**Rich Alderson**

I became a jazz aficionado after discovering the music through Charlie Parker records. John Coltrane's music in 1961 wasn't as ear-shattering or surprising to me as that. To my ears, it seemed like that he was progressing in a way that he had been doing since his days with Miles. That's when I first heard him and got to know his sound at the Village Vanguard and other clubs. He was at the jazz forefront then and at the Village Gate he was definitely still there. He had just started to have a lot of commercial success with "My Favorite Things." It was exciting to have Coltrane at the Gate that summer, because it felt so new and different—like something was getting ready to happen.

I have been a recording engineer and producer all of my life. It all started for me growing up in Cleveland. I loved all kinds of classical music at first, including Schoenberg and Webern. My career was based on the fact that I was a hi-fi hobbyist. I built my first hi-fi when I was 15. But I always wanted to be a sound engineer. I visited New York City for the first time when I was 18. Soon after that I got married for the first time and we moved to the Village and lived at 148 Bleecker Street between Thompson and West Broadway, later renamed LaGuardia Place.

My career started at Art D'Lugoff's Village Gate around the spring of 1961 when I was 22. The club had opened a few years before and was literally one half-block away, on Bleecker between Sullivan and Thompson. Back then the entrance was on Thompson Street. I was hired to put in the club's sound system and help run the sound. The system they had was more a public address thing—it was a joke. But back then most clubs didn't have what you'd even call a system. I brought in three KLH speakers, an amplifier and an Altec mixer—no speakers onstage. That was very elaborate at the time. A year later, I put in a smaller version of the same setup for the Gaslight folk club on MacDougal. Art was my champion and mentor and recommended me around even after I left, helping get me work.

It was Chip Monck who first introduced me to Art. Chip was the Village Gate's lighting director who started as a janitor, worked his way up and eventually put in a professional lighting system and recommended me to come in and build the sound system. We had a good rapport and worked the shows together. People were amazed—they had never seen light and sound working in sync that way. Chip later went on to design stages and lighting for the Monterey Pop Festival, Woodstock and then the Rolling Stones. At that time, he was living in a room off the club's main room and I'm sure I was between wives at that point because I remember spending a month there that summer. That's where Bob Dylan hung out and wrote "A Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall."

The Village was a hotbed of activity then—bars and nightclubs with comedy shows, experimental theater, poetry readings and live music. Even in the restaurants: folk, Broadway, jazz. The whole scene was getting popular. I remember a whole lot of people at the Gaslight and Café Wha? and after a while, the same thing at the Village Gate.

In 1961 the Village Gate was one of the bigger and better jazz clubs in the city. It was just one room then. The theater upstairs, and the other spaces came later. Most of the clubs like the Village Vanguard and the Five Spot were small. The Gate could seat a few hundred people for dining and they had very good food. And they were starting to get some top jazz performers in '61, like Nina Simone, John Coltrane, Art Blakey, Horace Silver and Herbie Mann. D'Lugoff had a reputation for doing eclectic booking, like comedy and jazz on the same night, or folk music and Broadway. Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't.

That's also when some of the record companies started recording at the Gate. Colpix hired me to do a recording and also paid the club. That's my voice on the recording saying, "At this time the Village Gate takes great pleasure in presenting Miss Nina Simone." My voice sounds much like it did then. A year later, I recorded Bob Dylan at the Gaslight, and some other jazz musicians like Thelonious Monk at the Gate again.

With these reels of Coltrane and his group, I hadn't planned to record any music surreptitiously and D'Lugoff didn't know I had. I wanted to know how the system sounded in the room. I also wanted to test a new ribbon microphone that Bob Fine—of Fine Recording Studio—gave me. Bob was a mentor of mine. The mic was an old RCA 77-A that I modified by removing the back to make it more omnidirectional and sound less boxy.

When I recorded Coltrane, it was the only time I ever used just one mic for a live performance. If the recording was intended for commercial release, I used a fuller setup. In '82, with Grover Washington, Jr., I had a full recording truck and I more gear than you could shake a stick at. At the Gate, the ideal spot for the mic was in the ceiling above the stage, so I placed the RCA there and ran a line through the length of the club into Chip's digs and recorded the music on a Nagra III reel-to-reel. I remember checking the sound with a set of Beyer headphones.

On this recording, even without any mixing, you can hear Coltrane and the drums very well, and also piano, bass, and Dolphy. It also got a nice room sound, with all the people and applause. I can see that basement room in this recording, and the power of that group, especially Elvin Jones. For me, he was the greatest jazz drummer I ever knew, hands down. The way he played was perfect for Coltrane and he excelled at that. We got to be friends and we had a plan to work together on a movie with this photographer I knew. It was going to be called *Pigeons on the Grass, Alas* from the Gertrude Stein poem, and shot in Bryant Park. Elvin was going to do the soundtrack. We got as far as a storyboard with lots of pigeons, but that's where it ended.

I graduated from working the clubs in the Village to working with Harry Belafonte and then started my own recording studio on 65th Street near Broadway, which I called RLA Sound at first—my initials—and later, Impact Sound. That was Harry's suggestion. He became my partner. Over the next few years at Impact, I did most of the recordings of ESP Records and sessions for other labels like Prestige, Fania, and others. In 1965 and '66, I was hired to build Bob Dylan's stage sound system and went on the road with him. Around that time, I also got involved with the Institute of Sound at Carnegie Hall, a small non-profit run by a former child actor named Richard Stryker, which was dedicated to preserving historic recordings, primarily opera.

Eventually, when Nixon was elected in '68, I decided to leave the country and left all my reels—music by different musicians, my own *musique concrete* stuff—with the Institute. Six years later I came back and found out that Richard had died and all of the recordings had been given to the New York Public Library. For a long time, I didn't even know they were there until Parker Fishel, a Dylan archivist, found a box marked "Alderson?"—with the question mark. Fishel was only looking for the Gaslight tapes. The rest were processed by the Library, including the Coltrane reels. I was relieved that the box was finally found but there's one recording that's still lost that I wish they would find: a *musique concrete* piece I made cutting and editing Bix Beiderbecke's "In a Mist." I was very proud of that one.

I'm grateful that these tapes were found and I'm happy I recorded them. In a way, I wish I had done more like this, but I never did. I was young and a recording engineer for hire and when I was asked to do that, I did a good job. That summer, Coltrane sounded amazing, and I loved where he went with his music after that, when he became more avant-garde and really took jazz one step further. He never became the pop artist that you might think he was heading to become. He took all the notoriety he got from "My Favorite Things" and developed it into something even better.