example of this phenomenon, seeking to bring in the Hindu notion of a spiritual meditative site, a rural refuge, into Western urbanity (cf. Bivins 2015: 142–5). In 2011, this spiritual concept became explicitly connected to the Coltrane movement with the establishment of "The Coltrane Memorial Urban Ashram," a vehicle to achieve *A Love Supreme* life-style: "through devoted practice of universal truths we are living examples of the transformative power of the teachings of *A Love Supreme*."<sup>40</sup> It is in a similar, open and individualized way, accommodating the often holistic world views of modern urban residents, that Coltrane devotees from all over the world can relate in their own way to the weekly services on Fillmore Street.

Although the St. John Coltrane movement is often depicted by journalists in sensationalistic and superficial ways—as a fringe group of Coltrane zealots or



*Figure 10.3* Jamming and meditating on the music of *A Love Supreme* at the John Coltrane Church, August 2011. Photo by Peter Jan Margry.

an eccentric jazz version of Elvis devotion—its veneration of Coltrane’s life and music in fact mirrors the attitudes among jazz devotees and others about Coltrane as both a cultural and spiritual icon and inspirational source. For many, Coltrane represents one of the great individual achievements in American music and African American culture, a symbol of creative exploration, self-expression and excellence achieved through discipline, inspiration and hard work. For others, Coltrane embodies the freedom sought for by the Civil Rights movement and black cultural liberation—an example of African American equality and triumph in the face of racism and oppression—just as jazz as an urban phenomenon offered moments of equality and transcendence. The ethos of the church and the religious dimensions of the jam sessions also reflect Coltrane’s own deep spirituality and his perception of the transcendent and spiritual dimensions of music and musical performance. Thus, for many visitors to the church, the incarnation of the divine in John Coltrane and his music is present, regardless of whether such a belief is actually couched in other terms due to the current affiliation of the movement with the African Orthodox Church, and is expressed as well by the Coltrane Church itself: “We thank God for the anointed universal sound that leaped (leapt) down from the throne of heaven out of the very mind of God and incarnated in one Sri Rama Ohnedaruth the mighty mystic known as Saint John Will-I-Am Coltrane.”<sup>41</sup>

Jazz enthusiast Gary T. (age 38) from Chicago described his experience of the divine in Coltrane's music in the following way:

I'm not particularly religious, but I heard about the Coltrane Church, so checked it out. It sounded like a wild-ass combo of soulful jazz and serious spirituality. And it was, a righteous scene, and also a real welcoming vibe, people dancing and jamming. The sound just swallows you and the preaching connects. Those preacher-players are deep six in soul. The music gave me a taste of God, Coltrane's sound as a sacred thing.<sup>42</sup>

Eric Williamson (age 43), from Charlottesville, Virginia, no longer attends church services or practices religion within an institutionalized context, but says that his visit to the Coltrane Church evoked a sense of spiritual euphoria and shared joy:

Coltrane's music in particular is uplifting simply because of its genius. I personally think to celebrate the best and most exceptional in humanity is to celebrate the Creator . . . The experience was genuine and appealed to a sense of the sublime. I felt a sense of being united with others in the abstract and being a part of something bigger for a brief time. It definitely felt therapeutic.<sup>43</sup>

In a similar manner, jazz commentator Gordon Polatnick (2000) described his experience of Coltrane's music as one of belonging, divine love, and faith:

Sometimes I think I'm the only one who understands what true religion is. It's that cozy state of mind where nothing is more apparent than the unsailable fact that each of us belongs here on Earth, and is deeply loved by an enduring spirit. If you've got that kind of religion, you want to share it.

## **Conclusion**

As no other jazz musician, John Coltrane symbolizes the consanguinity and fusion of jazz and religion, a symbolic interrelationship that is still mediated in the present. Although the cultus of Coltrane is formally embedded within the Christian framework of the African Orthodox Church, research on the weekly practices of the Coltrane movement shows that the musical services devoted to him have a much wider character related to multi-faith and secularist metropolitan urbanicity. The urban renewals of the old Western Addition and Mission districts of San Francisco and the church's forced relocation to a new part of town in the year 2000 weakened its connection to the mainly African American community it had served for years and jeopardized its future, with a decline of locals as well as travelers at the services. Considering the obstacles that the church has faced over the decades—as a jazz-based, non-mainstream African American religious movement that has survived gentrification, exorbitant rents, "cult" accusations, the loss and alienation of community—it is remarkable that the Coltrane Church

still exists at all after 45 years. Indeed, its future remains uncertain, as the ongoing gentrification process has pushed out much of the older community and the church continues to struggle with financial issues. However, since the church's return to the heart of the Fillmore district in 2007, weekly attendance seems to be on the upswing, with a flow of visiting jazz enthusiasts and travelers that have added an increasingly dominant global dimension to the services, and who also drop a few bucks into the church donation basket which is circulated throughout the service.

Nonetheless, those who attend the religious performances at St. John's—regular participants and many visitors alike—do not just worship the Christian God, or in fact may not even do that at all: they celebrate the divine genius of John Coltrane and his jazz music as a religious expression. Participants regularly explain how the worship services are transformative, a communion with jazz as sacred music, in a personalized and welcoming communal context. As a grass-roots expression of contemporary spirituality, the individualized and inclusive aspects of the Coltrane movement provide insights into the nature of urban religious expression in the twenty-first century. The eclectic and hybrid spirit of the Coltrane Church and the religiosity evoked by Coltrane's music are necessarily products of the urban milieu, where musical forms like jazz and an open orientation towards alternative and multiple religious expressions have been mutually productive and synergetic. Although limited in size, the movement's "churched" status, recently situated in a renovated, gentrified and cool San Francisco district now attracts new audiences open for spiritual experiences and thus allows the movement to survive and spread Coltrane's message and musical charisma worldwide. In this context, the church has created an expansive religious podium where a great variety of devotees and spiritual travelers can find comfort and meaning within the urban environment through the collective celebration of jazz as the divine expression of John Coltrane.

## Notes

- 1 Oriah Vaughn, personal communication to authors, June 6, 2015.
- 2 Although the religious origins and dimensions of jazz are most frequently associated with Christianity, musicians have drawn upon numerous other religious traditions as well, including Islam, Judaism, Bahá'í, and Buddhism (see Bivins 2015; Stowe 2010).
- 3 For a discussion of jazz communitarianism, see Bivins (2015: 112–47).
- 4 See, among others, Peretti (1997); Floyd (1996); Gennari (2006); DeVeaux (1997); Murray (1989); Porter (2002); Neal (1999: 1–23); Ramsey (2003); Berliner (1994); Monson (1996); Levine (1977: 155–89, 292–7); Rosenthal (1992); Saul (2003); Stowe (2010), and Fischlin et al. (2013).
- 5 Cf. Leonard (1987); Stowe (2010: 312–14) also uses metaphors in discussing the relationship between jazz and religion, not making clear to what extent jazz could be religion in itself and not only an avenue by which existing religious forms can be mediated.
- 6 During the production process of this volume, the Coltrane Church was forced to move its location once again due to further gentrification and an increase in rent. Eventually, around April 2016, the church found a new shared space a few blocks

- away at 2097 Turk Street (Western Addition), in the St. Cyprian's Episcopal Church and its arts community center.
- 7 Franzo Wayne King was raised in Los Angeles and comes from a family of preachers (the Church of God in Christ, an African American Pentecostal denomination), reared in the tradition of the Pentecostal school of black homiletics. Initially, he worked as a hairdresser, and then after establishing the Coltrane movement, he studied with the leaders of the African Orthodox Church in Chicago in the early 1980s, receiving his Doctor of Divinity degree in 1984. King is an experienced saxophonist as well.
  - 8 Before the church found its most recent storefront housing on Fillmore Street, it used an upper room in the St. Paulus Lutheran Church at 930 Gough Street and operated a co-ministry, between 2000 and 2007. For a history of the church up to the year 2000 as recorded by one of its members, see Baham (2001); his revised and updated analysis is the first book-length study of the church and its role as a community institution (Baham 2015).
  - 9 See US Census Bureau at <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/06/06075.html>; accessed August 15, 2016.
  - 10 By 2013, the median price of a home in San Francisco had reached \$1,000,000. See Elise Hu (2013), How This Bay Area Tech Boom's Different From the Last One. *All Tech Considered* (National Public Radio), 13 December; <http://www.npr.org/sections/alltechconsidered/2013/12/17/251996835/how-this-bay-area-tech-booms-different-from-the-the-last-one>; accessed 12 March 2015; also Joe Kloc (2014), Tech Boom Forces a Ruthless Gentrification in San Francisco, *Newsweek* (April 15); <http://www.newsweek.com/2014/04/25/tech-boom-forces-ruthless-gentrification-san-francisco-248135.html>; accessed March 12, 2015.
  - 11 Hanna Morjan, personal communication to authors, May 2, 2015.
  - 12 [www.westbaysf.org/about.htm](http://www.westbaysf.org/about.htm); accessed April 6, 2014.
  - 13 Liner notes to *A Love Supreme* (1965).
  - 14 In the late 1960s, prior to the foundation of the One Mind Temple Evolutionary Transitional Body of Christ, the group was first called the Yardbird Club and then the Yardbird Temple, beginning as a small "listening clinic," dedicated to saxophonist Charlie "Yardbird" Parker and John Coltrane; the name was then changed to the Vanguard Revolutionary Church of the Hour in 1969, identifying as a black nationalist group with paramilitary leanings aligned with the Black Panthers, emphasizing social change and revolution, and influenced by the ideas of Dr. Huey Newton according to founder Franzo King, who explained that the church eventually shifted its emphasis from revolution to "spiritual evolution" (Washington 2001: 408–9).
  - 15 See Freedman (2007); Washington (2001: 394); Saint John Coltrane African Orthodox Church website: <http://www.coltranechurch.org/#!/about/csgz>; accessed April 3, 2014.
  - 16 G. Duncan Hinkson left the African Orthodox Church in 1984 and created his own independent jurisdiction, the African Orthodox Church of the West, consecrating Franzo King as a bishop.
  - 17 [https://m.facebook.com/stjohncoltranechurchwest/about?expand\\_all=1](https://m.facebook.com/stjohncoltranechurchwest/about?expand_all=1); accessed April 1, 2006.
  - 18 King quoted in the documentary *The Church of Saint John Coltrane*, by Gayle Gilma and Jeff Swimmer (Tango Films, 1996).
  - 19 For the mission of the Coltrane Church, see its Facebook page at: [https://m.facebook.com/stjohncoltranechurchwest/about?expand\\_all=1](https://m.facebook.com/stjohncoltranechurchwest/about?expand_all=1); accessed August 15, 2016.
  - 20 Oriah Vaughn, personal communication to authors, June 6, 2015.
  - 21 Implicit religion is a concept proposed by sociologist Edward Bailey: an expression of the *seemingly* secular (in this case, jazz music) that contains a religious dimension of its own (Bailey 1997; cf. Margry 2012; Bivins 2015).
  - 22 See the interview with Dukes and Franzo King in 2010 at <http://openspace.sfmoma.org/2010/01/interview-with-coltrane-icon-painter-mark-dukes-and-archbishop-franzo-king/>; accessed August 15, 2016.

- 23 Lyrics from “Lush Life,” performed on the 1963 studio album *John Coltrane and Johnny Hartman* (Strayhorn 1997).
- 24 Prior to the noon worship services, Deacon Marlee-I Mystic leads “A Love Supreme Meditation” at 10:30 a.m. that involves the recitation of Coltrane’s spiritual testimony from his liner notes of *A Love Supreme* and concludes with the singing of the devotional poem he wrote, the words of which correspond to the music of the fourth movement, “Psalm.” Apart from the weekly services, the Reverend Wanika King-Stephens and Marlee-I Mystic also host the “Saint John Will-I-Am Coltrane Uplift Broadcast,” which airs every Tuesday from noon to 4 p.m. on KPOO 89.5 FM. The show includes the music and inspirational words of wisdom from John Coltrane.
- 25 The fieldwork for this essay was executed in the summers of 2011 and 2012, fall 2012, summer 2013 and spring 2015.
- 26 This happens regularly during the winter when there are fewer people visiting San Francisco and the church.
- 27 See the Saint John Coltrane African Orthodox Church website: <http://www.coltranechurch.org/#!/services/c8k2>; accessed August 15, 2016; on the polymorphous sound of jazz as prayer, see Bivins (2014).
- 28 The African Orthodox Church celebrates the seven sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church, follows Eastern and Western rites and liturgies, and affirms the Nicene Creed, the Apostles’ Creed, and the Athanasian Creed in an amalgamation of various religious traditions.
- 29 <http://www.yelp.com/biz/the-st-john-coltrane-african-orthodox-church-san-francisco>; accessed April 6, 2014.
- 30 The African Orthodox Church began as a denomination for black Episcopalians, founded in 1921 by George Alexander McGuire at time when people of color were excluded from advancement in the Episcopal Church. Its early membership was primarily West Indian; the AOC currently has approximately 2,500 members organized around 17 parishes throughout the world, in which the St. John Coltrane Church is the only branch in the western United States (Pruter 2006: 85). As an independent movement that arose in response to the exclusionary racism of white churches at the time, the AOC has a history of opposition and controversy, as its founder McGuire was consecrated a bishop in 1921 by the controversial renegade *episcopus vagans* (“stray bishop”) Joseph René Vilatte (1854–1929), a consecration enacted to place McGuire and the AOC in apostolic succession, but an apostolic status condemned as schismatic by the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East (Brandreth 1987 [1947]: 70).
- 31 <http://www.coltranechurch.org/#!/mission/c21kz>; accessed February 20, 2015.
- 32 <http://www.yelp.com/biz/the-st-john-coltrane-african-orthodox-church-san-francisco>; accessed April 6, 2014.
- 33 King quoted in Boulware (2000); accessed April 6, 2014.
- 34 <http://www.coltranechurch.org/#!/about/csgz>; accessed February 20, 2015.
- 35 Quotations from the documentary *The Church of Saint John Coltrane* by Gayle Gilma and Jeff Swimmer (Tango Films, 1996).
- 36 King quoted in Cox (1995: 154).
- 37 Text on backside of Coltrane’s album *Meditations* (1966), the spiritual follow-up to *A Love Supreme*.
- 38 Marlee-I Mystic, personal communication to authors, April 11, 2014.
- 39 See, for example: <http://soulpancake.com/conversations/view/6789/does-religion-enable-humans-to-reach-their-full-potential.html>; accessed August 15, 2016 and [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientology\\_beliefs\\_and\\_practices](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientology_beliefs_and_practices); accessed August 15, 2016.
- 40 <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Coltrane-Memorial-Urban-Ashram/32892971049> 1994; accessed August 15, 2016.
- 41 At the beginning of the Coltrane movement, it was believed that Coltrane was a god or an incarnation of God, but as of 1982 Coltrane became Saint John within the AOC and

since then his music is perceived a divine incarnation; cf. <http://www.coltranechurch.org/#!/about/csgz>; accessed August 15, 2016.

42 Gary T., personal communication to authors, April 25, 2015.

43 Eric Williamson, personal communication to authors, May 31, 2015.

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