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**JIMMY COBB**  
**NEA Jazz Master (2009)**

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**Brower:** It is Monday, July 26th, the year 2010. I am William Alston Brower. I am here to interview Jimmy Cobb on behalf of the Smithsonian Jazz Oral History Program. We're in New York City at the Wells Hotel.

Mr. Cobb, if you could – we want to go from the beginning. So would you introduce us to your parents?

**Jimmy:** My mother is Katherine Bivens Cobb, and my father is Wilbur Cobb. They met somewhere around before I was born and got married and had me. He's from Carolina somewhere, and she's from southern Maryland. How they got together, I'm not really sure about that. That's how it happened. They tell me I was born in Corcoran Street – 1515 Corcoran Street – in the basement. But I'm not really sure of that even. Sometime I have to try to check that out myself. Every time I go by there I look and say, well, maybe that was where it was.

**Brower:** That's in northwest Washington [D.C.]

**Jimmy:** Yeah, northwest, 1515. In fact, in Corcoran Street, I lived in two or three – over my lifetime, I lived in about three blocks of Corcoran Street. I remember being in – I don't remember being in the 1500 block. That's before memory. Later on I was in the

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1300 block, between 14th Street and 13th Street. Then, a little bit later, I was in the 1700 block. That was 1725 Corcoran. I remember Corcoran Street because it has a big spot in my life span.

That was it. My mother was from southern Maryland, which is about 32 miles – a place called La Plata, Maryland, which is about 32 miles south of Washington, down [highway] 301. When I got old enough to be going to school, I used to go back there for the summer. I used to spend the summertime down in my grandfather's farm – tobacco farm.

So that's basically how I got started. I stayed around Washington a long time. Being where we were brought up, there was not a lot of places where you could be. So my mother had me – she put me in a Catholic school which was not too far from where we lived. That was – I think the Catholic school was St. Augustine's. It was right in the neighborhood. I remember going there mostly all my life from kindergarten until I graduated to go to the ninth grade to go to high school.

**Brower:** St. Augustine's – that's about 15th and V [streets], or something like that?

**Jimmy:** Yeah, it's right in there somewhere. I'm trying to think. Yeah, it's right there. I used to walk – be able to walk to school from wherever we were living at the time. I remember that. The teachers – sisters always - I remember them being nice and kind to me, the Dominican sisters, I think they call it. That was it for me. I was right in the neighborhood. I could go to school there. I remember one little girl that lived in the neighborhood. My mother used to get her to take me – by the time I got to go to school – used to get her to take me to school, because she went to St. Augustine's too. Her name was Connie Wittingham. She was a little girl that used to carry me to school who I met a lot later, after I grew up. She had moved to Detroit. So I remember little things like that, just being around that neighborhood.

From being born until I went to school, I don't remember much about that. I remember being in a position where I used to go to school, but by the time I got to go to school, there would be a little bully in the neighborhood that would take whatever little money I had. It was guys – bigger guys used to walk around and take money from little kids. I remember that happening, because I remember once he took some money from me, and I threw a rock at him for doing it. He got – I remember it was a yard. Right on the corner was a yard. I threw a rock across the yard and missed him. He threw a brick across the yard and hit me in the head. Those are the kinds of things I remember about childhood, stuff like that, and being in that neighborhood.

Overall, I like Washington, because until I was 21, that's all I knew, was Washington. About the childhood, going to St. Augustine's school was nice. Like I say, I went the whole time. I never went to another school, like a middle school or any of that. I just

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went from kindergarten all the way out until I went to high school. I don't know what I can think about in between that.

**Brower:** Do you remember the Depression? You were born on the cusp of the Depression. Do you remember that at all?

**Jimmy:** I guess I was too young to remember it. I just remember they didn't have food stamps or nothing like that. I remember you could go to the store and buy \$5 worth of groceries and have to have somebody help you bring it back, because the dollar was worth a lot of money. I remember cigarettes being 15 cents a pack. At the corner store where I was, they used to sell cigarettes by the penny. They used to be a penny apiece, and the guys going – because they didn't have any money. It must have been the Depression then. They didn't have any money. They'd buy a penny a cigarette. I remember it because I'd say, that couldn't be too much money. The owner's making like five cents on a pack of cigarettes. They was really hustling hard back then. So that must be in the Depression.

You could go get flour, sugar – what is it? – fatback, all that stuff that you needed to cook with in the ghetto, give them \$5, and have some change coming. A carton of cigarettes, it was like a \$1.39 or something like – maybe not that much, may \$1.10 for ten packs of cigarettes.

**Brower:** What did your parents do?

**Jimmy:** By the time I got to be seven years old, I was separated – my mother and father were separated. So my mother pulled the duty of taking care of me and my sister by herself. She was a domestic worker. She used to work in people's houses later for \$15, \$20 an hour, to take care of us all her life. That's what she did. She was gone most of the time.

**Brower:** You mean \$15, \$20 a week?

**Jimmy:** No.

**Brower:** An hour?

**Jimmy:** I think she might have been – maybe it was a day. I don't know. She was getting minimum money for what she had to do. She was a hard-working woman. Basically, I had to be home, when I got old enough, to take care of my sister. My sister was a couple of years younger than me. Her name was Eleanor. So I was the man. I had to take care of her. So we would be together all the time. Everywhere I'd go, she had to go, because I couldn't leave her anywhere. We got to be like sister and brother, for sure.

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I remember doing that, and growing up in Corcoran Street with a lot of friends. The guys used to come and hang out in my house. This – I’m progressing now. I’m getting to be a teenager. Guys are coming to hang out in my house. I had records. I had to do a lot of different kind of things to take care of myself, to supplement my mother’s income, so that we could have some things that we needed. I had a shoeshine box. Sometime I would go and shine shoes. Then I had – eventually I had a paper route. That was pretty good. It was right in the neighborhood, which was very good for me, because I could just get up and within the circumference of two or three blocks, I had a paper route. I could go and do that.

All of this is for me hustling on the side. Back then, they had a thing where you could save bottle tops and stuff like that, and turn them in, and go to the movies, like if you had – what? – 20 bottle tops, whatever they advertised that you had. It was a whole lot of different things – when you used to talk about the Depression, they would say that you could save tinfoil and put it in a ball, and you take it to the junkyard, and the guy would buy it from you, because of the war effort, because that was right – by the time I was a teenager, it was wartime, ’41 to ’45, right in there. So there was a whole lot of things you could do. You could sell scrap iron at the junkyard. So we used to do all that stuff to get money enough to go to the movies, which was like maybe 10 or 15 cents. I used to go on Saturday and stay all day. I used to see all the Westerns and all the – they had things called chapters, episodes of thing. They give you 15 minutes, and then get to a climactic part. The end of it says, “continued next week.” I was hooked on that. It’s almost like the ladies get hooked on their daytime shows now.

I used to do all of that stuff. I remember one time, when I got old enough and strong enough, the guy used to come through the street on an ice truck. He used to recruit young boys to take ice up to people’s apartments. So I used – I did that. That was about \$5 a day. I remember doing that. People would order like 50 pounds of ice. Take it. Put on your back. If they’re on the third floor, walk up to the third floor, get to put it in the ice box. Come back down – get your money and come back down. Figure \$5 is a lot of money for – back then, for young men that didn’t have any money. So I used to do that. I had all kind of little hustles that I did to make things happen. I did those.

Later – this is much later – I probably got interested in the drums, because there was one of the guys in the block, it was his hobby. We used to hang out in my house, because one of them gigs, I had the paper route. There was one lady in particular that knew I was interested in music. So she used to buy me all the latest records of the time, the hits, like Tommy Dorsey, Artie Shaw, Benny Goodman, Count Basie. She used to buy me all those kind of records. But all the time I was listening to Billy Eckstine’s big band, which had all the bad guys in it. Everybody that really got to be big time into jazz music had been in that band. Either Earl Hines – they came from Earl Hines. A lot of them came from Earl

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Hines to join Billy Eckstine's band. Between those two bands, all those guys that you know about: Dexter [Gordon], Charlie Parker, Miles [Davis], Dizzy [Gillespie], J. J. Johnson, and – what's the boy that played the baritone? – Leo Parker, all them guys. Leo Parker was from my hometown. A little later on I had a chance to play with him when I learned how to play.

So all those guys I was listening to, growing up, and me and this guy – his name was Walter Watkins – we used to sit in my house and listen to records all day long, while my mother was working. I got interested in playing the drums from him. We used to sit there and play these records, and take our knuckles and play rhythm on the side of the tables with the records. So I said, maybe I should buy some drums.

**Brower:** Let me stop you. As you said, you fast-forwarded. At what age did the spark of music get you, if you can . . . ?

**Jimmy:** Actually it was in my teens, I think. I was living in a neighborhood where you could hear the music – it was like, the people in the ghetto, they work all week, they get their little money, they buy their little refreshments, and they go home, and they play their music.

**Brower:** So it was in the air, so to speak.

**Jimmy:** Yeah. When you walk down the street, you could hear Father Divine. If you went past the church, you could hear him getting down, and Elder Michaux. You remember Elder Michaux?

**Brower:** Michaux was over by Griffith Stadium, right?

**Jimmy:** Yeah.

**Brower:** Cross from . . . . Let me ask you, because you said you would save your money. You'd go to the movies. Was the center of that life U Street at that point?

**Jimmy:** Yeah. U Street. The center was – for the ghetto, U Street was the center. I used to walk from school, from St. Augustine's, to U Street to a cafe called You and Me. Used to be right next to the Republic Theater. It was a little cafe. I used to – I remember going up there. I always loved tuna fish all my life. So I used to walk up there, get a tuna fish sandwich and a milkshake for lunch, and then go back to school. So that was like the – that was the boardwalk for the ghetto, then.

**Brower:** What would have been the theaters where you would go see these movies?

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**Jimmy:** From 15th to 14th Street was Booker T. From 14th to 13th Street was Republic. From 13th Street to 12th Street was Lincoln, where the Colonnade and all that stuff was. You know. You were there. You worked there.

**Brower:** I worked in the Lincoln Theater when it was revived. I ain't that old.

**Jimmy:** [laughter] Okay. Don't take me there.

**Brower:** I heard about it.

**Jimmy:** That was it. We had three theaters that we could go to.

**Brower:** Was the Howard a part of your life?

**Jimmy:** Yeah.

**Brower:** And the Dunbar?

**Jimmy:** Yeah. The Dunbar was where I used to go every Saturday to see all those Westerns and stuff, because they don't have that – they didn't have that up on U Street.

**Brower:** What was the difference between what you could see on U Street and the Dunbar? Who was on U Street?

**Jimmy:** The Dunbar did the B movies and the C movies, like the Westerns, where Tim H[?] and all those old guys. What's the boy that died? His father was – Tex Ritter. You could see all those kind of movies there. Shoot-em-ups. That's what we called it: shoot-em-ups. And chapters. We called them chapters, but it was a serial that happened every week. You have to come back next week to see what's happened. That's to suck you back in there. So I used to do that. I used to go do that. I enjoyed it. I used to stay in there from morning to night, eating popcorn and candy and stuff until I got sick. Then I'd go home.

**Brower:** So the distinction was sort of – the Dunbar was where the – let's say the shorties went, and the Howard was for the adults, more or less.

**Jimmy:** Well, the Dunbar was – the Howard was like a variety theater. You could go there and see shows. They didn't really show that many good pictures there. Their thing was basically for the shows. They'd have something to stick in there between shows, but it wasn't like big-time theater. Up on U Street was where the theaters – where you could see the best movies. So that's where I used to go, because you couldn't go downtown anywhere. You could, but you had to sit way upstairs in the crow's nest in the balcony. I

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really wasn't there for that one. So we had three theaters that we could go to – four – five, actually, if you're going to count Dunbar and Howard.

**Brower:** You're mentioning, without being very direct about it, racism, discrimination. How aware at that point in your life were you that your life was circumscribed. There was places you could go – not places you could go. Was that a dominant thing in your life? Or was your life so full within that community that it didn't matter?

**Jimmy:** We kept to ourselves enough, but if something happened where it involved the police, you can see where it was like that, because by the time I got old enough, there were no guys was doing different things that I wasn't doing. Guys would get busted for a little joint in a matchbox and do five years. That's really ridiculous, for what it was. That was only in the ghetto. I don't think they did that in the other neighborhoods. So it was things like that that made you know that that was going on. Or if you get caught doing some stuff, they would rough you up probably more than they would do in the other neighborhoods.

**Brower:** What about things like shopping for clothes or normal things that people did in the course of the day? Did you feel limited by not going downtown, so to speak, and doing those things on 7th Street more so, or whatever?

**Jimmy:** You could go downtown, but there was some things – Washington is in between Virginia and Maryland. That kind of a situation, you're in a sandwich there, of people not thinking the way you think. They think that their way is the right way, something like that. We was right in the middle of that. We could go to – what was the places downtown, the big what's-the-name stores?

**Brower:** Like maybe – shopping stores?

**Jimmy:** Yeah.

**Brower:** I couldn't speak of them, because I wasn't there. Maybe like a Garfinkel's, by the time I got there.

**Jimmy:** I don't know if it was Garfinkel's. No, it was something else. It was two other stores that I can't think what the names of it was. Since then they turned them into something else.

**Brower:** Are there distinctions like, you could buy the clothes but couldn't try them on?

**Jimmy:** Yeah, that was going on.

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**Brower:** Maybe you could buy a hat, but you couldn't put it on your head, or these types of things.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, that kind of thing. All of that was going on. We just tried to ignore that. I remember being – once, by the time I got to be a teenager, there was one store that the brothers liked for that, because they had the top-shelf stuff, the sport shirts and all that stuff. Louis and Thomas Salt. You know that place?

**Brower:** Yeah, I've heard that name.

**Jimmy:** That was big-time in the ghetto, for then. If you had something out of there, you was in big-time. Sort of like – that was one place that you could go. They probably figured you the same way, but if you had the money, you could buy whatever they had to sell. There was – I'm trying to think. The department store is about to come. Lansburgh? Is that the name?

**Brower:** Lansburgh. Okay. It's now where the Shakespeare Theater is. It's an old Lansburgh there.

**Jimmy:** Yeah. They changed it into something else. There was another one. I can't think what that was. Those you could go to under those rules. You could buy stuff. You couldn't try it on, or you couldn't put the hat on your head, all that kind of stuff.

**Brower:** Who told you those rules?

**Jimmy:** Who told me? Didn't nobody have to tell me. You just look around at what's happening. They'd tell you. If you went in there, they'd tell you, "You can buy this, but you can't try it on. You can't do this." Blah blah blah. So they'd tell you. They would force whoever management was in the store, for them to tell you that you can't do that.

**Brower:** What did your mother convey to you about these rules, if anything?

**Jimmy:** She was a Southern lady. She had to go along with it too, because that's the way it was at the time. Where she came from, her people did laundry. I remember being out in a field with a big pot with – what do you call it? – blue-in and all that stuff they put in the pot to make the clothes whiter. My aunt – my grand aunt, she used to do clothes for the whole neighborhood. The people in the neighborhood would bring their clothes, and she would wash them, iron them, and deliver them. So that was her gig.

My grandfather, he had the tobacco barn where he would probably – I mean a tobacco – he had three or four acres or something. It wasn't that much land – where he would work the whole season. Plant the tobacco. Grow it. Then cut it. Then spear it [pronounced

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“spare it”]. Then hang it up in the barn to dry. Then sell it, and probably get about \$300 for all that work he did. He was working his butt off for no money, but that’s all he could do, and that’s what he did.

**Brower:** Did you have a hand in that? Did you do some of that?

**Jimmy:** Yeah. He taught us how to cut it and spare it and to hang it up.

**Brower:** What is spare it?

**Jimmy:** Take it. Cut it off. Hang it up like that. Stick a . . .

**Brower:** Spear it.

**Jimmy:** Spear it, yeah.

**Brower:** Spare it. Spear it.

**Jimmy:** Spear it. Spare it. Whatever. Hang it up – then hang it up from the ceiling and let it dry out. Eventually, after a while, that barn – the same barn thing, when I got to play music, is where we used to go to play music at, in the barn. After a while, when I really was into playing music, I used to go down there. They used to have a baseball game in the fields that had been planted for tobacco. They had some kind of where they had it smoothed out, where you could play baseball on it. They used to play baseball with the – there would be counties around. There would be baseball teams. Then, after that, they would have a party – party time. Everybody would bring a little – little drinks, cookouts, and stuff. They’d go in the barn, and then we’d play the music. I had the music. I had – I remember having a band one time with Buck Hill. The first guy I really played with in jazz was Buck Hill. What’s the piano player? I had his name until I went to call it. I went to school with him. We had a quartet that used to go down there and play. We used to kill them. We used to play *Red Top* and all that stuff that they liked. It was beautiful. We all got about \$5 apiece. That’s how the money was then.

**Brower:** You mentioned – and I’d like to come back to more stories about that – you mentioned Eckstine. How aware were you that – when you heard the records – that all of that really started in Washington, that Earl Hines found Trummy Young there and Tommy Potter there and . . .?

**Jimmy:** Yeah. I didn’t know about Earl Hines had found Tommy Potter. I knew Tommy Potter was from there. But I don’t know how he got to music. The only thing that they – by the time I got to listening to it, he was with Charlie Parker, Miles, and like that. That’s where I started. Symphony Sid, who was the only disc jockey that was playing that music

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at the time from New York City, who came on like 12 o'clock midnight and played until six o'clock in the morning, because that's the only station that would play that music at all. I mean the entire thing, like Bird, Miles, and all the guys. It was the only station that would do that. So I used to listen to that until six o'clock in the morning. Then get up, try to go to school, which I missed a lot. My mother would leave and says, "All right, James, I can't call you. I'm going to work." I says, "All right, Ma. I'm'a get up." I wake up at three o'clock in the evening. School is out. So I missed a lot of school like that.

Eventually I got a job where she was working. She was working as a short-order cook in a drug store that was like 13th [Street] and Rhode Island Avenue. It was in a little mall kind of a place right there. She worked in the – she was the short – the cook in there. She got me a job as the bus boy – bottle-washer bus boy. That was good. I made about \$27 a week, but I could fix up all the sundaes and things, and she could fix me food. So that was a blessing. I probably ate up more food than I made money in a week. So that was good. It was right across the street from where they had a club a little later on. Right on that corner was a club. I'm trying to think of what that was. I remember playing in there with Miles Davis way later, after I got [?].

**Brower:** Did the name Tommy Myles – does that mean anything to you?

**Jimmy:** Tommy Myles. I don't know.

**Brower:** He had the band at the Lincoln Colonnade that I understand that in his band – I've actually seen pictures – John Malachi was in that band, Tommy Myles's band. Tommy Potter was in that band. I'm trying to think of the arranger – Jimmy Mundy was also . . .

**Jimmy:** Jimmy Mundy. Yeah. I know those names.

**Brower:** . . . was also there.

**Jimmy:** That's before me, then. That's before I got to the scene.

**Brower:** You would have been – this is late '30s.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, well, I wasn't there yet. I didn't get there until maybe about '41, '42, somewhere around in there. I just probably was not even – got interested in listening to the music. By the time that happened they was probably in and out of that situation you just mentioned. But I knew Malachi. A little later we got to be good friends. A little later I got to play with Leo Parker and guys like that, because they lived there.

**Brower:** Was this after Leo came back?

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**Jimmy:** Yeah, it's after Leo came back. Was a lot of good things happening around here. Between the time I started to play and the time I left, I did a lot of good things. Worked with Rick Henderson. Rick Henderson was about my age, but he was way far ahead in music than I was, because he was a good alto player and he could make arrangements.

[recording interrupted; it resumes in mid-sentence]

. . . and places like that, after I got so I could play a little bit.

**Brower:** What was the – take us back. You mentioned the gentleman that you got interested in drums . . .

**Jimmy:** Walter Watkins?

**Brower:** Yeah. You got interested in drums with him. Was there a broader group of peers that was into jazz? And if so, who might they be, whether we know them or not?

**Jimmy:** No, actually, it wasn't. It was him, because we used to listen to – he would live right in the block, and we used to listen to music together. Like I say, we used to listen to Billy Eckstine's band with all those guys in it. Other than that, there was no – oh yeah, there was a guy in there that I used to hang out with. He was a little younger than me. I call him P. J. His name was Pinkerton Byers. He was a young guy that lived up in the 1800 block of Corcoran Street. We used to hang out together. He wanted to play trumpet. We used to hang out like that. So over the years we got to be good friends. But it wasn't a whole lot of guys into music in that block, maybe except for us, because we listened to the music. Like I say, you could walk through the block and hear gospel, and you could hear – like my uncle had every blues record I think you could mention. Some people I really didn't know anything about, like Blind Lemon Chitlin' or somebody – all the funny kind of names like that. He had all those records. So I used to hear a lot of music. Then I was going to Catholic school. There was that music, the choirs and the chants and all that stuff that happened in there. There was Baptist churches that I'd pass on the street. Like I say, Elder Michaux was on the radio, every Sunday, except for the church. You hear that. My path to school or somewhere, I could walk by a lot of that stuff and hear it. I remember walking down the street, whistling symphony music. I heard a lot of that too. [Cobb sings a melody.] I used to walk down the street whistling that. I don't even know where it came from. But I was hearing it, and it just came up. I think it was probably signing off at night, some of the stations would play this symphonic kind of a thing, growing up. So it's just some things that seep into your consciousness, and I just could reproduce it. That basic – that was just grabbing – I guess my brain was just grabbing from music at that time. So that's probably how that happened.

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But there was no major anybody said, “You’re going to play some music here, boy,” except for maybe Walter, just hanging out there. Walter – I had – once with him, I was passing a pawn shop somewhere, and I looked and saw a saxophone in the window. I think it must have been somewhere like 17th and U Street, right on the corner there. I think there used to be a pawn shop or something. I went in and asked. I said, “How much does that horn cost?” He says, “I don’t know. I’ll let you have it for \$75.” I said, “Oh yeah?” So some kind of way I managed to come up with the \$75, and I went and got what I thought was a tenor saxophone. I brought it home and come to find out it was C-melody. So Walter says, “Oh, yeah. You got this horn. Let me borrow it.” I said, “Yeah, okay.” So I let him borrow it. He took it back to the pawn shop. I never saw it any more. So that was it. That was the extent of me playing the saxophone. I probably even didn’t learn how to play the scales on it yet. Someday I was into the saxophone. Musically, that’s as far as I got with that.

But the drums stayed with me. So I managed to find a teacher around there that was in the National Symphony Orchestra. He was the youngest – one of the youngest percussionists. His name was Jack Denay. We struck up a friendship. I started taking lessons from him. He was telling me that if I got him some more students, he would teach me free. So I tried to get him some more students. I don’t know whether I did or not, because the only guys around here that I really knew that were playing the drums was like Fats Clark and Maurice Lowes and . . .

**Brower:** I saw Maurice last night.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, no kidding? Maurice Lowes, he’s a funny dude.

The best drummer in there was Mack Simpkins. Did you know Mack Simpkins?

**Brower:** No.

**Jimmy:** Mack Simpkins was the best drummer there. He was in the drum and bugle corps with us. He was the most known about the music stuff, like, say, peer – he was one of our peers. He used to get all the gigs around town, him and George Brown.

**Brower:** Drew Brown?

**Jimmy:** Drew Brown, yeah. And he was the youngest guy into the bebop thing. Everywhere we played, I used to follow him around – with him. We got to be really friendly. Mack Simpkins. He was a bad guy.

**Brower:** What about Clark? You just mentioned Fats.

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**Jimmy:** Yeah, me and Fats was tight. We used to hang out a lot together. In fact he even lived – when I moved to – I moved to Stanton Terrace with my mother when we got out of Corcoran Street. We moved to 1892 Stanton Terrace, which is out by Alabama Road.

**Brower:** So now we're in Southeast.

**Jimmy:** Now we're way out there, yeah.

**Brower:** At that point, was that a black area or a white area? What kind of area . . . ?

**Jimmy:** No, that was another ghetto thing that they set up, I think. This whole complex was for lower-income people, I think. So that's where we were, because my mother, she's the only – she's the one parent at the time.

**Brower:** Date. Give me a date. Are we in the late '40s now? mid-'40s? Where are we time-wise?

**Jimmy:** I think we're in the late '40s, because I left – I didn't leave town until the '50s. So it's got to be between '45 and the '50s. Got to be in there, because I remember being out there. The dates, you know, I guess I'm an old guy now. I can't really think of when the dates – pigeonhole where the dates are, but it had to be in that area. So, yeah, Fats was pretty close, because he used to live pretty close to that. I remember him walking from his house to my house. He was a fat dude. He wore out a pair of pants. He'd burn out a pair of pants walking to my house.

He was a good drummer too. At one point Benny Carter wanted to hire him, when – a while later, when he broke out so he could play professionally. Benny Carter wanted to hire him, because he was the house band in the ghetto section of Las Vegas. They put up a place out at Las Vegas where – they set it up, because you couldn't go on the strip. So they set up a whole complex out there, casinos, houses for people that worked in casinos to stay, and all that. They made – I think Joe Louis was the greeter. He'd meet you at the front door. Benny Carter had the band in the big room. So he wanted to hire Fats to work for him. Fats didn't want to come out there, because by that time he was married, and his wife didn't want him to go anywhere. She was a religious type, and he was a religious type. So he couldn't take the gig because of that. But he was a good drummer, man.

**Brower:** Did he come out of a – was he in a service band or something? Did he have that background?

**Jimmy:** No, I don't remember him being in the service. I just remember us being in the . . .

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**Brower:** You mentioned drum and bugle.

**Jimmy:** . . . drum and bugle corps.

**Brower:** What organization was that?

**Jimmy:** That was in Armstrong High School. That's the school that Charlie Rouse went to. It's a technical school. It wasn't like a – it was right down across from Dunbar.

**Brower:** So it's like Dunbar is the academic, Armstrong is the vocational.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, right across the street. They was right across the street from each other. If you went to Dunbar, you was going to be a lawyer or some of the good stuff. If you went to where we were, you was going to be a mechanic . . .

**Brower:** Printer.

**Jimmy:** . . . the really . . .

**Brower:** Trades.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, trade. So I went to the trade thing, because some of my peers had gone there. So that's where I went.

**Brower:** What trade were you pursuing?

**Jimmy:** I don't even know at the time. I was just there, I guess because it was easy to get there. It wasn't no burden on my mother. So I just went there. So I don't even know what I even had in mind to do, except for playing the drums. That's probably where I was – went into the drums and bugle corps.

**Brower:** They had a lot of musicians came out of Armstrong.

**Jimmy:** I know.

**Brower:** When you were there, what were your peers . . . ?

**Jimmy:** Oh. That's what I was trying to think about. I was in a little band – I was talking about the tobacco barn – with Ellsworth Gibson. You know Ellsworth. Gib.

**Brower:** Um-hmm.

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**Jimmy:** Gib was in that band, because at that time . . .

**Brower:** Papa Fly.

**Jimmy:** Yeah. Because at that time he was the youngest guy that could play like Milt Buckner, who was the piano player, the house-rockin' piano player for the Lionel Hampton band. He could do all of that. So we would go down to country and tear them up. It was big-time down there like that because of Ellsworth and – what's the bass player's name? It will come to me too in a minute. It comes and goes.

**Brower:** Let's just back up. Tell us how you got hooked up with Buck, how that got formed, and then how you got to your grandfather's.

**Jimmy:** I got hooked up with Buck because we started to get little gigs around town, little cheap gigs around town. I remember working one of them little cheap gigs with Benny Golson. Benny Golson was down there at the time, going to college. I remember us working in a place. I remember working two weeks for this guy. We was only be getting like five bucks a night and didn't get paid for two weeks and never got paid, actually. So I worked two weeks for nothing with Benny Golson in this place where they had a guy that sang like Lady Day [Billie Holiday]. He sounded good. He sounded like her too. He was a gay guy that sounded like Lady Day. So we used to – we went down and did that little gig.

But there was – like you say, there was a few guys, like Rick, Benny Golson. There was Carrington Visor. Did you know Carrington?

**Brower:** I heard he was an awesome player.

**Jimmy:** Bad guy. Little guy. He weighed about 130 pounds.

**Brower:** Tenor player.

**Jimmy:** Tenor player. Sounded like Gene Ammons. Had that big sound. You say, "Where's it coming from?" Just a little guy like that. It was him – it would be him and Benny Golson. At that time, Benny Golson was playing like Dexter Gordon. So they would get on the stand, and they would go through that thing Gene and Dexter used to do. They used to do the repeat of it. They was very good at it, Benny being Dexter and what's-his-name being – Carrington being Gene Ammons.

**Brower:** Where was the locus of that activity? Was that 7th and T?

**Jimmy:** Yeah.

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**Brower:** Were they both in the Howard Swing Masters at that point? Were you aware of that thing going on?

**Jimmy:** I'm not sure about that. They may have been. I can't put my finger on when exactly that was, the Howard Swing Masters. What do you mean, the house band at the Howard?

**Brower:** No. There was a band at Howard University called the Swing Masters, not officially a part of the university, but Bill Hughes talks about it. Benny talks about it.

**Jimmy:** That could have been, because Bill Hughes was in the marching band with us too. So that's why . . .

**Brower:** At Armstrong?

**Jimmy:** Yeah. That's where I know him from. Bill Hughes probably ain't had but one gig in his life. He was like Harry Carney with Duke Ellington. One gig, all your life, like Harry Carney. Duke went to his mother and says, "I want to take your son on the road." She said, "Okay, if you take care of him." So Harry Carney wound up being Duke's chauffeur and all that. I think he only had one gig his whole life, and that was with Duke Ellington's band. Bill Hughes was like that too. He only had one gig. It was with Count Basie. Now he wound up – he's the head of it or something, isn't he?

**Brower:** Right.

**Jimmy:** So that was his thing. The bass player, Jones, his aspiration . . .

**Brower:** Eddie Jones?

**Jimmy:** Eddie Jones's aspiration all his life was to play with the Count Basie band. He got to do that. So, life fulfilled, I guess.

**Brower:** Did you know – a lot of that came through Frank Wess. I think Frank was the first one, and he turned the Count on to these other guys

**Jimmy:** That's probably right. I had a – I was in a band with Frank. We had a quartet. I was in his quartet. Recently he sent a photo that we had taken together, which was about – by the time I got it, it was about 50 years old. We're looking [?]. We used it on one of our CDs that we put out – that Eleana put out. Eleana is my wife. She put out – we made this record. She produced this record. On the front of it is me, looking like I'm 18, which

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I was, and a big bass drum. But they cut off the rest of the picture, which was him and a piano player named Rob Harley.

**Brower:** I heard that name.

**Jimmy:** Rob Harley, Frank Wess, Ben Stuperville, I think was . . .

**Brower:** Bass player.

**Jimmy:** Bass player. Yeah. That was our quartet. Then another time, speaking of the time between me learning how to play and leaving town, there was a piano player that was going to school at Howard. His name was Carl Drinkert.

**Brower:** The one that went with Lady Day.

**Jimmy:** He was with Lady Day. While we were there, we formed a quartet. It was him, Ralph Noble. You knew Ralph Noble. Ralph Noble was my adopted brother. Ralph Noble. I think maybe Benny Stuperville. Like that. When Lady Day came to town and worked at the Blue Mirror for two weeks, it was – he hired – she hired – no, he hired us to be with her. It probably was a good, cheap way to get out. It probably fit in their budget. So the bass player, myself, and him played for Lady Day for two weeks.

**Brower:** Just don't pass on by that.

**Jimmy:** What do you mean?

**Brower:** Give us a little bit about that.

**Jimmy:** We played downtown. At that time black people couldn't be out – I don't even know that black people could be in that club at that time.

**Brower:** So it's like the Cotton Club.

**Jimmy:** Yeah.

**Brower:** You could play there . . .

**Jimmy:** But you couldn't . . .

**Brower:** . . . but you couldn't come in the front door and have a meal.

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**Jimmy:** Like Las Vegas, where you could go in behind the bandstand and come up on the stage in the lounge, play, but you had to go back out – come back out. When I was with Dinah Washington, you had to do that and go – we had a trailer out in the parking lot. That’s before Frank Sinatra went out there and cooled all that out for Sammy Davis. But it was that kind of a thing.

So we worked down in the Blue Mirror like that, but I don’t remember a lot of black people coming there. We worked two weeks there. For me that was great, because I had opportunities to work with some big-time people. She was very nice to me. She called me “Youngblood.” She used to be in the dressing room. She used to come to me and says, “Would you help me fasten up my corset?” She had the corset on. I used to hook up her corset. That’s how open she was.

She had a little Chihuahua dog that she carried around like she was its mama. She would feed it raw eggs and hamburger. The dog was eating better than some people at that time. She’d put it on the floor. He’d turn up his nose at her. She’d get down on her knees and say, “Look, mommy’s” blah-blah-blah-blah-blah. The dog still ignored that stuff. He was a little Chihuahua. They’re kind of shaky all the time anyway. The time we did it was in the wintertime. When we came outside, it would be a little cold. The dog is just trembling. She’s got him in her arms. He’s trembling. So I say, “Hey, give me the dog.” I had a patch pocket, an overcoat. You know what that looks like? An overcoat with a patch pocket on it. So I took the dog and slipped him down in my overcoat. His head was sticking up, and he was shaking. I remember those kind of things.

**Brower:** Is a patch pocket like a Chesterfield?

**Jimmy:** Yeah.

**Brower:** Where the fabric on the pocket is different than the fabric of the body of the coat?

**Jimmy:** It could be that. I just remember it being a popular style at the time. I had one. So I put him in there to keep him warm while he was waiting for their ride.

So I remember like that. She was very nice to me. And I remember some things that happened that I’m not going to say nothing about. But it’s memorable just to be around her.

**Brower:** Let me ask you this: where did you – just because you said that – where did you draw the line in what you talk about and what you won’t talk about? And why do you draw that line?

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**Jimmy:** I don't want to put – it's just like kissing and tell. I ain't going to do that. There's a lot of things that happened that a whole lot of people really don't need to know about. So I'm going to keep it like that. That's where I draw the line.

Mentioning about being up on the main drag, U Street, there. We had a gig right next to the Republic Theater in a place called the Republic Gardens, which was a bar that a guy owned that had gone to school – Armstrong – with Rouse, with Charlie Rouse. When Charlie Rouse came off of the band, with Dizzy Gillespie's band, he came back home. He got a – he talked to his friend, and his friend say, "I got this place up on U Street. It's a bar downstairs with a restaurant, but upstairs I got a room that ain't doing nothing." He said, "Why don't you get a band and bring some music up there?" So Charlie said okay. He got a band which was Wesley Anderson, playing valve trombone and trumpet. Tommy Multrey was the bass player. Cedric Williams was a young . . .

**Brower:** Was Tommy Multrey white?

**Jimmy:** Multrey, bass player.

**Brower:** Was he white or black?

**Jimmy:** Black.

Cedric Williams was the piano player. He was my age and from Kansas City at the time, who, at that time when he came from Kansas City, he was in some weird way. He had a habit. I had never seen that. I didn't know nothing about that. One day he asked me to help him . . .

**Brower:** [?] and all of that?

**Jimmy:** Yeah. We went in the back room, and I helped him tie up his arm and all that stuff. He went to do his thing. When I saw it, it disgusted me so, I say, that will never in my lifetime happen to me. That right there stopped me from ever doing anything like that.

So we had that gig up there, speaking of Rouse and Cedric and - what's the name? His sister used to sing. That trumpet player. His sister had – his sister was a singer. We went to school together too. Wait a minute. Boy, she would really be mad if she think I didn't know her name. Wait a minute. Who did I say? Wesley Anderson. Oh. Mary Anderson was his sister. But you never heard her. She never got that popular, but she could sing. Occasionally she used to get little gigs around Washington, but it never went any further than that. We were friends.

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Getting back to this gig: this gig was like, we could play anything we wanted, six nights a week, one night off. So we played bebop all the time. That's where I learned all those – all the modern songs. Charlie Rouse knew them all, because he had been out there with Bird and Dizzy and everybody. He knew all the songs. We used to play all that music. People used to come and hear us. The guy said, "You probably have to have some kind of entertainment." So on the weekend, we would have some entertainment. The entertainment turned out to be Redd Foxx. Redd Foxx used to come up. Redd Foxx used to kill them. So he had people coming up to see him. I don't know whether they liked the music or not, but they came. We played the music, and Redd Foxx made them hysterical. We did that for a long time.

**Brower:** Did he sing with you guys? Did he ever try to . . .?

**Jimmy:** Nah, he never tried to sing, although he had – he told me later he had a band, what they called a tramp band, him and his – he's from St. Louis – him and a couple of his boys that – later on, when he got a show – he got to show them on his show – they used to go out on the corner. He used to play a broomstick and a tub. Did you ever see that?

**Brower:** Um-hmm.

**Jimmy:** Dum dum, like it was a bass player. He had another guy. There was two guys out there. The other one of the guys was a guy that he called Bubba on his show. That was one of his pals. They used to go out and hustle money on the streets. That's when I got to know Redd. I knew Redd from about 18 years old.

All of these good people, like I said: Frank Wess, John Malachi, all these home boys that I know put a lot of input into what kind of music I – Rick Henderson.

**Brower:** From the time that you became interested in drums to the time you started to play professionally, to gig, what were – how much – three years? four years?

**Jimmy:** I would say maybe five years. I would say from '45 to '50. I left at '50.

**Brower:** How many lessons did you have with the classical guy?

**Jimmy:** Not many. I don't remember having too many.

**Brower:** Five? ten?

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**Jimmy:** No, not that many. Maybe five. Not ten or nothing like that, because one way or another we got separated. The band left town or something like that. Something changed where I couldn't – we couldn't get together.

**Brower:** What did he give you? What did he show you?

**Jimmy:** He gave me some technique about the snare drum. That's what I wanted from him, to learn about the snare drum. Had I stayed there long enough, I probably would have learned the whole percussion thing from him, because he was going to teach me free. It would have been a matter of time of just doing it with him. But we got separated some time. I don't even remember how. I remember, way later in my lifetime, I got a call one day. He called up. He said, "This is Jack Denay. I read somewhere where you mention my name every once in a while." I say, "Yeah, man, how you doing?" By that time, he was 70, 80 years old or something like that. He said, "I'm doing okay." I said, "I'm sure glad to talk with you. I always give you the benefit of being one of my leaders. I just wanted you to know that." He found out how – a way to get in touch with me.

**Brower:** You give him the respect.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, gave him respect.

**Brower:** We have a little bit of time left on this tape. The last thing I want to ask you about on this part is: last night Maurice said that you guys would get together over drum books.

**Jimmy:** Yeah.

**Brower:** So, take the formal training out of it, and talk a little bit about how that circle of up-and-coming drummers developed each other.

**Jimmy:** That happens . . .

**Brower:** Was it competition? What was going on?

**Jimmy:** No, it was a learning process. There probably was some competition too, because Maurice right now, he's got a competition thing going in his head, I guess, until now. Because the last time I was there, he told me, he says, "Hey, man, here's my latest CD." So I say, "Yeah, okay man, good." So I know he's still competitive in his mind. But he's – we're all right. We've been all right all our lives.

I understand it. Mack – Mack Simpkins went to New York. I guess I might have been a little luckier than him, because he was actually the better player of all of us, playing that

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music. He got there. He didn't really do as well as I think he wanted to do. I think that over time that depressed him. He just went out. I don't know. He died or something. He was really depressed about not being – not doing as well as he thought he would.

**Brower:** Was Stump in the mix?

**Jimmy:** Stump [Harry T. Saunders]. Yeah, Stump was my man too. We used to hang out. Stump is a lot younger than me. Stump is maybe after I left. I'm not sure if he was there that much before I left. I can't remember. But I remember Stump. I remember him playing with Lady . . .

**Brower:** Shirley [Horn]?

**Jimmy:** Shirley. He was one of the better drummers that she had, because she used to sing so slow that nobody could keep that slow a pulse. But him and the bass player had it down, where they was perfect for her. Lewis – the bass player's name was Lewis something. I can't think of it.

**Brower:** Powell?

**Jimmy:** Maybe that was it, Lewis Powell. Stump and Lewis Powell and her was perfect. Stump I think I probably met after I left and came back – started to come back.

**Brower:** So it wasn't part of Maurice and Fats Clark and all that.

**Jimmy:** Clark and Mack Simpkins. It's possible that we did that together. I'm trying to think if it was anybody else in that drum thing. I can't think of anybody else. What do you want to . . . ?

**Brower:** Is there anything further you might want to – we're want to cover that development period and what it took for you to get to that point where you could leave Washington or play on a professional level. Anything else you want to say about influences or peers or . . . ?

**Jimmy:** Yeah. This is leading up to leaving Washington. It was a thing that happened, speaking of Seventh and T and Howard and all that. There used to be a group that came from Port Chester, New York, that came to Jeanne [Klors?], which was a restaurant right on the corner, opposite the Dunbar Theater. What would that be? South side. She had a restaurant down there.

**Brower:** Southeast corner?

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**Jimmy:** Yeah. She had a restaurant downstairs and a place upstairs, the same thing, where she had some music. She used to hire this trio from Port Chester, New York. It was a saxophone player, a drummer, and a bass player. They used to come down and do a couple weeks and act as the catalyst to bring people from the theater to come up there and jam. That was a way of getting people from the theater to come up there and help her to do a music thing. In that band was Keter Betts. Keter, we got to be friends.

**Brower:** That was Carmen Leggio?

**Jimmy:** Carmen Leggio . . .

**Brower:** . . . was the tenor player?

**Jimmy:** Yeah. Carmen Leggio, Keter Betts, and I forget what the drummer's name was. He was a great drummer. He was a good drummer. I used to admire him, because he had a fast foot and he could play real good. I wish I could think of his name. I wish I could find him, because I'd like to remember him or even to know if he's still alive.

I met Keter. We got to be friends. They would go and come back. One time he went and came back, he was with Earl Bostic. He told me, he says, "Look. Our drummer's quitting. Do you want to go on the road?" I said yeah. He say, "Okay, I'll tell Earl. You can get the gig, and we can go."

By this time now, I'm 21. It's 1950. It turns out I go on the road with Earl Bostic. I meet him here in 125th Street and St. Nicholas Avenue. That's the first – that was the jumping-off spot. I remember pulling up there. He had the little Cadillac that he drove, that he was proud of. He had the little truck that carried the instruments and things. I remember meeting him there, and we started going on the road. I remember going cross-country two or three times in that year, riding on the jump seat in the Cadillac. A jump seat – there ain't no seat in the middle in the back. That's a hump.

**Brower:** That's the one that faces to the back?

**Jimmy:** No, no. This is just a regular car, like a regular sedan, with the regular seats in the back, but it's only two seats actually. The thing in the middle is hard. It's not a seat. It's something that separates the two seats. That's what I sat on. It's a good thing, because it kept me awake most of the time, to watch his ass, because he was – didn't want nobody to drive the car. He would drive forever, all by himself

**Brower:** Bostic.

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**Jimmy:** Yeah. I used to sit to try to keep him awake. Everybody needs sleep. I'd be there talking to him. "Say yeah, partner, what's happening?" He'd say, yeah, blah blah. We'd go through that. By the time it got to be daylight and everybody else started to wake up, I'd try to get a nap on that hard seat. I'd get out of the car looking like I'd just had a baby or something. Big circles around my eyes, from watching his butt.

One time I didn't go with him. He had an accident. He left the gig one night where he could have stayed, because he wanted to get to this next place the next day, before – some business he had to do. So he took off that night and had an accident. He was in the hospital or something like that.

I used to sit with him and watch him, keep him awake. Let's see, '50. I left in '50. Like I say, Keter Betts is a good friend of mine. We was friend until he died. In fact I saw him maybe a couple – two or three weeks before he died. We had dinner together on Columbus Avenue.

When I got on the road, I was with – with Earl Bostic's band, the package was Dinah Washington and the Earl Bostic band. So that's what we did. When she sang – she was only traveling with a piano player. The piano player was Wynton Kelly. So, when she sang, it was her, Wynton, Keter Betts, and myself played for her. Eventually that had got to be her first original trio. Before that, she hadn't had the trio. Then we got to be social. I was traveling – after Earl Bostic, I was traveling with her and our trio. That's what it was. It was trying to say we were married, but we was just living together.

Through that I met a whole lot of people and got to do a whole lot of things I probably wouldn't have done had that not happened. I met all the bandleaders and all the people that we played with. So that was a plus for me. It's being in the right place at the right time.

**Brower:** Bostic: that was – describe what that was musically and genre.

**Jimmy:** Bostic was an A-1 saxophone, one of the better ones in the world. At one time in New York, when they used to have jam sessions, they had a thing where, a competition thing. The best guys on the stand could be on the stand. Like if you was up on the stand with Eddie Davis – Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis and Charlie Parker – Earl Bostic could be there, because he could play. He could play everything you wanted to do, in all the keys. That's what you had to be, to be with those guys, because they could do that. So Earl Bostic was noted as a great player, but to do – he had to do what he had to do to make money to earn a living. So he had to play rhythm-and-blues, which is what that was called at the time. So that's what he did. He played rhythm-and-blues until it got to be where they could accept him a little better for him trying to play jazz, which a little later I think he did. His concept changed from where when we went with him, with Keter, and I

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went with him, to where some other people went with him. Over time he had [John] Coltrane in the band. He had – what I just mentioned. Who did I say was . . . ? He had a lot of guys, a lot of guys that you know that came through that band after me and Keter left, and the music changed a lot. He was noted as a great saxophone player. You know that Tommy Dorsey’s brother – Tommy Dorsey’s brother was a alto player, Jimmy Dorsey? Very technical alto player. He could play like that.

**Brower:** He had all the chops.

**Jimmy:** All the facilities. He could play notes that wasn’t on the horn, make a whole octave off the horn. It’s probably where Coltrane got a lot of his stuff. A lot of them guys that worked for him got a lot of training from him. But a lot of people don’t know that.

I had occasion once to go to Moscow with a trumpet player who was a Russian guy [Valery Ponomarev], used to work for Art Blakey. There was a guy that we played for that ran the Tchaikovsky thing. It’s the same kind of a thing as Lincoln Center, like the Carnegie Hall kind of a thing. He was the director, the music director. He was carrying me around. He was showing me Moscow. In the conversation, he was telling me, he’d say, “I played a record today. It’s a guy that plays – who was a tremendous saxophone player.” I said, “who?” He said, “Earl Bostic.” He said, “You know him.” I say, “Yeah, I think I do.” He say, “Yeah, I just got this record. This guy, it’s unbelievable.” I said, “Yeah, I know that guy.” He said, “You know him good?” I said, “Yeah. I’ll tell you what you do when you get home. Look on that record you got and see who the clientele is.” So he went. It says there Gene Redd, Earl Bostic, Keter Betts, and the drummer’s Jimmy Cobb. He say, “I didn’t know.” So I say, “Yeah, I knew him pretty good, man.” I worked for him about 3 or 4 years. That’s how I know him. But he was raving about him, and he was the symphony director of the Tchaikovsky music center thing there.

I had ran across a lot of people. Getting back to Dinah Washington, I ran across a lot of people. I met Sammy Davis. We used to do shows for them. I think he was – I hung out with Sammy Davis a little bit, because we was in San Francisco together. I think he really wanted to be close to me because he wanted to get to Dinah. I think it’s really what it was, thinking about it, longevity think about it. I remember him being with Will Mastin and his dad and his uncle, the Will Mastin trio. I remember us hanging out. It was a place right across the street from where there’s a Booker T. Hotel, where all the guys stayed. It was a place where – a social club across the street where the guys played cards and all that – neighborhood guys played cards. They knew me from being with Dinah. So they invited me over to play. I’d go over and play poker with them.

So Sammy was there, and one day, he said, “What are you doing?” I say, “I’m going to go across the street and play some poker.” He said, “Can I go with you?” I said yeah. So we went over across the street. It’s one of them places, you knock on the door. They peep

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out at you and say, “Who is that?” I said, “Jimmy.” So the other guy say, “Who’s that with you?” I say, “He’s a friend of mine.” So we go in, and we go and play poker. Over the years, after the time he got that big, I said, oh, man, do you realize that I was with this little guy and they didn’t – after he got big, we met up again where – by this time I’m with Sarah Vaughan, and we’re working in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. We’re playing at a place where it’s a golf course. Every day I think Sammy goes out and tries to play golf. I’m trying to think of this guy that lives – lived right on the golf course. My mind is getting fuzzy. This guy was a big tv star. Played Ralph what’s-his-name on . . .

**Brower:** You mean Gleason?

**Jimmy:** Yeah, Jackie Gleason lived there. He had – every day he would play golf. He had a golf cart with all this – made like a bar and all that stuff. So Sammy tried to have that too. I used to go out there. Sammy said, “Let’s go play golf.” When I didn’t go, he said, “You just go down and tell the guy you know Sammy.” So, I’d go down. The guy said, “Any friend of Sammy’s a friend of mine.” So I’d go down and play golf – golf every day. Me and Keter, probably. Not Keter. By that time, it’s somebody else. I’m trying to figure who the bass player was then. But, to make a long story short, that’s the connection I had to Sammy and Jackie Gleason and the golf.

**Brower:** Where did Pearl Bailey come in?

**Jimmy:** Pearl Bailey was before I left Washington. I had an opportunity to play with her in 2011. You know where that is? That’s on 15th Street. It’s a complex.

**Brower:** It’s above U Street. It’s now a big apartment building, the [Caramel?] Heights thing.

**Jimmy:** On the first floor they had a club. I had occasion to play in that club with her. I think it was one night. It may have been two.

[recording interrupted]

**Brower:** We’re jumping around, which is great. I did want to – there’s some D.C. things, and we touched on Pearl and what that was. But, identify other venues in D.C. in which you played before you hit the road. We hit [Klors?], and that was . . .

**Jimmy:** 7th and T. They used to have – right two doors down from [Klors?] was called 7th and T. It was a bar downstairs and another place upstairs where the guys around come from the theater to jam, whenever. The shows changed every Friday and ran to Thursday. So you’d get different crews every week. Guys would play all day and want to get away from that same thing they had to play all day, come and jam. I used to be randy for that

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all the time. You could hear it actually from the street, because where the drums was set up was right in the window. It was at the street. Your back would be towards that window. So you could hear everything like you was in the room. Even if you didn't – couldn't go up there to check it out, you could hear it from downstairs. There was a lot of that going on. There was that place and Jeanne [Klors?] upstairs. There was a lot of places. There was a couple other places.

**Brower:** Do you remember Little Harlem?

**Jimmy:** Little Harlem, yeah.

**Brower:** Do you remember a drummer named Streamline?

**Jimmy:** Streamline, yeah. Streamline was a guy that stammered. He couldn't get one word out for maybe five minutes, but he could sing "The green grass grows all around, the green grass grows all around" and not miss a beat. I never could understand that. He used to have to sit up there and sing. When he'd come down and try to talk to you, he'd be trying to get a word out. Good guy though. I loved him.

**Brower:** More like a show drummer?

**Jimmy:** Yeah, Streamline. Good drummer and singer – entertainer. That's what Streamline was.

**Brower:** How about Al "Gotta Be" Dunn.

**Jimmy:** Al "Gotta Be" Dunn was a good one too. He was like a – Al Dunn at that time, he was like a pimp playing the drums. He looked like a – he dressed like that, and he played with his hand over like that.

**Brower:** Matched hands?

**Jimmy:** No, just like this. Not matched hands, but with his hand turned over like that. He'd make rim shots like that. Like, what do you play? He'd play like that. I just looked at it. It looked funny to me, but it was perfect for him. He was one of the guys. He was a hard hustler. He would go around and hustle up gigs for his band. I used to admire him, because he was a great hustling guy. He can play good.

**Brower:** Was the Old Rose Tea Room or something across the street? Was that happening, like a piano spot?

**Jimmy:** Could have been.

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**Brower:** How about Freddie's Footlight?

**Jimmy:** I don't know about that one. That may be something after I left, but . . .

**Brower:** How about the Stagedoor? Cecile . . .

**Jimmy:** Stagedoor, Cecile's – that was there. That's right across from the Howard. Guys used to go over there in a bar – right from the Stagedoor, right straight to the bar. Then they had pretty good food in there. Upstairs, across the alley, was a restaurant that sold soul food, I think. I think it might have been Cecilia's.

**Brower:** [Klors?], she also had a rooming house, too.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, it's across the street, on the side where Dunbar was, but in the middle – right about in that little triangle there. She had a house there. I think I remember staying in there with Dinah once.

**Brower:** Was the Howard the – what animated that whole area?

**Jimmy:** Yeah. That's because they stuck everything in: a little hotdog stand in there called Tim's. Hotdogs. They served half-smokes and cold sodas or something. That's all – that's probably all they sold in there, because he must really have been doing something else. I didn't have that kind of idea at the time. I just figured, I don't see how you can make a lot of money. But it was a little tiny place, and everybody was coming from all around to get half-smokes, because it was probably the best. It's like that place right across the street – the alley from . . .

**Brower:** Ben's?

**Jimmy:** Yeah. It was like that first. That's probably where Ben got the idea, maybe from little Tim.

**Brower:** I heard it was a woman named Annie that he got that.

**Jimmy:** Could be. Could be. I'm just saying that Tim had that too.

**Brower:** Had it happening.

**Jimmy:** So yeah, guys right out of the theater used to come in. That's probably what kept him alive. There was a poolroom there between the theater and Tim's, and there was a – I

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think there was another little soul restaurant stuck in there somewhere too. That might have been Cecelia's.

**Brower:** What was happening on the after-hours side?

**Jimmy:** Let's see. On the after-hours side, where was it? After hours in Washington. I don't remember too much after hours in Washington. If there was, I probably wasn't old enough to get in it. After hours in Washington. I can't – I don't have no comprehension of.

**Brower:** So, after you . . .

**Jimmy:** Oh, it may have been the Caverns. It might have been the Caverns.

**Brower:** Were you aware of Benny Caldwell, who that was?

**Jimmy:** No. When I was going to the Cavern, it was Cab Calloway's sister.

**Brower:** Blanche Calloway.

**Jimmy:** Blanche Calloway. She was running it. She had – the m.c., his name was George Craft, he was a gay guy that was the m.c. He was a singer and the m.c. I remember that crew. I don't know who was before that or after that. That's where I remember meeting Ruth Brown, because she was – turned out to be Ruth Brown's manager.

**Brower:** Blanche did.

**Jimmy:** Blanche. So that's where I met Ruth Brown. She brought her there to sing, and I played for her.

**Brower:** At that point, was it the Caverns, or the Crystal Caverns, or what was it?

**Jimmy:** It was the Caverns.

**Brower:** The Caverns. What was the inside? Was it white?

**Jimmy:** No, it was the same kind of a cavern-looking thing. They did some things to it over the years, but basically it's still like with the stuff hanging from the ceiling. It looked like a cave. It looked like a cave in there for a minute. Because I remember what's-his-name jumping up and down with his horn and hitting his head on them spikes that was coming down from the ceiling: Leo Parker. Wild antics and stuff. So it was basically like a cave.

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I'm trying to think about some other places around there. There was the Benghazi, because I remember – there was a place right on T Street, right on the corner. What was that? I remember seeing Roy Haynes in there with Pres [Lester Young], because the bandstand, you could – the bandstand faced where there was a fan – smoke fan that was blowing the [?] out.

**Brower:** This is the same – Benny Caldwell had that place too. He had that place, and he had the Caverns. I don't know why I'm stuck on stupid . . .

**Jimmy:** That's T Street, isn't it?

**Brower:** Yeah, 14th and T.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, right on the corner. I used to go there. They had a little stairs that looked like a side entrance or something. I used to climb up on this, look through the fan, with smoke blowing in my face, at the bandstand, at Roy Haynes playing with Pres. I tell him about that too. He tried to say that was him looking at me, you see, because I met him a few times before when he came down. He just came down there – the first time I saw him, he was with a house band from Boston that he worked with. I keep – the name keeps coming up, and I keep forgetting it, but it was a Boston house band that he came down there with. Then, the next time I saw him, I think he came down with Pres. Then I think later on he was with Sarah Vaughan. Then he was with Bird [Charlie Parker]. He was with – he was all over the place. He was doing very good. So I met him. I've been knowing him 60 years or something like that. He was always nice. He would always talk to me, and it was always friendly like that. I remember that. He's still like that. A good man. I can never think of that band up there, but it was a big thing.

**Brower:** Sabby Hayes?

**Jimmy:** Something like that.

**Brower:** I know I've seen him associated with – that was an important Boston guy, not the only thing, but it seemed like . . .

**Jimmy:** Sabby Lewis or something like that.

**Brower:** Sabby Lewis. That's what it is.

**Jimmy:** Something like that. I remember vaguely something like that.

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I'm trying to think of some other places was around Washington that we could work. That place was, like you say, 15th – it was called what the number of the place was: 2313, I think it was. That was the name of it. No, no: 2011. 2011 was the name of the building and the club.

**Brower:** That's the one on 15th Street.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, and the one I was telling you about, next to the Republic Theater, that was where I worked with Rouse, and the Blue Mirror was downtown. I'm trying to think of – I don't know. We used to do – I think we did – I used to do something in the Colonnade with Rick Henderson. He had a little nine-piece band, where occasionally we would go down there and play for a dance or something.

**Brower:** Was Turner's Arena happening?

**Jimmy:** Yeah. Turner's Arena, where you could go on Sunday and see a band, but during the week it was basketball and boxing and all that stuff. But on Sunday they would bring in Woody Herman's band, [Stan] Kenton, like that. You could go and see that one-shot thing. I saw a lot of folks up there too.

**Brower:** What about off of U Street? What about in northeast or southwest? Like Bruce Wall's. Was that a fixture?

**Jimmy:** I don't remember Bruce Wall's. I don't remember too many places in – what was in northeast?

**Brower:** Like out there [?].

**Jimmy:** I never spent a lot of time that way. The only thing I even know vaguely out there was Phil what's-his-name's club. That's way later. The singer?

**Brower:** Oh, you're talking about on Benner Road? Jimmy. The Gold Room?

**Jimmy:** Jimmy McPhail. That's where he lived. We went there once, because he wanted the trio, me and Wynton and – actually, it was Jimmy what's-his-name. Used to work with Coltrane, because Paul [Chambers] had died by that time. It was Jimmy . . .

**Brower:** Garrison?

**Jimmy:** Jimmy Garrison. Me and him and Jimmy Garrison. We worked in Jimmy McPhail's for a week or so, I think. And there was the Caverns. We worked down there for Tony, a couple times, when it was Bohemian Caverns.

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**Brower:** Tony [Taylor] and Angelo Alvino?

**Jimmy:** Yeah. What else? There's not too many other places.

**Brower:** So essentially, after '51, or after you go with Bostic, your relationship with Washington becomes one of, you come back to hit with somebody.

**Jimmy:** Yeah. Well, no, actually. My mother lived there. So when I'd come back, I'd come back and stay and visit my mother, stay with my mother. At that time she had moved. I'd left her at 1892 Stanton Terrace. That's out there off Alabama Road. She moved to 2313 G Street [northeast], which was off of Benning Road, out there by where the Giants had their – I mean the Redskins had their stadium across the street. It was some kind of a football thing over there. I forget which . . .

**Brower:** You mean R.F.K.? Where they built the new . . . ?

**Jimmy:** Was that off of Benning Road?

**Brower:** Yeah, kind of sort of.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, well, that's it. She lived there. The last part of her life, she lived there. So I used to come back there. I'd stay with her. But I didn't really come back to stay that much. After I left Dinah, I came back for two weeks and stayed there. Then I say, I got to get out of there, because there ain't nothing too much happening. So I came back to New York. I was just floundering around for a minute. I had my bags. I stayed in a place on 34th Street called the Sloan House, which is like a YMCA. They had some cheap rooms that I could afford, because I didn't really have that much money then. So I checked in there, and I stayed a couple of nights. I was a bad scene for me, because the room was about as big as a closet. It was so big that I couldn't hardly even open my bag without touching each wall. I had bought a little portable tv. At the time, tv had just started. I got to be here by myself. I got to have some entertainment. So I mess around and just went over – wandered around the town, just to check things out. Then one night I come home. The situation was where you had to come out of your room to take a shower and go down the hall, and there'd be 30 guys in there taking showers. I said, now that's the first thing's wrong with this. I'm not going to do this. Then, another time, I came in late one night from going to the clubs, and they was bringing a guy out on a gurney, dead. I said, oh, now wait a minute. Hold it. I said, this is really not going to work.

I ran into a friend of mine. It turned out to be a really good friend. His name is Khalil Madi. He was a drummer also. We had a conversation. I was telling him about what was going on in this Sloan Ho – in this Sloan – I don't know what they call, a hotel or

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whatever – YMCA. So he said, “Oh, man, you don’t have to put up with that.” He say, “I’ve got a room. I have a room uptown. I live in the Bronx, and you can come up, stay with me, until you get yourself together.” He just offered. So I said, “Yeah, okay, because I can’t take what’s going on now.” So I went up there and stayed with him. We stayed – we split the rent and we did all of that. The rent was really not that much at that time. The rent was maybe sixty, eighty dollars a month. I mean some really cheap rent. But we had – sometimes we had a hard time getting to that. But I went up there and stayed with him. Actually, I wind up stay with him five years. While I was up there, I got with Miles, a bunch of stuff. So we remained friends all the rest of our lives. He died maybe two years ago. He was five or six years older than me. I didn’t know that. He played drums all the way though all of it. So he was one of my good friends in New York. Don’t be for him, I might not be sitting here talking about this now. I don’t know what I might have been like.

Getting back to that, I never mentioned too much about my dad. My dad is – was separated from my mother since about when I was seven years old. Off and on I would see him, because he worked in the government for 35 or 40 years. He was a guard in a place called the – temporary place called the temporary U building on Constitution Avenue. He was at a bunch of temporary buildings down there at the time, during the war and after the war. He used to work, and he was a security guard. I used to go down occasionally and see him. At that time, everybody in Washington had two jobs. They either had one job in the day, and the second job was driving a cab. That was their transportation. So I used to go meet him after the gigs – after his gig, and we’d go hacking. I’d go sit with him. We’d go drive all over Washington, picking up people and taking them different places, to everywhere. So that was – we had that connection together. We did that for years. That was my connection with him. I didn’t mention it in the first part of this, because we was talking about some other stuff.

But we got to be close. Way later, he wind up staying with us, with Eleana and our family – Jamie, Serena – in Woodstock. In fact, that’s where he’s buried now. So in the last part of his life, he lived with us in Woodstock. We had a good ending. I was with him in the room when he died. So I guess that was apropos. I guess he wanted me to be there, because I got there late. I used to go visit him in the hospital. I got there late. I think he was just hanging on to make sure that somebody was there that was going to take care of him. So I went in and says, “Okay, Pop, I’m here.” So he said, “Okay.” I said, “I’m going to sit with you a little bit. I had something to do today. That’s why I got here late.” So he said okay. In the meanwhile, a lady – the nurse came in to take his vitals. So I sit there and watched him do it. She took his blood – I mean, took his heart beat and all that stuff. She left. She says, “He’s okay.” Shows you what she knows. She says, “He’s okay.” She went out of the room, and I sat and watched him. After about 15 minutes, he didn’t move. I say, wait a minute. So I called her back. I said, “You better check him again, because I don’t see any moving. I don’t see him breathing. I don’t see him doing nothing.” So she

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checked him again, and he died. I was right there in the room. I guess that was what he was waiting for, somebody to be there to make sure he's going to be taken care of. So that's how that happened. We buried him up in Woodstock. He's there now. Artists Cemetery – is that was it is? Yeah. So that's how that happened.

**Brower:** You named after him?

**Jimmy:** Yeah, Wilbur. Everybody said, “How'd you get that name, Wilbur?” I said, “It's my daddy's name.

**Brower:** My man Tony Bazley, he's a drummer in New Orleans. He wanted to make sure that I call you Wilbur.

**Jimmy:** Nat Adderley and Cannonball used to call me that. They used to call me both my names, says, “James Wilbur.” That's what they – they're really getting familiar. Some people do that now.

**Brower:** That's what the Bullet called you?

**Jimmy:** Yeah, “James Wilbur.”

**Brower:** That was – Larry Ridley gave me that.

**Jimmy:** Who?

**Brower:** Ridley.

**Jimmy:** Ridley.

**Brower:** I called him and asked. I said, “What do I need to ask Jimmy Cobb?” He said, “Ask him about the Bullet.” It took me a while to understand: Cannonball, Bullet, Cannonball, Bullet.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, Buckshot. They called him Buckshot once, because he was on a record in England where he couldn't use his name. He wasn't supposed to be recording for anybody else. So he has – his name was Buckshot La Funke.

**Brower:** So that's where Branford [Marsalis] got that from.

**Jimmy:** Maybe. Could be.

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**Brower:** Because he used – he made some music – his hip-hop stuff, I think. He used Buckshot.

**Jimmy:** Then he had another time he did the same thing. His name was Ronnie Peters. He had to use those fictitious names, because he was contracted with some other companies who would have frowned on him making records with other people. So he was Buckshot La Funke in one and Ronnie Peters in the other.

**Brower:** This trio – let’s get back to Earl Bostic to Dinah and the sort of simpatico that you developed with Keter and Wynton, which I guess then becomes a similar simpatico that you develop with Paul.

**Jimmy:** Right, because Keter was a great bass player, even then. See, Keter started out playing drums. Then he changed from drums to the bass player – to bass, and went to this teacher. Let’s see. I’m trying to think. Red – Red Mitchell. Him and Red Mitchell I think went to the same teacher, and they’re the same kind of a – they’re players. I guess that, being from the same teacher, they’ve got some similarities of playing. I think they’re the same. They kind of looked – their mannerisms were sort of the same, only one was black and one was white. But you could see where the connection was. It was – you could see the connection with the teacher, I think.

The thing about Wynton [Kelly]: Wynton is one of the most underrated players – piano player – in the century, because when I first sat down and played with Wynton, I said, this is it, right here. I don’t know how it can get any better than this. Because Wynton was right on everything he played. Dinah breathed, he’d breath with her. He played all the stuff. If you listen to the records, you can hear him and her doing a conversation. So him, Keter, and myself, I said, this is it. We don’t need nobody else. That’s what it was. We were a trio. I remember going to Detroit once and playing in a club there. What was it? Bluebird? I think it was called . . .

**Brower:** Bluebird Inn?

**Jimmy:** Bluebird. The house band was Yusef Lateef, Barry Harris. The bass player was Milt Jackson’s brother.

**Brower:** Ollie Jackson?

**Jimmy:** No, not Ollie. His name was something else. It wasn’t Ollie. But the bass player was his – and the drummer was Elvin Jones. That was the house band. So I remember I say, oh man, these are some bad guys here. But I was never afraid to go anywhere with the two guys I was with, because it don’t make any difference who it is, there can be no better than us. That was the attitude I had through the whole thing with those guys. I said,

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I can go any place in the world with these guys and don't worry about it, no sweat. That's what that was. And anybody that played with Wynton felt the same way about Wynton, because Wynton could play with everybody. He could play sick, and drunk – any kind of way. He could play, just swing through everything.

**Brower:** I just read a quote where you said something – that he was epileptic?

**Jimmy:** That only happened when he got to be a grown man. That didn't happen through the first part of his life. I don't know what that was that happened. He got – I think he claimed that happened maybe after Paul died, that he was – he liked Paul so much, he started – he used to drink a lot.

He was in a place in Brooklyn where they thought he was a man. They thought he was a young man that could play the piano. He started out when he was maybe 12, 13 years old. He could play the piano. I think what they say is Wynton, when he was three years old, just went to the piano and started playing it. He had a gift. All through the years, he was the prodigy of Brooklyn. They was proud of him. He probably played in the church, organ and all that stuff. So he learned pretty good. He made a record when he was about 17 years old, and he was playing with all the big people. So Wynton was a great piano – underrated great piano player.

**Brower:** Why do you think he was underrated?

**Jimmy:** Because people just didn't realize how good he was. In fact, just lately I was talking to Monty Alexander. He's 80. He came to me. He says – because he met me – when he met me, he was talking about Wynton. He'd just come from Jamaica. He's the one who put this back in my mind. He says, "Man, we should really do something about Wynton, because Wynton is one of the underrated piano players of all time." You hear him say that. He's a good piano player too. So I say, "Yeah. You just made me think about it." But his cousin does things like – has things for him, maybe every year or every other year, to keep his thing alive. I did a couple things for her up in Canada. She does it. What's her name?

**Eleana:** Grace Metivier.

**Jimmy:** Grace Metivier. She's his first cousin, and she keeps his image alive. I might probably have to talk to her again. Maybe we can do something else for Wynton, because Wynton is my man, lifetime. I knew the first time I sat down to play that it couldn't get no better than that for people playing together, because he could do that with anybody. He could sit down and play with anybody and swing through anything, play through anything, sober, drunk, whatever. He was phenomenal.

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Then you get to Paul [Chambers], which is another genius, when you get to Paul. Then you've got him and Paul and me. It's the same thing. It's the same thing. Now it's really the same thing. We had a good time. We worked with Miles until they got tired and quit, and we figured we'd have a trio. So that's what we did. We had a trio. Then we were together. The trio was so together, they started putting us with people, people that wanted an established trio. We made some records with Wes Montgomery. We made some . . .

**Brower:** *Smokin' at the Half Note.*

**Jimmy:** Yeah, like that. We made things like that. I think we made a couple of trips with Zoot Sims and – what was the other – his partner?

**Brower:** Al Cohn?

**Jimmy:** Al Cohn and Zoot Sims. We made a couple trips with them. They just put us with everybody like that. We did some – what else did we do? We just did a lot of record dates with people. In fact we did one record date, I think, that had Berry Gordy before he really got into his soul thing. We did – I remember – I don't remember hearing it. I don't even know if it got put out, or they threw it out, or what, because we weren't doing what he expected or what he probably turned out to do later, with Reba and all those people that he squired there. But I remember doing something in that place.

Over the years, we did a lot of things with a lot of people, and I enjoyed all of it. We did that thing with Wes in San Francisco. Actually it was in Oakland, I think. We just did that on the day off. We had a day off. We were working in the Blackhawk for Miles. On the day off, we went over there and worked that night, and they made that record.

There's a lot of things that happened like that, and most of them is all good. Like we did a thing where we used to go to Baltimore. You know that thing that they have, the Baltimore Jazz Society thing?

**Brower:** The Left Bank Jazz Society?

**Jimmy:** Left Bank, yeah. We used to go down there and do that. The guys used to say, anytime you all got some time off, call us up, get a saxophone player, and come on down, go to work. So that's what we did. We did it a few times. I think the first time we did it with – who's this guy? I knew his name until I was getting ready to call it. We did one – about 2, 3, 4 – with four different people. We did one with George Coleman. We did one with – what was the last one we did with – we sold – people like it a lot, but it was only two sets. He put out two albums. Who? I don't know. I can't think of . . .

**Brower:** These are the things that just came out a few years ago?

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**Jimmy:** Yeah.

**Brower:** Or maybe not a few years ago. Maybe within ten years.

**Jimmy:** Yeah. We did one with Hank Mobley. We did one with George Coleman.

**Brower:** I got to think the Left Bank was . . .

**Jimmy:** We did one – the first one we did was Harold Vick. Did you know Harold Vick?

Brower: Yeah.

**Jimmy:** We did one . . .

**Brower:** Howard University guy?

**Jimmy:** Yeah. And we went down there with Wes Montgomery, but Wes wouldn't let them record him, because he was probably contracted to CSI [CTI?].

**Brower:** Joe Henderson.

**Jimmy:** Joe Henderson. Yeah, we did one with Joe Henderson that they like a lot, because I guess out of all of them, they pick Joe Henderson their most favorite. I get a lot of comments about that.

**Brower:** How did you like that thing? How did you like that?

**Jimmy:** I liked it. I enjoyed going down to work with them guys, because they enjoyed having us there. We had a lot of fun. It was this thing where people come and bring their own liquor, their own refreshments, their own food, and sit down and listen to music for – what is it? Three hours?

**Brower:** It was 6 to 9.

**Jimmy:** Yeah.

**Brower:** On Sundays, Sunday afternoon. I remember the famous ballroom. I've got to say, I think things have changed, but it was among my most favorite environments, because there's nobody getting in between the people and the music, dictating what it's supposed to be.

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**Jimmy:** Yeah. They're just there to listen and have fun, and they loved Wynton, and they loved us. So we used to go all the time. Every time we could get somebody, was a space open, we'd go and do it.

**Brower:** Let me ask you: did you charge them differently than you might charge other circumstances?

**Jimmy:** No. We just went off whatever budget they could pay, because we know they didn't have . . .

**Brower:** That's what I mean. In other words, you might do something for them that if somebody – a New York club owner called you or something that you . . .

**Jimmy:** Yeah, it could be different. It's flexible. If we all agree to do it, we'll go do it. I remember going down there with my drums, on the train, and getting off the train with my drums on a wheel, pushing the drums down to that place. It wasn't that far from the train station to that venue, like two blocks or something? I'd roll the drums down there. That's how we would do this. That's how funny the money was. But that's what it was. So what it is, is what it is. So we used to go down there and do that. We enjoyed it. They enjoyed it. So, peace.

**Brower:** So we go Earl Bostic, and that leads you to . . .

**Jimmy:** Dinah's trio.

**Brower:** Dinah's trio.

**Jimmy:** So we did that. Then . . .

**Brower:** With her, you did more than play drums, in the sense of the band, right?

**Jimmy:** Yeah. We were supposed to be married at that time. That's what that situation was. We was . . .

**Brower:** But you had other responsibilities. Take the social part out.

**Jimmy:** I was supposed to be the manager.

**Brower:** Yeah.

**Jimmy:** I was supposed to be the manager, because I remember some people telling me, "You look too young to be a manger." I'd say, "Well, it happens like that sometimes." I

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was a bandleader at one time. She made me a bandleader. Had “Dinah Washington and the Jimmy Cobb Band.” That’s what she did with her guys, I guess. I can’t fight it. So that’s what I was, a manager. I remember somebody like – what’s the popular singer, popular white singer – she told me – she says, “You look too young to be a manager.” I say, “You know what? That’s what I am.” Somebody’s got to be it. I’m here.

**Eleana:** Rosemary Clooney.

**Jimmy:** No, it wasn’t Rosemary. Somebody like that, though. It was . . .

**Brower:** Anita O’Day?

**Jimmy:** Patti Page.

**Brower:** Patti Page?

**Jimmy:** Patti Page, yeah. Patti Page say, “You look like – you don’t look old enough to be a manger.” I say, “Yeah, well, I guess I don’t, but I am.”

**Brower:** How did you all travel in those days.

**Jimmy:** Cars. We had – we used to buy Chryslers. Had a Chrysler station wagon and a Chrysler 300, I think it was, which was a very fast car at that time. We used to travel with the station model filled up with our clothes and Dinah’s shoes. That was incredible, 200 pairs of shoes.

**Brower:** She’s like Imelda Marcos or something.

**Jimmy:** It’s like my daughter. All those daughters. She likes shoes too. So those guys – she was traveling with a bunch of shoes. I remember living in – in New York, we lived at 2040 Seventh Avenue, which is the place where Erroll Garner lived, Dizzy and Lorraine [Gillespie] lived, and Dinah had lived up on the eighth floor, in a little one-bedroom apartment up there. It had an elevator. So one night, we’d come off the road after doing six weeks or something, come back home, get back there, and the elevator’s broke. Now we got all this stuff in the car we got to take upstairs. We got to walk all this stuff up eight flights of stairs. That is really some horrible stuff. All 800 pairs of shoes. Gowns and all that stuff. Just stuff that we carried. The drums – I don’t know if we took the drums. I think the drums might have been with the roadie. But it may have been the drums. All that stuff had to go upstairs. So we did that. Then – in fact, that was the last place that me and her were together, because one night we fell out about something, and she stormed out. While she stormed out, I took all of my stuff and moved out two or three blocks to the Theresa Hotel. I walked my stuff up there. I know if I walk up eight flights

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of stairs with stuff, I can walk up the street with my stuff and check in. So I did that. and I stayed in the Theresa for about half a year, six months or some stuff, working around town with different people. I met Pee Wee Marquette when I used to stay there. That's a little guy that used to be the barker in . . .

**Brower:** Birdland.

**Jimmy:** Birdland. He was staying down the hall from me, telling people that when I got famous, that he taught me all I know. He's a funny little guy. Like I say, Dizzy and Lorraine, and Erroll Garner, and some other people that wasn't that noteworthy lived in there, but they were entertainers. Right in between that building and the Teresa Hotel, Sugar Ray [Robinson] had his whole – owned the whole block there. He had a barber shop, a bar, a real estate office, a lot of stuff. That was his block. I used to hang out there with them. I got to know all the boxers, because I was right there, right there living with them. So I got to know them. I got to go watch Ray train. I got to know him a little bit.

**Brower:** Were you good with your hands?

**Jimmy:** No. I never went to do that, but being a drummer, I probably got – could have done something, but I'm not one of them guys to hit me all night. So I figured I'd play the drums.

**Brower:** In that position, road manager, taking care of things, you got to deal with some situations.

**Jimmy:** Yeah. I don't remember too many situations coming up like where I would have to fight anybody. I remember being on the stage once with Earl Bostic in New Orleans where a guy pulled out a pistol. Earl cringed and stayed – he'd push everybody back against the wall. We were outside. These guys are shooting at each other across the street, at the dude [?] – like cowboys. Pow, pow. I said, whoa, wait a minute. Get me out of here. I'm - and Earl is probably up under the piano by then. But there was some really crazy stuff down there. I said, oh my goodness. This is Wild West.

**Brower:** What's the difference between what you had to do in an r-and-b and with Dinah, on both sides of the fence, so to speak? There's a fence between the r-and-b and the jazz.

**Jimmy:** Dinah can do it all. Dinah started in the trench, gospel. That's where she started. She started like that. I don't know whether her mother wanted her to do that other, that blues thing. She got to the blues thing, because the gospel is the blues. So she got to that. I think one time she worked in a place where she was in one room downstairs and Lady Day was upstairs. So when she got through, she'd go upstairs and watch Lady Day sing.

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So she got so she could interpret her. She could sing like that. At that time, a lot of people could do that, because I think she was – Lady Day was probably the easiest study to implement.

**Brower:** Easier than Sarah. Easier than Sarah or Ella.

**Jimmy:** Oh yeah, easier, because that's hard to do that, Sarah or Ella. It takes some doing. But Lady Day, her style was a little more fitting to people that could do it.

She could do all of it. It wasn't no problem about her doing that, because she could sing ballads, she could sing the blues, and she could make the shout, like that. She was just a all-around singer. So there was no problem for her to get to certain things. All what had to happen is she would go to some place, and somebody would tell her, just tell her what they wanted. If they wanted a record, they'd say, we want you to sing these kind of tunes. She'd get out there and tear it up. That's all that was, easy for her.

**Brower:** What about its demands on you, though? Or – as a trio, or as accompanists? That's . . .

**Jimmy:** Oh, no. We can handle all of that. We can handle all of that. That wasn't a big thing. We could handle whatever she did, because that's what I was telling you. Wynton was a genius with that stuff.

**Brower:** Did you rehearse a lot?

**Jimmy:** No, not that much, no. No, we just went and played. Like if we had to do a record date or something, we could probably had to read – if they had charts for her, we probably had to do that, but we didn't rehearse with her, because we was together. We all – we didn't have to rehearse. We knew the stuff already.

**Brower:** How did you get to the reading part?

**Jimmy:** I learned how to read in Washington, with – I'm telling you, with being with the teacher, and with Rick. Rick had – he used to write little parts for the nine-piece band that we used to go play the things in the Colonnade with, and like that. So I learned how to read a little bit like that. When I left Washington, I could read pretty good, but when I got on the road, I could read. But reading is a thing you have to do, you have to keep doing every day, or else it will slip away from you, especially when you start getting old. It gets hard to see that stuff. So reading – I could probably read about as good as now as I did when I left Washington, because I don't really do that today. I can just look at it, hear what they doing, and do it. It's almost like Buddy Rich. Buddy Rich could read nothing, but you played it down once for him, and it's like he could read everything.

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**Brower:** The machine gun couldn't read?

**Jimmy:** Couldn't read at all. Neither could Erroll Garner. Neither could Wes Montgomery. Neither could [?] brother. That's what they do. They do it as – I don't think Buddy – if you called chord changes out to him, I don't even know if he knows what that is. He'd just hear it and play it. It's a measurable process.

**Brower:** Is there anything else on the r-and-b side of things that you did, that you would like to bring attention to or you think is illustrative in any way?

**Jimmy:** Back to the time with Bostic, when that started, that's what it was. We were – everybody out there was playing r-and-b. There was a lot of bands. There was – Cootie Williams had a band, I think, that had to do the same thing, had to play – he had to play that music to get across. They expect you to – the saxophone players to walk the bar, hold a note. All the stuff. Everybody was doing that, even guys that could play. Like Illinois Jacquet and all that was playing a certain kind of way to get across. I remember playing a lot of shuffles and backbeats, because that's what they required. Everybody around was doing it, because that's how you made a living. That's the way I started out, doing that on the road with Earl Bostic. Occasionally we would play some swing thing, but he didn't want to do that too much, because he figured that they couldn't use it. So he played things like *Flamingo* [Cobb sings the opening phrase of the melody], something simple they could grab a hold of. Then other things would be backbeats. We played a couple tunes that we really liked to play, that we could get into, which I can't even – it won't even come to mind now. I remember one we used to play that I couldn't wait to get to, because you get off of some of that backbeat and shuffle stuff he was doing. But that's how things were back then. You had to do what makes your money.

**Brower:** In terms of your style as a jazz drummer, here's a question I want to ask you is: did you think of yourself as an entertainer or an artist? Or was that even a dichotomy in your mind?

**Jimmy:** I never thought about it either one way or the other. I just thought about it as trying to be a drummer as good as Max Roach or in that idiom: Max Roach, Art Blakey, Buddy Rich, Gene Krupa – all those guys back then – Papa Jo Jones. I was just trying to be adequate, to be able to be in this business to make a living. So I wasn't thinking about any kind of pigeonhole standards, nothing like that. I was just trying to get it done as the best of my possible – the best way I could possibly do it.

**Brower:** But you just hit on two standards. You hit on make a living, and then you hit on being adequate in this music.

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**Jimmy:** They're related. You had to be adequate to make a living. If you were at a place where somebody's going to hire you, and you're not adequate, then you won't get hired. So you have to be at the right place at the right time with the right stuff, and then you got a chance. It's not always being good. There's a lot of guys out there were very good. Like I tell you, Mack Simpkins was a very good drummer, but he never got to where he thought he should be, because maybe I had better luck than him, being in places at the right time. Had he been there, he could probably did the same thing better. But he didn't have – maybe – I figure he just didn't have as many breaks as I had. I loved him like a brother, because he was a good player and he was a good guy. But it just doesn't happen. Some people can be the greatest player that there is and have bad breaks and not ever get to where they should be. I'm fortunate to have been in the right place at the right time and with some luck.

**Brower:** And the right stuff.

**Jimmy:** Yeah. Well, you have to have something or else anybody ain't even going to look at you to consider. You have to have something to show.

**Brower:** How did you get to the Cannonball situation?

**Jimmy:** The Cannonball thing – I met Cannon when I was with Dinah. We went to Florida, Fort Lauderdale, and we were unpacking to going into – what do they call it? – the Sir John Hotel. That's where all the artists stayed. This guy was standing up beside the building. He come up to me. He says, "Are you Jimmy Cobb?" I said, "Yeah." So he said, "My name is Julian Adderley. I'm a teacher here. I play alto saxophone. I just want to talk to you about some things, what's going on in New York," because he's down there, stuck in a position where he don't see nobody, and he's interested in what the music is, because he's a great player. He just wants to talk to somebody to see what the cats are doing. That's what it was. Like he wanted to know whether Jackie McLean and some of the other alto players – what was happening with them and what's going on in New York, places to work. So we had that conversation. We go in the hotel, and he comes up to the room. We're having a conversation. There's a place where you can cook and all that stuff. So I bought some potpies and we cooked food, set up, and had little snacks, and we talked about it.

A little later – it probably was in his mind anyway that he wanted to leave doing that, what he was going to do to get out into the big time. So after that, after meeting him, one day – I don't know how much longer – he came – he used to come to New York, where we were playing. Eventually – I mean, he would come occasionally, and he would come and find me someplace, if I was playing somewhere. I remember one time playing a duo with Horace Silver and myself. I think it was in a hotel lobby on 46th Street. That's all they could hire, was a piano. So we was playing this duet thing. He would come and sit

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in. It was like a – he would do that occasionally. I think he was probably feeling his way to see that the atmosphere was in New York. Then later he came up, and he got in – he played with – I think Kenny Clarke had a band at the – what’s that place downtown on 4th Street? I don’t know. But he was working there. He played with him. Him and Nat sat in with them. Actually it was the bass player’s band. Can’t think of nobody’s name. This is really – one of the great bass players of all time. He was off of – Paul came off of him.

**Brower:** Pettiford?

**Jimmy:** [Oscar] Pettiford. Pettiford’s band. He sat in with Pettiford, and Pettiford hired him. After that he played with Pettiford a little bit. He felt his way around. I think he got in touch with John Levy and told him he wanted to have a band. So he got a band and brought some guys from Florida that he had been playing with down there. They were, I think, Junior Mance, because they were – him and Nat was in the army with Junior Mance. And Sam Jones was there. He’d been – they had been playing with Sam. So it was Junior Mance, Sam Jones, him, Nat, and a drummer they called – I think they called him Saint Mary. That’s all I ever knew. So he went to New – came to New York, and I think he auditioned for John Levy. John Levy said, “The band sounds good, but the drummer sounds weak. You probably need to get another drummer.” They said okay. So he hired me, because we had met and he knew I was with Dinah and Keter and everybody. So he had a band. The band was what I just named: him and Nat, Sam Jones, Junior Mance, and me. We made an album called *Sharpshooters*. We did pretty good. We was trying to go round with it. On one occasion he wanted to go back to where he was at Fort Lauderdale. It was a place called – I think they called it Porgy’s or something. Porgy’s, I think it was. They had been working in there. Nat at the time was the bandleader, because Nat is a singer. Nat was a singer. He used to go and sing all the blues. So Nat was the bandleader, and whatever money he used to split with Cannon. So he figured – Cannon figured, now that they got the band, they would go back to this guy. He said, “I got a band. You can bring us in now.” The guy said okay. So they brought us in, and we went in there playing that music that they wanted to play, all the bebop music. After about two or three songs, the guy came up and said, “When is the little guy going to sing?” Julian looked at him and says, “We don’t do that anymore.” The guy said, “Oh yeah? Well, pack your shit up and get out of here.” So Cannon come over to me. He say, “Pack up.” I said, “What?” He say, “Pack up. We’re leaving.” I said, “Okay.” So we packed up, and we left. But the guy didn’t want to hear nothing but Nat’s singing, because that’s what he was used to.

After that . . .

**Brower:** Was he fully formed?

**Jimmy:** Who?

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**Brower:** Julian Adderley.

**Jimmy:** Oh, man, yeah. He was a killer. He was a killer right then. If you don't believe me, listen to that record. Find that record, and listen to it. You know exactly how he performed. They were both – had been playing together, had their things together. They was like real killers together. Nat was the fire, and Cannonball was the music. If you had that record, you can see how fired up they was – they both were.

We did that for a while. Then they – we worked around a little while, and then they had to break up the band, because they weren't paying any taxes. The IRS guy said, "You got to pay taxes. I don't know what you were thinking." So they broke the band up, and they had to both go each way. I think Nat came back to Florida and Julian went to – Julian stayed – no, Nat went to Long Island. Went to [?] – he got an apartment in [?]. When they broke up, I think Cannon went and stayed with him and Ann in Long Island until – then, in the interim, Miles hired Cannon in the band. So Cannon had a gig, and he was staying over there with Nat and Ann. He played it for a little while – no, he stayed in the band. He started calling me, because at that time, Philly Joe [Jones] was in the band. Miles's band was Red Garland, Philly Joe, Paul, Coltrane, Miles, and him. At that time Joe was missing a lot of gigs, for whatever reason. He had some issues that he had to deal with. So he wouldn't show up on time sometime, or he wouldn't show up at all sometime. So Julian told me, "Why don't you come and sit in with us? So if Joe doesn't show up one of these times, you can play. You can be right there. You can play." Eventually, that's what happened. It happened on a record date. One record that they did, Joe had started, and he didn't show up for the second one. What Joe's reason was, he says, "They take too much time to pay your money," which is – he was right, because, Columbia, you make a date. Then you have to wait to the union for two weeks or three weeks to get your money, and Joe needed his money yesterday.

**Brower:** It wasn't like working at Bob Weinstock.

**Jimmy:** No, no. Bob Weinstock, he probably could pay a little bit of money right then. But the legitimate companies, they want you to sign where you're not going to get no money after this, but you're going to maybe wait a long time before you get this money. That's what it was. Joe, basically, when he wanted a record date, he wanted the money that day. But they said, "No, we're going to put this through the union. You're going to wait two, three weeks to get it." So he got tired of that.

This was – this date was *Porgy and Bess*. Joe didn't show up, so Miles said, "Okay. Let Jimmy play." So that's what I did. I played. We finished the record. That was the start of it. Joe had done half of the record, and I did the other half.

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Then later on – we’re getting to – I got to Miles now – later on, Miles called me. He called me one day and says, “I want you in the band. Joe quit. He’s not going to be here anymore.” So I said, “Okay.” So he called me. I said, “Okay.” We went through a few things. I said, “Okay. When you working again?” He said, “Actually, I’m working tonight.” I say, “Yeah, where?” He say, “Boston.” “You say Boston?” We’re talking. It’s like six o’clock in the evening. I’m in New York. So he say, “Yeah, Boston. I’ll see you here.” “What time you hit?” He say, “Nine o’clock.” “Nine o’clock? How am I going to get there by nine o’clock?” He say, “You want the gig, don’t you?” I said, “Yeah, okay man.” So I started to get myself together. I’m scrambling to get the drums out to the airport. The airport at that time was pretty close to me, LaGuardia. You could go out. You could get a shuttle flight from either – from New York to Boston or New York to Washington in 55 minutes either way. So I went out there and got the plane and got up there. When I got up there, we’re on the bandstand playing without the drums, Paul and Red and Trane and Cannon and Miles. So I got up and set up the drums while they were playing. They were playing *’Round about Midnight*. So when they got to this certain part, if you know this record – a certain part of the record – I played this little break with them, and I was in the band, no rehearsal, no nothing. We played all the rest of the night. I played all the rest of the gigs, because I had been sitting around, waiting for Joe not to show up for a lot of these gigs. So I knew the music. In fact, I probably knew it even before I got to that, because I used to go see A.T., when A.T. was in the band playing, Arthur Taylor. I used to go and sit with him, because we were tight. He used to come off the stand sometime and say, “Man, am I playing all right? Is the time falling down.” I say, “No, man, it ain’t you. Everything is cool.” He quit. He quit because he was going through some things in his head about him being at fault, or something’s happening in the band. But we was – we used to hang out together. We used to talk a lot. This is way before the thing with Joe and him happening, but me and Joe was tight. Joe used to come to me and say, “I need to do this,” and blah blah, “Can you help me?” I said, “Yes.” And every time he’d do it, I could do it. So we got to be really good friends. So, when it happened, I just went in the band. That’s how it happened.

**Brower:** What was the circle of drummers at that time? You mentioned A.T. You mentioned Philly. Who were the other cats?

**Jimmy:** There was Art Blakey. There was a lot of drummers out there. I’m trying to think, at that time.

**Brower:** That you were relating to. What I’m getting at is, was there, as we referred to earlier, like maybe in D.C., when there was a group of cats that you related to, maybe you all did stuff. So, was that going on with the cats on the scene in . . . ?

**Jimmy:** There was a lot of guys. There was the guy that I mentioned that I stayed with in the Bronx, was Khalil, and a friend of his was named Phil Grant – I mean, Phil Harris,

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who was a drummer. He really was more a teacher than an actual player. He taught – I think he taught Ben Riley. There was Ben Riley. We used to hang out with Khalil, Phil, Ben Riley, and – I’m trying to think who else would be with us sometimes. It’s another guy, lives in the Bronx. I can’t think of what his name is. He wasn’t with us that much. It was like that. We used to do it like that. But it was just a small group. Sometimes – I used to go to A.T.’s house sometimes, and we used to practice.

**Brower:** What would you work on?

**Jimmy:** Just out of the books, or just some tunes off of records.

**Brower:** What were the books?

**Jimmy:** Slonimsky, stick control. Just the books was popular. Coordination books. Just whatever was handy. We would play – read duets. That’s almost like the drum and bugle corps things. We did some of that, and we did a lot of the other stuff.

**Brower:** How much time were you putting into this?

**Jimmy:** Before I got on the road, I used to practice maybe eight hours a day if I wasn’t doing nothing else. I’d stay on the drums.

**Brower:** This may sound like a crazy question, but walk me through – if you’re spending eight hours on a drum kit, walk me through what you were doing.

**Jimmy:** You sit down and play. You listen to records. You play. You do something in the book. You play. You get up. You eat. You sit back down and play. You just play, just keep doing – I figured I’d keep myself busy, because I wasn’t doing nothing else. I might as well be doing something to contribute to what I wanted to do. So that’s what I would do. I would go as much as I could. In fact, I drove a lot of people crazy probably doing that. In that place on Stanton Terrace, it was built – you could knock on the wall and hear people next door. I used to drive them people nuts. The guy used to run over and say, “Would you please stop? My wife’s got a headache,” blah blah blah blah. I said, okay. It was like that. Wasn’t a whole lot of places you could play like that. I like to [?]. I [?] a whole lot of places, because in New York they had a law that says that you could play from 10 o’clock in the morning to 10 o’clock at night. Can’t nobody bother you. So I wore that out. In fact, we wore it out. It was two of us. So there was double trouble, Khalil and myself. We had the drums set up in the kitchen. I’d get up and he’d sit down. Like that. I had a lot of practice with him, because I lived with him. That’s how that happened. He was a sweet guy. Don’t be for him, like I say, no telling where I’d be. I probably would have been a security guard or something. I probably went back to Washington.

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**Brower:** Did you have preferences as to what you played? Or did it make a difference what the kit was?

**Jimmy:** Nah, that's just part of learning the drums and what they were doing at the time. You listen to Max and see what kind of solo he just put out or something, and go through it – try to go through that, analyze that, and try to see how much of that you could play if you wanted to. Things like that. It was Kenny Clarke. It was Max. It was Art Blakey. There was a lot of guys I can't call the names of. Shadow Wilson. There was a lot of guys. I got a tee-shirt on with about 150 guys that I knew them all, and I can't call nobody's name. But it's a friend of mine that makes this tee-shirt, and he's got all the drummers listed on the back of it. It was that guy who used to live uptown. His name was Bill English. He sang out [?] a little bit too.

It's a lot of guys. It's just, the names won't come up. In fact, there was one guy that was in the army. His name was Gene Gammage. He was a Caucasian guy that was in the army in Washington. He didn't have nothing to do. He was a drummer and a magician. Some kind of way he found me. We used to hang out tough. All the guys in the ghetto was wondering, "What you hanging out with this dude for?" I say, "He's my friend. He plays drums, and we're together. So, what you got to do with it?" He wound up being like maybe the first drummer that played with the Oscar Peterson trio. They drove me crazy, because it was Ray Brown and Oscar and him. I don't know how long he did that, but I think he was the first one to do that. Then afterward, in the later part of his life, he was with Bobby Short. He was with Bobby Short in that hotel gig that he had all – forever – and he didn't like that either, because he was a bebop drummer in his head, and he was down there having to play that cocktail music every night. So he got a – he formed a drinking habit, and he really got off into it. So I think after a while he had to go through AA. I remember seeing him one time. After a period of time I went to buy him a drink, and he would say, "No, man, I don't drink no more. I'm with AA." I say, "Oh, okay." After that, he disappeared. I don't know what happened to him. I don't know where he went or he probably died or something. I never even heard about it. But he was a – we were good friends for a minute. He was a good magician. He had all the little tricks with the cards. He would do a thing, cross his hand with the card. You know that kind of thing? He was into it. From a little boy, he was into that. He was a pretty good drummer too. I hadn't thought about him in a while, but he was a good friend, Gene Gammage.

**Brower:** Were jam sessions a part of all of this, overlaid to all of this?

**Jimmy:** Yeah. There was a lot of it. That's what you could do a lot of, because it was a lot of places to do it. Like right in that neighborhood I was telling you about, Jeanne [Klors?], and 7th and T, and all that. There was two places right together, right there.

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**Brower:** What about in New York?

**Jimmy:** In New York it was all over the place. There was Minton's Playhouse. There was the Paradise, which was at 110th Street, I think, and what? – 110th and what? Eighth? Somewhere down there. I don't remember being there, but there used to be a saxophone player named Big Nick, who used to have . . .

**Brower:** Big Nick Nicholas?

**Jimmy:** Um-hmm, who used to have the band, and then the same thing happened. He would be in there with three pieces and have guys come up and play all nights. That's where this gig was. They got pictures of Lou Donaldson being there with Bird. A whole bunch of people coming through to do that. It was that place. It was Minton's. And there was a few other places like that too. I don't know what they all were. They was all over.

**Brower:** We're in the mid-'50s now, I mean, from some – '55, '56, '57, all in that.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, start from '50 with that, because when I got there, they were doing it. And they had after-hour joints. Like Minton's had an after-hours place, that after the regular thing, you went down in the basement, and they had a trio or something that played until maybe light. There was a few places like that. Was a place called – was Minton's. There was the [Shondu?], which was up near 125th Street. It was – I don't know if that was under the Shalimar Restaurant. It was a place uptown. It was a top-shelf elite bar for the brothers up there. And they had a place, the after-hours club was called [Shondu?], I think. So there was that place. Those two I knew about. Then there was another place off St. Nicholas Avenue that Rouse used to work at times, because I remember being – going down there. I don't know what they call it. I can't remember what they called that. But there was a lot of them going on. In fact I worked at the Minton's one, because the drummer there, he used to take off. He used to give me the gig. So I used to be down there sometime doing that, which is – was pretty nice.

**Brower:** So you got, on top of 6-, 5-, 6-, 7-, 8-hours a day shedding, then you're out. If you're not working . . .

**Jimmy:** Yeah, looking at folks.

**Brower:** You're in these sessions. You're either studying cats or in the sessions.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, basically that, yeah. See, because you had to be a certain – had to have a certain prowess to even go to a session, because it was so – there's so much competition at the time that, like I say, if you can't do it, you can't go onto the bandstand, and they'll tell you that. They'll tell you to come back when you can play. That's easy for them to

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say. They would say that very easy. That's what the scene was like. You'd have to be toge- – if you're going to go up there, you better produce something. That's probably why everybody came to New York, because the energy was so high, and you have to be on top of your stuff to be there, to stay there, especially to get a gig.

**Brower:** Did you find yourself saying that?

**Jimmy:** Yeah, of course. I'm just like everybody else. I have to try to stay there to produce something, to get a little jive gig. That's what everybody did. So you get a chance to play with almost anybody. I worked the Stan Getz quartet, Dizzy Gillespie small band, Cannonball's and Nat's, and a lot of stuff.

**Eleana:** Clark.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, Clark Terry had a band I worked with occasionally sometimes. Just everybody that – we'd all get [?] – you get the call – you have to make yourself so people will call you, and you can't do that if they don't know how you can play or if you can play. So that's what that was like, competitive.

**Brower:** Cutthroat?

**Jimmy:** Yeah, that too. Then they had – at that time, they had a agent for the musicians union that was . . .

[recording interrupted; it resumes in mid-sentence]

. . . was not up to date, he wouldn't let you play. If he came in and saw you, he said, "Come down. Let me see your card." You didn't have no card, he say, "Come off the bandstand. You can't play." It was really gangster style almost. I mean really. I remember his name. His name was Mr. Rome. I knew when I saw him, I'd say, awwww. If I wasn't cool, I started to getting off of the bandstand, because he would run everybody. He would go every different club where it was happening. He would show up like the sheriff.

**Brower:** Did you think that the union – was the union a positive force for the musicians, or not?

**Jimmy:** I think they thought it was, but I don't remember getting a gig from the union the whole time I was in it. I mean, the union call me up and say, "We got a gig for you." I don't remember that ever happening. Whether they were positive or not, they got a thing where they sent – you put some – they'd tax you for the gigs you do do, and after a while they send you a little check or something for the things. You get like a pension check or something. They're good for that. But now, I think they're trying to work on something

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that's more beneficial for the musicians that hasn't been happening over the years, like getting money for the records you made or records that you were on that you only got paid once for, and people been abusing it. They're trying to make that scene a little cleaner. They got some musicians, friends of ours, that work on it, trying to make it happen. They got Bobby Cranshaw, the bass player, and – who else works down there?

**Brower:** Jimmy Owens.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, Jimmy Owens. They know what the scene is, and they try to make it better. Working on it.

**Brower:** Looking at how musicians learn today, and what they have to go through to get to a level to be adequate or do what's required, versus how you had to do it coming up: how do you weigh those?

**Jimmy:** It's harder in one way, and it's easier in another way, because right now, they got schools that you could buy – you can buy into. You can go and pay somebody to learn the stuff and probably have an adequate teacher teach you. Back then, didn't have no schools like that. And even if we had them, we didn't have the money to pay for it, anyway. So what we did, is had to learn the way we did, through the streets, through listening to people, through talking to people, and like that. Listen to records and all that. They got all – they could still do all that, the guys now. They even got videos on top of that. But it's not like what we had. We had – we could walk up and touch them guys, talk to him, know what he sounds like, what he thinks, like that, and he could tell you things that you're probably not going to get from a video or any of that other mechanical stuff.

**Brower:** Who gave you the most, in terms of who you could relate to? Who gave you the most? Who did you really – yeah, that's my question: who gave you the most?

**Jimmy:** I was based – like most guys at that time playing drums, I was based on Max Roach. I was thinking Max Roach – at that time, Max Roach was the king. So I was into that.

**Brower:** More so than Kenny Clarke?

**Jimmy:** More so than Kenny. I think . . .

**Brower:** More so than Roy?

**Jimmy:** Yeah, more so than Roy too. But I was into Roy too. Roy was maybe the second part of that, but I was really into Max. I thought Max was the king of all that at that time. I think most people there at that time thought the same thing. Art was a different kind of

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thing. He was third. He was the swinging part of that trio, the hard-swinging part of that trio, because Max was like the professor of the playing and the construction of solos and all that stuff. All that hip stuff, he probably came out with first, because he was a student, and he worked on the things that he did. He worked on trying to make everything different every time he did it. Or playing in different time signatures and things like that. He worked a lot on that: 3/4, 7/4, 5/4, all that. That wasn't probably in existence until he put it out there a little bit. Maybe Dave Brubeck . . .

**Brower:** [Joe] Morello.

**Jimmy:** . . . helped some of that. Dave Brubeck is probably – probably got Morello into it.

So, like that. I basically listened more to Max, I think, as most drummers were then. Then was – after that was Philly Joe. Philly, I met him when I was with Earl Bostic. I think he was still in Philadelphia driving a streetcar. That was his gig. It's rumored that they had a club there called – what was that? Blue? Blue Note? Was it Blue Note? It was a club, something like that. I think it was Blue Note or something like that, where the streetcar went right by it. It's rumored that Joe stopped the streetcar – I think it was probably empty – stopped the streetcar, parked it in front of that, went in, and jammed a little bit with the band in there.

That was another one of those places in Philadelphia where the guys came to jam. The owner wouldn't let anybody in there that he thought couldn't play. Somebody would get on the bandstand, and he thought it wasn't up to par – he was a little crippled guy. He would come hobbling down the stairs, say, "Come on off of there. Them guys play bebop." He was that kind of owner. It was a place where he hired Clifford Brown, who lived pretty close to there, in Delaware, and it's the house band or something. So he used to invite guys from New York to come down and play, so they could – so Clifford Brown could shock them. He did that with – I think he did it with Miles. He did it with Kenny Dorham. He did it with all them guys that was supposed to be bad players then. He put Clifford on them. That's how competitive the stuff was, like that.

Another time, talking about how competitive: Dizzy went – after Charlie Parker, Dizzy went to – when he got out of the band with Bird, he went to California to form his own band. He had a gig out there. He called Miles up and told him – he says, "I got a little guy out here's gonna to kick your ass." Something like that. He was saying – he was talking about Chet Baker. Chet Baker had just started out there, and he was like – he was the phenom out there at the time. So he wound up – eventually, Chet Baker came to New York, and we were both in Birdland together. It was Miles Davis – no, it was before I got in the band. It was Miles Davis with Sonny Rollins. Who was the piano player? Bud Powell or one of them guys. Miles's sextet was terrible, really bad, with them guys.

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Kenny Clarke. I think Oscar Pettiford. I mean really, really, really bad band. They brought in Chet Baker. So they had them both together. Miles went and burned it up so tough. Chet Baker come on. He had to sing, because there isn't no way he was going to play a whole lot of trumpet after what they did up there. It was evident. I say, oh my goodness. It was Sonny Rollins, and Jackie McLean, and all them guys. I say, I hate to be up there, having to follow that. So that's what it was. I think Dizzy put that spur – that burr on his saddle.

**Brower:** Did you hear Fats Navarro?

**Jimmy:** Yeah. I told you, I listened to Billy Eckstine's band all the time.

**Brower:** I mean live.

**Jimmy:** No, I didn't hear him that much live.

**Brower:** Where do you put him, through?

**Jimmy:** One of the great saxophone [*sic*] players. That's where Clifford Brown came from. That's where Freddie Hubbard came from. That's where a lot of guys came from. He was really, really a phenomenal guy, for the Fat Girl. I don't know what reason. But he was tremendous.

**Brower:** I hear people say that that should have been the trumpeter with Bird.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, but that's – what happened, when Bird left – I mean when Miles left – I mean, Dizzy left Bird, they were standing out in front of the Three Deuces, and the proprietor was out there. The proprietor say, "Okay, Bird. Now that Dizzy left, who you going to get to play trumpet when you come in next week?" or whenever that. Miles is standing there. So Bird said – Miles said he didn't even look at him when he said, "This is my trumpet player here." He wanted to get the gig. He just – say, "Here's my trumpet player." At that time Miles wasn't the best trumpet player. Like you say, it could have been – Kenny Dorham, I think, was probably the better trumpet player at that time, and some other guys, but Miles just happened to be standing there. Sometimes it's just being at the right place. So that's what happened. That's how that happened.

**Brower:** You actually knew Miles before you got in the band.

**Jimmy:** Yeah. I ran across Miles once. I was in St. Louis, playing in a place that – called Pop Chambers. He used to have a place upstairs on the second floor. It was like a dance hall. He used to bring in groups. Dinah was over there. Across the corner was a bar, and Miles had a quartet in there. So I used to come out there, go across the street, and listen to

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Miles for whatever time I could listen to him. We didn't meet then, but that's when I first saw him, and saw him in his own habitat. He was still – St. Louis is not where he was – he was born in Akron – what do you call it? – Alton.

**Brower:** Alton, Illinois.

**Jimmy:** Alton, Illinois. That's right outside of St. Louis, right? So he was right in his neighborhood.

**Brower:** Alton, East St. Louis.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, yeah. East St. Louis. So that's where I first saw him. Then a little later, when I was still working with Dinah, we were in a theater in Philadelphia. It was – what was it? – Dinah Washington and somebody else. I remember – oh, Symphony Sid All Stars, which was . . .

**Brower:** Same guy you used to listen to on the radio.

**Jimmy:** Symphony Sid, yeah. He used to bring out some of them guys that he was playing that music. He would get them to go out and perform in the theaters. It was Bird, Miles, Milt Jackson, Toots Thielemans. That was his All Stars. So our band had – our rhythm section had to play with them. Everybody's just – the budget we're working with here. They didn't bring a rhythm section. So they used the rhythm section that was on the show. That was – that would be Dinah's rhythm section, which at that time was Beryl Booker, Keter Betts, and myself. They went on three or four times a day, and we got to play with them. They would play – we would play maybe an hour or something. Then they show a short movie or something. We'd come back and play again. That's what it was. I mean, Dinah would do something. Then – that's how the shows went down. We did that for about a week. And on Sunday, in Philadelphia you can't work. So the show would go to Camden, a little theater they had in Camden. The same show would be there every week. I can even almost remember when they – what everybody was playing. We'd come on, and Miles would play *Move*. Bird would play one of his blues. Milt Jackson would play *The Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*. Toots was just come from Belgium at the time. He was still playing guitar. He wasn't playing harmonica that much. He would play the guitar. I forget what tune he played. But that's how we all met.

I used to see Toots. Later on, I used to see him. We were in California once together, and we're all staying in the Watkins Hotel. Dinah decides she wants to fix a dinner for everybody. She's a good cook. She had a girl that was working for us that was a good cook. She would cook up some soul food and invite the guys by. She said, "You think Toots would want to come up and have dinner?" I said, "Yeah, he probably needs a good soulful meal." So we invited Toots up. She fixed him a plate. He sat down, and he ate.

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Occasionally she would walk by him and say, “Toots, is everything okay? You need something else?” He said, “Yeah, can I have some more of them green things?” That was collard greens. So when I see him now, I say, “Yeah, can I have some more of them green things?”

We just had a thing where we were on the jazz – what is it?

**Eleana:** National Endowment.

**Jimmy:** National Endowment thing that we all was in together, and we discussed it a little bit. I told that story to him.

**Brower:** How about Beryl Booker? That’s a somewhat obscure . . .

**Jimmy:** Beryl was a phemon lady piano player from Philadelphia. She was known around there a lot, and Dinah liked her. Occasionally we would need a piano player after Wynton quit. After Wynton quit, there was a variety of piano players. So we had Beryl. At that particular time we had Beryl. So that was what we used in the theater. She was a good player. It was Beryl, Keter, myself, and the Symphony Sid All Stars. I remember Tootie Heath used to come through – he was about 12, 14 years old – and check us out, hang out. In fact, when we took the show to Camden, he came over. We – Keter and Bird and myself – we was in a little dressing room jamming. I had a snare drum and the brushes. We were playing. Tootie came in. Bird said, “Let Tootie play.” I said, “Okay.” So Tootie took the brushes. He was shaking. He remembers that. He tells that story too. That’s what I remember about that.

In those days, everybody came to town. Mrs. Heath used to invite everybody for dinner, everybody. Every group that came to town, she would fix dinner for them. You go to Jimmy Heath’s house and had dinner. She knew all the musicians. It was all family-like. Beautiful. Every time I see Jimmy, I say, “Boy, you look more like Pop every day.” He just looks like his daddy more than Percy or Tootie did. He looks almost like his daddy: same size, same posture, same thing.

**Brower:** Talk about Bird.

**Jimmy:** Bird – I don’t even – Bird was a mysterious, intelligent guy. You could talk to Bird about anything. He was – but he had some condition that needed treatment all the time. I think that’s probably what happened to his becoming addicted to what he came addicted to. I think whatever he had probably required morphine, which he could not afford, because at that time it was like about \$100 a shot, or whatever he needed. So he found a way to get around that when he got to New York. He found a little guy was selling heroin for \$6, \$10 a pack. So, guess what? Guess what he going to do? If he’s

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going to get sick, and has to do it, that's what probably made him do it. Because he could do any – he could afford \$6. I don't know how many times a day he would have to do that. But that has my – that's the way I figured it happened for him.

Then, at that time, the guys was thinking that it was a fad or something. So they got into it with him, thinking that that was going to make them play better. That's what I think. That's what I heard people say. They thought they was going to be able to play like Bird. Silly. But it became a fad. A lot of guys around him did it. I go back to the dressing room with Cedric Williams. I say, that will never be me.

About Bird, Bird was an intelligent guy. I liked him. I remember one time we was – we were getting on the stage. He was in the dressing room sleeping. We couldn't wake him up. They got Beryl to go wake him up. I think she went over and whispered some exotic stuff in his ear, and he rose up like – he got right up. Nobody else could make him get up. He got right up and went right on the stage. I remember he had on a shirt. It looked like [?] – down the front, and the tie was around here. Went on stage and burnt like he always did. Just woke right up and started burning.

The man was phenomenal. That's the only time I got to play. I got to play that week with him. It was beautiful. Miles, all them guys.

**Brower:** Any other musician you worked with that you felt was at that level of capacity to invent, just like that?

**Jimmy:** Julian was like that. Trane. All them guys. Miles.

**Brower:** In the same way? Because it seemed like Trane got to it differently.

**Jimmy:** He got to it differently, because he had to have something different, because at one time Miles had two tenor players. He had Sonny Rollins and Trane. He would just get them up there and see what they was going to do to each other. For a long time, Sonny Rollins a saxophone colossus. Everybody in the world wanted to play like Sonny Rollins. In fact, you can hear – you can probably still hear it now, that influence that he had on the tenor players, most of them. So every night he used to get up there, and Sonny used to tear him up. So he said, oh, I'm getting tired of this whipping. Said, I got to figure out something else to do here to get across this. So he got to working on what he was working on. He went in – and I think, in the end, it confused Sonny, because Sonny didn't know what it was.

**Brower:** Did Trane always have the sound and have to develop the concept? Or, did . . . ?

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**Jimmy:** Trane went through a lot of phases. Trane, I told you, was with Earl Bostic. He had to play that way. He had to play the blues. He went through all of these kind of things. First – Trane started out playing the alto saxophone. Then he heard Charlie Parker and said, no, this is not it. This is not going to be it.

**Brower:** Like Jimmy Heath did.

**Jimmy:** Yeah. Well, Jimmy Heath was – Jimmy Heath went to the – at one time they was calling Jimmy Heath “Little Bird.” I guess Jimmy just got to tenor. He was playing tenor. He was – Jimmy was a bandleader way back there. Before Percy started to play the bass, Jimmy was a bandleader. Percy used to carry his horn around. That’s how long ago he’s been out there doing it. Then he went to college for that long time, and he came back out.

**Brower:** You mean the university? That special university?

**Jimmy:** Yeah, he went to the university.

**Brower:** Drew that line again.

**Jimmy:** That’s right. That’s what he calls it. He says, “I went to college.” Saved his life.

**Brower:** Lexington University.

**Jimmy:** That’s right. Saved his life. It’s a good thing, too, because he could have really been gone for 40 years by now. It really did him good. He talks about it too. He’s not ashamed about nothing.

**Brower:** I was in the – I just finished his book, and I was – I didn’t really know the extent of, in going back, the kind of things – he doesn’t hide anything about . . .

**Jimmy:** No, he’s just right on it. Tells it like it is, like it was. I love James.

**Brower:** Did Lex have that reputation? Because a lot of cats went through there, and the Tombs too.

**Jimmy:** What, Lex Humphries? What Lex you talking about?

**Brower:** In Kentucky. That . . .

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**Jimmy:** Oh yeah. All them guys went through it. I think they thought it was cleansing their bodies so they could get higher quicker or something like that. I don't know what they did. They have a vacation or something there.

**Brower:** Just clean it out.

**Jimmy:** Clean it out.

**Brower:** And go back to it.

**Jimmy:** "I just go down to Lex" blah blah "and come on back." A lot of them did that.

**Brower:** Could – you could check yourself in.

**Jimmy:** Yeah.

**Brower:** You could check yourself in. You could check yourself out. If they sent you there, they owned you.

**Jimmy:** So that's what a lot of guys did. They'd go down there and check their self in, because it was a weaning-off process, I think, that probably happened, that they was getting treated every day for what they needed, without having to be on the street, doing what they had to do for it. By the time they do it, then they come back on the street clean, it's easier to save them out – make some – I don't know what their theory was, but it was something like that. They would check their self in like it was a country club.

**Brower:** This is July 27th, 2010. We are in the apartment of Robert Steinberg at 920 Riverside Drive, Apartment 12H. I'm William A. Brower along with Kenneth Kimery, conducting part two of the Smithsonian Jazz Oral History Project interview with James Wilbur Alexander Cobb.

Jimmy, if I may, I want to go back to a few things during your time with Dinah Washington before we move forward. There's some personalities, some names, that I'm unfamiliar with that maybe you might want to touch on. You did some stuff involving Charlie Singleton?

**Jimmy:** Charlie Singleton, yeah. That's a name I haven't heard in a long time. But that was in New York. That wasn't in Washington. That's after I got to New York. I used to do little gigs with Charlie Singleton, because he was a hard, hustling guy, a tenor player from Kansas City. He used to get gigs where probably most people couldn't get gigs. He just used to come and find me. I used to go play some with him.

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**Brower:** What was his style?

**Jimmy:** He wasn't actually – he was probably more a hustler than a tenor player, but he could probably play the changes. He wasn't that great a tenor player

**Brower:** What were the venues? Where did this stuff take place?

**Jimmy:** Whatever he could find, whatever come up. People might ask him to bring some music to some place. Wherever it might be, he would hook that up. He was – like I say, he was a hard hustling guy. Later on in his life, he invented some kind of a barbecue sauce or something that he went to – he was the president of the company or something. I don't know what it was, but I remember him saying that.

**Brower:** So he went from hustling gigs to hustling barbecue sauce.

**Jimmy:** He was hustling everything.

**Brower:** Another thing that interests me is – or I think would be of interest – is, during Dinah's time, you did recordings with people like Hal Mooney and his orchestra, and then you did things with Quincy Jones. I think there probably was a big difference.

**Jimmy:** The thing with Quincy Jones was an album called *For Those in Love*, I think. That was maybe one of the first arrangements that Quincy had ever done like that, plus it was at the beginning of his career too, when that was happening. But they were friends, and so he did it, because they were friends, and we were friends.

**Brower:** Did she push him forward in that circumstance?

**Jimmy:** I don't think she – she probably – that probably helped him, because he arranged the music for that date. He probably got some note from that, I'm sure. I'm sure – like I say, I'm sure it helped him, one way or another.

**Brower:** From the standpoint of the music that was happening in the orchestrations, was there really a marked difference between the kind of things that Hal Mooney was putting forward and . . . ?

**Jimmy:** This is before Hal Mooney.

**Brower:** This is before Hal Mooney.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, this is before Hal Mooney. Hal Mooney's much later.

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**Brower:** How did that flow?

**Jimmy:** That was great. They were friends too. I think the record company – what was it? What was the record company? Capitol?

**Brower:** I think so.

**Jimmy:** They met, and he liked the way she sang. So they got together and made some things. I'm trying to think if it was Bobby Shad or who it was that hooked all this – was the . . .

**Brower:** A&R [artists and repertory] guy at the time?

**Jimmy:** Yeah. I remember one record date we did, Bobby Shad was there, was the A&R guy. I mean, he produced and all like that. So this might be one of those. He did a few of those. He wrote nice arrangements for her. They were a perfect pair.

**Brower:** Did she play – when the music was presented to her, what was her role? How did she react to things? Or did she say, I like this, I don't like that, I want it to go this way? Or did she just accept what was in front of her?

**Jimmy:** Most of the time she accepted a lot of it. Sometimes she would change lyrics in a song and put some words that she – that was closer to her than the words that were written. But mostly, she was a musician. She could play piano. She was raised up in the church, singing gospel with her mother and their family. So she was a musician. She could sit down, probably play for herself if she needed to. So if you just brought her some music, she'd read the music and do it.

**Brower:** She seems – she must have been – had quite a sense of humor, because she had such a facility for the . . .

**Jimmy:** Oh yeah. She was . . .

**Brower:** . . . for the risqué.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, she was really – I'm trying to think of the word for her. She was like the starch stuff, like you starch things. Because I remember later on, when we was together, we had a little girl from Baltimore was the maid. She used to fool with her. She used to tell her things like – I'm trying to think of what her name was now. She would say her name and say, "Would you go downstairs and ask the stage manager for a bucket of steam?" Or, "And another thing, you can bring me the keys to the curtain." She would say foolish things like that, just to put them girls through some things. Then she used to

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do things like – the girls weren't probably making a lot of money working for her, but she would go to the store and buy them clothes and stuff that they couldn't afford and then take it out of their money. She probably did that, because that's probably how Gladys Hampton did that to her when she first got with Lionel. That's what – Gladys used to do that for her. She was new on the scene. She was maybe a little country girl who didn't know nothing about it. So I think Gladys was trying to dress her up. So she used to go and just buy stuff and give it to her and take it out of her money. So she got that habit from Gladys Hampton. She used to do a lot of things. She was like this – she liked to tell jokes and that kind of thing. That was her personality.

**Brower:** She was something of a matchmaker too.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, well, I don't know about that. Matchmakers. I don't know how many people she matched up, but I know she had a few matches herself. In fact, I used to walk around the Apollo when we were together. The guy that was affiliated with the Apollo Theater, his name was Spain – no, Puerto Rico. His name was Puerto Rico. That's what they call him: Puerto Rico. He's a funny little guy. I used to walk by him. He used to call me, "Hey there Number Five." I say, "Watch it, boy." So he was another pesky little dude.

**Brower:** Like a Pee Wee?

**Jimmy:** Yeah. But he was back there – he was the guy, like when they had amateur hour, he would come out and get you with the hook if you wasn't doing too good. That's what – his name was Puerto Rico. A little later it was Sandman.

**Brower:** Replaced him, the same function.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, Sandman did the same function. Them guys, back then in the theater, they was all of them a piece of work, but it was a lot of fun.

**Brower:** That's a very interesting era in entertainment, when you really had all those elements together, the comedians, the dancers, the r-and-b, the jazz.

**Jimmy:** Be all on one show.

**Brower:** All on one show.

**Jimmy:** I knew Redd Foxx before that, but a little later he had a thing he called Foxx and White. It was Slappy White and Redd Foxx – Redd Foxx and Slappy White. They used to do a lot of things in the Apollo. So there would be – in fact, any time Dinah was there, she would probably ask to hire them, Redd and Slappy, because they were – we were all

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friends. So we got a chance those times to see a lot of things, people dancing. There was a guy named Harold King, used to tap dance on roller skates. Did you ever see him?

**Brower:** No.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, his name was Harold King. He used to come out on the stage in roller skates, and he had a tap-dance act. So you could see a lot of things. And back then, in those days, if you were in a band, you most likely had to play the show if you were in that band and that band was one of the headliners. You would probably have to play all those – play some of those acts.

**Brower:** In doing that, were you reading music? Or . . .

**Jimmy:** Yeah, you had to read.

**Brower:** Read whatever the charts were.

**Jimmy:** Yeah. You had to read charts and stuff like that. So you had to know all of that stuff. It was a good thing. It was a good learning process.

**Brower:** Did – were there instances where people didn't have the music and you had to create it for them?

**Jimmy:** Yeah, well, they would – they had some inkling of what they needed to do, and they would tell you. We could work it out.

**Brower:** I know in talking with folks about the people involved at the Howard Theater, oftentimes these artists would show up. They would only have the record to go by, and you might have to create that on the spot, that day. Somebody had to be able to do that.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, somebody. It was like – usually the bandleader could probably make arrangements, write arrangements and things like that, because I know when Rick got to be the bandleader for the Howard Theater, he could do that. He could write arrangements. They could tell him what they needed. In a little time, he could produce it. He was that kind of a young, talented guy, Rick Henderson.

**Brower:** Before we started – this is another flashback – you were giving us a sense of what Armstrong High School was like. Maybe we touched this on – about this yesterday, and forgive me if we're being redundant, but I just want to have a sense of, when you were at Armstrong, who else was there, involved in music, that either went on to do something that we know about, or maybe didn't, but you feel they ought to be in the record?

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**Jimmy:** One that comes to mind right away is Bill Hughes, who was a trombone player. He was there when I was there. We were all in the marching band together. It was Bill Hughes and Ellsworth Gibson, who is – he's still down there, right? He's still in Washington?

**Brower:** He's gone.

**Jimmy:** He's gone? Wow, I'm sorry about that. Was Git – we used to call him Git. And like I say, it was Buddy Mack Simpkins, and there was Fats Clark, and I think – the guy I was talking about the other night. He was there too.

**Brower:** Nat? You remember Nat Turner? Napoleon Turner?

**Jimmy:** Maybe. I'm not sure about that. I have to see his face in my mind again. Nat Turner, yeah.

I'm just trying to think of who else that we might know that still – but most of those guys are gone. Fats is gone, and Buddy Mack is gone. I'm trying to think who else was there. It was basically those – the only guys, the close guys that I was with, that I remember.

**Brower:** Were they all beboppers?

**Jimmy:** Yeah. We was all trying to – as I said, Mack Simpkins was the most talented one of all of [?]. He was into it pretty good. He could probably do it better than all the rest of us. We learned from him.

**Brower:** Take us forward, as the circumstances around which that trio – the trio began to move forward, coming out of the situation with Dinah. How did that unwind?

**Jimmy:** When we got away from Earl Bostic, she just took us with her. So we just quit Earl Bostic, and the three of us went with Dinah. That was her first legitimate trio. That's how it was, until I left. Wynton used to be in and out of that. There was some kind of way where they would get into a thing where he would just quit and go back. Then he'd come back, things like that, but for most of the time, we were all there together, him and – Wynton, Keter, and myself. That's what it was.

**Brower:** So Wynton was the first to leave? And then Keter?

**Jimmy:** Well, Wynton used to leave often and come back. We'd use some people in between, and then he would come back. Bu yeah, I think he probably was the first to leave, because after that, we had a lot of piano players, getting back to when I was telling

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you we were in the Earle Theater in Philadelphia. That was Beryl Booker. So that was one of the changes that was made with piano players. Then she had a guy named – what was his name? He had a Muslim name. I can't think of what it is right this minute. But he was one of the piano players. A lot of guys went through there. His name was Adriano Acea.

**Brower:** Acea.

**Jimmy:** Acea. Did you ever hear that name?

**Brower:** Yes. I've seen it.

**Jimmy:** Seen it. Yeah. He was there for a while. I'm trying to think of who else that you might know. Georges – what was his name? There was another couple guys there that we used – she used a lot. Their names won't come up either right now. There was a lot of transition going in that piano slot. Oh, there was the guy from Los Angeles. His son plays – a piano player. I think he just died recently too. What is his name? I don't know. It'll come up later too, when my brain shifts. But we used a lot of guys. What is his name? [Gerald Wiggins?] He got a son that's a – that plays pretty good piano now – bass. It'll come up. Just keep going over the archives in my mind. But it was a lot of guys.

But getting back to the trio, basically, that was the one I liked, because that was the one we started with, and that was the one that sounded the best to me, because we all connected. So, we did it. I did it. I was there. When me and Dinah broke up, I don't even remember if I played there. I still played there a little bit, but we weren't together. I was just working there. Then I remember one – when we really broke up was where I was telling you, 2040 Seventh Avenue.

**Brower:** When you moved your stuff.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, when I moved my stuff to the Teresa Hotel. But up until then, the whole haul took about – I think from talking about Earl Bostic and Miles – I mean, and Dinah – took about five years, I think. That was the end of that situation.

**Brower:** So your – the total length of time in which you were associated with Wynton and actively playing with him was about an eight-year period? Or about eight or ten years or so?

**Jimmy:** Oh no. I mean, from Wynton – from that time we played off and on for the rest of our lives, actually – for the rest of his life we would be in some kind of situation together. When Red Garland left Miles Davis and he got – for a minute he got Bill Evans, we were telling – after Bill, we was asking, who should he get? We would all tell him to

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get Wynton. So that's how Wynton got there. So we got that chance to play with Wynton again. Then after playing with Miles all that time, him and Paul and myself got a trio, almost like the one that was with Dinah. So we went out, and that lasted until he died. So most of our lives we was together a lot of the times, let's say.

**Brower:** I want to come back to Miles. There's a few people that don't get talked about a lot. How much did you know Lucky Thompson?

**Jimmy:** Lucky, I didn't really know him that much. I knew him because I had occasion to be on a date or so maybe with him on Dinah's – some of Dinah's stuff, but I knew him pretty good. We didn't hang out or nothing, but we were acquainted. That's how I knew him. We weren't really bosom buddies or nothing like that, but we knew each other.

**Brower:** What kind of cat was he?

**Jimmy:** He was a nice guy. He was a nice guy and a great player. I heard later that he just stopped playing altogether. He just got disgusted with it for some reason. The last thing I heard about him, somebody said he was out west somewhere, Seattle or somewhere out there. But I haven't seen him in years.

**Brower:** What about Paul Quinichette?

**Jimmy:** Paul Quinichette, we got to be pretty tight, because we made a record together. It was him and – what's that trumpeter? – oh, Nat. Him, Nat Adderley, I think it was Ron Carter, Wynton, and myself. We made a record that he liked a lot, because he hadn't been doing much beside being with Duke Ellington at the time. He was just – that was probably his first record date that he had done in a long time, outside of being in that band. I thought the record sounded pretty good, and he was exceptional on it. That's about the extent of – with Paul. We'd see each other when we had to play, like we was on shows together, like Dinah would be with the Duke Ellington band or something like that. The trio, and Dinah, and the Duke Ellington band. Stuff like that. We crossed paths then, but not that much.

**Brower:** I want to go into the Miles thing. I know it's been beaten like an old drum.

**Jimmy:** Well, hear it some more.

**Brower:** But we can't avoid it.

**Jimmy:** No.

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**Brower:** There's – let's not focus on *Kind of Blue*. Talk about some of the other things that you were involved with.

**Jimmy:** I made about – what? – five, six albums with Miles. Maybe more than that. I can't remember all of it. But I know I remember making – participating in *Porgy and Bess*. That was the one where Joe didn't show up, and I sitting there. They put me in to work, and I finished that album with them. A little later I think we did *Sketches of Spain*. After that, I don't know in what sequence they came. It was a few albums we made. What is it? *Jazz Track*? I don't know what it was. We made *Friday and Saturday Night at the Blackhawk*. We made a couple other albums like that. Overall I think it was about five, six.

**Eleana:** *Plaza*.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, and *Jazz at the Plaza*.

**Brower:** That's an interesting story. Can you reconstruct what that evening was like, or what you remember of that, *Jazz at the Plaza*?

**Jimmy:** *Jazz at the Plaza* was a thing where Columbia Records was showcasing some of its artists. I think Duke Ellington was there, Billie Holiday, and Miles Davis. That was the three that they showcased. Everybody had a chance to play. I think Duke Ellington's band played. I think maybe – I don't know in what sequence Billie Holiday was. She probably sang in front of them or with them or whatever. I think the last part of it was the Miles Davis Sextet. I had to play on Sam Woodyard's drums, which [were] set up for the band, which was way away from where the quintet was set. They was maybe across the room or something.

**Brower:** Because he's in the back of the big band, and you all must have been down stage at all of that.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, and I had to play those drums. Wherever they were, we didn't move them.

**Brower:** Had a different setup than probably what you were working with.

**Jimmy:** Yeah. Well, it worked out, because if you can hear it – sometime you can hear him bring it in, even from the drums being way away. You can hear him bring it back to where the quintet is. So that worked out. And we did a thing at Carnegie Hall. So that's what?: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, - maybe 7, 8. I don't know.

**Brower:** Then there's *Someday My Prince Will Come*.

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**Jimmy:** Yeah, that one. We did – that was the one where Coltrane was out of the band by then, and he was starting his own quartet. I think he was working in the Apollo Theater when we were doing this date. By then we had Hank Mobley in the band. We were doing the record date. We were playing *Someday My Prince Will Come*. I think Miles, prior to the date, had talked to Trane about coming down. “If you see if you can come down, come down and be on the date.” So Trane came in just as we were finishing *Someday My Prince Will Come*. Miles waved him in, and we played this little interlude [Cobb sings the pedal bass line from the interlude] until Trane got ready. He came in and played his solo. This is after . . .

**Brower:** So he’s putting his horn together as you . . .

**Jimmy:** Horn together. I mean, he hadn’t tuned up anywhere. But he must have done it, because he was in tune when he got in the studio. He must have tuned up outside, listening to the track in the thing. So he came in, and he played a solo. Only two – there was two tenor solos on that. But when they put the record out, they put it out first time with just the one solo. Then put it out again, with the two solos on it. Sometimes you listen to it, you don’t know which one it is. I do, but I guess a lot of people don’t. But that’s how that happened. He just came down and walked right in and played a solo. Then got up and went back to his gig.

**Brower:** There was a succession of saxophone players in that last – after Trane left.

**Jimmy:** Not that many.

**Brower:** Stitt was in there.

**Jimmy:** Stitt was there, yeah. Stitt took Trane’s place, but after Stitt it wasn’t any – I don’t remember anybody else being there. It was Sonny. Miles wanted him in there to play alto, but Sonny was traveling with alto and tenor. He wants to play them both all the time. But when he played the alto, people went crazy. They’d say, “Yeah!,” because he was reminiscent of Charlie Parker. But he wanted to play – on the gig, he wanted to play the tenor too, and Miles didn’t want him to play the tenor. So Miles used to tell him, say [Cobb imitates Davis’s whispering voice:], “I’m going to step on that tenor.” That let him know he wasn’t going to play the tenor on the gig.

We was overseas. We did a few gigs. Then after that, I got out of the band. When I got out of the band, I took Miles to his record date where he was doing – they did *Seven Steps to Heaven*. He was asking me, he say, “You’re going to leave, who shall I get, drummer?” I say, “There’s a good drummer out there. His name’s Frank Butler. Maybe you can get him.” So he got him, and Frank started to do the date. But Frank had some problems too. So he didn’t – Miles didn’t want to go through that again, because he had

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been through that with everybody was in the band before. So he said, “No, we can’t use him.”

[Harold] Lovett, Miles’s lawyer and friend, suggested that he get Tony Williams, who at the time I think was working with Jackie McLean. So he got Tony in the band. Tony was so young, he couldn’t – at that time, he probably couldn’t get into these clubs without Miles bringing him there. So he got Tony. Then they had Wayne Shorter and that band that they had.

I was in the last part of the band, where it was Ron Carter, George Coleman, Harold Mabern, and an alto player. I can’t . . .

**Brower:** Strozier?

**Jimmy:** Frank Strozier, yeah. That was the band. After Wynton and Paul quit, that’s who Miles got to finish out the tour.

**Brower:** That was a Memphis connection.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, all those guys were Memphis guys, except for Ron. Ron is from Rochester, New York, up there. So I played the last part of the gig with Ron and those guys. I already told them I was – when we got through the tour, I was going to leave, because we was going to get the trio together. In the meanwhile, Paul and Wynton, they’re playing all over Brooklyn and stuff, and A.T. is the drummer.

Let’s get back to taking Miles to that date. I was taking a car to the airport, and I dropped him off. He was making *Seven Steps to Heaven*. I dropped the car off. When I got back to New York the next day, I made *Boss Guitar* with Wes Montgomery. That’s how that stuff was just traveling like that. That’s how things were unfolding. Eventually we got the trio back. For a while there, A.T. didn’t want to give it up.

**Brower:** It was good to him too.

**Jimmy:** It was good to him. He didn’t want to give it up. I say, “Come on.” I say, “A.T., it was planned that we was going to have a trio.” He said, “I’ll wait for Wynton and him to tell me.” I said, “Okay.” Eventually they told him the same thing I was telling him. He just say, “Okay.” So we got up, and we had the trio, and we did all different things with all different people.

**Brower:** Did you know the name Marshall Hawkins?

**Jimmy:** Yeah, I know Marshall Hawkins.

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**Brower:** I heard somewhere that was – might have been in line to get Ron’s slot, what became Ron Carter’s slot.

**Jimmy:** He could have been. He’s a pretty good bass player. What about the other boy that was with Monk?

**Brower:** Butch? Butch Warren?

**Jimmy:** Butch Warren. Butch Warren was a good bass player.

**Brower:** Did you know the family, Eddie Warren?

**Jimmy:** I knew his daddy. Piano player, right?

**Brower:** Yeah.

**Jimmy:** I played some gigs with him, I think.

**Brower:** In D.C.?

**Jimmy:** Yeah, when Butch was a young boy.

**Brower:** And Quentin Warren. Did you . . . ?

**Jimmy:** Quentin, yeah.

**Brower:** The guitar player?

**Jimmy:** Yeah. I knew them guys. Washington was okay back then. It was kind of busy. You could see somebody come into town every week at all them different little places they had, the theater, and the – what is it? – Benghazi or whatever that stuff was. It was a few little places that . . .

**Brower:** You had 7th Street, 9th Street, 14th Street, and U Street, all those . . .

**Jimmy:** Yeah, all those places had some music going on.

**Brower:** Parallel with – and particularly, I think, when you got to Europe with the things you were doing – Miles – you end up doing some things with Trane. I don’t know whether they were intended to be recordings or what, but things you did in Europe. Do

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you have any recollection of just the recordings that you did with Trane out while you were with Miles, outside of working – recording with Miles?

**Jimmy:** There was a thing where this guy had a studio in New Jersey. It was . . .

**Brower:** [Rudy] Van Gelder?

**Jimmy:** He had a studio over there. Every Sunday – actually, the studio was at his mother’s living room. They made – he made a studio in his mother’s living room. That’s how he started. They used to go over there every Saturday and make records, anybody. Mostly they used Miles’s band. They used Paul and Joe and Red and Trane. So Trane used to make – bring people over every week, and they’d make a different record. When Joe couldn’t make it, they used alternate people. They had alternate person to go, each instrument. So I got into the flow there some kind of way. When Joe couldn’t make some stuff, I would probably do it or another alternate would do it. That’s how I got to make some records with Trane over there.

**Brower:** I was really referring to some things that happened in Helsinki, in Finland, in – this had to be – this is actually a little bit later, in ’60.

**Jimmy:** You’re talking with Trane?

**Brower:** Yeah.

**Jimmy:** That happened because Miles went to – had a contract to do something. Come time to do it, he got sick, and he couldn’t do it. He either got sick, or he got sick on purpose. I’m not really sure what happened. It may have been something in the contract that he didn’t like, and he just said, “No, I’m not going to do it.” The guy – the promoter panicked. He said, “Oh man, please, I got” blah blah blah. You know what they go through. He say, “Can I use the band?” He say – Miles say, “Yeah, you can use the band if you pay them.” So the guy said, “Okay.” So we – he fixed us some kind of thing – so we did a television show where Trane just played all the things that Miles played. That was a pretty good take too. So that’s what you’re talking about, Helsinki. That’s basically the only playing that we did with Trane there. That’s how that went down.

**Brower:** Going to *Kind of Blue* and that date. What was the – what is your recollection of how that went down, what the energy was in the room, the whole Wynton / Bill Evans piece, just how that all played out.

**Jimmy:** Listen, there wasn’t a lot of fanfare about it. It was just another Miles Davis record date, because Miles had been making good records all the time. I like the ones I heard with Joe any more. I loved all them records.

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**Brower:** All the Prestige stuff.

**Jimmy:** Yeah – no, I’m talking about, he did some stuff with Columbia, too, with Joe. They did a lot of things like that. I loved all those records. So I was just happy to be in that situation to be able to do that. I got – probably got there first, because I had to bring the drums and set them up and stuff like that. Then everybody else started to come in. Then Wynton came in from Brooklyn and saw what’s-his-name and panicked. He said, “But wait a minute.” He said, “I thought I was on the gig” and blah blah blah, and Bill Evans is sitting at the piano. So he said – he was befuddled. So I said, “Man, don’t worry about it. You’re both on the gig. Don’t go crazy.” So we were there. Miles came in with some paper – maybe some music paper or something like that. It wasn’t a big thing. He just came in and told them what they wanted to do. Evidently maybe him and Bill had been planning it or something in his basement. He had a little basement with a piano down there, and some stuff like that that they probably ran over. I didn’t know nothing about it until – when I got there, he just said, “This is what we’re doing” blah blah. So that’s – it went down like that. So this song is this – he would tell them, “This is a ballad” or something. You can play it like – you can play these three chords as long as you want to, and then you would go to these chords. We’ll call that the middle, and you can play that as long as you want to. Then you can come back to the first three chords. Like that. You got your freedom. So that’s what happened. They started to play the music like that. He said, “Jimmy, you know what to do. Just make it sound like it’s floating” or something like that. Said, “Okay.” That means brushes. So we did that. The only tune that we used Wynton on was the one that he knew Wynton could do the – Wynton could do it.

**Brower:** Put the grease in it.

**Jimmy:** Put the grease in it. Bill could do it. He probably couldn’t do it like Wynton did. It’s two different styles. That’s what he wanted. So that’s what happened. That’s how it all came about. We all did most of it in one take apiece, because he didn’t like to go over things, because he figured that was – every time you do it, it would probably get worse. He liked the first out-of-the-barrel kind of thing. So that’s how most of it happened, except for the tune that Wynton played on. He stopped that, because there was one turnaround in it that he didn’t want a certain chord played. So he stopped that, say, “Wynton, don’t play that chord.”

**Brower:** That’s with *Freddie*.

**Jimmy:** *Freddie Freeloader*. He stopped. I think he said, “Don’t play A-flat,” or whatever that chord was. But that was – we played that again, and that was that. The whole date went like that. In fact it was two dates, actually. We did another date to finish it, I think, a couple weeks later. But it all went down like clockwork. Everybody thought

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it went down good, but nobody had no inkling that it would last as long as it did and be as popular as it got and be the greatest jazz-selling record in history. That I would not have believed if anybody told me anyway, because I looking at – I say, “You mean it sold more records than Louis Armstrong or Duke Ellington or Count Basie or any of those guys?” It was hard – that was hard for me to believe. But it did. So there it is.

**Brower:** A lot is made of the issue of race among musicians and particularly – not particularly – but how Miles related to Bill Evans, sort of needling him. What do you think was behind that?

**Jimmy:** Miles was doing what? Needling?

**Brower:** Needling. Would needle, so to speak, Bill Evans.

**Jimmy:** He was – that was the way he was. He would do that to a lot of people. He would say things just to see what your reaction could be. He used to bounce – liked to bounce things off of people to see what would come back.

**Brower:** Whether it was race or not.

**Jimmy:** Whether it was race or anything. He said something in the car one time. We were sitting out in Ohio. We were just sitting, waiting to check in a hotel or something. We’re just sitting there. So him and Cannon – we were all sitting in the car – him and Cannon was talking about something. Whatever it was, Bill went to say something, and Miles said, “Wait a minute, man. We don’t want no white opinions.” But Bill – he was kidding, but Bill didn’t know how to take that. So he would say things like that. Then he would say things like, “You know, man, when a new guy comes in the band, he has to make love to everybody.” Bill didn’t know how to take that either. But it’s just needle. That’s what it is. Because he was like that.

**Brower:** Make you or break you.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, he would just see how it rolls off you. It’s funny when I think about it.

**Brower:** What was – could you cut the air at that moment?

**Jimmy:** No – well, yeah. You could see Bill was thinking about it. He’s saying, now wait a minute, what’s going on here?

Then another thing was going on at the time. We used to go to all these places that they used to – the band used to play when Joe and Red and Paul was there. They go back to

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these places and see Bill sitting there. Say, whoa, wait a minute. Something's wrong with this picture. "What's going on, Miles?"

**Brower:** You're talking about the audiences.

**Jimmy:** Yeah. That didn't lay on Bill that – he didn't – say, wait a minute. He felt shaky. He was in a whole different atmosphere. But they got – a little later, they got used to seeing him there, after they heard him play.

**Brower:** We're still, even today, negotiating these sensitivities: what you can say, what you can't say, how people are going to process it. Just the thing that happened with this lady [Sheira?] in trying to tell a story of reconciliation and how she actually felt about something.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, and they chopped it down to where they make it sound the way they wanted to make it sound.

**Brower:** I almost feel that same when I read these stories. What you're repeating is something that's in a bunch of texts. How people read this has a lot to do with how we have come to grips, or even to understand the complexity of it. Not to – I don't think in either case was it – Bill Evans had to manage some stuff, Miles had to manage his stuff, you, as bandmembers, had to manage the stuff, and the audience is managing stuff. It's just not so simple.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, there's some mean stuff goes on a lot of times. Like you say, you have to manage it, though. That's what I've probably been doing all my life: managing stuff.

**Brower:** How about the role of Gil Evans in all of this?

**Jimmy:** Gil loved Miles. He said, to him Miles was the second greatest trumpet player, since Louis Armstrong. Something about the way he sounded. He said something about his timbre in his playing, or something it was – he liked that more than anybody else that he had heard since Louis Armstrong. So they got to be friends. I think a long time ago he wrote the music for *+19*, that first album we made, *+19*. It was Gil's arrangements.

I remember being in Washington, hearing Gil's arrangements – but I didn't know they were Gil's arrangements – from *Snowfall*. What's that guy? Claude Thornhill played *Snowfall*, and I think Gil was the arranger for him at the time. It dawned on me way later that that's what that was. I liked it. Didn't know why I liked it. But that's what it was.

**Brower:** A minute ago, you just said the word "timbre," and you described the instruction that Miles gave you, the feel that he wanted. I think, in listening to those

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recordings, the signature of Jimmy Cobb, to me, is touch, is bringing out the particular qualities of the different aspects of the kit to fit the mood and how the arrangement is supposed to move.

**Jimmy:** That – I guess the sensitivity probably comes from having to work with singers, because you have to really be sensitive there. You have to listen, and you can't overshadow. I got a lot of experience with Dinah Washington doing that. In fact, I had played with singers before I left Washington, but I got much more experience with her doing it, because a lot of the – most of the songs we did were probably with brushes – we did some with sticks, but with brushes. So you get to know how to handle that. You have to listen and just be a part of what's going on.

**Brower:** There's moments where the decay of your cymbals moves into the swish that you're creating, and it's almost hard to know where one ends and the other begins, but it always introduces another place where the music is going.

**Jimmy:** Now I'm connected to something that sounds like what you're talking about. On *So What*, I think, going into the solo things, I had a cymbal, and I thought I hit it too loud for the place where we are. It said, baaaaaaaaaaaaaang, and rang, and I thought that was too much. But when – after I did the record, I had tell me, say, "Man, that cymbal lick you hit in the front of that just kills me. I love that." So, okay. It works. They had a way – the guy – the engineer had a way to handle that – handled it so – made it work.

**Brower:** You mention working with singers, but how much does this go back – this approach to the instrument – go back to the influence of Max?

**Jimmy:** To the beginning. To the beginning. When I first started to play drums, that's who I wanted to play like: Max. That's probably why I liked Buddy Mack Simpkins, because he was close to that. He was close to doing that. He was like that. Like I say, he was – of all of us, he was our mentor, let's say, and that's the way I wanted to play: Max, Art Blakey, Roy Haynes, like those guys.

**Eleana:** And Roy Rogers.

**Jimmy:** Who?

**Eleana:** Roy Rogers.

**Jimmy:** Roy Rogers. What's she talking about, Roy Rogers? See, I used to have a thing for Roy Rogers, because I'm – back – this is back to going to the Dunbar and watching these Western flicks all day long, the serials and things. So in my room, I had a picture of Max Roach and a picture of Roy Rogers, and nobody would say, "What's the connection

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to that?” Same reaction you got. So I say, “Listen. I love Roy Rogers, because I know he’s going to be something good a little later on.” And I like him because he jumps off the horse and jumps in the station wagon. That sounded intelligent to me. I told Max that once. He say, “What?” I say, “Yeah, man, I had a picture of you and a picture of Roy Rogers.” “Roy Rogers? What . . . ?”

**Brower:** W. t. f.

**Jimmy:** That’s right. Everyone I tell, their reaction is the same way that you all just did. Roy Rogers.

**Brower:** Speaking of singers, Sarah Vaughan.

**Jimmy:** Sarah Vaughan was a tremendous voice. Sarah Vaughan, every time she sang, hair go step up on your body, neck, and all that stuff. Dinah did that to me, first time I heard her, too, because I was listening to Catholic music, choir and all that kind of stuff. I heard all the stuff, Baptist music and all that stuff, but Dinah really brought back – I was about to shout, and I didn’t know what it was. I said, whoa, something’s happening here that I never felt before. Those ladies could put something on you that you’re not used to having it. You can see a lot of people sing, but it don’t affect you like that. Dinah had a thing that she could affect people, and Sarah had a thing that she could affect people. Sarah, to me, is the greatest – one of the greatest that ever was ever going to be, because I don’t know nobody else who’s going to be – is as bad as – can do – even Frank Sinatra was thrilled by her. A lot of people – everybody saw Sass was really thrilled by her, because she had all this variety. She could – she had about five or six octaves that she could deal with. And she was a musician. From her being in that band with Billy Eckstine, she learned a whole lot about everything – music, everything. She could play the piano. I mean well. She could play it well. She was a good reader. You could just come in and give her some music. She could just go in, sit down, and hit it. She was a total musician and a total singer.

**Brower:** How much time did you spend with her?

**Jimmy:** Nine years.

**Brower:** Nine years?

**Jimmy:** Yeah.

**Brower:** That was a decade.

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**Jimmy:** Yeah, from 1970 to 1979, which was thrilling all the time, because we did a lot of different things. We did trio. We did – augmented the trio into things like – we would do maybe five pieces, six pieces sometimes. We’d do big bands. We’d do symphonies. So there was a lot of different things that you could do, and we enjoyed all of them, because we enjoyed hearing her go through all of that. We played with Count Basie’s band. We played with Woody Herman’s band, Duke Ellington’s band, Jones and – what is it? I can’t figure – Thad Jones–Mel Lewis – played with that band. We played symphony orchestras. We played the London Symphony Orchestra. We played a lot of symphony orchestras. In fact that might have been where – I’m trying to think if that’s where I met Congressman Conyers, but I’m not sure about that. That was probably just a regular trio thing. But we played a lot of things, and it was all enjoyable.

**Brower:** What was the trio that you mostly worked with, with her? Who were your bandmates?

**Jimmy:** A lot of times – that changed a lot. When I first went in the band, at the start, it was – the guys that got me in the band was a bass player named Gene Perla and a piano player from Europe. His name was Jan Hammer. You know Jan Hammer?

**Brower:** Um hmm.

**Jimmy:** Jan Hammer was a Czechoslovakian that came here, wanted to be a rock star. He was in – they were in a band. They had a drummer at the time. It was a good drummer, but he would get nervous in front of an audience. So he couldn’t play in front of an audience. So they had to get rid of him. So they asked Sarah to get me. That’s what happened. They came and told me. They say, “Sarah – you want to work with Sarah?” So I say, “Okay.” So I went out there. It was Gene Perla, Jan Hammer, and myself for a while. Then a little down the line, it got to be Willie Mays – everybody used to laugh when she’d say Willie Mays. So he changed his name to Bill Mays. They’d say, “Willie Mays” and look over and see him. Say whoa, wait a minute.

**Brower:** You ain’t the Say Hey kid.

**Jimmy:** You ain’t him at all. So it was him for a minute. I think before we got there, the guy arranged the [?] was playing. What was his name? He wrote most of the arrangements for the trio. He was a good . . .

**Eleana:** Bob James?

**Jimmy:** Bob James. Bob James wrote a lot of arrangements for – that we played. It was good. The arrangements were good. We got them down. The whole thing was nice. We

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played a lot of good venues. We played hotel rooftops and that kind of thing. We played symphony orchestras and Carnegie Hall.

**Eleana:** The Shah of Iran.

**Jimmy:** Oh yeah. We played in the White House for Jimmy Carter when he had the Shah of Iran there and his wife and all that. We played – it was Jimmy Carter. We had – it was Dizzy Gillespie’s band. Dizzy played – of course Dizzy played *Salt Peanuts*. And it was Sarah and a trio with Carl Drinkert and Walter Booker and myself. The last time – jumping ahead a little bit – the last part of the thing with Sarah Vaughan was with Carl Drinkert and Walter Booker and myself. We did that maybe three, four years.

**Brower:** So that’s a D.C. trio.

**Jimmy:** Carl Schroeder’s not from D.C.

**Brower:** Drinkert – was it Drinkert or Schroeder?

**Jimmy:** Schroeder.

**Brower:** Drinkert, we’re getting – that’s the Billie Holiday.

**Eleana:** You played for President Ford, right?

**Jimmy:** Yeah, we played for President Ford, but that was down in the Dominican islands. He was having a meeting out there with – what was it? Giscard d’Estaing? the French president? What was his name? They was having a meeting there, out in the middle of this ocean. He needed some entertainment, and we happened to be close. So they got us out there to entertain him. After we did that, we got a ride back on Rockefeller’s jet, from there right to LaGuardia Airport, with no passport or nothing. We just got on the plane, got off the plane, and walked out of there. Nobody said nothing. That shows you what these guys are getting away with while they could. See, Rockefeller had just lent his . . .

**Eleana:** David.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, David Rockefeller had lent the plane to – who was it? The guy that just got married. The [?]. They were having wars in Europe at that time. He had been – he lent them the plane to go on their honeymoon?

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**Brower:** Just to throw something out, you said the end it was – you mentioned Drinkert. But that’s – I think you talked about him earlier with Billie Holiday. So was it Drinkert, then Schroeder, or?

**Jimmy:** No, Drinkert was first. Drinkert’s when I was still in Washington. Schroeder’s after I left and went through all this stuff with Miles.

**Brower:** So that’s . . .

**Eleana:** Schroeder’s at the end of Sarah.

**Brower:** At the end of Sarah.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, we’re talking ’50s – we’re talking about ’40s and ’70s. That’s the difference in that.

**Brower:** Bookie. Did you bring him into that, into the group?

**Jimmy:** Yeah. I don’t know. He got in there. I think he might have knew – he might have been with – he knew Sarah too, because Bookie had a place in his apartment where we used to make recordings all night. You can build yourself a little home studio. So everybody used to come through there. I’m sure that at one time or another Sass was up there. Everybody used to come through. We used to sit down and party and make records all night, with John Hicks, everybody.

**Brower:** Let’s cut, and let’s come back, and I want you to pick up with, when we come back, pick up with your relationship with Walter Booker, where that begins, how that evolves, and then talk about this scene that I didn’t know about and probably a lot of people don’t know about.

[recording interrupted]

Jimmy, let’s go back to the *Kind of Blue*. Let’s not talk about the music. Let’s not talk about Miles. Let’s not talk about Trane. Let’s not talk about Bill Evans. Let’s just talk about the business. How much you get paid for that date?

**Jimmy:** I think back then a date was – what was it? I don’t know. It was a certain amount of money, but not a lot of money. I can’t even remember what it was, but it was under – I’m thinking it was under \$500, way under \$500. Then you have to sign some sort of agreement to even get that money. Then that would take you a few weeks to get that, because it would have to be processed through the union or some kind of way, so they could get their share out of it, taxes of whatever they take, or a pension. I don’t know

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what it was, what they were taking, but they probably had you sign a contract saying that you're not getting anything else from this particular record. You have dissolved yourself from this record altogether. That's what you have to sign. That's what you have to sign to even get the check. There was a lot of money then. After that, you are completely out of it.

I remember talking to Miles one time when we did the record in Oakland, and he had brought us – we were actually working in the Blackhawk, and he had brought us there. I told him – I say, “We got a little gig on the day off.” He say, “Oh, man, you all can't do that. I brought you out here.” I say, “Yeah, man, we did your gig too. I can't see how you could – you would – if you was to do – if you was to make some extra money somewhere.” So he say, “Okay.” So we did it. On the day off, we did it. He was saying – what I'm trying to get to, he was saying, “If you do it, why don't you get Wes to give you a point or something.” I said, “Look, man, how long have I been working for you? Have you ever given me a point? I've been working for you a long time.”

**Brower:** Meaning a percentage of the proceeds.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, a percentage of the record. “Have you ever did that for me?” He said, “Well, no, man, you know . . .” I say, “Okay, well, then I don't think I'm going to get that from Wes either.” So we went and did the date. Just one night in the club. It came out to be a record. That's what I'm telling you. You don't get – you don't make deals in front – if you don't make deals in front like that, which was very unpopular at the time. It was even unheard about, that musicians are going to get a part of somebody's record, like I'm going to get a part of Miles Davis's record. That don't make sense, unless he, out of the goodness of his heart, tried to talk to the people that be to do that. But that wasn't even possible.

**Brower:** I doubt he was getting points.

**Jimmy:** No, he was – he had he – I think he had – whatever agreement he had, they had it already.

**Brower:** You could get a loan.

**Jimmy:** But however – yeah, and then that's according – they would charge him about how much it cost to produce a record. They would take that off of his share of the record. He'd be paying that a long time. Had he known that the record's going to last 50 years, he would have really stuck them up, because he would have asked for three or four Ferraris outside, a penthouse, . . .

**Brower:** It's like sharecropping for Cadillacs.

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**Jimmy:** Yeah, right. He would really have done that. Yeah, I don't know if he had no inkling that the thing would be as large as it got. As for the side guys getting money from it, that's not happening. When you go to talk – later on, they sold the whole project to Sony, right? So now you got to talk to Sony, and they're going – they're really distant from it, because they got a lot of people there that's just working – there's academic people with no rea- – they probably don't even know about the music. They're just business folks that's doing a job. So the whole thing goes down the line where – had I – if I'm just getting a little bit off of this record for 50 years, I got a piece of money, right? But that's not happening. Occasionally she – my wife goes to the company and says, "Are we going to do something? We want you to help us do it." They can either say yes or no, or either we could do it or not do it. Like that. But it's not a lot like you're getting what you're probably supposed to get off in a situation like this.

**Brower:** Would you be working as hard today as you're working if the political economy of jazz were different, so to speak?

**Jimmy:** I don't know. It's all according to how – what it is. If they was giving you what you was supposed to get, I probably wouldn't have to work as hard. Right now they got some guys in the union trying to make things right along those lines, trying to see that the musicians get treated more fairly than they have been.

**Brower:** Moving forward, there came the 40th anniversary of *Kind of Blue*. What happened when that came out? How did . . . ?

**Jimmy:** They approached us about doing some advertising for it, but even then they didn't want – they think it's gratis or something, that I'm supposed to do it because – I don't know why they think I'm just supposed to do it because they say it. But they talked to my wife about doing it, and she says, "I don't think so. You're going to have to – we have to make an arrangement. You have to pay us." She made an agreement where this is a one-time thing. If you do it again, you have to pay us again. They – and when it come to be 50, they want to do it again. They don't want to pay us again. She made some other arrangements about what was supposed to happen and what had to happen for us to agree on some stuff. It's still in the works as trying to – it's still going on. The record is still selling a lot of records, and it probably will be doing that. So maybe a little later something will happen. Maybe after I'm gone. Maybe it will happen then. Maybe our family – my family will get something, inherit something. Who knows? But right now, it's like – they are nice in some ways. They send us records and CDs, and on my birthday . . .

**Eleana:** I called them.

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**Jimmy:** . . . she called them. I guess she made them give up something. So they had some kind of a little party downtown, and they presented me with a snare drum that a friend of mine made. It's supposed to be a very expensive snare drum. So I got that at home. Maybe now and then I get a few questions. They come up with something. They send a couple boxes of records. They sent us what you're going to give the Conyers, that big Miles thing. They sent us a few of those when we asked. But it's not what could be, let's say. We're working on it.

**Brower:** You're being quite gracious about all of this.

**Jimmy:** Well, listen, what are you going to do? I don't have no money to fight them. They got the advantage there. So you just have to get at them the best way you can get at them. Maybe through the union will help it, because we got some guys that know the situation and want to help it. So maybe that will come across.

**Brower:** We're bringing in a new element to the oral history: Eleana Steinberg Cobb. We particularly want to go into some of the details of decisions that you've made collectively about how to steer Jimmy's career and the things he should do. Given the hindsight, which is always 20-20, on how this business works and what's fair, what's equitable, and what's economically in the interest of the persons who actually created the intellectual property. Just roll with it.

**Eleana:** I would say starting around *Kind of Blue*, Jimmy – sidemen don't get paid in this business. Just, they don't. They do work for hire. Usually this record goes out there, they sell a few copies if they're lucky. Sometimes – every once in a while, somebody like Herbie Hancock will get a hit tune, and then life changes. But mostly that doesn't happen for jazz musicians. Miles was popular. He was selling records. I always tell Jimmy that I don't think *Kind of Blue* would have been the record it was if it wasn't for the drummer. What if it was Philly Joe? It might not have . . .

**Jimmy:** You would say that.

**Eleana:** I would say that. Well, it's my personal opinion, and I'm entitled to it.

**Jimmy:** You and Jaime would.

**Eleana:** Our daughter. [?] our daughters.

They don't want to pay you. The same thing happened with – you were talking about Helsinki, and that videotape popped up. I saw it being sold as a John Coltrane tape. I knew, from the story, that it wasn't a John Coltrane tape. It was a Miles Davis tape. Miles Davis didn't – it was the Miles Davis band. It was not the John Coltrane band. So I called

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whoever it was at the time, and said, “What did you do? Jimmy’s on that. You didn’t pay him.” He said, “There’s money for him at the union.” So I called the union. They said, “Jimmy Cobb. When did he die?” This was the first question. Then, “Oh yeah. We have \$250 for him.” So I called the fellow back. I said, “\$250?” He said, “Well . . .” I said, “What did you do with John Coltrane?” He said, “We went to the John Coltrane estate.” “You went to the wrong estate. It was not the John Coltrane band.” I said, “As far as I’m concerned, it’s a collective band, and everybody should pay. I’m not going to let you” . . . . So I did get a good deal of money for that for Jimmy, because he just took a free thing out of the radio station or television station in Germany, I think, and just decided to put it out and pay everybody a couple of hundred dollars, the estates. He thinks everybody’s dead. Jimmy is alive and well and outlived everybody. So he was sort of stuck. I could have held him up for more, but I really felt that I wanted to be fair. I wanted – I did want him to put it out, actually. I didn’t want him to – but that happens often. So you have to really watch what you do. Jazz musicians really like to play. They don’t like the business end of it too much usually, and they don’t really know that the promoters or the producers or whoever it is are taking the royalties and taking – owning the music. Then, after a while, they start to think, okay, you write your own music and you get a catalogue. But even today you make a record and it’s standards often. Often the musicians don’t write their own stuff, because people don’t want – they don’t listen to it enough. They like standards, whatever. So it’s a difficult thing.

Knowing that, after – I think Jimmy was saying – 40 years, they came to us – Sony – and asked him – Sony – to work for them. But they don’t think that he needs to be paid. They don’t – they think it’s – you buy someone – they don’t even send you music or lunch or send you a Sony camera. Nothing. Just do it.

**Brower:** You should just be happy that we called you.

**Eleana:** Yeah, we’re calling you. You’re going to be on CBS News. Think about it. “It’s good for his career,” they say. “He’ll be seen.” I say – at the time, I say, “He’s 80 years old. He’s got a career, and he’s been seen plenty. We need to eat dinner, to be paid. We don’t need to help Sony.” So, at 40 years old, I didn’t help Sony. But, at 50, I decided that we would let Sony help us. So we put the band together. We got an agent and a great manager, and we did a hugely beautiful and successful world trip based on Miles Davis, something that in the jazz community would be thought of as selling out. “Do your own music.” Basically, for Jimmy, “Do your own thing. Be Jimmy Cobb. You don’t have to be Miles Davis.” But that is so not realistic. And the point is, everybody’s doing it now. I find that after we did *Kind of Blue*, we got *Bitches Brew*, everybody. There’s about four bands going around now. All . . .

**Brower:** *Tutu Revisited.*

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**Eleana:** Yeah, *Tutu Revisited*. They all did it after this was successful, and it's a good idea, because people need – like McDonald's. It's a goofy hamburger, but it's packaged very well. So people buy it. In this business, you have to somehow package something so they want it. After all these years, we did. He's been working with Chesky Records, and he's been working with a lot of close friends, great musicians, for his own music and his own career, because he spent a career playing for singers, for Dinah, for Sarah, for Nancy, for great singers and great front people. He's a great musician. So he started doing his own stuff after all.

We have a wonderful show that he did in the early '80s with Gregory Hines singing and dancing, Freddie Hubbard, all of that stuff. Put it on television on Arts and Entertainment. So he's been putting out his own stuff for a couple of decades now, and we're starting to get the just rewards. He's, I would say, a celebrity in this music.

**Brower:** How many dates did you do with the *Kind of Blue* at 50?

**Jimmy:** What is it? 40?

**Eleana:** Yeah, between 40 and 50.

**Jimmy:** About 40.

**Eleana:** Closer to 50.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, we went a lot of places.

**Eleana:** It was a wonderful tour. It really was.

**Jimmy:** You mentioned [Erickson?]. This is the only band I ever been in that got a standing ovation every night. And he was right. That's what happened. Every night we got a standing ovation.

**Eleana:** It was more like theater, in a way. You go to see *The Fantas-* – that's what I said. *The Fantasticks*. I don't know if you remember it. It was a little play off Broadway that played for about 20 years, different casts, over and over. But the music . . .

**Brower:** I got a chance to see two of those dates.

**Jimmy:** Oh yeah?

**Brower:** New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival. How did you feel that – or do you even recall that hit?

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**Jimmy:** Recall what?

**Brower:** Recall the hit in New Orleans.

**Jimmy:** Oh, it was good. We had a friend in there was giving interview. He's the guy that wrote the book.

**Brower:** Ashley [Kahn]?

**Jimmy:** Ashley. Wrote the book on the thing. So I – he had lived around there a little while. He was down there doing his thing in the festival. So he had me and Larry Willis on this little talk show right there in the yard. I remember. It was pretty nice. People accepted it. The band sounded good every night. It was great.

**Brower:** That same weekend you hit with George – you were hitting with George – you were really there the whole weekend, because you hit with George Wein. I think Esperanza [Spaulding] was in the band. How do you feel about that, this new generation of players like Esperanza?

**Jimmy:** I think the talent – all through this music, there's going to be people that come up and come to the top, because the people love this music. It's going to always be jazz music. It's al[ways] going to be. I don't know how popular it might ever be. It might be like it has always been, up and down, but it's always going to be here. For me, I can't see it getting any better than through my life, being all the people that I had an opportunity to see, like Louis Armstrong, to know him and see him play and just be around while all this music is going on, like Duke Ellington, all the big bands. I had an opportunity to see that. I had an opportunity to go through bebop. I had an opportunity to be around those guys. I don't think that in the future there's going to be that much – can ever be that – better than that, let's say. It might get as good. But I can't see it being any better.

**Brower:** The significance of that to me is that you have so much seasoning. Now, if you got talent – and I want to say a little bit of talent, but that young lady has more than a little bit of talent. She got an extra portion or so. But will they get the opportunity to get the seasoning?

**Jimmy:** I don't think – I don't know if that can happen or not, because of the way things are. Things are more mechanical than human, than it used to be. So I don't know if they can get it. They've got some advantages, because they have videos and all that stuff, but it's not walking up and shaking the dude's hand or something, and talking about things, or ask him questions.

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**Brower:** But in that circumstance, not only with Esperanza, but probably to a degree with Giovan[ni Hidalgo], and probably to a degree with – although Vincent [Herring] was with you with Nat, and he had the benefit of that, but you got to have – or, there’s an opportunity there, that you have, and that they have, to get a little something that . . .

**Jimmy:** Yeah. I can make it real, because I was original. So that’s one plus. And the reason we had Wallace [Roney] there, because he would probably have been Miles’s choice, because they were tight. They were buddies. That’s Wallace’s mentor, is Miles.

**Brower:** This is a little aside. I started working with Wallace when he was in high school. I’ve been in his house when Miles called. His daddy, Big Wally, and I couldn’t believe this stuff, I should say. He’d be like, “Little Wally! Miles is on the phone.” I thought, my – you all got to be kidding. So that went on a long time.

**Jimmy:** I think I remember telling Miles. I say, “I got this little guy from my hometown that plays trumpet, and his daddy is a boxer.” So that right there piqued his interest right away.

**Brower:** So you made that connection.

**Jimmy:** Yeah. Somewhere down the line they – all that stuff came together, and they got together. I told him. I say, “Yeah, they got a little trumpet player, and his daddy used to – is a boxer.”

**Brower:** Out of Philadelphia?

**Jimmy:** Yeah, yeah.

**Brower:** He was like a jazz – I would call him – you got stage mothers. He was – meaning theatrical stage mothers. He was a jazz dad. He was a jazz stage dad. And he got it not only with Wallace, but with Antoine [Roney]. Got that from filming.

**Jimmy:** It’s good, hey?

**Brower:** The other date that was a part of that was kind of an add-on, was the thing that we did at the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation and the legislative conference with Congressman Conyers. Can you reflect on what that meant to you, if anything, that particular audience, that particular day, that particular man?

**Jimmy:** That particular man is – I met him under some bizarre circumstances – not bizarre, but it just happened – it was on a venue what we did. He was backstage after – he came backstage after the performance, and he was telling us how much he – he was

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telling me how much he enjoyed it and how much he liked Sarah and stuff like that. So I was talking to him. I didn't know who he was. I said – he was talking so much, I thought he was a musician. I said, “Are you a musician?” He said, “No, I'm not a musician. I'm a Congressman.” I said, “I'm sorry, sir. Excuse me.” So that's where I met him.

Over the years, he's been – he'd maybe show up at places where I've seen him. But at the Caucus, I'm really proud that he did that for me, that he even remembered about that, because some people look at that, they say, I don't have to do nothing. But he figured that he wanted to do something, and I appreciated that he did it, because it was right there in my hometown, and that makes it much better.

**Eleana:** He wrote it into the *Congressional Record*. He actually read it into the whole – not only Jimmy's band, as well as the Miles Davis *Kind of Blue* . . . .

**Brower:** He did it twice.

**Eleana:** Did it twice, which I think is quite remarkable.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, he's with the music. I like that.

**Eleana:** American history is being written. It's American history. America. I love it.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, he's a beautiful man, and I really appreciate him doing it. Someone told me. He said, “Come over,” and sat over here. I didn't know what was going on. So I'm there, and he's sitting down writing something. I don't know what he's doing. I figure he's writing a speech or something to say, but he was preparing to bring me up, and I didn't know that until I got up there. So I said, “Okay. Thank you very much. I wasn't really expecting that.” It was beautiful. I got the plaque at home, and the letter, and all that stuff. It's a nice letter.

**Brower:** Got another plaque coming.

**Jimmy:** Okay. I want to take it.

**Brower:** Because I think the one from – you probably have the one that was given that day, but subsequently he did the thing about the recording, and we need to close that loop.

**Jimmy:** Cool. All right. I'm going to have to find me some more wall.

**Eleana:** That is so true. We have the pictures of *Kind of Blue*, because Ashley – David Baker – do you remember? He was a great recording engineer, and he passed. Anyway,

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he did a lecture at the – what is it? the Coliseum or wherever it was – about how all of the music was recorded, and they used the *Kind of Blue* album to show the record and then the eight-track and then the cassette, because *Kind of Blue* has been on every type of recording . . .

**Brower:** Every platform.

**Eleana:** . . . that they have. So they – so what did Sony do? Sony made these big, beautiful pictures of *Kind of Blue*, the ones that everybody sees, with Bill and Miles . . .

**Jimmy:** The ones in that portfolio we got. We got the big . . .

**Eleana:** In this book. But they're like this, and they're beautiful. They're all decorating the room, because they're doing a Miles Davis thing. At the end, I said, "We want them." They were very nice. They gave us all the pictures.

**Jimmy:** See, the only thing – I'm not – the only thing about it, there's no pictures of me there.

**Eleana:** I was going to say . . .

**Jimmy:** So my children look up and say . . .

**Eleana:** We put it in our bedroom.

**Jimmy:** Say, "Where's your picture, Daddy?" I say, "I'm not there." So her mother says, "He's standing right here."

**Eleana:** Yeah, he's alive.

**Brower:** Touching you.

**Eleana:** He's not there. He's here. But it's those great pictures from that session. So I said at the end, "I think we should take those pictures. They belong to us." They were gracious. They gave it to us.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, we got the big ones.

**Brower:** Speaking of how special being recognized in your home is, we were in a break, talking about a scene that Walter Booker had.

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**Jimmy:** Oh yeah. Going back to Bookie. Bookie had a place in his apartment on 87th Street. He made a home-style studio. He used to have guys come up. He used to record all night in that place. He soundproofed it so you couldn't hear outside. He did it all his self, basically. We used to go over there and hang. Everybody used to come through there. I'm sure Sarah Vaughan was through that.

**Brower:** Give me a time frame.

**Jimmy:** When was this?

**Eleana:** '70s. Late '60s, '70s.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, late '60s, '70s.

**Eleana:** Early '80s, actually. He was there probably 20 years, I think.

**Jimmy:** Yeah. He was in that place a long time.

**Eleana:** He had a big place like this, but the middle room, when you walked in, was a recording studio. You walk around. He had a bedroom on one side and a kitchen on the other, but he had a studio, a control room – a real studio. They did a lot of stuff. I'm sure it's all somewhere.

**Jimmy:** Yeah. Somebody's got it.

**Eleana:** Somewhere. Just sitting in a closet somewhere. Reel-to-reel.

**Jimmy:** Nat, Larry Willis. Those was the home guys. I think he went in partnership with Ragman. You know Ragman?

**Eleana:** Larry Clothier.

**Jimmy:** Larry Clothier. You know Larry.

**Brower:** Yes I do.

**Jimmy:** They were in partnership a little bit, making records. We went down to Texas and got Roy Hargrove. Larry's his manager still. We got him when he was down there in high school. There was a place that we played called Dreams. The club was named something Dreams and something [Caravan of Dreams]. That was the club that they played down that way. He was still in high school, like I just said. His mother and daddy

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used to bring him to the little gigs that he had down there. He got out, came to New York, and he's doing what he's doing now. He's a talented little guy from a long time ago.

**Brower:** I don't think I brought that, but you did – I think you did the record with – is that the record with Russell Malone on it?

**Jimmy:** Yeah. This is the – you got it on the floor there.

**Eleana:** There was another one, *Cobb's Corner*.

**Jimmy:** He's got that there too. No, that's the other one.

**Eleana:** That one's not here. We did two with – I co-produced them with David Chesky. We did two with . . .

**Brower:** With Roy?

**Eleana:** . . . with Roy. We did two, with Christian [McBride] on both of them. Cedar [Walton] and Hank Jones are the other two.

**Jimmy:** You get Hank Jones, Cedar – no.

**Eleana:** And Javon [Jackson].

**Jimmy:** Hank Jones, Christian, and myself. We got Cedar, Javon, Christian, and myself. And we got . . .

**Eleana:** Russell.

**Jimmy:** Russell and Webber.

**Brower:** John Webber?

**Jimmy:** Yeah, Webber . . .

**Eleana:** And Roy.

**Jimmy:** . . . and Roy and myself. Before that, the first one we did was – what was it?

**Eleana:** *4 Generations*.

**Jimmy:** *4 Generations of Miles*. That was with Ron and – what's that other?

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**Eleana:** George Coleman.

**Jimmy:** George Coleman

**Eleana:** Mike Stern.

**Jimmy:** Mike Stern.

**Eleana:** Who is the . . .

**Jimmy:** . . . the guitarist. We just found out. She likes a program that's on . . .

**Eleana:** *The Closer*.

**Jimmy:** . . . tv called *The Closer*. The lady on there is named Kyra Sedgwick. Come to find out lately that that's the guitar player's sister.

**Brower:** Oh, that's Mike Stern's sister.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, Mike Stern's sister. The way that came about, he told me, is that his name was Sedgwick. That was his last name too. But his mother married a Stern. So he took the Stern name. So that's how it could be like it is. Then we found out she got a sister someplace. Somebody knew . . .

**Eleana:** Edie Sedgwick. Yeah, the jazz thing. That's a very talented group of people. Six degrees.

**Brower:** Roy – we mentioned Roy Hargrove and Wallace. These are two of the younger players that I think really are throwbacks. They're not spitting out a lot of etudes and whatever. It really makes you remember cats like Lee Morgan in terms of having that other thing in the music, other than having studied a lot of stuff and internalized a lot of solos and all that. You really feel that they're bringing something out.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, they are. They're just special people. They come from a different vibe, I think.

**Eleana:** Also, when Wallace would play the *Kind of Blue* thing, it's interesting, because these guys grew up listening to that record, and yet when they play in their world, you don't really want to sound like somebody else, necessarily. You want to have your own sound. But something about this music – everybody slipped into the character, and

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sometimes Jimmy would get up and say, “Whoa, wow, it’s just like . . . .” He really would slip right into that character.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, Wallace would.

**Brower:** Probably him more than anybody. Miles picked him to be him.

**Eleana:** And he does it very well. He does himself very well too, but in this particular idiom, he really captured it to the point where you – some of them were so beautifully lit in such incredible places, like the Tower of London or – they had some incredible – you know how music is around the world – these incredible backdrops and the lighting and this music. It’s just incredible.

Also, Darlene Chan – is that her name?

**Jimmy:** Yeah.

**Eleana:** She did the Hollywood Bowl, which I think was the most beautiful – were you there? –

**Brower:** No.

**Eleana:** – one of the most beautiful concerts.

**Brower:** Playboy Jazz Festival?

**Eleana:** No. Playboy Jazz Festival they played the *Kind of Blue* thing, but Hollywood Bowl, she did *Sketches of Spain* and *Porgy and Bess*.

**Jimmy:** *Porgy and Bess*.

**Eleana:** And *Kind of Blue*. So they did *Sketches of Spain* and *Porgy and Bess*, and then they had the *Kind of Blue* session – no, no, they had the Gil Evans sessions on two huge – in between – on two huge screens. The music was so magical, *Porgy and Bess* and *Sketches of Spain* together. It was really – outside. It was just a magical concert. I think – who was there? Peter Erskine. Christian hosted it. And the Vince Mendoza orchestra. It was fabulous.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, they played the charts really good.

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**Eleana:** Mr. Davis. It was great that Jimmy is here to pull the little bits. Everybody gets to reacquaint themselves with that. He changed music, Miles. Every decade he did something completely . . .

**Jimmy:** Yeah, they was looking for Miles for direction at all times.

**Eleana:** Jimmy was at the – what was it? – the jazz festival in Newport? with Miles when he changed his – with the drummer. He heard Sly Stone.

**Jimmy:** Oh yeah. I think Miles went to hang out with Sly Stone, who was working in the Gardens in New York, downtown. He – they got to hanging out. They got to talking. Sly was telling him, he say, “Yeah, man, I worked in the Gardens – Madison Square Garden last night. I made 83 grand.” Miles say, “83 grand!” Right after that I went by Miles’s house. He had a closet full of funny-looking little suits and shoes and hats and all that stuff. I say, oh, wait a minute. So he went into the music. He had the wah-wah pedals. Boy, he went all out.

**Eleana:** He changed the backbeat.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, he changed his whole thing.

**Eleana:** He couldn’t change the way he played, though.

**Jimmy:** No, he played the same.

**Brower:** He put it on top of it.

**Eleana:** But he changed the backbeat and the textures and the costumes.

**Jimmy:** Yeah. Sly Stone, I think, brought him out of the closet. He say, “Oh, no kidding. 83 grand.” Miles, boy. Opportunity knocks, he’ll jump right on it.

He went searching there a long time with that band too, what different bands sounded, trying out what they did. It was during – he had Dave Liebman in the band one time. Dave Liebman was just standing there. He didn’t know what to do, because they was all over the place, and everybody was different. So Dave went to Miles. Say, “Hey, man, what am I doing here? What am I supposed to do here?” He said, “Why am I here?” So Miles said, “They just want to see how your fingers work so fast.” That’s the weak excuse he gave him.

Then, another time, he had Sonny Fortune in the band. Sonny was in the middle of a solo, up and down. Miles go and say, “Sonny, Sonny.” So Sonny say, “What Miles?” and he

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just kept on playing. So Miles said, “Sonny, Sonny.” Say, “What?” He get irritated, and he say, “What, Miles?” Miles say, “Play your flute.” Some funny stuff. She got a videotape of them somewhere, from one of them bands.

**Eleana:** Yeah, he gave me for my birthday one year. He said – I think I gave him something first, maybe a photograph or a painting or something like that. Oh, no, I gave him real boxers, old boxers. I don’t even know the guys, Max . . .

**Jimmy:** Schmeling, Joe Louis, and all that.

**Brower:** Sugar Ray.

**Eleana:** And my brother will never forgive me, actually. He says, “You just gave him all those things.” “Did I really give him? I just gave him.” Anyway, he said, “Take that.” He had just been – the beginning of video. It was the beginning. Japan had it under control. We didn’t really have it too tough here. We were still filming. So the Japanese filmed this concert, and he took – they didn’t have a right to film it. They didn’t have a contract. So Miles took the original master.

[recording interrupted]

**Brower:** Let’s back up for a second. Tin Palace. Start. Hit that. You was – talk about your Tin Palace days.

**Jimmy:** Tin Palace was a nice little club down on the Bowery – down Third Avenue in the Bowery, somewhere down in there. We used to work in there. I remember we all was – in the band – everybody in the band drank cognac. So the lady used to say – it was a young woman that ran it, her and her brother. She used to come and say, “You all drink up all the cognac, I can’t make any money, because I have to sell the cognac for a certain price, and you all drink it, you get a reduction.” It was Rouse. The trumpet player was – what’s his name? I can’t think of what it was. But all of us drank cognac.

I remember this dude I was with, his name was Marshall Fisher. I had introduced him before to Sarah Vaughan. We used to hang out all the time. He used to act as a road man. He used to take the drums around for me and set them up. Act like a roadie. He saw this girl at the bar, was sitting with another Japanese girl I know. He said, “Man, I sure like that girl. I like her hair.” So I say, “Oh yeah?” I say, “I know the girl. I know that girl.” I say, “You want to meet her?” He say, “Yeah.” So I took him to meet her. So she said – she said something about that the other night. She says, “Yeah, I met Marshall at the Tin Palace, and then I just fell in love, because he had those blue eyes.” So that’s what she knows. That’s what she liked about him. He was with her maybe all the rest of his life. He married her to keep her in the States, because after three months or so, she had to go

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back. Just before she was going to go back, he say, “Now I can’t let her go back.” So they got married. Lived down there on – what is that street? A hundred – I can’t think of the street. He said it’s the longest time he ever lived in any place, is that place there. He’s from – actually, he’s from Denver, Colorado, I think. He was Sarah’s husband for a minute, our road manager, and stuff. We’d just hang out. And Bookie. Him and Bookie was good friends, when we was all together with Sarah.

**Brower:** Sounds like the band you were talking about, with Hicks, yourself, and Booker, was some of the same cats. It was the basis or often involving these sessions.

**Jimmy:** Yeah. Bookie was making a lot of records in his house, and he had guys coming through. They would come up there if they probably needed dubs or some stuff to present to people for their gigs, then he could make them for cheap. He was into that. He used to go hang out, smoke, and do whatever. That’s what it was. Called Boogie Woogie. That’s what he called it: Boogie Woogie’s.

**Eleana:** Studio.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, Boogie Woogie Studio.

**Brower:** Are you familiar with the Loft – this thing, the Loft Project? About that situation downtown, where the guy had the jam sessions and he took all the pictures.

**Eleana:** The loft jazz. They had something called the Space for Innovative Development, I remember, in the ’70s.

**Jimmy:** They had loft jazz too.

**Eleana:** They had loft jazz everywhere.

**Jimmy:** What’s-his-name had a loft down there.

**Eleana:** Martin Morganelli.

**Jimmy:** Martin Morganelli.

**Eleana:** Jazz Forum.

**Brower:** But there’s a project out now called the Loft Jazz Project. No, it documents something that happened before. This photographer had this space that was a jam-session space, and he recorded everything, not only music, but conversations and street noise,

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and he also photographed it. Now Duke University's made a big project out of it, and it sounds like Boogie Woogie's would be a candidate for a similar kind of treatment.

**Eleana:** It would be nice, because his wife – his last wife – is Bertha Hope, and she has all the stuff in her house, probably in her closet. She has a huge amount of this music, which probably is, I don't know, a lot of people: Andy Bey, Jimmy, as he said, Larry Willis. All the guys were up there.

**Brower:** Did you play with Bertha at all? Bertha Hope at all?

**Jimmy:** Played with her last night – the night before last, at this thing I was just talking about, at the service: her, and the Japanese girl's boyfriend is Ron McClure. You know who that is?

**Brower:** Bass player.

**Jimmy:** The bass player, yeah. We played, Bertha, Ron McClure, and myself played a couple – two or three tunes. Then they had some Japanese people there playing, and they had a Japanese choir singing, and all like that. It was pretty much a Japanese burial thing, but at the end of it – with some jazz added at the end of it. It was nice.

**Brower:** Did you know Elmo [Hope]?

**Jimmy:** Elmo, yeah. That's Bertha's husband. Yeah, I knew Elmo. Not that much, because back then they was into some stuff that I wasn't going to be around.

**Brower:** I mean, did you know him musically?

**Jimmy:** Yeah, I knew him musically.

**Brower:** Did you hit with him?

**Jimmy:** No, I never hit with him, no. Him and Bud Powell came up, I think, around the same time. Buddies or something like that.

**Brower:** I've heard people say that Elmo was really – not really the cat, but that he had done a really . . .

**Jimmy:** Yeah. Definitely he was in it.

**Brower:** Did you have much to do with Slug's?

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**Jimmy:** No, I didn't really like Slug's that much. First time I went in, I say, "What? This is a nightclub?" I mean, this is – we're talking about the dump. I say, "Whoa." I went back there. Somebody say, "Jackie McLean is working down at Slug's." I say, "Where's Slug's?" They say, Avenue something and 3rd Street or 2nd.

**Eleana:** East 3rd.

**Jimmy:** So I found my way down there. I walked in. I got halfway. I said, oh, no. I backed out of that joint. It was too funky for me.

**Eleana:** I remember Joe what's-his-name, the saxophonist with Elvin. Was it? - who was it that played saxophone?

**Brower:** Joe Farrell?

**Eleana:** Joe Farrell. I remember watching him with Elvin there. That's when I was young.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, that was a tired place.

**Eleana:** I couldn't think of his name the other day. Jerry owned it, that fellow, the short guy. His name was Jerry. It's a jazz club in New York. I prefer Bradley's. You talk about a jazz club where everybody really played and had a moment for musicians to go and be – it was a community there, Bradley's.

**Brower:** Bradley's came a little bit later, though, didn't it, so to speak?

**Eleana:** I think Bradley's was happening at the same time, really. I think Bradley's was around for a long time, but maybe – because I think Slug's was like 1971, '2.

**Brower:** Actually it was be- . . . yeah.

**Eleana:** '71, I remember it. It just started right around then. It didn't last very long.

**Jimmy:** Do you remember a picture of Bradley was in the back, right back of the piano?

**Eleana:** Yeah.

**Jimmy:** With him playing the piano. What's-his-name has got it down there in the Jazz Gallery. I [?] walked past. That's where that thing is.

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**Eleana:** Bradley was something. He would help all the cats with the money, cash checks. He took care of a lot of people.

**Jimmy:** He told me, he said that even though it was a place you couldn't play – you only could play bass and piano in there. You couldn't have no drums, because of a residential thing. He used to tell me, he said, "Soon as I get the drums, you're the first guy I want to have to play the drums." So I say, "Yeah, okay." At that time, I figured that we could have done it, because I was working with a trio up in Woodstock. It was – you know who I'm talking about – it was Warren Bernhardt and . . .

**Eleana:** Oh, Dave Holland.

**Jimmy:** . . . Dave Holland. Warren Bernhardt and Dave Holland. We did some trio stuff up there. You know Warren Bernhardt?

**Eleana:** . . . and Dave Holland?

**Brower:** Um-hmm.

**Jimmy:** We used to do some trios. So I was telling Sarah, I got just the trio for us, when we do it. But it never happened. I think the first one to do it was probably my man – he used to live right across the street from me. You know who I'm talking – used to play with Monk.

**Brower:** Gentleman? Ben?

**Jimmy:** Ben Riley. I think Ben Riley was the first one to do it.

**Brower:** I call him Gentleman.

**Jimmy:** Gentleman Ben.

**Brower:** I had that from somewhere.

What about McHale's?

**Jimmy:** McHale's, she knows a lot about McHale's.

**Eleana:** That's going to be her conversation. McHale's was a great club. Mike and Pat McHale

**Brower:** I think about that and Bradley in tandem, in a way.

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**Eleana:** It was a little more – McHale’s was more of an r-and-b club, although Art used to play there and – South African.

**Brower:** Hugh?

**Eleana:** Hugh Masekela played there, but that was about the – they had – but it was more like Sissy Houston. Stuff played there a lot. They had a pretty much . . .

**Brower:** It was a friendly environment, though.

**Eleana:** It was a great environment for the music. People loved it. It was – and there was Seventh Avenue South, in the 70s, also, that was a great – Mike and Randy Brecker opened it, that club. Everybody played there. That was sort of like the fusion thing started, all that fusion.

**Brower:** Bradley’s seemed to be a place that you went after . . .

**Eleana:** Yeah, after hours. It was really – it started around 11 o’clock until 3, 4 in the morning. McHale’s was sort of like that too. He went late. You stayed . . .

**Brower:** That was a Polly spot.

**Eleana:** Yeah, Polly. Polly went everywhere. She really did. She amazed me. She would go Monday nights to hear the big band at the Vanguard. She really had her – she loved all the guys. She went – we have a huge thing of, what?, drum sticks now, signed drum sticks. She loved the music, and she went everywhere. At that time it was – the 70s – where did you used to come down to? The Five Spot. Didn’t that move to Eighth Street at one point?

**Brower:** That’s where I remember it.

**Eleana:** Sweet Basil.

**Brower:** Sitting right on the corner, catty-corner from the Dome.

**Jimmy:** Then it moved – I’m trying to think – it moved someplace down a little further around a little corner there somewhere.

**Eleana:** We used to see Art there all the time, with Javon. That was when Javon was a kid, 19 maybe or – Jazz Messengers. New York, New York. There’s no place like it.

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**Brower:** Talk about a slew of trios that you've been involved with. Some of them we don't know about, like Warren Bernhardt, Dave Holland.

**Jimmy:** That was because we all lived up in Woodstock at the time. It was convenient for us to do it. There wasn't that many places to work, but whenever something come up, we could do it with the trio, because we were all there.

Speaking of trios, I got a guy that I go to Italy with. I call him my Italian son. He loved Wynton Kelly. That's how we got to meet. I think I met him through Bookie. Bookie went there first. He said - come back and said, "I met this little guy that loves Wynton. He wants you to come over there." So I say, okay. So I got to meet this guy. His name is Massimo Faro. He plays piano sort of like Wynton's style. Then there's another Italian guy. His name is Dado Moroni. He plays really great piano. He plays style – he can play that style or any kind of style.

**Eleana:** Ronnie Matthews.

**Jimmy:** We had a trio with Bookie, Ronnie Matthews, and me.

**Eleana:** John Hicks.

**Jimmy:** John Hicks, Bookie, and me. A lot of that going on. We had one with Bookie and the Italian guy and me. We made some records. We made a few records in Italy. Almost every time we would go to Italy, we'd do a little tour. Then we would – at the end of the tour, he had a guy that had a recording studio. We used to go in there, just record, and he'd put the records out and sell them . . .

**Brower:** On the gigs.

**Jimmy:** . . . on the gigs. Each one – it wasn't a lot of money. Each guy would get a bunch of records to sell on his own. We had that kind of arrangement. So I got about two or three of those. Maybe more than that, right? So it's a lot of trio things. One time, Bookie and myself did a record with Kenny Barron and John Hicks.

**Brower:** Together.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, the double-piano thing. We did that. It was a whole lot of things, a lot of combinations. There's probably some more I can't even think of. Like that. Do whatever you could, whenever we could. I did a trio with Monty Alexander. We went to – I was supposed to go to Rochester with the Wynton Kelly Trio. That day – the plane was about 3 o'clock – about 1 o'clock, his sister called me, say, "Wynton is – Wynton can't make it. Wynton just had a seizure. He can't make it." So I say, oh, Lord. The plane is 3 o'clock. I

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know that Monty lives out by the air- – by LaGuardia Airport. So I called him. I would say, “Look, Monty, Wynton can’t make this. Can you do it?” He say, “Yeah, mon, I go.” So we jump on the plane. We go up there, him and a bass player named – what is his name? Williams I think his name is. He – we got him in on it. So we went up there and worked a whole week. At the end of the week, the guy was telling me something. “You know, I contact you for Wynton. He wasn’t here, and the business wasn’t good,” blah blah blah. So he – I didn’t get paid, actually. I worked the whole week free, is what happened. I saw Monty the other night. He was talking about that. That was just a little bit after he came from Jamaica here, Monty.

**Brower:** So basically you paid the other cats and stepped . . .

**Jimmy:** Yeah, I paid them, because we took planes up there. At that time – the whole gig was only \$750. So I gave them – what? – 250 apiece, and the other – all the rest of it was airfare and stuff. So that was that.

Then, later on, when I was with Sarah Vaughan, I see this guy. He’s in California. He walks up, talking to me . . .

**Eleana:** Like you’re friends.

**Jimmy:** . . . like we was friends.

**Brower:** Like y’all cool.

**Jimmy:** Like we was cool then, that you didn’t stiff me for the money. Say, “Yeah, I got a house. Why don’t you come on?” I say, “Yeah, wait for me.” We was talking about that.

**Brower:** Why don’t you cook dinner?

**Jimmy:** Nah, he just wanted to invite us to his house and party. I said, no way I’m going to do that with you, man. That was really some dirty stuff he did. I guess he was on a shoestring. I guess he figured that was what he had to do. So that’s how that went down.

Bookie’s place was lively. In fact, this guy I was just talking about, Marshall Fisher, who married, he was acting as the road manager. I had a gig one night on Sutton Place for a private party or something, and I had another gig the next night at another place. So Marshall say, “Okay, don’t worry about the drums. I’ll take the drums and bring them by the next gig and set them up.” I said, “Okay,” because he’s good at that. He went by Bookie’s house and stopped for about 5, 10 minutes, and parked the car right out front. When he came back down, somebody stole the drums. The drums, my cymbals,

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everything. That whole set of drums. I said, okay. He felt so bad about it, I think he managed to call up Pearl Drums, and they sent me a set of drums. In fact, they sent me two sets of drums over time. That's what happened with that. Getting back to Bookie, that's some things that happened around his era. There was a lot of fun to be had up in Bookie's place. Everybody used to come by.

**Brower:** Speaking of cymbals, is that the most important part of the kit to you?

**Jimmy:** Not most. It's very important, but not the most important. The drum kit is a good thing too. You have to have a good drum kit, and you have to have good cymbals. In fact, I just had the best cymbals I ever had, stolen in Madrid, this last trip, the ones that I finally got comfortable with, that I could play with, that sounded good in most every place I would go. They could handle almost all venues that I was in. It was a thing where this road manager is supposed to be watching out for my stuff. He lives in Washington too. He's supposed to be watching out for the stuff. He – we get out of the car. I'm getting ready to check in the hotel, and the guys come out to get the bags and all that stuff. In the commotion, he gets to talking to a woman that has something to do with the venue and forgets about the cymbal bag. I think he's got it. So I just go up – take my bags and go upstairs and go in the room. We got a day off that day. The next day he comes by the room, saying, "I came by to get the cymbals." I say, "I don't have the cymbals. I thought you had them." He says, "You don't have them?" I say, "No, I don't." So we went downstairs. We started questioning the bag handlers. They say, "We don't have it." Evidently what happened is, in the commotion, somebody just came and acted like he was part of our group, scooped the stuff up, and split. That was the best cymbals I had. It was some cymbals that I had gotten from Mel Lewis when they stole the drums I was just telling you about, and I was very comfortable with those cymbals.

**Brower:** What was in the package?

**Jimmy:** In the package it's a roller cymbal bag with a stick bag in it with all my sticks and brushes.

**Brower:** What was the cymbal package? What were the elements of it? This kind of ride, this kind of crash.

**Jimmy:** It was – I had two 20-inch cymbals, 14-inch hi hats, and a 18-inch crash cymbal that I love – I mean, side cymbal that I love. Everybody wanted to take – get it from me. Now somebody has got it.

**Eleana:** They don't even know what they have.

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**Jimmy:** They don't even know. Somebody probably went and sold the whole package for ten bucks or something. What was the – do you remember that guy's name from Washington? You probably know him. Tony what?

**Brower:** Oh, Tony Wheelock.

**Jimmy:** Tony Wheelock was supposed to be looking out for it.

**Brower:** Dan Melnick brought him to the [?] for you. Tony used to be at Blues Alley, and then from there he went over and worked at B.E.T., on all the jazz stuff over there.

**Jimmy:** He was supposed to be taking care of that. In fact, he left them a couple of places. We left them – one time, we was changing planes. You had to get off of this plane and walk back to the next terminal, which was like a half a mile outside the terminal. You had to take your own stuff, push your cart, all that. He left – some kind of way, he left the cymbals there, and we had to go – he had to go back and get them, from . . .

**Eleana:** He wasn't prepared for this part of the gig.

**Jimmy:** I didn't think so, because he wouldn't think about that.

**Eleana:** He was good at the administration stuff.

**Brower:** It had been a long time since he'd been taxed in that way.

**Eleana:** It wasn't right for him. They're heavy.

**Jimmy:** I know he felt bad about it. I felt bad too. I still ain't got right with the cymbal thing yet.

**Eleana:** And they should have been insured, anyway. It's just [?].

**Jimmy:** That don't bring them back, being insured, but . . .

**Eleana:** Our daughter put a Facebook. She called the police department in Spain.

**Brower:** Yeah, we knew about it. Maybe remember it. Now that you say it, I remember that this happened.

**Eleana:** The last thing they're concerned with is – they're musicians. They just want to make – it's like BP. What are they concerned with? They're not concerned with their workers. They're not concerned with their – they're concerned with their cash end, how

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much money they're making at the end. And that's what's happening with these guys. So they use them, and they keep the money as well as they – Morris Levy was a great example. Who was on his? Was Tony on it then? Morris Levy?

**Jimmy:** Do you mean his label or something?

**Eleana:** Yeah, his label. He was famous for, basically – they control the music. They keep the music. They tell them what to perform on. It's a hugely . . .

**Jimmy:** He might have Count Basie. I don't know. He might have Count Basie. There was singing. He might have had Sarah. She might have been on it.

**Eleana:** Until Berry Gordy, before that it was just basically all the white media would steal the music from the black media, and it became – what did Lena Horne say? “She took my Max Factor” – makeup for her, for *Porgy*, and put it all over Ava Gardner. It was like – that's really what it is in the music. As soon as these guys were to get a foothold and started recording, they'd take a Pat Boone or Elvis Presley.

**Jimmy:** That was the style back then. Black people couldn't record for those companies. So if they go a hit on the small companies, it would be repeated by the white artists in the big companies, exact same thing, the arrangement and everything, and they would go on the charts.

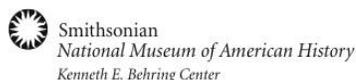
**Brower:** Everything but the quality of performance.

**Eleana:** Right. They couldn't play, they couldn't sing as well, and it didn't really make any difference, because they had the money, and that's really what controlled the whole game. It took a long time. Maybe Berry Gordy had some – you read all the time about everybody trying to sue for their royalties or whatever it is. But in this music, there were a handful of geniuses, and they recorded. I'm glad the music is recorded, but it's certainly not pushed or put out. They say, oh, it's jazz. Well, what was Frank Sinatra? Please tell me. What was that? Is it any different than Chet Baker singing a ballad, really? What is it? It's not jazz. Is it jazz? What is it? It's music. So if you take somebody like that, and take a whole music form and say, oh, that's popular music. But these guys got pigeonholed into a music that was – into a – and all of a sudden, the drugs and the – it was a very difficult thing to overcome.

**Brower:** Even that element is used to tar . . .

**Eleana:** Yes, it's used to tar the music.

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**Brower:** No-one defines any number of other brilliant people in whatever their field by whatever their personal proclivity is. That doesn't get to define them.

**Eleana:** It's just a way to frighten you away from people in the music. That's what it was. It was – that's really the – we don't know what it is. I have an old friend I went to school with in Tucson, Arizona. I went there. It's a very white community, country clubs, just completely homogenous [?] community. I brought her a record by Cleo Laine, singing – what was his name? – Charles Ives. Cleo Laine singing Charles Ives, which is pretty traditional, standard stuff. That was Walt Whitman. The words were Walt Whitman. The music was Charles Ives. The singer was Cleo Laine. I handed – I started playing this music for her son. He was about 10 years old at the time. She had a nervous breakdown, literally a nervous breakdown. She did not know what I was playing for her son. It just scared her. Years later, she saw Cleo on television. She called me and apologized. She realized how frightened she was of nothing.

And I remember Gary Keys. Do you know Gary Keys?

**Brower:** No.

**Eleana:** He was a director. He did the – he did a movie about Duke Ellington in Mexico. Sort of famous at the time. He was one of the first guys that went on the road with a camera crew and followed them around. And he did a movie – short movie – about gospel singing. He had some young white people going to a neighborhood to sing. He has them in the car, being afraid to go in the house, literally afraid, creating this – frightening. “We're in another neighborhood. They could hurt us. We're afraid to go in.” Of course, you watch all this build up, and they go in. It's a happy party, children, light, relaxed, happy. It was just – the fear is unjustified, and create [?] . Just, be afraid. The music – this music frightens people. The most beautiful – you say, “I'm going to go hear jazz. I'm going to go hear Hank Jones play with a piano trio.” That is about as scary as what? It's some of the most beautiful music. Or Bill Evans. You couldn't get a cross between more refined, elegant, and creative, exciting music. And yet people were just afraid of the word, because they think it's going – and yet, what do they listen to? When you listen to music today, words, it's frightening.

**Brower:** I was in the hotel today, walking down the steps. Guess what was playing? *Kind of Blue*.

**Jimmy:** That happens a lot.

**Brower:** It's everywhere.

**Jimmy:** A lot of places. We were listening to a television show.

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**Eleana:** People can wrap themselves around that.

**Jimmy:** It was going off. It was playing *Kind of Blue*. I say, “Would you listen to that.” It’s everywhere, like you said, man. It’s everywhere.

**Eleana:** Music is everywhere, and it shouldn’t be pigeonholed, and the only way it is, is if somebody wants to get the money over here. They figure if they frighten you away from that, then they’re a better opportunity to take. It has nothing to do with music. It’s selling shoes, really. It’s selling things. Luckily, for us, American – this music – it was created out of what? out of – like you can’t go anywhere. You can’t do anything. You can’t go out and eat. You can’t drive. You can’t go to a movie theater. Like you would say, I have to go – I didn’t go . . .

**Brower:** The crow’s nest.

**Eleana:** Yeah, because I couldn’t go in the balcony – or had to go in the balcony. So it’s a very hard – when you think about the oppression that takes place, even today, where do these kids get out of the ghetto? Where do they go? If they go a block, they’re stuck. If they go into a white neighborhood and they walk in to get an apple somewhere, the manager comes out. They have nowhere to go. They really have nowhere to go. If they’re not educated and taken somewhere and shown how to go through the world. They’re picked up. They’re thrown in jail. I just don’t understand – I just hate – it’s hard for me to see it. It’s just hard for me to watch it over and over again. So, as far as we’ve come, we haven’t come very far, because a lot of that stuff hasn’t really changed. These kids, they’re all juiced up, and a lot of kids with nowhere to go. So this music – when we go around the world and teach, you see these young people playing this music, and a lot of them are white. They’re not black. They’re white. You wonder where they got it. They grow up hearing this music. They grab on to it. It’s fabulous. The New School. Think about it.

**Jimmy:** We just came from Israel.

**Eleana:** Or Israel. These kids go to school. Where do they get – what kind of job do they get, playing jazz? You know what I mean? Their parents send them to school for \$30,000 a year to become a jazz saxophone player. Then they come out, and they get a job for \$100 a night. I was telling you that, in the ’70s, the Bottom Line wanted to pay Larry Coryell \$5,000 and Jimmy \$150 for the same gig, the same night, same band, because it was a different – it’s a different system of paying the guys, unless you were the 4, 5, 7, 9 bands, and most of them were white bands, on top of that.

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**Jimmy:** I think at one time Stan Getz was making more money than Miles. He's got a quartet or something. He's getting paid more money than Miles's quintet or something.

**Eleana:** Or Barbra Streisand and Sarah Vaughan.

**Jimmy:** Yeah. I was in – we was on a gig in Las Vegas where Barbra Streisand was in the big room and Sass was in the lounge, in the same hotel.

**Eleana:** [?] Barbra Streisand? [?]

**Brower:** Yeah, I wanted to speak on that project, since we brought it up.

**Eleana:** Yeah, yeah. That's a story.

**Brower:** This is something that I didn't know about.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, not too many people knew about it. What happened is, Barbra Streisand all of a sudden decided she wanted to give something back and come back to the place where she got started. So it was an article – you can do it from here.

**Eleana:** Jimmy would be telling me a story for years, because Barbra Streisand, coming from – I come from Connecticut. There were no Jewish people in Connecticut when I grew up. It was me and maybe the – the other Jewish girl, her parents owned ABC Disney. His name was Goldenson – Leonard Goldenson. But there were no Jewish girls. So my entire life, it was, “Oh, you remind me of Barbra Streisand.” It's kind of a lie, but that's what they said. So I grow up with this – nobody told me I could sing like Barbra Streisand, by the way. It was a gestalt kind of thing. So he would say to me for years, Barbra Streisand. She would come – she came to the club. She was like a little waif. She was a little skinny waif, and she asked if she could sit in with the band, and Miles said no. “I don't play with girl singers.” So he said no. So the waiter came to Jimmy, and Jimmy asked Paul . . .

**Jimmy:** No, he was the manager, right?

**Eleana:** He was the manager. Whoever. Jimmy asked Paul. He remembers it as Barbra had her own pianist, but Barbra tells – Barbra I don't think remembers any of it, because what happened was, I'm reading the *New Yorker*, which I had boycotted, because they had that picture of Obama and his wife looking like terrorists. So I cancelled my subscription. I thought, wrong. After about eight months, I gave up and I went back to the *New Yorker*. I'm reading the *New Yorker*. It's like a Thursday. Barbra Streisand is coming to the Village Vanguard. “Not since her stint with the Miles Davis Quintet has she been there.” That's Miles Davis. My picture is right next to Miles Davis. I go, “Oh.”

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First of all, it's not true. She never even – I know the story, right? So I ask our p.r. person. I said, "Look," . . . First I called the Village Vanguard. "Lorraine [Gordon]. I'm Jimmy Cobb's wife." She says, "Yes, dear, I know Jimmy Cobb." I said, "Lorraine, Saturday." She says, "Call me Monday, dear." "It's Saturday, Lorraine." "Call me Monday." So she gives me to Jed, the door guy. He tells me to call Marty Erlichman, who is the manager. So I decide I'm not going to call. I'll get our p.r. person to call. She calls, tells them the story. They love it, because it turns out that Marty Erlichman has been with her for 48 years – which I find out when I finally get to the show – and he's created this whole record. She does a jazz record that was produced by Diana Krall. Is that her name, Krall?

**Jimmy:** Yeah.

**Brower:** Krall.

**Eleana:** Krall. Isn't she Jackie and Roy's daughter? Do you know?

**Jimmy:** Could be.

**Eleana:** Anyway, it's a jazz record, even though Barbra Streisand is not a jazz singer. She's a theatrical – she sings a straight tune pretty much. So he's all excited. He's going to bring her back to the Village Vanguard, and I'm saying to Jimmy, "She's never going to walk down those stairs." This place – you know what I mean? They should recreate the Vanguard in Sony studios, because this woman, when she gets into this – the Village Vanguard is a very funky little tiny club. It probably hasn't been cleaned in 50 years. It's a scary club. She says, "I'm not going to have stage fright, because there's no stage." She got – they're using the old cord and the old microphone.

Anyway, they were so excited that Jimmy was alive and could be – they invited us to the show. They invited us to the party at the Waldorf afterwards. It was the hottest ticket in the known universe. 70 seats at the Village Vanguard. Clinton is there, his wife, Chelsea, what's-her-name? *Sex and the City*. Nicole Kidman is there. It's like a group of them, and here's Jimmy and I. Meanwhile, it's the most beautifully shot video I have ever seen of a music video.

**Jimmy:** Especially in that place.

**Eleana:** Because it's such a dump – that they actually made it look beautiful. I have to say that they colored me out. I cannot see me. You see Jimmy. He had a white coat on. You could sort of see Jimmy. But I am really not there until maybe one little shot, and then all of a sudden they decide to allow me to appear in this. But Jimmy, she introduces

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Jimmy, and it was really a fabulous moment, Barbra Streisand introducing Jimmy Cobb. She was very sweet with him at the Waldorf. Anyway, she's a fabulous vocalist.

**Jimmy:** She said to me later, said, "Do you remember anything I sang that night?" I said, "I surely don't. If you don't, I don't."

**Eleana:** Yeah, it was really an interesting moment though, because – then I get a call from somebody – I wish I remembered his name – a journalist, saying, "Miles said it was Herbie Hancock and" – who was in that band? Herbie and whoever. Who was in the band?

**Brower:** That would have been Ron and Tony.

**Eleana:** Ron. They called me. They said, "Miles said it was Herbie." "I don't want to answer that."

**Jimmy:** They're wrong.

**Eleana:** Miles made a mistake. He forgot. It was the wrong year for Herbie. It was the wrong decade. It was the wrong era. It was not Herbie. It was Jimmy, because he's been telling me the story since we – 31, -2, -3 years, telling me the Barbra Streisand little waif – little waif Barbra Streisand. So here we were. Everything comes around again. She's a great talent too. It was certainly a pleasure.

**Brower:** I don't know if these are ironies, or what they are, but there are a lot of them in your life. I guess if you live long enough . . .

**Jimmy:** You go through some of them.

**Brower:** . . . you get a chance to see the . . .

**Eleana:** It was weird, because when I was very young, I did one of those open calls on Broadway, and I sang a tune called *Spring can really hang you up the most*. Afterwards, we would perform at the Vanguard on Sunday afternoons with the people I was with at the time. So I ran down to the Village Vanguard after I won this vocal thing. Max was very animated. Max Gordon said, "You come over to the Blue Angel, and why don't you sing?" I was so afraid that I wasn't a jazz singer, that I would embarrass the people that I was – that I said no. Here we are at the Vanguard, and Barbra Streisand sings *Spring* – didn't even remember this story, until she came up with *Spring can really hang you up the most*, which is a great tune written by Fran Landesman, great lyricist, who had given her this song when she was a young girl. I just remembered, boy, this woman had a lot of – because I'm going, no. I wouldn't sing for you. She's like – Barbra Streisand. She was

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working for a living, singing for her supper. What did they say? She had two bags, and everything she owned was in those two bags. She wasn't that popular in the beginning.

**Brower:** In the time that we have left, we want to cover two things. One area is a bunch of different elements, that is, your working groups that you have now, and the range of them. Cobb's Mob.

**Jimmy:** The band that I have, which you just said, is Cobb's Mob. I got that with Peter Bernstein when I was in the School – in the New School [for Social Research]. I had a little gig down there once a week where I taught a rhythm class. Guys would come in. We would just pick some tunes and go over them. They would trust me to critique their playing, whatever it was, drums, instruments. It got to be a pretty big thing. It got so big guys used to be standing out in the hall. Reggie Workman, who was working there – still works there now – used to come by and say, "Man, these guys can't stand out in the hall." I say, "Okay. Move them. If they can't get in here, put them someplace." So he had to break the class up into two classes. What is – the drummer's name is? – the other drummer's name is Adam Nussbaum, I think. He had the second part of the club. That happened as long as I was in town, but at that time I started to get gigs where I would go out of town for spells of time. They needed somebody was going to be there consistently. So I said, "You all will have to get somebody else, because I'm working." So that's how I got out of being there that much.

While I was there, I met Peter Bernstein and – what's the piano player's name?

**Eleana:** Richard Wyands?

**Jimmy:** No, not that.

**Eleana:** Oh, Geoff?

**Jimmy:** No.

**Eleana:** Stefan Karlsson? Geoff Keezer?

**Jimmy:** No, no. A young boy. He's got a trio of his own now. That was our piano player at the time. It'll come to me in a minute.

**Brower:** Not Benny?

**Jimmy:** No.

**Eleana:** Benny Green.

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**Jimmy:** No, not Benny Green.

**Eleana:** He's young. Who?

**Jimmy:** You might even know him. You'll know him if I call his name.

**Eleana:** I will?

**Jimmy:** Yeah. John Webber, I met later. But it was that group that we decided we would form the Cobb's Mob thing. They named it. Peter named it. When I heard him, I liked him, because he played like guys that I'd been used to hearing. For a young boy, he was into it. He used to say, "If we get a few gigs around town, you up to playing?" I say, "Yeah." So we did that. We formed that group, the Cobb's Mob thing. Boy, I can't get this piano player's – before it's over with, it'll come up. He's a young boy. At that time he was 20-something. Maybe not that much – Brad Meldau. Brad Meldau, Peter, John Webber, and myself. That was the original Cobb's Mob. Then Brad moved to California and got to be famous out there and got his own trio. So we had – we got Richard Wyands, who is – we made a record, and the guy that wanted – the guy – the producer liked Richard Wyands. So he say, "Why don't you get Richard?" Okay, we got Richard. Richard's been there ever since. Richard, I had known since when I was with Dinah Washington. He lived in Berkeley, California. I met him when I probably 21 years old. So we got together. Since then, that's what the band has been.

So we do that occasionally. Then we got some gigs that we do with – we had a saxophone player. One time it was . . .

**Eleana:** Eric Alexander.

**Jimmy:** . . . Eric Alexander. We made a record over the top – the song over the top of the trio. Now we do it sometimes with Javon. We do it with other people. We just had a gig in the Iridium with Eddie Gomez – what's his – I can't think of the – when I get to call these names, they start to skip out of my head.

**Eleana:** Javon, Eddie, George Cables.

**Jimmy:** George Cables. Eddie, George Cables, Javon, and myself. We did that gig. So sometimes that's a band. A lot of times it's whatever . . .

**Eleana:** Then there's the *So What* band that did the Miles stuff.

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**Jimmy:** Yeah, well, he knows about the *So What* band, I'm sure. That's the *So What* band, which is Vincent Herring, Javon, Wallace Roney, and . . .

**Brower:** Larry.

**Jimmy:** . . . Larry Willis, and Buster Williams. That's what it was. When Buster got sick, we used John Webber. That works out pretty good.

**Eleana:** When Javon couldn't do it, we used Pee Wee.

**Jimmy:** We used Pee Wee Ellis. We used Pee Wee Ellis for one gig and – where was that? What's the name? Frome? What's the name of that place?

**Eleana:** No, we were at Wales.

**Jimmy:** It was in Wales.

**Eleana:** We did the Hay Festival in Wales.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, the Hay Festival.

**Brower:** Who lives in Wales? Pee Wee?

**Eleana:** Pee Wee lives in Frome.

**Jimmy:** In Frome.

**Eleana:** They live outside of Frome now, southern England.

**Jimmy:** It's funny.

**Eleana:** He's married.

**Jimmy:** Talking about England.

**Eleana:** He has a great life. He – when we all went to San Francisco many years ago, he got with Van Morrison. Van lives . . .

**Jimmy:** Pretty close to him.

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**Eleana:** . . . in Frome, and he has a studio there. So Pee Wee ended up moving there when he was his musical director, and he stayed, got married. That was that. So, when Javon couldn't make the gig – and it was a fabulous festival, a literary festival.

**Jimmy:** We got a tape of that somewhere too.

**Eleana:** Pee Wee did it. Then Sky Television, which is like PBS over there, videoed the whole thing. It's really beautifully lit, beautifully shot, I'm going to have to say. It was a high-end festival, literary festival. The reason they brought us over was because Hannah Rothschild had just done a documentary about her great, great aunt, Nina van Koenigswarter, Nina Rothschild.

**Jimmy:** Nica.

**Eleana:** Nica. I'm sorry. Nica.

**Brower:** Pannonica.

**Jimmy:** Nica.

**Eleana:** Pannonica. Pannonica, which they found out was a moth, not a butterfly. She tells it. It's great. Monk, and how they got together. I didn't know it, because they had asked us, because it was a book festival, to bring over some books that Jimmy's reading. So I said, we'll bring over *Kind of Blue*, Ashley's book, and we'll bring over *Three Wishes*, which – compiled – asking all the guys their three wishes. I didn't even know that we were really invited by – for that reason, because she was presenting her film at this festival, and she had suggested the band. So we were really over there for this Nica moment, Pannonica moment. She was quite the lady.

**Jimmy:** It was nice.

**Eleana:** Great film

**Brower:** The other thing we want to talk about is the things you do outside of playing. You alluded to New School, Stanford.

**Jimmy:** Oh yes. Occasionally I go to Stanford. In fact I'm going in September.

**Eleana:** No, you're going to San Francisco State.

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**Jimmy:** San Francisco State in September. But Stanford I go to sometimes. I mentioned that because I think that right now that's where Andrew [Speight] is, right at this moment.

**Brower:** Andrew's the player you recorded with . . .

**Jimmy:** Alto player. Marsalis.

**Brower:** . . . on Marsalis Music.

**Jimmy:** Yeah. So occasionally I go out there with him. We got a thing – we got a band we call Generations Band out there. Eric Alexander's in it. Then it was a trumpet player from Detroit. Marcus Belgrave was in it. But I think he's too busy to do it now. So occasionally we get other people to do it. It was Ronnie Matthews, who's not with us. It was Bulldog Drummond – Ray Drummond, the bass player. That was the band we used – and Andrew. It was Andrew – it was sextet. That's what we do out there. Occasionally we go out there and we give clinics to try to instill in the children about this music, to try to make them learn more about this music and try to learn how to play it more like the guys used to play it. Not like this school thing that they got going, where everybody sounds like everybody else. We've been trying to give them some knowledge of some base for this music. That's what we do out there. We go to different schools or just do the classes out there, do clinics out there, San Francisco State.

Then, the other thing: sometimes this gentleman I was telling you about, my Italian son, Massimo, he gives a school over there in Italy for a couple of weeks, and he uses – sends for guys like me from here, Buster, and people that come over to teach different instruments. He used to live out – Bobby Durham. Bobby Durham used to live with him over there. He stayed over there until he died recently. So Bobby used to be with him and give lessons every time. Every time he would have a clinic, he would have a place for Bobby. Bobby's a very talented guy. He could sing, he could dance, and he could play the drums good. So he would have guys like that. He had Buster, me. I'm trying to think who else he had

**Eleana:** Hal what's-his-name?

**Jimmy:** Who?

**Eleana:** Hal. Kind of an older saxophone player.

**Jimmy:** Oh, Hal – you know, from California. He used to play with Max. Harold Land. Is that who you're talking about? Not Harold Land.

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But he'd just bring guys over on different instruments to teach Italian guys.

**Eleana:** Shawnn Monteiro. She's a singer. Sings like Carmen.

**Jimmy:** Shawnn Monteiro is a singer that actually was Jimmy . . .

**Eleana:** Woode.

**Jimmy:** . . . Woode's daughter. You know Jimmy Woode?

**Brower:** Um-hmm.

**Jimmy:** She sings, and she teaches a class over there. So he brings people like that. They have it every year or something like that. So we do that.

**Eleana:** Berklee.

**Jimmy:** And I did a thing at Berklee.

**Eleana:** Tallahassee Jazz Festival.

**Jimmy:** Guys call me from different places to do little clinics.

**Eleana:** Clinics, master classes.

**Jimmy:** That's what happens. When they call up, we do them if it's possible.

**Eleana:** We like to do it every time there's a gig. We like to somehow get the school involved and do a master class. It's work.

**Brower:** Have you private students?

**Jimmy:** Yeah, my daughter sets up private students. She told me: next week I got seven. I use a little studio on 46th Street as the drum shop on the third floor. A friend of mine – his name is Barry – we got a pretty good rapport. I go in there and use this little room for whatever time it is. Guys come from all over to do lessons for an hour. It works out pretty good. I've been having a lot of success with it. So I do that. They call Jaime. Jaime talks them up on the internet. She'll say, "My daddy gives lessons." She's into it.

**Brower:** Do you have to have a sense of how well they play before you take them?

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**Jimmy:** We do that. When everybody – it’s personal. Everybody come, and you have to know what they play, but you can’t tell them anything. You have to sit down and say, “What do you think I know that you need to know?” Basically, what I do down there, it’s more mental than guys playing, because usually the guys come that’s learned something. They already started to play. They can already play. They’re just probably maybe interested in how I play the cymbal, or, “What do you think when you do 4s and 8s?” Any kind of thing like that. Then we go through some things. I’ll sit down and play and see what they want to know or see if I got anything that I can teach them right then. Usually the guys that come, they come from Canada. I had guys from Israel. I had guys from all over the place come with me right now. They want to do it.

**Brower:** Are they generally already at a professional level?

**Jimmy:** Most of them, yeah. Most of them are not really beginners. Some of them are. Most of them are into it and making gigs.

**Eleana:** They’re pretty into it by the time they get to – want to get to Jimmy. It’s not a beginner . . .

**Jimmy:** It’s not. I’m not starting kids with rudiments. Usually when the guys get there, they know all of that.

**Brower:** I’ve seen some video where they’re doing that. You may have a band, you’re running down a tune, and you’re just sitting there listening to them.

**Jimmy:** Yeah, that too. Then you tell them what it is. You say, “Sit down and play something for me.” Then you say, “Maybe you need to start out playing just the time with your cymbal and your foot, your hi hat. Just sit down and play time. Let me hear that for a minute, without trying to be Elvin or like that. Just give me some straight time, some swing.” I try to start them out like that. Then I say, “After you develop that, you can get to something that you want to get to. But you got to have basics first.” You can’t just start out sounding like Elvin Jones. You have to learn a lot of things about the history of the music, because if you don’t know the history of the music, you can’t improvise. You can’t know who played like this or who played like that or what you like about it or any of that. You have to get into it. You have to be into it. It’s like that kind of a thing. It’s a mental thing between whoever it is and myself, about whatever they need and whatever I could show them. So that’s what it is. Basically, we get something done.

**Brower:** Do you, in your playing – behind, on, ahead: where do you like to be on the beat?

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**Jimmy:** I'm usually ahead. Like the boy was playing last night? He's my student. With some feeling, with some force, and a little above the – I used to show it like, if this is the middle beat, some guys play here, some guys play there. I think I'm here. But if you can – if I can play here, he can play there, and we can stay like that, no problem, because I know what he's doing, you know what I'm doing. So it's like that. Just what you do – just do what you think you can do for them, and it all usually works out.

I used to take photographs of them when I was doing it. I got a few photographs of some students in there. I can't call their names, but I know their faces.

**Brower:** Are they mug shots, or what?

**Jimmy:** No, not mug shots, just shots when they get up off the drums or something, before they leave, so I can remember them.

**Eleana:** What they look like. I thought it was an interesting question once: somebody said to him, "What about your arms? How do you play with your arms?" He said, "I like to play this way, using a lot of arms, because I work all day. On some of those gigs, you work – you don't want to use your whole body, when all you have to do is use your wrists." It made me think of the tap dancers. Jimmy used to tell me that tap dancers used to be able to stay all night in these dance studios, but they had to dance. They couldn't sleep. He said that they would sit in a chair, and they – chair dancing actually developed that way. What's it called? Tap dancers, when they sit in the chairs?

**Jimmy:** Just sit in the chair tap dancing, I guess?

**Eleana:** They couldn't sleep. The point was that they couldn't go to sleep. They needed to sleep, so that they would tap dance in chairs. I thought of that when he was saying your energy had to be – what you learn when you're working so much is how to really . . .

**Jimmy:** Do it the easiest way you can do it.

**Eleana:** So you can get to the end of the night.

**Jimmy:** And for the longest time.

**Eleana:** Keep the time together.

**Brower:** It's odd, but it seems like the key to speed is relaxation.

**Jimmy:** Yeah. You have to relax. It works you too hard if you don't. And you have to use – the best thing – many remedies that you can use. For instance, if you're sitting there

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playing and your hand gets numb, you have to find out another way to do it, or stop. If you got a grip that's this way, you play that. Then that don't work. You have to get another grip, maybe to make it that. It might help you to get through until this one gets back. There's a lot of things that you need to know about this music, if you're intending for it to be the rest of your life and to pay your rent. You have to – or if your foot wears out on you, you have to know what to do about it, to try – or you have to play another way. In front of – instead of patting it like that – Gus Johnson used to play with his heel, because that's easy. Just put his foot on the pedal and played with his heel.

**Brower:** Rather than the toe.

**Jimmy:** Rather than the toe, because it was easier for him. He could do this better than he could do that. He developed that.

**Brower:** Did you know Osie Johnson?

**Jimmy:** Yeah I know Osie from home. Yeah, I knew Osie.

**Brower:** Was he at Armstrong with you?

**Jimmy:** No. I think he was ahead of me. Yeah, I knew Osie. I didn't really know that he was from New York until I got to New York, actually.

**Brower:** From D.C.

**Jimmy:** Right.

**Brower:** How about Papa Jones, speaking about . . . ?

**Jimmy:** Papa Jo, I got to meet – we got to be good friends. In fact, at one time he used to come see me and bring me an apple. I don't know what that about. He was a bizarre man, but he was good drummer. I loved it. Everybody loved it, because he had a way of teaching. The way he learned is from Kansas City. He learned from playing with tap dancers. So a lot of his stuff, when you see him doing things, a lot of his stuff is about tap dancing. He's got a lot of things he did because of that. He wrote – there's some tapes out about him explaining some of his stuff. It's very interesting. If you ever get a chance to get one of them, you have to listen to it, because it's very interesting, educational.

**Brower:** How you feeling?

**Jimmy:** What? About what?

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**Brower:** Period.

**Jimmy:** I feel all right. I got about whatever all the guys my age have, but other than that, so far so far.

**Brower:** What's left to do?

**Jimmy:** I'll just keep doing – being able to do what I've been doing is a plus, because that's what's going to have to pay the rent.

**Brower:** You got a whole lot of awards. You're wearing the NEA Jazz Master hat.

**Jimmy:** I just got this in – what is it? – '09? I think a friend of mine who I made a record with – his name is Ron DiSalvo – helped me, trying to send in some how-do-you-do's for me, and was probably helpful in getting this done. I got the award that you guys gave me from Congressman Conyers, which I really appreciate. And I got a few other awards.

**Eleana:** Guinness Jazz.

**Jimmy:** I got a lot of things.

**Eleana:** What is it? Harper's Ferry.

**Jimmy:** I went to Harper's Ferry. They gave me some award – Jymie Merritt and myself, the same day. There's all kind of miscellaneous awards. It's cool. I never thought I'd get a lot of awards, but . . .

**Eleana:** Different jazz festivals.

**Jimmy:** I got an award from the Playboy thing. That's a long time ago, when I worked with Miles. It's a little silver medallion. It's a lot of different things over the years. I got a collection there. I don't know what they all are.

**Brower:** Thank you so much . . .

**Jimmy:** Thank you, brother.

**Brower:** . . . for sharing so much of yourself and your time and your wife and your daughters and just rummaging through your life and being so lucid and transparent about it.

**Jimmy:** I'm surprised that I remembered that much.

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**Brower:** It's a great gift to the American people.

**Jimmy:** I hope so.

**Brower:** And I think it's going to be important for generations to come to be able to live through these moments with you and to understand what it is, in a first person kind of way, as a witness you've been. So, all that being said, I think we're at the end of the Smithsonian Jazz Oral History interview with the great Jimmy Cobb.

**Jimmy:** Thank you, sir. I appreciate it.

(transcribed and edited by Barry Kernfeld)

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