

# Charlie Wilson: The GAP Band, cocaine, his wife, and his music

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"Piebald" Ennis

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Chicago, IL - Really, the Gap Band are members of the primacy of R&B/Funk innovators. Three Black men out of Tulsa, Okla., took us by storm — they knocked us out!

We have loved their music, their modernism, and their lyrics for years. C'mon, their songs' hooks have become a hip part of our vernacular. "Oops Upside Your Head (I Don't Believe You Want to Get up and Dance)," and "You Dropped a Bomb on Me."

Ronnie, Robert, and Charlie Wilson, their impression on us, simply: "Outstanding."

Charlie Wilson and his brothers formed what was originally known as the Greenwood, Archer, and Pine Streets Band; their derivational name represented the Black business district in Tulsa. The young artists soon found out that printing such a long name required too much space, so they were forced to decrease the amount of letters. That reality coupled with a typographical error resulted in fertile soil for their new name: GAP Band, to take hold as securely as the Oklahoma Rose.

Their early years were spent touring all over Oklahoma performing in country

clubs, country saloons, juke joints, supper clubs — you name it, chances are they did it. They were a hard-working, young, energetic group, and all were mere teenagers when they started — teenagers with matchless, marvelous talents. Their study and mastery of instruments span the spectrum; the Wilson brothers are meritoriously learned in the performance of percussion, brass, and string instruments.

For those who go way back with the GAP Band, their earliest memories of their genius group is the "snazzy juke tune," "Shake." Although "Shake" was not their debut, it was their first chart-topper, ranking at number four on the national R&B chart. "Shake" is definitely the GAP Band's spaceship, so to speak, that they used to rise to stardom.

**"Yearning for Your Love"**

And, as the saying goes, when it rains it pours, their first hit lead to many more. Four of the GAP Band's nine albums have gone platinum many times. Their eclectic sound attracted heavy-hitters in the industry, and they began touring with all-time best selling artists, such as The Eagles, the Rolling Stones and KISS. Their ability to hang with the big boys of Rock & Roll has earned them the title — the "Black Aerosmith."

Their innovative style has



CHARLIE WILSON

become ingrained in the music industry. So much so that over 150 artists have sampled their funky music. And if you listen closely, you can hear when Madonna, George Michael and Tina Turner have yearned for some of that GAP Band love.

**"Oops Upside His Head"**

Money, fame, and a devil-may-care attitude, can sometimes lead to big trouble. For Charlie Wilson, it led the once choir boy and church band member to a life festering with loose women, a steady stream of alcohol and hardcore drugs. Wilson and his brothers came of age in their father's Pentecostal church, however, their gift for producing cutting edge R&B music took them far from home, and their attractiveness, youth, and talent landed them in circles of people who sought to be filled with more than the Holy Spirit.

Although, each Wilson brother has had his difficulty; Charlie Wilson, eventually found himself on a path that was leading straight to a shameful and certain death. His life had come undone, and, consequently, he had no other choice than to acquire professional help to loose him from the life that had him bound to misery.

**"Mo' Better Mahin"**

It's fair to say, that she, Dr. Mahin (his future wife), dropped the bomb on the brick wall that had become Charlie Wilson's life. He admits to having been a stone cold drug addict, partier, and ladies man who had lost it all. Wilson has said, "I wasted 12-14 years smoking cocaine." He's been homeless,

Enter Mahin

We know the scene from "Mo' Better Blues": Bleeke Gilliam (Denzel Washington) walks to Indigo Downes' (Joie Lee) house in the rain and, in a moment of truth, vulnerability, and acceptance, Gilliam asks Downes to save his life, to save him from the streets, himself, and nothingness. She accepts, and gives him the world — unconditional love, matrimony and a higher-level of manhood. Gilliam and Downes' story was told from beginning to end in 130 minutes.

However, Wilson's life is no Spike Lee Joint, his is a very real and harrowing experience that was complicated by a perilous bout with that ol' white devil — cocaine (the real white devil.) His fierce addiction lasted more than a decade.

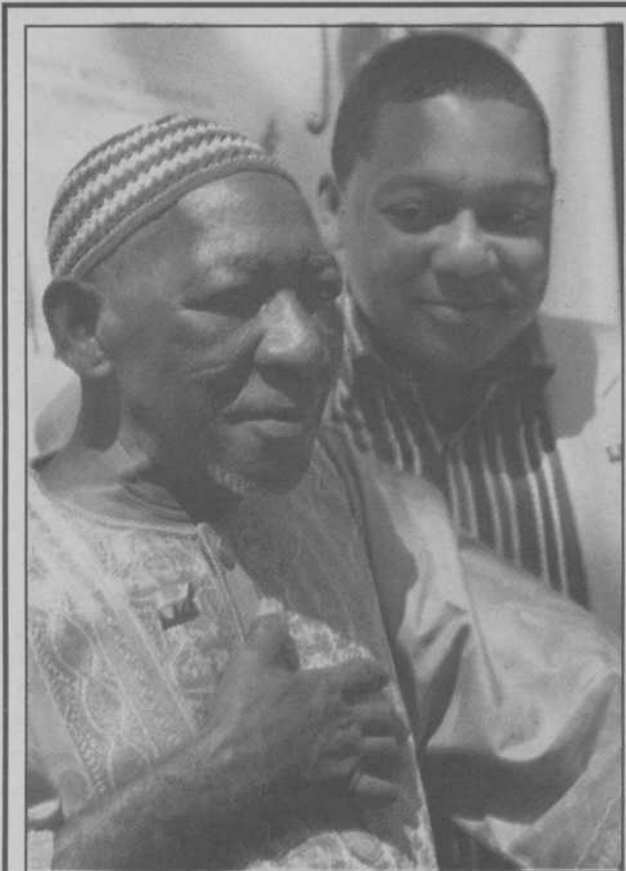
To date, he's been clean and sober for 11 years, a sobriety he attributes largely to God, his wife and the 12-Step Program.

Wilson says of his wife, "I didn't have anything, nothing! I was in rehab. Then she came. She told me she wouldn't let my feet hit the

ground. I didn't even know her, she bought me a house, and furnished it. I didn't even know who she was.

I knew she was a doctor, but I didn't know her. I even tried to get away from her, but she wouldn't let me go. She'd jump in the car with me, rollers in her hair and all — if I was going somewhere, she was going with me. Everybody wanted to know what she wanted with me — I didn't have anything. But, she stayed with me through it all. And, that's why I call her my walking rehab."

Wilson went on to say that after two years of pure resistance, her love and persistence finally won him over, and he married her. If in the back of your mind you're hearing Gladys Knight and the Pips's "You're the Best Thing That Ever Happened To Me," you're right on cue. When Charlie Wilson talks about his wife Mahin, and how her love saved his life, one can't help but understand Gladys when she sings: "If anyone should ever write my life story/For whatever reason there might be/Oh, you'll be there, between each line (See Wilson, Page 15)



## SHARING FROM THE HEART

Ghanaian drum master Yacub Adda, left, as famed trumpeter Wynton Marsalis listens at a news conference in New Orleans on Monday. They are announcing a week of free programs for all ages, including concerts, master classes, clinics and workshops.

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