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SHEILA JORDAN
NEA Jazz Master (2012)

Interviewee: Sheila Jordan (November 18, 1926 -)
(Cameron Brown also present)
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Brown: Today is August 30, 2011, and we are conducting the Smithsonian Institution Oral History interview with NEA Jazz Master singer, vocalist and songwriter Sheila Jordan in her apartment in New York City. Sheila, thank you so much for cooperating with us to first performing for us, which is a very rare treat, but also to be able to spend this afternoon with you for you to share your life, for you to tell your story in your own words. So if we could just start at the very beginning, your full name, your birth date, and birthplace.

Jordan: Okay. Okay, well, as I sang, I was born in Detroit. But my mother was very young. I think she just had turned seventeen, and I was with her for a little while but not too long 'cause she really couldn't raise me, you know. She... I don't think she had a high... none of the girls in the family... actually, none of the, none of the children in my mother's family had high school educations except one, and then me, of course. I had one later on. But uh, they were bartenders or they worked in the factories and... They got jobs in Detroit so they, they lived there for all their lives and worked in the automobile factories and... So I went back to... I went from Detroit back to Pennsylvania, Summerhill, which was about a mile and a half from the coal mining area. And I, my grandparents raised me until I was about fourteen, fifteen, something like that. I was in my teens. And then my grandfather got in a fight with my mother and said, "Take your kid." I've raised her all these years, now you can raise her. So, but my grandfather at that time had become sober. He had been very hooked on alcohol. And my mother was also an alcoholic. She died from the disease. So they got in this fight, as I said, so that's how I got back to Detroit. But in a sense it was a blessing in disguise because what happened, I got turned on to the one and only Charlie Parker and his Reboppers at the time. So uh, I was always a singer as a little kid. I sang since I was three years old. I remember one time in Detroit, I was staying with my mother and they put me on the Michigan Theater. I don't even remember what I

sang, but I was out there. This little tiny kid. You know, I'm not a very tall person, so as a little kid, I was very small. And I sang and... I think I sang You Are My Sunshine. I believe I did. I didn't win, but I think I came in second. So, back in Pennsylvania, I'd go on these radio shows because they'd have like... they'd have like Uncle Nick's Amateur Hour and kids, you know, going on there. Of course, I never got... we never got to hear it because we didn't have a radio at the time. Or if we did, the lights were cut off 'cause we didn't pay the bill due to my grandfather's drinking, you know, so... So anyway, it was a hard life, you know, and, and some of the boys were in the coal mines. And I saw a lot of mine explosions as a kid growing up. And that was quite shocking to a young kid, and I used to be afraid all the time. I was always scared. I was so unhappy. And the only thing that saved me is the music. I would sing. If I had to go by the graveyard, I would sing. If I had to go by the railroad tracks, where a lot of the mine explosions were near there, I would sing. So that's what I did. I sang. If I got teased in school, I would sing. And I got teased a lot because we were the poorest... There were two poor families. Mine was one of them, and there was another one. And uh, we were sort of ostracized in a sense from people there, you know. They called us half-breeds, you know.

Brown: Why half-breeds?

Jordan: Well, my... I have Native American so, on my grandfather's side. Also on my father's side. But getting back to me being born, my father never raised me. He sort of married my mother to give me a name and then that was it. He never sent money to support me or I didn't visit him until I was in Detroit, 'til I was a teenager. And uh, and even then, he was kinda standoffish, you know. But um... that's what happened to me. So when I moved to Detroit, I was... it was great. I was thrilled to be in Detroit 'cause I loved to sing and I was singing all the time, and I didn't know what I wanted to sing. Actually, the songs of the day were quite hip. They were a lot of Cole Porter and, you know, and they would have this music. My friend had a radio, so they'd have the hit parade, and these, and these tunes would be on there. So uh, when I got to Detroit, man, I heard Bird and I said, "That's the music I'll dedicate my life to, whether I sing it or whether I teach it or whether I just go out and support it." It's been my, my path, and I'm very happy I took that path. You know, I had a lot of obstacles in the way, but I overcame them. And uh, and one of the obstacles was I had a problem with alcohol. I didn't think I would. I hated it. But uh, working in these clubs in the Village of New York City, 'cause that was about the only place you could find a job, you know. Then you'd go down there and sing and then the customers would buy you a drink. I remember, I never drank at first, but I remember one night, this couple bought me a drink and... I would drink Cherry Herring 'cause it was sweet. So I'd take a little bit and then I'd spit it back in the glass of water. So this guy looked over and say, "How come your water's pink?" [laughs] So I got caught, and I was so embarrassed. So then I just started drinking, and it set off the craving of alcohol. But I've been in program now for twenty-five years and haven't drank anything in over thirty-some. So I'm one of the lucky ones, you know.

Brown: If we could return to your early years, first if you could tell us your parents' names?

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Jordan: Oh, my, my mother's name was Margaret Helen Hull, H-U-L-L. And they used to call her Maggie. That was her nickname—Maggie, after Margaret. Sometimes they called her Helen, but nobody ever called her Margaret. My father's name was Donald McKenzie Dawson, and he was from, originally from up in Sarnia, Ontario. And he never went to school. I don't think he ever learned how to write, read or write. But again, they worked in factories. And uh, my grandmother's name was Armenta Hoover. And my grandfather's name was Walter Earl Hull, H-U-L-L, and they used to call him Happy Hull, as a nickname 'cause he'd get drunk and sing all the time. So they, everybody thought he was so happy. [laughs] And I'd have to go and drag him down from the beer garden so he wouldn't spend all of his money, and he'd sing to the top of his lungs all the way down and... Oh my God, we would pass these people's houses and... Oh, I was so embarrassed as a little kid, you know, 'cause I knew I was gonna get teased, you know. Yeah, it was not easy growing up in the coal mining area. I saw several mine explosions, where they come rolling up the track. I mean, like big balls of fire, you know. Terrible. Miners trapped in the mines. A lot of that stuff went on. One time, there was a terrible explosion and just about every house had a wreath on the door. That's how many miners were killed—young men that were... And a lot of the boys in my family... my uncles, who were more like my brothers because I was raised with them, you know. So they were like my brothers. And my, my... I had an aunt that was six years older than me. She was like my big sister. And then the other two, two sisters of my mother, they were older and they went to Detroit. So the three girls went to Detroit. That left me and my, uh, Aunt Esther, who's like my sister, as I said. And she was very... I was very close with her. She was very good to me. But uh, yeah, it was, it was rough. But the boys would go to the CC camps. I don't know if, you know, you remember that but...

Brown: Conservation Club?

Jordan: Whatever. They'd go out there and work and then they'd get a salary and they'd get three square meals a day and a place to sleep and, you know, it was, you know, so... they did that.

Brown: Do you happen to know what Native American tribe your heritage is?

Jordan: Six Nation.

Brown: Six Nation?

Jordan: Cherokee, yeah. And uh, what else? Oh.

Brown: Can we ask... can I ask...

Jordan: You ask me questions.

Brown: Sure. About your early, your early influences or inspirations for singing. Was there music in the house?

Jordan: Well, my grandfather always sang when he got drunk. And my grandmother played the piano, and my grandmother finally joined my grandfather in the drinking department, and she sang. So yeah, they were always singing. I could never understand. They were so happy and singing and lovey-dovey and everything. And then the next morning, they treated you like, “Get outta my way,” you know. [laughs] Not quite that harsh but, you know, it was like, what a difference. I couldn’t believe. I said, “What’s goin’ on? Why are they like this?” I didn’t understand. I was a little kid. How was I gonna know, you know? Oh, my God but... I had a great aunt on my grandfather’s side, who was a piano teacher. So my grandmother asked her if she would give me lessons. Actually, my mother did, too. And she said yes. So I went down to her, or walked two miles down to South Fork, and they called it Scoopy Town on the other side, ‘cause that’s where the mines were. And she was on the other side of the mines. There was like the railroad tracks in between. So I would go down to her house and... it was a nice house. She had running water and a bathroom, you know. I said, “Oh, wow, this is living.” We didn’t have that. Everything was outside, including the well, including the pump. That was all outside. So uh, I started taking piano lessons with her, but she was cruel. She was terrible. She used to take a ruler and... I have small hands. I mean, you can see my hands are small. She used to take a ruler and hit you over the, the, the knuckles with, with her ruler if you didn’t hit... put your hands on the right keys. Oh, man, that was horrible. I got so turned off. I never... I said... my grandmother said, “What’s wrong with your hands? They’re all blue.” I said, “Aunt Alma smacked me with a ruler.” She said, “Has she been smacking you?” I said, “Yes, when I don’t... I can’t reach the keys.” She said, “You’re not going there anymore.” You know. So I didn’t go anymore. So, and I had this thing about a piano for a long time. I mean, I... actually now up home I have a beautiful Yamaha piano, but you know, it took me a long time. I’d go by [UNINTELLIGIBLE] [laughs] like it was the devil, you know. [laughs] Oh God, when I think of those things, it’s really, it’s really wild. But that was, that was how it all started. But I just naturally sang, since I was a little kid. I natural... When I was on Michigan Theater at three in Detroit, I just naturally sang. And everybody knew I sang. But what happened to me in Pennsylvania, and I think I should talk about this, especially for young people that are out there now trying to do their thing, uh, I got teased. They would go, “Ho, ho, ho, ho,” when they’d see me coming out of the school. As soon as I’d come out, they’d make fun of me being a singer because I... they would ask me to sing at all the PTA meetings and little different things that they had going on. And uh, I got very upset, so I just stopped singing. I didn’t sing anymore in grade school. I quit. They totally turned me against singing, making fun of me, you know. But they were gonna find something else to make fun of, you know, so... Today, at 82 and a half, I know that. But back then, it was all new to me, you know, so... That’s what happened, you know, I... But I got... I went to high school, the first year of high school, just half a year, in South Fork, Pennsylvania. And uh, there was a teacher down there—Mr. Rushing—and he knew that I sang. Somehow, he’d either heard me on the radio or whatever it was, but he knew that I was a singer, but I didn’t... So he, he did his music appreciation class and he said, “I would like you to sing at the, uh... there was a special day they were gonna have. I can’t remember what it was. And he said... I think it was a Mayday thing. And he said, “I would like you to sing.” And I said, “Oh, I don’t sing.” He said, “Well, you used to sing.” I said, “Yeah.” So he said, “Why don’t you want

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to sing?" I said, "Well, I don't know." I said, "You know, the kids don't like it when I sing and I guess I'm not very good." And he said, "That's nonsense." And so, I said, "Well, I can't sing." He said, "What if I get somebody to sing with you, another student?" I said, "Okay, I could do that." And so, he got another student, and we sang, "Will I ever find the boy on my mind?" I think it was that tune. Either that or "I'll never smile again." One of those two tunes it was. Halfway through the tune, I don't know whether he did this or she forgot the lyrics or what, or whether he told her to lay out, I don't know. All I know is, I ended up finishing the tune by myself. And then that whole feeling and that whole urge and that whole fulfillment of the music came back, just from that one experience. So I have him to thank for that, wherever his spirit is today. Mr. Rushing. And he was a piano teacher, too, but I never went back to the piano. [laughs] Never went back to the piano again. Uh, so that, that was pretty much it back there. A lot of, a lot of poverty, you know, and... But I'm gonna tell you something. I am not sorry for being raised like that, 'cause going through what I've had to go through since then made me strong that I could deal with it, you know. So by the time I was in high school, full-time high school and moved to Detroit and heard Bird, that was it. I had to be, where is that music? I need to go where that music is. How can I find that music? And um, I had no clue about racial prejudice 'cause we were so prejudiced against as a kid that I didn't know anything about black/white nonsense. I didn't know anything about that. I mean, it didn't enter my mind.

Brown: Were your neighborhoods integrated or segregated?

Jordan: We... you know what? At the time, I think they were segregated. But, but I found a way, you know, I found a way to find out where these guys were playing, where this music was happening 'cause I knew it had to be happening. So uh, and I did. I found the Club Sudan, which was a place that a white couple from Canada... 'Cause Canadians, believe it or... well, you probably know this already. They weren't into the same kind of prejudice that they were in the U.S. And uh, this couple had this club down there called the Club Sudan, and we used to go down there and that's where I heard about it, and I said, I want to go down there and see what that's like. And I went down there, and uh, the music was there. And I met Tommy and I met Barry, you know, and I met Kenny and I met all of these Detroiters, and I met these two young guys—Skeeter Spight and Leroy Mitchell. And they got up and they were scatting. And I said, oh my God, I'd love to sing with them. Now by this time, I was in high school and I started drinking to be accepted in the crowd—the high school kids. So once I got into the jazz, there was a... I hooked up with a lovely woman who was... I think she was from India or something. So she had brown skin. So you know, she had a rough time. And she and I became very close friends and started finding these places 'cause she loved the music, too. Her name was Jackie Berko or Berkhoff. Jackie Berkhoff. And uh, so that's what we did. We would go to the Club Sudan, 'cause we couldn't go to the bars, you know. We were not old enough. And uh, that's where I heard the guys. And so when I met these two guys, I went up, I ran up to them and I introduced myself. I said, "I'd love to sing with you. I love to sing. Can I sing with you sometime?" They said, "Yeah, we'll help you but you gotta stop drinking." [laughs] 'Cause I was pretty like... you know, at that, in the beginning. Not drunk drunk passing out but they knew I was drinking. So uh, I said, "Okay." And so I did. I, I got friendly with them. I had their telephone numbers and we used to get together and we became like the Lambert, Hendricks and Ross of that time. Before Lambert, Hendricks and Ross. Or maybe they were doing it in New York then, but we didn't know. And so, every time Dizzy Gillespie or somebody would

come to town, they'd get us up to sing. And Bird, you know, and John Lewis. He'd come with... I think he was with Diz one time. I can't remember, but he came one time—John Lewis. And uh, so I started, you know, trying to write lyrics like they did, you know, but I wasn't not near as good as they were. But I learned how to... and I didn't scat with them very much. I sorta just listened but I'd sing the line with them, and then sometimes I would sing the lyrics and I learned a lot from those guys. And eventually, when I felt confident enough to try scat singing, I started scatting with them, you know. Uh, so it happened very natural for me, the scatting. But basically, I was just singing tunes and singing the lines, the Bird lines with them and that was it, you know. They did. Especially Skeeter Spight. I never heard anybody scat like him. Never have to this day heard anybody that could scat like him.

Brown: What was so distinctive about his...

Jordan: I don't know. He just had incredible syllables, incredible time, and there was just a fantastic, joyous way of how he improvised. It was incredible.

Brown: And how old were they [inaudible/overlapping]?

Jordan: Ah, well, they might have been a little older than me. I would say they were like probably eighteen, seventeen, somewhere around there.

Brown: And when you rehearsed, was it a cappella or did you have [inaudible/overlapping]?

Jordan: Oh, yeah, no, it was a cappella. We'd, you know, we'd go over to a different home like their homes or... Oh, I think Mitch was a little older because he, he got married. So we would go to his house, Skeeter and I, I think. But that was years, you know... We were together quite a while, quite a few years. I mean, not... maybe like four or five, six years, I think. I'm not sure. I can't remember. [laughs] Senior moment. But uh, but we, uh, we would get together and they'd say, "This is how it goes." 'Course, I had already been down on John R in the record store buying the 78 records, you know. Any little bit of change I ever got, scrubbing a woman's floors or whatever I had to do, it all went to buying 78 records. I would wear those records white. Charlie Parker records. They were white, trying to learn that. Charlie Parker and his Reboppers, like that 78 up there says, you know. And I would wear it white trying to learn those lines, you know.

Brown: Now if we go back to when you first heard Charlie Parker, what made it so distinctive or different than the music you had been listening to? What was it that captivated you about Charlie Parker?

Jordan: Oh. His heart and soul and this whole thing. I mean, it just hit me. I heard four notes and the hair was standing up on my arm. On my head, too, I guess. I mean, I, I said, "Oh, my God. That's it! That's it! That's what I want to do." And that's why I said, the dedication at that

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early age... I made a dedication to make this music my life, as I said, regardless of how I got it out there, you know. So I mean, just sitting here today with this tremendous honor, you know. Who would ever thought that? I never expected it. I really didn't. So it was Bird. It's all Bird's fault. [laughs] Blame it on the Bird!

Brown: All praise the Bird.

Jordan: Blame it on the Bird. Oh, he was wonderful, you know. And I'll get into that later. He became like a big brother to me.

Brown: I want to talk about any early musical training. You were in high school. You had Mr. Rushing but no training.

Jordan: None.

Brown: No...? How about church? No church?

Jordan: Uh, my grandmother... my grandfather, of course, was not into organized religion, you know, not at all. But my grandmother had been raised a Catholic. And she grew up with a... well, actually, her mother had her out of wedlock, and she had put my grandmother on a pretty wealthy couple's doorstep, and that's how my grandmother was raised. So she had musical training with a piano and everything. But uh, but I never, I never had any, any kind of musical training. It was all hearing. But you know...

Brown: And when you were living in Detroit, what neighborhood did you live in?

Jordan: We were pretty close to John R. There was Woodward Avenue. We were close to Woodward Avenue on the other side. And then, I think, if you went another block or two, it was, uh, John R, I think. I think so. I'm looking over at... Cameron Brown's here.

Brown: [inaudible] another Detroiter [inaudible].

Jordan: [laughs] He's a Detroiter and...

Brown: Yeah.

Jordan: Yeah.

Brown, C.: [You were?] downtown. So you were...

Jordan: Yeah.

Brown, C.: You were virtually right downtown.

Jordan: I was on Woodward Avenue and, uh... I can't remember the other street. But yeah, I could practically walk down there. Oh, there's so many stories about Detroit before I left there.

Good and bad. Terrible. It was... So again, getting back to the racial prejudice, I didn't know it existed until I got to Detroit. I mean, I guess I was kinda like naïve, you'd say, you know. But I didn't know it existed, and then I got to Detroit and I saw what was going on. 'Cause as a young kid, I was visiting my mother and I saw a couple of race riots. That was scary, you know, and uh... [laughs] It was like really something, the way those people were treated. I... it really bothered me. It made me feel helpless, you know. I said, "What can I do?" So when I started hanging out with Tommy and my friends, my Afro-American friends... I identified with, uh, with Tommy and those guys. Not only because of the music, but because of the prejudice, because I grew up in prejudice in a sense in Pennsylvania, you know. So I could identify with that. And uh, there were just times when it was almost impossible, but I kept going. I mean, I was constantly stopped on the street. In fact, the principal of my high school, Commerce High School, which was attached to Cass Tech. I think Cass Tech is still there but Commerce is gone. She called me down to the office once. She said, "Sheila," she said, "you dress so nice and you seem intelligent. Why do you hang around with colored girls?" I said, "Colored girls?" I was getting her, though. I was, I was pretending. I said, "Oh, is there a difference?" [laughs] But I meant it, too, you know what I mean. I said, "Oh..." I forgot her name. I can't remember that. Maybe it's better I don't remember her name. But I said, "Mrs. whatever," I said, "Oh, is there a difference?" She said, "Well, yes." And I said, "Oh, well they're my friends." And that's it. You know, I thought maybe she was gonna expel me or something, but she didn't.

Brown: So your school was integrated or segregated?

Jordan: It was integrated, but this is a principal telling me that it's okay that they're in the school. You can sit in the classroom with them, but don't associate with them when the class is finished, you know. And I don't... I... That's not how I, I live. I don't live like that. So I had a lot of harrowing experiences with the cops, you know. A terrible, terrible time. The racial prejudice was terrible. And uh, I remember... You know, I got a job very early. I was a teenager when I went to work in an office. I worked for a company. I think it was called Strellinger, 'cause I had learned how to type. So I was even part-time working and going to school. Or in the evening or on Saturday on, on the weekend. I always made a little, a little money for myself. I was of the understanding that it wasn't gonna be easy for me, you know. So I, I know that I did that. And then after a while, I left... I couldn't stay with my mother anymore, because she had, she had seven husbands at some point. Or close to seven. You know, we had to married in those days. They didn't live together like they do today, you know. So if you were gonna live with this man, you better damn well marry him. So that's why she had quite a few husbands. And they were... the last one she was married to was brutal. He would beat her and he molested me. And uh, I got outta there. I went and I lived with my aunt, who was like my sister, in Pennsylvania. And then I was there for a while, and then I decided, uh, I decided that I wanted to, to be on my own. So I went to a woman's... it was like a rooming house, and you got your meals and you paid so much money a week, you know. But by this time, I was already out of high school. So that's...

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Brown: You graduated.

Jordan: Yeah, I graduated. Oh, yeah, I graduated and I had taken the commercial course, and I'm very glad I did because it saved my life, financially, years to come, you know. So...

Brown: Do you have any siblings?

Jordan: I have half-sisters and I have a half-brother. Of course, he's passed on. But I never really knew them. I knew the two older ones 'cause I went to... I was invited to the second eldest's... I was invited to her wedding. So I went to her wedding and uh... But that was it. All my uncles and aunts, except for the older ones, were like my brothers and sisters, you know. So uh, as I said, my Aunt Esther, she was like my... she was like my big sister.

Brown: So you're living at this women's rooming house.

Jordan: Yeah. I forgot what the name of it was. But it's a very... it was a very famous hotel at one time where you went there, you paid your room and your board, and you had a nice room. Sometimes you'd have to have a roommate. But you know, it saw me through. And I'd go do my job and then go out and hear my music, and I didn't have anybody telling me where I could go or where I couldn't go. The only thing was, I still couldn't get in bars because I wasn't old enough, you know. And uh, and then Charlie Parker came to town. And he played at the Greystone Ballroom. And Skeeter and Speight... I mean, Skeeter Speight and Leroy Mitchell and myself and another dear friend of ours... he wasn't a musician but he loved the music. Willie Bowler. We would go down and stand right in front where Bird was playing, you know, and he would come there. I think he had... the first time I heard Bird, I think he had Max and, and he had Duke Jordan, and he had Curly Russell, and he had... and, and I think he had Miles. I think he had Miles. That was the first time we heard Bird. Then I heard him again and he had Red Rodney and... who was the piano player...?

Brown: Wallington?

Jordan: Uh...

Brown: No.

Jordan: He was white. He was from Jersey.

Brown: It was either George Wallington, or was it Al Haig?

Jordan: Al Haig, Al Haig. Right, Al Haig. Al Haig was with him once. And then Roy Haynes was with... and I met Roy Haynes. He was very sweet. And we became good friends, Roy and I. He dressed so sharp, you know, and he liked the way I dressed. He said, "Oh, you dress so sharp." I said, "I'm trying to keep up with you." But by this time, I think we were like eighteen, nineteen, twenty. But in Detroit, you couldn't get in the bars until you were twenty-one. And of course, I got to be twenty-one there and of course I hung out at the Blue Bird Inn and uh, a

couple of other places. What was that place on 12th Avenue, Cameron? Years... oh, before your time.

Brown, C.: Clan's [?] Show Bar.

Jordan: No, no, no, no. Not that one. Before that one. Before your time, sorry. Cross that out. [laughs] Anyway, um... you know, it was... like we hung around. We just went to all these places and did what... and they'd ask us to sit in and we'd sit in, you know, it was great. I remember John Lewis came to town one time with, um, with Diz. And during the break, Skeeter and Mitch said, "Hey, Jeannie"—that was my nickname. I didn't like Sheila 'cause I got teased as a kid in Pennsylvania. You know, if they weren't gonna get me one way, they'd get me another way. So it was my name—Sheila. What kind of a name is that? So my middle name was Jeanette so I went by Jeannie. So they always called me Jeannie in Detroit, you know. So they said, "Why don't you go over during the break and sing in John Lewis's... Sing your lyrics to Afternoon in Paris to John Lewis." And I said, "Oh, I can't..." They said, "Yeah, go on, he'd love it." So actually, Diz saw us and he knew we were scat... well, they were scat singers. I was just along for the ride, sorta like singing underneath it all. So uh, John said, "Hey, you kids," you know... He liked us. We, but by this time, we were pretty much hitting close to twenty-one. And uh, so I sang Afternoon to Paris, the lyrics. You know what he said? [laughs] He said, "I don't like the lyrics but I like the way you sing." [laughs] I said, "Oh," and I was destroyed. [laughs] I was absolutely destroyed when he said that. And I was... you know. I said, "I told you those lyrics weren't any good," to Skeeter, you know, and Mitch. I said, "I told you those lyrics weren't any good," but oh my God.

Brown: Can we go back to your recollections of seeing Bird? I mean...

Jordan: Oh, sure.

Brown: You've mentioned all the personnel, I mean... If you could just recreate the, the setting when they, you know, the club and...

Jordan: Well, we danced to Bird. That's what was so amazing. That's what was so amazing. There was a dance that, I think, only Detroiters did, and it was called the Bop. And we danced to Bird, and Mitch was a dynamite dancer on top of singing and being very intelligent and, also, you know, he was more educated in the music, technically, than we were. But he was a great dancer, and I used to dance the Bop with him. And uh, so Bird didn't care, as long as we enjoyed the music. [laughs] But I didn't like to dance that much. I just really had to hear this man blow, you know. And he was very kind. He, uh, he had us get up and sing with him the first time, one of the first times we saw Bird. Somebody told them, uh... Blue Mitchell... not Blue Mitchell, Billy Mitchell, a saxophone player, who was a little older, he was from Detroit, too. And they always told all these musicians that came to Detroit about us, us singing. It was a trio, you know. And so, uh, Diz let us sing. He'd ask us up, get us up there and we'd sing, you know,

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whatever—Anthropology or Confirmation or Little Rolly Leaps, ‘cause they were always writing lyrics to everything. So we would sing. We would sing for them. And uh... he... Dizzy would, uh, would encourage us. He was very encouraging. I have a very nice picture of Diz and I years later taken in Oslo, Norway. But uh, Bird was the one for me. He was the one. I loved everybody, but Bird was the first one I ever heard do this music, and uh, it was just great, you know. He was... I got to be very good friends with him. And then of course, when I moved to New York, he became like my, my big brother. He was always at my loft, ‘cause I had a loft when I moved here. I met Duke Jordan, but before Duke Jordan, Frank Foster came to Detroit and lived. And he was, uh, he was from Cincinnati. And that was my very first boyfriend, was Frank Foster. So it got to the point at some point, we lived together. We had a room, one room—a room, you know... No... I don’t think we could cook... oh yeah, I guess we had kitchen privileges. But we would sometimes cook there, sometimes we’d eat out, but we, we lived there together in that one rooming house, in that one room. And uh, Frank was the cat in town. I mean, everybody loved Frank’s playing and he could play. And uh, I sorta, kinda ran after him in a way, you know. [laughs] I don’t know why. Just, but, you know, it wasn’t my style, but I, I didn’t usually do things like that, but I, I sort of ran after him, and we ended up getting very close and, and then he was called into, uh, the war, the Korean War, and when that happened, I moved to New York. And I saw Frank in New York after he, he was home on a leave, and by this time I was already in New York living in my loft, and I said, “Come on. Charlie Parker’s playing up at Birdland.” And I said, “Bring your horn, man.” And so he said, “Really?” I said, “Yeah.” So we went up to Birdland and... the old Birdland. And uh, Bird came off the stand, did a set. Sounded fan... as always, always sounded fantastic. And uh, I introduced Frank to Bird, and he even, he even wrote about it somewhere that I introduced him to Bird. I said, “You were gonna meet Bird, anyway, so it didn’t... had nothing to do with me.” I, but I did say to Bird, “Bird,” because by this time, I had gotten quite friendly with Bird. He was at my loft a lot. He was always checking up on me to see if I was okay. He was like a big brother and that was it. Nothing... no romance, nothing like that at all. And uh, I said, “Would you let him sit in, Bird? He can really play.” Bird said, “Of course.” So he, Frank got up and he played with Bird and, uh, Bird was blown away by him. He said, “Boy, that soldier guy sure can blow.” He said, “Anytime I’m playing anywhere, you’re more than welcome to come and sit in with me,” you know. So that’s how, how Frank met, uh, met Bird, was when he came to New York on leave. But it was kind of a... it was a sad part in our lives ‘cause he had to go to the Korean War and uh, and I didn’t want to stay in Detroit any longer. I mean, even though Tommy and Barry and... they were still there, you know, but... I know there was this... the, the lady who owned this rooming house was from the South. She had this unbelievable accent. And she’d say, “Yeah.” She’d say to us both. She said, “When he bees gone, you bees gone to the window, and when she bees gone, she bees gone to the window, and if it gets any worser...” [laughs] Right? [laughs] “If it gets any worser...” Oh, my God. She bees gone, he bees gone. Oh, my God. And Frank and I to, you know, to the last time I saw him, I say, “And when she bees gone,” [laughs] then he said, “And when he bees gone...” We still say that ‘cause we remember that, yeah. So that, that was a, you know, it was a very pleasant... He wrote a song for me called Now That She’s Gone, after... ‘cause after he went in the Army, that was the end of our relationship, you know. Then I got involved with Duke Jordan and ended up marrying him. And I always kid. I say, “Yeah, I married Duke to be near Charlie Parker’s music.” [laughs] ‘Cause he was his piano player, you know. So uh, yeah. Anything else you wanna go back?

Brown: Well, you said you moved to, to New York. How, how did you arrange that? Who, who, or what...

Jordan: Me.

Brown: ...made it possible for you to...

Jordan: I was very, I was very independent as a young person. I just knew that I was gonna have to take care of myself because of my, my background, where I came from. And I knew that, you know, it wasn't gonna be easy. And of course, as I said, my father never really talked to me that much or... no, he didn't, you know. He'd forget my birthday. He would never send me anything. If I'd go visit him, he'd buy me some clothes once in a while for school, but that was it. Uh, so I knew I was gonna have to be on my own. So I made a point of taking a commercial course, and I supported myself all these years by typing. Up until I was 58 years old, I typed and supported the music as I said to myself when I first heard Charlie Parker and his Reboppers. "I'll support the music until it can support me." But again, for young people out there that have to go out and get another job, it keeps the music, it keeps it alive, you know. You just don't go get a job and forget to play your horn or sing your song. I mean, you have to find some kind of way or place, whether it's a session or just getting together with a... if you're a singer, with a piano player, just to keep it going. Music never left me. It was always there.

Brown: So when you moved to New York, you were able to find a job so you could continue...

Jordan: Oh yeah, because I was a good typist.

Brown: ...and continue to also sing?

Jordan: Oh yeah. I, I was a good typist, and I always... Well, actually, Bird, Duke was working... I lived with Bird, uh, Duke originally when, and then we got married, and that was in Brooklyn. But Duke did a lot of concerts with Bird or a lot of... they used to call them Cocktail Sips. And what those were is that the Afro-American community would get all decked out in their hats and their beautiful, you know, coats or suits and, and then they all cook up this fantastic food and they'd hired a hall and they'd get Charlie Parker to play. So when Bird did these kind of Cocktail Sips, he would ask me to come up and sing. He always asked me to come up and sing. I remember the one thing Bird told me years ago. He said, "You have million dollar ears, kid. Don't lose them. You have million dollar ears." And another thing he said to me further on, or quoted, he said, "If you can't say it in two choruses, you'll never say it." And uh, I was listening to something that somebody sent me on YouTube from a Berlin festival I did years ago. Man, I did like six choruses. And to me, it went nowhere, you know. And I said, "Boy, it's a good thing I remembered what Bird said." Today, I'm using that. "If you can't say it in two choruses of improvising, you'll never say it," you know. So uh, I looked at it and I said, "Oh, my God, does that come back real clear," you know. But uh, yeah.

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Brown: For those who might not understand or be able to interpret what Bird said about your million dollar ears, what do you think he... what do you feel he was referring to?

Jordan: That I could hear stuff quicker than I could, uh... like in other words, when I took piano lessons, I could hear that melody way before I could even play it on the piano, the little bit, you know. I could hear it, you know. I, uh... He knew that. I mean, we'd go and sing lines to his... I mean, we'd go and sing lyrics to his, uh, his compositions. And uh, he knew. We were in pitch. We were... I mean, we had all the notes together. And he knew that I could hear.

Brown: And you learned most your music by ear rather than by reading.

Jordan: Yes. Yes, I did. That's true, I did. I wish I had been able to go to school and, and become a more educated... more educated in music as far as technically, you know. But uh, I never had that opportunity. And the kids today are very lucky because there're schools out there that teach jazz. I teach workshops with singers, jazz singers, kids, you know. And uh, at first, it was John Lewis got me that up at City College in 1978. I went up there and Eddie Summerlin, who was the head of the department at that time, wanted me to come up and do a workshop. I said, "I don't know what that is." He said, "Just come up and sing and talk about it." I said, "Oh, really?" And he said, "Yeah." So I did. And afterwards, the two classical teachers said, "Why don't you come up here and do a workshop? Start a workshop up here?" I said, "Doing what?" And they said, "Singing. Singing jazz." And I said, "Really?" And they said, "Yeah. Try it." And so John Lewis also said, "You should do this, Sheila. You should do it." And I just taught them what I knew and how I approached it and how I learned it, you know. And one of the things I taught was, learn the original melody of the tune first. The original melodies of tunes are the steppingstones to improvisation, you know. So uh, so that's... and little by little... and I encouraged. I never was on a power trip. I never broke their spirit. If you're gonna break spirits when you're teaching, then don't teach. That's how I feel. 'Cause I remember my great aunt, and she broke my spirit. Otherwise, I might have been a helluva piano player today, you know. [laughs]

Brown: Well, I'm gonna add a little footnote here, Sheila. I was actually at Jazz in July in 1988, when Max got his MacArthur. So I actually was there... I saw you give workshops and that was with Max and the percussion ensemble.

Jordan: Really?

Brown: Yeah.

Jordan: Oh, my God.

Brown: So I, I know firsthand about, about the way you teach.

Jordan: Oh, you do?

Brown: Oh, yeah.

Jordan: So was it okay?

Brown: Absolutely. [laughs] But let's not go into that. Let's not go there.

Jordan: [laughs] That's off the record, huh?

Brown: Yeah. [laughs] No, it was, it was a very, very memorable experience. Anyway, um... your biography lists that you did perhaps more informal studies with Lennie Tristano.

Jordan: Yes, I did.

Brown: Was there any other musical training before Lennie?

Jordan: No. I started... when I moved... after I moved to New York, I got a job immediately. I went to a part-time, a temporary agency, and then little by little, uh... I was good at what I did. I was good at typing. So they would ask me to stay on. Eventually, I got a full-time job. I mean permanent full-time job. And uh, what happened was, I was living in Brooklyn at that time I was...

Brown: Where, where in Brooklyn?

Jordan: Uh, what is that? Nostrand Avenue. Somewhere around there. It was just a room again, you know, with kitchen privileges. But I was with Duke. We were together there. And then, I would take the train and go up... 'cause I heard Lennie was teaching. And I don't know. Somehow, I moved from Brooklyn and got a loft on 26th Street right off of Eighth Avenue. I knew people who lived in lofts—a lot of painters. And I said, "Oh, my God, this would be great," you know. So one of my dear friends who was a painter in Detroit—Virginia Cox—was a wond... That's her painting on the wall over there. She gave that to me. That's me singing with Duke and Miles Davis in the back. She made that up. I mean, that didn't happen but, you know, that's what she did. And her name was Virginia. And uh, she was, she was moving here along with my dear friend, who was white, Jenny King. We used to hang out together later on in Detroit during all the prejudice. They came to New York. I was still with Frank. And so when that happened, I came and I stayed with them. There was a room, an extra room they had, and then eventually, I went and lived with Duke in Brooklyn. We had a room there. And then eventually, I met this artist and she wanted to share half of her loft. There was a wall in between. So I took that loft. That half of that loft, and it was wonderful. Sessions like you wouldn't believe. Oh, my God. They'd go on all night long, you know, until the neighbors next door would send the cops. But Bird was always in that loft. He knew, he was always at my loft. Anytime he got in a fight with Chan or she didn't want him in the house because he was misbehaving, which I understand, he would be up at my loft and he had a bed there. I had a couch and I called it Bird's Bed. And that's where he... "It's me." I said, "There's your bed, for additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



Bird,” you know. I had a parakeet, I know. I had a parakeet that I taught to say, “Hello, Bird. Hello, Sweetheart.” That’s the only two things he said. So one time Bird came to the door, to the loft, and he knocked on the door and he said... I said, “Who is it?” He said, “It’s Bird.” I said, “Wait a minute, Bird Bird. I gotta get Torrey in the cage.” That was the bird’s name. I think Torrey is bird in Japanese. I could be wrong, but I think it was. A painter gave me that name for the bird. So he said, “Oh, no, no, that’s okay.” I said, “No, no, no, he’s really gonna disturb you so let me get him in the cage.” I couldn’t get him for anything. Finally, Bird said, “I gotta come in and lay down.” I said, “Okay.” So Bird came in. He went and he laid down, and he wasn’t too familiar with the bird. He knew I had this bird, but he never saw him out of the cage, ‘cause I would not put the bird out when people were there. So he was like leaning back, and the bird jumped on him. He was almost half out of it and he said, “Hello, Bird.” And Bird said... looked over at me and said, “What are you, a damn ventriloquist?” I said, “No. That wasn’t me. That was the bird.” He said, “Get outta here.” Or “Oh, come on with that.” So then he, I said, “Rest,” you know. So he went back to sleep again. This time, the bird came right up into his mouth and said, “Hello, Bird.” And he said, “Goddamn, that bird does talk.” [laughs] That was a wild story, and I can still see Bird. I can still see him on that couch. There was a photographer one time, came up to the loft. I wish I could remember these photographers ‘cause they must have some incredible photos. That’s the one thing I am so sorry of, was all the times that Bird and all the sessions I had with Bird and all the wonderful people that came there, that I didn’t have a camera to take pictures.

Brown: Who were some of the others?

Jordan: Oh, Sonny came up to the loft. And Monk came up to the loft. Uh, and then I got, as I said, then I met Mingus, and Mingus and Max were the... Well, Max knew me from Detroit as a kid. But those were the two musicians that recommended that I go, recommended that I go to Lennie Tristano. So that’s how I got to Lennie Tristano. Charlie Mingus took me there. And that’s how I started studying with Lennie. And by this time, Duke was in and out, you know. His, his disease took over and, uh, I don’t know. He went and lived with somebody else in Brooklyn and, you know... I was still married to him but, you know, it was...

Brown: This is the early ’50s...

Jordan: Yes, yes.

Brown: Wow, what a period. I’m just... when, when was Traci born?

Jordan: Traci was born in 1955.

Brown: Okay.

Jordan: But I took myself to the hospital when Traci was born, ‘cause Duke was not there, you know.

Brown: Let’s go back to seeing Bird at this time. Was, was it becoming obvious about his illness or was stuff like that...?

Jordan: Oh, we... oh, yeah, I, I mean, I knew Bird had a, you know, had an addiction, which I choose to call a disease. I found that out after I got into program myself. It's a disease. Nobody wants to have that disease. It's just a cunning, baffling, powerful disease. And uh, Bird was... never stole from me, never used me. And uh, I remember one time he was up at the time, at the apar-- at the loft, and he said, "Can I call my mother?" And I said, "Of course." I think she was in...

Brown: Kansas City.

Jordan: Kansas City. And I said, "Of course you can call your mother." "Well, here's some money." I said, "Bird, that's okay. I'm working in an office. I have money." And he called up because it was raining and thundering. He said, "Mom, Mom, do you hear, do you hear the thunder and lightning? That's God talkin'." And, you know, and I thought, oh my... I always remembered that. I always remember him saying that on the phone. "Mom, that's God talkin' to us," you know. And I thought to myself, I sure wish he'd talk to you so you would stop using drugs 'cause I don't want you to die, you know. And then he got off of heroin for a while and then he started drinking. So I guess he did them both at the same time. But I remember one time, he came up to the loft and I was having a session, and uh, he played and it was wonderful, you know. And then he started throwing everybody out. He said, "You go, you stay. You go, you stay." All these people. Hundreds of people. I mean, well, maybe not hundreds, but a good size. Too much for these floors. I didn't get it at the time. And so, I said, "Bird, why are you throwing my friends out?" He said, "I'll tell you later." And they left and he said, "Did you ever see this movie?" I forgot what the name of it was. It was a black and white movie at the time. Well, that's, that's what the movies were then just about. And uh, it was all these women going for this job, one job, and the stairway collapsed. And so he said, "Do you realize how old these floors are? Do you realize how old that staircase is?" And I said, "No, I never thought about it." He said, "Well, I did." And I thought, here's a, a genius who is also an addict. Would he even be bothered worrying about a set of stairs, you know, two flights of stairs? But he was.

Brown: And then we'll get into Lennie.

Jordan: Oh, sure. Okay?

Brown: Okay.

Jordan: I remember one time, you know, when Duke and I were still together living in the loft, before my daughter was born, Monk came up. He didn't say one word. He just said, "Hello." I mean, he knew who I was. He said, "Hello. How are you?" Something like that. He could say in three, four words what it'd take somebody else a paragraph. That's what I always say. But he came up and I had these huge windows in the loft that went out like this. They... you'd open them up and they would go sideways. I mean, we're talking almost as high as this ceiling.

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That's how high these windows were. And he used to come up there and he'd put his head out and he'd stare up at the sky. Stare up at the sky. And he'd stay like that for the longest time. He was just... I thought he was sleeping but his eyes were open. [laughs] And he was a strange guy. What a genius, huh?

Brown: Well, his music is quite, quite different than Bird's. What... did you...

Jordan: Okay, I'm gonna talk about that.

Brown: Okay, please do.

Jordan: 'Cause Skeeter and Mitch were big Monk fans, besides Bird, of course. But I, I don't know. I thought the music was so simple. I said, "Well," you know, even his playing. I said, "Well, you know, he's not Bud Powell or..." You know, I was into that whole thing. Well, he's not Bud Powell, you know. Uh, 'cause I love Bud Powell. But it was... once I started trying to learn his music, I said, "This is the most difficult music that I've ever, ever tried to sing." His music. And did I get an eye-opener. Did I get a lesson, you know. Red Mitchell wrote a tune one time called Simple Isn't Easy. [laughs] And he dedicated it to Art Tatum because, according to his interview, which Red gave me years ago, he said, uh, he wanted, uh, he wanted to play like Art Tatum. He wanted to play piano. And he thought it was simple, you know. [laughs] Until he tried to do it. And then he wrote this tune called Simple Isn't Easy. I think I'm gonna learn that tune one day, Cameron, and do it. But uh, oh my God... I couldn't get over it. I said, "How stupid are you?" I mean, where are your million dollars ears at? Hello? Never mind. You know, use them. If they're million dollars ears, which I don't think they are but, you know... So I, I never forgot that eye-opening experience of, of Monk's music when it finally hit me. And that was when I tried to... simple tunes. Oh, these tunes are simple. Oh, my God. Eeuh. I don't think so.

Brown: Do you remember a tune in particular?

Jordan: Well, one of the tunes that I loved was Epistrophy. Remember that? [singing] Bu-be-bu-be-bu... Is that the one?

Brown: That's Mysterioso.

Jordan: Mysterioso. Mysterioso. And what, what was Epistrophy?

Brown: Epistrophy. [singing] Da-da-dum, da-da-dum.

Jordan: [singing] Do-de-duh, do-de-duh, do-de-duh, etc.

Brown: Right. [inaudible/overlapping]

Jordan: Yeah, that's right. [This has ever...?] Yeah. Oh, my God. Oh, and when Monk died... I wish I could find this picture but I think when my house upstate burned down, it burned down with it. It was a picture of me singing at Monk's funeral, and Barry called me up and

asked me to sing at Monk's funeral. And he said, "Sing your lyrics to, uh, to 'Round Midnight.'" So Monk's casket was right here and I was over here, you know. In fact, the photo showed Monk's casket open, you know. And I'm up there singing. And then, Tommy Flanagan said afterwards, "Were those your raggedy lyrics to 'Round Midnight?'" I said, "No, they weren't. I did not sing my lyrics. I sang the guy that got credit for writing them. It begins to tell 'Round Midnight.'" So I thought to myself, well, Tommy thinks those lyrics are raggedy, too. [laughs] But no, I said, "No, Tommy, I didn't." But all the time I was singing, I was thinking, who was I kidding? I was thinking to myself after it was all over. Who was I kidding to think that his music was so simple, you know? Amazing. And the way he played, you know. I love, uh... I was at the Five Spot. I think it was the... What was the name of that club all the way over on the East Side? It had a big stage, a big high stage. Archie Shepp worked there.

Brown, C.: On the East Side?

Jordan: On the East Side, all the way over on, uh... down where, where the Bluebird is... not Bluebird... Blue Note is. You kept going straight over... Art D'Lugoff.

Brown: Oh, the Village... oh, the Village Gate.

Jordan: Village Gate. And wasn't there an upstairs?

Brown: Yeah.

Brown, C.: Yeah.

Jordan: Okay.

Brown, C.: But the [unintelligible] Rouge is now.

Jordan: Yeah.

Brown, C.: But the big stage is downstairs, yeah.

Jordan: But, but I saw... Monk... I was there when Monk fell off. He was dancing around and fell off that stage.

Brown: Ooo, wow.

Jordan: He fell off.

Brown, C.: Was he in pain?

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Jordan: Yeah. He got up and got back up and played. I mean, he was famous for dancing around like that and, you know. Oh, my God. But I didn't know Monk the way I knew Bird, you know. And, and one of the tragedies with Charlie Parker toward the end of his life was, he would always come by when he felt whatever, and I always felt, here was my hero, and I always felt so honored that he would come by to see if I was okay. And sometimes he'd make up excuses 'cause he couldn't go home. And he'd say, "Oh, I saw the fire trucks outside of your, your loft and I thought maybe you and Virginia, who was next door, in the other part of the loft... I thought maybe you were in trouble," you know. So I said, "Bird, you don't have to make an excuse. Your bed's always here for you," you know. But I was... one time he came by the loft, it was... I think it was a Saturday. It was a weekend, I know, 'cause I wasn't working. You know, I worked five days a week at that time. And he, uh, he said, "Let's go up to Birdland." That's the old Birdland. And I said, "Okay." So he had a T-shirt on, you know. It wasn't ultra clean but it wasn't ultra dirty, either, and who cared. I never looked at Bird for what he was wearing. So we went up to Birdland and we got down the stairs, and I can't remember who was at... Oscar Goodstein, one of them, said, "Bird, you can't come in here." And Bird said, "Why not?" And he said, "Not dressed like that. You can't come in here." And Bird turned around and he looked at me and he said, "Can you believe this, Sheila? They name a club after me and I can't even go in?" I, his face, I can still see that look when he turned around and said that to me. And uh, I said, "Come on, Bird, let's go. Let's go over and play some of those games," because they had all those slot machines and different games on Broadway at the time, you know. They had these places.

Brown: Pinball and all that.

Jordan: Yeah, yeah, yeah, so... I said, "Come on, let's go do that." I'll never forget that. I remember one time... where did we go? We went somewhere. I went somewhere and he was playing, and uh... he said, "Come with me. I have to go up on Central Park West." I said, "Oh, okay." So I got in the cab with him and we got a cab. I think he was, it was after his gig. And I got in the cab because any time... first of all, any time Bird played, I was there. You know, I was a Bird freak, chasing the Bird. Like the tune, Chasing the Bird. Uh, and I said, "Okay." So he went up to Central Park in the cab, in the taxi, and he said... I think it was 110th Street. He said, "Okay," he said, "I want you to stay here." I said, "Well, I can come with you." He said, "No, no, no, I'm going up to feed my horse." I said, "Well, can't I come and sit..." "No, no, you stay here. Keep the cab." I said, "Okay." So he's gone for quite a while and I was getting a little nervous. And then finally he came down and then he said, "Okay, I want... take me to Sixth Street." That's where he lived. Actually, he ended up 'cause now that house, that apartment down there, that building is, uh, is a landmark now. They got his name even on it. A little... you know. So uh, he got, he got out, he got out and he said, "I'll leave enough money for you to get back to your, your loft." And uh, so the driver said, "Okay." I don't remember how much. It was a lot. So Bird said, "Well, who do I make this check out to?" At that time. The cab driver said, "Check? I don't get no check? What are you, kidding me?" And Bird said, "No, I mean, it's a good check," you know, or whatever. And I said, "Oh, my God. I don't have enough money to cover this." So then he said, "Pull up to this bar down here." So he went in the bar. Obviously they cashed his check for him and he came out and paid the cab driver. Then he went and I went on home in the cab. He paid for me to get home, too. But I never forgot that, trying to pay the cab driver with a check. But he did things, crazy things like that, but they were so

unusual, you know. I was... at that time... I mean, now, today, you can use a credit card, but at that time, oh my God, I couldn't believe it. So many Bird stories. Oh, my God. He came up one time and it was a Sunday and the liquor stores were not open on Sunday, and he couldn't get any beer because it was before 12:00 and he was shaking. And he took, he took... Oh, one time he came and he couldn't... it was after the bars were closed, and he drank rubbing alcohol for the alcohol. He had to go have his stomach pumped out. I mean... Oh, my God, you know. Cunning, baffling, powerful disease. I never thought Bird was supposed to be here that long, anyway. I always felt that he was just here to leave this music and he was flying on off to another, to another planet or wherever, you know. I felt he was a messenger of this music. And that's what I think of myself as—a messenger of the music. Not as a diva or anything in my teaching. Just a messenger of the music. I don't want to be a diva, you know. I don't like that title and I don't like the way they act sometime. [laughs] Anyway, what else you want to ask me?

Brown: Well, we were talking about going to Lennie Tristano, but before we get there, I want to talk about Mingus, since Mingus was one of the ones who recommended...

Jordan: Uh-huh.

Brown: ...Lennie Tristano, and some of your biographical notes mention studying with Mingus. Maybe we can...

Jordan: No, I never studied with Mingus. I don't know how that ever got out. Uh, I was into bass and voice in the early fifties, I know, and I was studying with Lennie, as I said. Max and Mingus, but Mingus was known to like change like that, you know—temperament or whatever. You know, one day he loved Lennie and the next day he hated him, you know. And then he would say, "You're gonna lose your soul studying with Lennie Tristano." And I said, "Charles, you're the one who took me there, Charlie. I mean..." you know. And he went... he didn't want to hear it, you know. And then he'd get mad at me. And then he'd see me after my daughter was born and walking... I'd be walking down by the Vanguard, down in that area. He'd say, "Hello, Traci, how are you?" Walked right... [laughs] You never knew with him. He came up to my loft and he played Eclipse for me. He said, "I would love you to sing this." And I said, "What's it about?" I said, "Eclipse? You mean the actual eclipse?" He said, "It has a double meaning. It's about dark meeting light, meaning interracial." And he said, "You're the one that can do it." And then he got mad at me [laughs], and he got somebody else. Oh God. But I remember, he played it on that old upright piano. I had an old upright piano. It was painted gray and red, and Horace Silver came up to the loft one time to take me to dinner. What a sweet man he was. And I had a big boxer dog at the time. This dog was so upset that Horace was sitting on the couch next to me. We went out to dinner, and I came back home, said good night to Horace. We remained better friends. We were never lovers. And I left the door open, and the dog ran away. He was so angry, he left and all the doors downstairs were open, and this dog totally took off. I never saw him again. Never saw him again. And I told, I told Horace. I said, "You know, my

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dog left on account of you.” [laughs] We laughed. But I gave him his first piano when he was living in this little hotel room, ‘cause I was getting another upright piano, so Horace got the gray and red piano, and they took it out through this huge window in the loft, you know. And I don’t know how they ever got it up the stairs of this hotel ‘cause the hotel was... the stairs was... you know, it was tiny stairs. But anyway, Miles Davis wrote about this piano in his book. I don’t know what tune it was that he composed, but he said he composed it on this old raggedy piano in Horace’s room, hotel room. And I thought, that’s my piano. Well, at least you... well, if you wrote a tune on it, how bad could it have been, you know. [laughs] But anyway, that’s how I got to Lennie. And, and how I started giving, uh, sessions at my loft is because Lennie was giving sessions on Friday and Saturday night. And I would take my lesson, I would get my lesson, and then I would stay for the session, you know. And it was wonderful, you know, it was wonderful to be up there ‘cause everybody came in. Max came in, Bird, you know, everybody came in. And yeah, Lennie was a great teacher. He just taught me to believe in myself. That’s the most important lesson I got from Lennie Tristano. To believe in myself and as a woman, to like really, uh, really stick up for what I was. And regardless of who put me down or whatever, to get my own sound, to be my own self. And I was always that way. I mean, I never thought I would... Do you think I ever thought I’d be sitting here today with you guys? No way, you know. So, you know, it’s all Bird. It’s all because of Bird, Charlie Parker, that I’m here today and still alive and still doing the music. So I have a lot to be grateful for. But Mingus, he was... I would do bass and voice up at Lennie’s at the sessions with Peter Ind, who was a wonderful English bass player. And I would try it out, ‘cause I had this idea in my head about bass and voice. And it wasn’t out there. And then finally Peggy Lee did Fever, but she had a drummer, too. But I said, “Oh, so it can be done,” you know. And uh, but I knew that I wanted to do this, you know. And I remember Skeeter and, and Leroy... you know, Mitch, the two guys I sang with, after I went back to Detroit for a visit, and I did a bass and voice there, they said, “Why don’t you use a piano?” They didn’t get it, either, you know. But I did. It’s what I wanted. And I remember the first time I ever sang in a club with bass and voice was with Charles Mingus. I was in Toledo visiting these half-brothers, this half-sisters, and the, and, uh, my, my father and the second wife he had, and I was very close with the oldest daughter at that time. Not to the point where we got in touch, but if I went to visit, you know, I think... I think it was the wedding. It was when I was invited to that wedding. So I went and I, uh, I said... she liked jazz and she liked to sing and she could sing, too.

Brown: What was her name?

Jordan: Her name was Donna. Donna Dawson. And she’s, she’s quite the lady, you know. I really got to really know her a little better now, my later years. But uh, I said, “Mingus, Charles Mingus is playing in this club, and I’d like to go hear him.” So she said yes. So we went. And it was Charles Mingus. I don’t remember who the drummer was. And it was Lee Konitz. It was just a trio. So during the break, he said, “Come up and sing something.” I said, “Are you kidding? No. No. I can’t do that. Oh, Charles, don’t do that to me. I’m, I’m afraid to do that. I couldn’t do that.” He said, “Do you do it at Lennie’s?” I said, “Yeah, but that’s different.” He said, “No, it isn’t. Come on up and sing.” I never forgot that. And I got up and I sang Yesterdays. G-minor. And then it went down to F-minor. [laughs]

Brown: So...

Jordan: So he sorta gave me that push to do it. Mingus.

Brown: Mingus.

Jordan: Mm-hmm.

Brown: Can you talk a little bit about Lennie as a person? How was he? He seemed to be...

Jordan: Oh... Oh, Lennie was, was lovely. He was a wonderful man. He was... I loved him most of all because he was a Bird freak. He loved Charlie Parker. My very first lesson was... I went in there and he said, "Okay. This is what I want you to do." I said, "Yes, Lennie." He said, uh, "I want you to learn this Charlie Parker tune and the solo." And I said, "Oh, I know it 'cause of Detroit." So he said, uh, "Well, let's hear you sing it." I think it was Now Is The Time. I believe it was. And so, uh... I mean, I didn't do a great job but I sang along with the record so if I'm singing along with the record, I can pretty much get most of it. And I said, "Well, I know it," you know. And he said, "Okay, let's hear you sing it." He thought I was putting him on. He said, "Oh, you do know it." And I said, "Yeah. Well, not great. But yeah." I said, "I have all those Bird records." He said, "Okay. What about Lester Young? What about Prez?" I said, "Oh, Prez. Oh no, I don't know Prez." He said, "Lester Leaps In. Try that one." [laughs] That's your lesson, you know. So it was, it was really something. But that's how I, I started. And then mostly because Lennie was very encouraging. He'd play the piano for me and he'd say, "Now what do you hear? What do you want to hear?" you know. And I'd say, I'd say, "Well, I don't like a lot." 'Cause if there's too much melody going on underneath me, it's, it's too distracting. I can't get into what I'm... what I feel. He said, "Absolutely, I know that." And he said, "And you gotta remember that when, whoever is, you're playing with, who's ever accompanying you, you gotta remember to tell them that." And uh, he was the one that suggested that when I'm with a piano player, before I get too involved with his playing, I say, "Play for me like you would a horn player." In other words, leave me space, you know. And I always remembered that. But he gave me a lot of encouragement, you know. He'd do like the two against four, the timing things and stuff, you know, all that stuff. But it was mostly his encouragement that really, you know, really was strong with me in his teaching.

Brown: He sounds, he sounds quite versatile because he's known as such an arch theorist.

Jordan: Yeah.

Brown: And did he ever, 'cause I mean, his theories are, you know, quite, quite expansive. So did he work with you on any theory or anything? It sounds more it was a conceptual...

Jordan: Well, I think he did that because I was the first singer he ever had. So I think he did that most with the instrumentalists, but with me, I think he just knew that I needed to have a little

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encouragement in what I did, you know. He didn't say I want you to learn the piano. I couldn't anyway. I didn't have a piano at the time, until I moved to the loft. By the time I lived in the loft. Then I was going to Lennie's, and that's where I picked up on these sessions at night. That's what gave me the idea to have sessions in my loft, you know. So that was all because of Lennie.

Brown: Is there any way to hang a date or any timeframe for you?

Jordan: Well, it was before my daughter was born, so it had to be around '52 or something. And Duke was off and running again so, you know, I was in the loft by myself. And of course, Duke came back and I got pregnant with my daughter, and the loft... I still had the sessions, though, and Traci would be jumping around. [laughs] Not for long, though. And then I had to move from the loft because when they found out I had a child, the landlord said, you know, "You're not supposed to be living here, first of all. But now that you have a baby, you're gonna have to find another place. But I'll give you time." And so, the man that originally had the building that gave me the loft had another loft in an apartment, so he found out and he told me to come over and then he gave me a place over on 26th Street and Eighth Avenue. Not, Ninth Avenue. And I lived there for quite a while with my daughter. Then I lived on the East Side for a while. Avenue D. I used to get on the bus. One time John Hendrix got on the bus, and he was singing on the bus all the way over. I was going over to the West Side and so was he. He was working at the Vanguard, but I was just... I don't know where I was going. But he was... And then after... Well, when it came time to get off, I got off the same stop. I said, "Nice singing, John." [laughs] He said, "Could you hear? What were you doing back there?" I said, "Listening to you, man." You know, I was all the way in the back of the bus. [laughs] He was in front. Quite a switch from the... right? [laughs] I thought that at the time. I always went in the back of the bus. [laughs] Even I'd'a been... if I'd'a been down South, they would have killed me, I'm sure. But one of the horrible things that happened to me when I was still with Frank is, we were going out to Belle Isle. Belle Isle is a beautiful, was a beautiful place in Michigan, right off Lake Michigan, I think, isn't it?

Brown, C.: No, no, it's an island in the Detroit River that's a...

Jordan: Oh, that's what it is. Belle Isle.

Brown, C.: ...park for the City of Detroit.

Jordan: Yeah. So that's what that was. And uh, we went, we decided we were going to there and have a picnic. Me, Frank, Jenny King, my friend, and uh, Gunther, the guy that she was going with. You know, so the two guys. We were, we were interracial couples. Not accepted, as I said earlier. Constantly. This was the capper of them all. So we were going on our way to Belle Isle and they stopped us. They said, "Where are you going?" And we said, "We're going to Belle Isle." So I had a cigarette. I was smoking at the time, and I threw it and it went under the car. He crawled under that car, Gunther's, Gunther's car. He crawled under the car to get that cigarette to smell it, 'cause he thought I was smoking dope. I never smoked dope. I didn't like dope, you know. It made me too paranoid. And uh, they took us down to the police station.

But we were scared, you know. We didn't know. I mean, we were... I don't know if Frank was scared, but I was terrified. He said, "Why did they take you? They're putting us in jail."

Brown: He was still in the Army or was he already out?

Jordan: No, this is before he went to the Army.

Brown: Before the Army.

Jordan: Yeah, this is before the Army. And uh, they separated. They took the guys somewhere else. I don't think they gave them much of a hard time at all. But me and Jenny, they took us in the room. And this detective who picked us up... one of the detectives... both of the detectives were there. I think there were three. And one was with the, with the guys. And he said, uh, "Does your mother know where you are tonight? What you're doing?" I said, "No." He said, "Well, I'm gonna call her." I said, "It won't do any good. I said, "Because I don't live with my mother." "Well, where do you live?" I said, "I live at the Evangeline Home." That was the name of that place. The Evangeline Home. And uh, he, he said, "Oh." I said, "Yeah, well, I... you know, I'm a typist. I work and I support myself. I haven't lived home since I was barely seventeen." So he said, "Oh. Really?" He said, uh, "Well, I'm gonna tell you something." He said, uh, "I have a nine-year-old daughter at home, and if I thought that I was gonna find her the same way I found you tonight, you two tonight, I... you see this gun in my holster?" I said, "Yes." He said, "I would take this gun and go home and blow her brains out." I swear to God, as I sit on this couch. "I would take this gun and blow her brains out." And I thought, shut up, Jor-- Well, I wasn't Jordan then. Shut up, Sheila. Don't say nothin', you know, just keep cool. I said, "Well, oh, well, I'm moving to New York anyway." He said, "Oh, where it's so cosmopolitan." He was into that, you know. And I said, "Well, I like the music." And they did let us go. They let us out, off. 'Cause they couldn't hold us for anything. They could have lied and said that was pot, but they didn't. I don't know. Maybe they weren't smart enough to think of that. Had it been switched around, that's what I would have done, if I was evil and ugly like that, you know. And that was a turning point for me. I said, "Oh..." I mean, I might have stayed on in Detroit but after that, I said, "I can't go through this anymore. Now Frank's going into the Army," you know. I said, "I can't go through this anymore. I, I just can't take it anymore," you know. So it was New York. So I came to New York thinking, oh, it's so cosmopolitan. Right. I'm giving a... there's a session going on in my loft one night... This is before my daughter was born. This was when I was still studying with Lennie, and Duke was over in Brooklyn. He wasn't, we weren't together, we were split up at the time. And I came down with two Afro-American painters to get something to eat at the Chinese restaurant. On our way back, just as we turned on Eighth Avenue and, uh, 26th Street, just as I was turning there, there was a bar on that corner. Four white guys jumped out, grabbed the two guys I was with, three of them, and the other one grabbed me, threw me down on the ground, knocked my cap out that I was having done, and uh, started kicking me. And I looked up and, and I was very thin then. I was quite thin when I was younger. And I looked up from the ground and I said, "This is

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it. I'm gonna die over this. But it's okay 'cause it's what I believe in and I know I'm right. I fought this for years in Detroit and I'm not giving up now, 'cause this is who I want to be and where I want to be." And I looked up and I saw this guy coming toward me with a gun. I said, "Now he's gonna blow my brains out." He said, "Get your hands off'a her. Get your hands off of them, too. You, you guys, you stop it right now." And he was pointing the gun at them not at me. He was a plainclothesman. Can you believe that? [laughs] Saved my life. That guy would have kicked me to death. He would have beat me to death. Now where did he come from? I mean, he was... I'll never understand that, you know. And I will never understand that. 'Cause somebody knew I was right and they were taking care of me. Okay? [laughs] That's all I can think of because...

Brown: Divine intervention.

Jordan: That's right. So that, that was, that was something. Oh, boy. So... Now what?

Brown: [laughs] We're pretty deep.

Jordan: I know, I know.

Brown: But, you know, it's so important to be able to, you know, share these experiences because, you know, kids nowadays, they don't, they don't know the world, that America was two different countries. And they, and they have to hear it.

Jordan: I know.

Brown: They have to understand it. And when you talk about, you know, some cop saying he would blow his, his child's brains out. I mean, then we can understand why this country's still sick.

Jordan: I know. Exactly.

Brown: You know, it helps them to understand...

Jordan: Exactly.

Brown: ...that this is, this is an illness in this country.

Jordan: One of the things I have to think about sometimes, too, now is that those detectives, especially that one evil one that was gonna his kid's brains out, if he found her like me, I know he's not alive anymore. I doubt it. But what would he say having a biracial President? [laughs] Huh?

Brown: Well, we can see why it's affected a lot of folks like the Tea Party, the Tea Baggery, you know, so that old spirit of evil is still alive.

Jordan: Is still there. Oh, oh, that I know. Yeah.

Brown: It's still there so...

Jordan: But the fact that he got elected is, you know, anyway... Not into politics but I just found that kind of fun. I think about that, I thought about that a lot when Obama was out there campaigning. So what else, kiddo?

Brown: Well, we're only into the fifties. You haven't even recorded your first record yet.

Jordan: Okay.

Brown: So let's wrap up... let's, let's...

Jordan: From Lennie?

Brown: Yeah. We, well, I mean, again, you know, you talk about how many years...

Jordan: Lennie's over.

Brown: How many years have you [inaudible/overlapping]?

Jordan: Lennie's over. Just, just a couple. I don't even remember.

Brown: Okay.

Jordan: Two, maybe two. Two, three at tops.

Brown: So you're working now. I mean, [inaudible/overlapping].

Jordan: Yeah, I'm in my office. I'm doing my, uh, I'm doing my clerical work and...

Brown: But singing and performing.

Jordan: Well, I would find a couple of nights a week to, to sing somewhere. By this time, my daughter's born. Did I get into that?

Brown: You mentioned it earlier.

Jordan: Yeah, my daughter was born and...

Brown: Let's get her name on tape.

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Jordan: Traci. Traci Jerrell Jordan.

Brown: Jerrell?

Jordan: Yeah, I gave her that middle name. I can't remember where I got it from. I just made it up. I liked it. So I had Traci and, of course, Duke was in and out, in and out. And then he finally, it was too much of a responsibility. He couldn't do... he wasn't doing anything anyway, except taking care of her in the morning when I would go to work, you know, a half a day, in order to pay the rent and buy some food. So he would wait until I came back and then he'd disappear, you know. And then he'd be gone. Uh, and that was just for a few months. And then after a while, he just... he just never came back. So uh, I still gave sessions once in a, once in a while, but not that much because after they told me that I couldn't live in that loft anymore with a child, I had to find another situation, you know. Uh, so where does that leave me? We're, we're getting into... What are we getting into now?

Brown: Well, you, you've relocated. You're on Eighth, you said Eighth Avenue.

Jordan: Eighth Avenue and 26th Street.

Brown: And 26th Street.

Jordan: Yeah.

Brown: So, but I'm trying to figure out and now, how, 'cause, 'cause we're gonna lead up to your recording session in '62 so [inaudible/overlapping].

Jordan: Good. Okay. Okay, I'll get... My daughter now, by this time, my daughter's about two or three years old. And I've been living in this place thanks to, his name was Herman. Hymie, we called him. He was a wonderful man, wonderful man. No racial prejudice whatsoever. And he's the one who originally owned the loft I was in and then got me this apartment in his new building on 26th Street and Eighth, Ninth Avenue. So I was over there with Traci and she was in, uh, she got to the age where they took her in nursery school, which was great, so I could go work my half day. And uh, I was in the club singing. I had a baby-sitter. A woman, Mary... what was her name? Mary, I think. Very sweet woman. And she lived in Chelsea. And uh...

Brown, C.: Alvin Jones.

Jordan: Oh, God, right. When I still, when I was still in the loft...

Brown: Detroit. [laughs]

Jordan: When I was still in the loft, uh, before Traci was born, Barry and a lot of the Detroiters would come and, you know, and they'd want to... I'd say, "Well, come, you know. See if you like it. You can stay in the loft." I always had the extra bed because, by this time, uh, you know,

there was, there was no reason why they couldn't stay there, just to see if they liked it. So a lot of the musicians from Detroit would come and stay at my loft. After my daughter was born, Alvin Jones came to New York, and he was going with this girl Barbara, and uh, they knew I had this loft, so he came up and I said, "Yeah, you can stay here. But..." Now the girl that he was with, they had a fight so she went back to Detroit. So it was Alvin by himself. I said, "Well, Alvin, you can stay here but you have to take care of my daughter until I come back at one o'clock 'cause I have a day job, a half a day, at this agency." So he said, "Oh yeah, I could do that." And so I would come back from the gig and he'd be holding her. She was like this. And you know how big he was. Oh, my God, it was wild. So he did that for me, I don't remember how... maybe it was a week or less than a week or whatever. I can't remember exactly. But he always teased me about it. He'd say, he'd say to [Kakel?], "I was Sheila's baby-sitter." I said, "Well, she's not a baby anymore, man. She's as tall as you almost." So he would laugh. He'd say, "Yeah, I was Sheila's baby-sitter." I, I loved that. He was very proud of that, you know. But anyway, the guys would come by and they would stay. So where does that leave me? Where am I going with this? What were we talking about now?

Brown: Well, we're into...

Jordan: Oh, I know what we were talking about. Then I moved over to Ninth Avenue and 26th Street, and I got a job at this club called the Page Three, which is on Seventh Avenue. And uh, they had Monday night sessions there, and then Tuesday was just a, a duo. A piano and drums. Why not, why not piano and bass, I'll never know, but they didn't. And uh, the drummer's name was Sir John. And the piano player was sometimes it was Baldo Williams, and then there was another German guy that played there. And then there was a guy that played there—Herbie Nichols. [laughs] So Herbie Nichols, when he first took the job, he said, "I'm not worried about any of these acts," because they had all kinda acts going on the Tuesday through Sunday gig nights, I should say. The Tuesday... Monday night was session night, so that as a whole different... that was a whole trio—piano, bass and drums. And I did that, too. So uh, but I did an extra couple of nights just with the, the drums and the piano, and Herbie said, "I'm not worried about the strippers, and I'm not worried about the comedians. The one that worries me is that little jazz singer." [laughs] I gotta tell you, Herbie Nichols took me on a musical, spiritual trip that I will never forget as long as I live. I was singing When the World Was Young... No. Lilac Wine. And he wrote the changes that he wanted on it. And uh, I just left my body. I'd never had an out-of-body experience yet in music. But I did with him. I was floating. I will never forget that. It was the first out-of-body experience I had in music. I will never forget that. He took me on some musical trips. One, I was singing Love For Sale. I don't know why I was singing Love For Sale, but I was. But the way he played it and the way he, and the way he... the, the way he played underneath me and played what I was doing, it was fabulous. And I never forgot that. Lilac Wine. When the World Was Young, and uh...

Brown: Love For Sale.

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Jordan: Love For Sale. Okay? So then, during the, during the Monday night sessions, we'd have different piano players and they were all good. So we had this one piano player, Jack Riley, who would play on Monday nights. So his teacher came down to hear him on a Monday night, and the teacher's name was George Russell. So he came down and he heard Jack, and he came over to me during the break. I had sung already. I had just sung. He said, "Where do you come from to sing like that?" I said, "Hell." And we both started to laugh. He laughed and I laughed, you know. He said, uh... I said, "No, I really come from Pennsylvania. Originally, I'm a Detroiter." He said, "Could I go back there?" I said, "Well, it's a coal mining area. I don't think you'd like it very much." He said, "I'd like to go back there and see that section of the country." I said, "Okay." My grandmother was still alive at the time. Now, no, nobody knew that Jack, uh, that, that George Russell was, was black, you know, 'cause he was so light-skinned. Not that I cared. I would have taken him regardless. If he was Miles Davis's color, I would have taken him. You know what I mean? So, but my grandmother was cool. She was cool. She said, "Come on, we're gonna go..." It was just for two... I think we were there just for the weekend. She said, "Come on, we'll go up to the [Bundt?]." That, this is where the miners hung out and they, it was a private club where you could drink. And so, I was drinking at the time and George was drinking some, and my grandmother, of course, was totally into alcohol by now. So we go up there and there's this miner sitting there. This, at the bar. And my grandmother's introducing us. She said, "Oh, this is..." Oh, and she's bragging about we're big stars and then I said, "Mom, I'm not a big star. George and the mus-- yes. But not me, please." You know, I'm still working in an office, how could I... "I don't want to be a star, Mom, please." So he said, "Oh, you're a star, Jeannie." You know, used my, my middle name. My nickname. I said, "No, I'm not a star. He said, "Well, do you still sing You Are My Sunshine, Jeannie?" I said, "Oh, no, I don't sing that anymore." He said, "Why not?" And then George Russell said, "Why not? Yeah, why not?" So there was an old upright piano, totally out of tune, and George sat down and he started... you know how he plays. Dissonant chords. All that stuff was going on. And I started singing You Are My Sunshine." And my grandmother literally pushed him off the bench. Literally shoved him off the bench. He had to hold onto the piano. She said, "That's not the way it goes." And so then she sat down and she played it, and I sang Sunshine with her. Then we went home. George and I drove back to New York. I can't remember how much time elapsed. It wasn't too much time, though, and he called me up and he said, "Come down. I want you to hear something." Because he was living down on Jane Street, or one of those streets in the Village. I forgot which one now. It was a long time ago. Sixty... it was in the early sixties. Sixty-one, sixty... So I went down. And uh, I was... Traci was in nursery school and uh... No. Traci was visiting some friends had taken her and their daughter, because my, she was friendly with this woman's daughter. So this woman took them somewhere. I don't remember. But I, I was able to go down to George's. And uh, he started... He said, "I want you to hear something." And so he started playing [singing], you know. And I said, "Oh, it was so nice. It sounded beautiful." And then he played this whole thing and then he stopped. I said, "Oh, that was beautiful." He said, "It's not over. Sing." I said, "Sing what?" He said, "Sing You Are My Sunshine." I said, "What? I'm not gonna sing alone." He said, "Well, you used to sing alone when you were a little kid, didn't you? It's no, there's no difference." I said, "Okay. I'll try it." And so I started to sing And You Are My Sunshine. He gave it to Riverside, recorded it for Riverside, that one, uh, that one record he made. The Outer View. The Outer View. And uh, he had me come up and sing Sunshine. It was amazing. Oh, my God. I'll never forget that as long as I live, hearing, hearing that, you know. A lot of people haven't heard that, you know. But in

the meantime, that was my very first, you know, professional recording. And then right after that, he paid to have a tape made—George Russell—of me singing songs that, all the songs that are on this Blue Note. That was George. George got that record date. He peddled this around to, to two different companies—Blue Note, who did not record singers, and uh, and Marcy, and the A&R man over there at the time was Quincy Jones. So Blue Note picked it up immediately and said, “Oh, we’d like to record her.” And so George told me. And then in the meantime, Quincy called George and said, “I would like to record her.” George said, “I just, she just signed with Blue Note.” So then Quincy sent me a letter and of course burned in my fire. And it said, “Maybe next time.” He said, “I wish you a lotta luck and it’s great. I’m glad you’re being recorded, and I would love to have had you on the, on the label, you know. But he said, uh, “You know, maybe next time.” Maybe I should call him now, right. [laughs] Anyway, anyway, it was George. And so then, I wanted to use a piano player and uh, he said, “No, no. We’re gonna use guitar. Barry Galbraith, Denzil Best and Steve Swallow on acoustic bass.” ‘Cause I worked with Steve Swallow at the Page Three on Monday nights. That’s who the bass player was when, when George first came down. But he knew Steve ‘cause Steve had done some things with him. So uh, that’s how Blue Note came about. Originally, it was all monoral. It wasn’t even stereo yet. Then it went from monorial, monoral, to stereo, and then from stereo to CD, you know. And it’s still around. They just... well, I think you can buy it online now. They’re, they’re not making them anymore. But uh, I bought a lot of the copies. But that was George Russell. I, I don’t think I would ever have been heard had it not been for George Russell. So between Bird and George Russell, those are my heroes, you know.

Brown: Well, let’s talk about that, that session with George ‘cause we mentioned earlier off-mic, David Baker and [inaudible/overlapping].

Jordan: Oh, yeah, David Baker was on it and, uh, Don Ellis, Pete LaRocca, Steve Swallow on acoustic bass, and a wonderful saxophone, saxophone player...

Brown: Not Eric [inaudible].

Jordan: No, no, no. Eric...

Brown, C.: [inaudible]?

Jordan: No, no, no. It was Paul Plummer. Nobody has ever heard...

Brown: [inaudible].

Jordan: Paul Plummer. Wonderful player. From Ohio. I saw him years later. I was out there doing a gig and he was in, he came in, and it was great to see him. Uh, but very quiet kinda guy. Kind of even strange in a sense. In a beautiful way. But he was the saxophone player on that.

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Brown: Did you rehearse in the studio, and how many takes?

Jordan: I think I most... I don't remember. I don't think there was many takes. But I remember that I went down to George's and he played it for me and he rehearsed it with me, you know, and uh, I, I don't think we... I think we went right into the studio. I think we ran through it a couple of times and that was it. And we did it.

Brown, C.: But Sheila, when you start that second chorus, it just... it's so breathtaking. And then the tapestry of the...

Jordan: [singing] Da-da, da-da...

Brown, C.: ...the [inaudible] little [inaudible].

Jordan: ...da-da.

Brown, C.: And you had to like stay on pitch and say...

Jordan: It wasn't easy. I don't... you know, why am I saying it wasn't easy? Well, I think it wouldn't be easy, but back then I wasn't even thinking. I was just hearing it, you know. I didn't, I had no trouble with it. I don't know. I guess it was pretty difficult at the time.

Brown, C.: When you start the second chorus, it's almost at a whisper.

Jordan: [singing] "They [inaudible] night. Da-da, da-da, da-da. [laughs] "As I lay sleeping." Da-da, da-da. [laughs] Yeah. So George is gone and Bird's gone, but they live on with me.

Brown: Well, let's talk about this session. Let's talk about the portrait of, of Sheila, because this is your first one under your name.

Jordan: Yes.

Brown: Um... I don't know if you want to talk about, uh, critical reception, but I'm interested in, you know, this guitar, bass, drums, plus it's got Denzil Best on it, too...

Jordan: Yes.

Brown: You know, with... Miles got credit for writing [inaudible].

Jordan: Yeah, Move.

Brown: So, and both Ken and I are drummers. And of course, George Russell was a drummer until...

Jordan: That's right.

Brown: ...essentially Benny Carter hired Max...

Jordan: Yeah.

Brown: ...and fired George. So, so, can we talk a little bit about this session? And if you could tell the, um, you know, for the historical record, something about Denzil Best 'cause, you know, unfortunately, he's [inaudible].

Jordan: Well, the one thing that we, we recorded this at, at, um, Rudy Van Gelder's. And Rudy was tough. You know, he was very careful. I remember we had a break, and uh, Swallow and I started going up the steps to go to the... we thought the bathroom was... "Where are you going?" He flipped out, you know. And we said, "Oh, well, we thought the bathroom was..." "No, it's not. It's down here." [laughs] I said, "Oh, okay." But I remembered that. But uh, I was in a booth and, uh, Denzil was... You know what Denzil said? [laughs] What he said to George? He said, "She scares me." [laughs] "I never know if she's gonna make it." [laughs] Oh, God. And when George told me that later, I said, "Oh," you know, I was kinda like hurt. I took it as kind of an insult. But years later, I said, "No, it was..." I probably... I didn't think I was out. I never thought I was out, you know. But obviously, Denzil got scared in a funny sense, you know. I'm sure nothing would scare Denzil Best. [laughs] But he was very sweet to work with, very...

Brown, C.: 'Cause you were so deep, Sheila.

Jordan: Oh, I don't know.

Brown, C.: [imitating]

Jordan: I don't know what it was. I have no clue.

Brown, C.: That's what it was.

Jordan: I have no clue what it was. But, but I know that, uh, I know that, um, I was very sick when I did that, uh, that recording, because I had an ectopic pregnancy. I was with this... one of the creeps I was involved with in my life, who will remain unmentionable. Uh, but I didn't know I was pregnant, you know, because I, I just didn't know. And had I not been... I was working at the Page Three still, too. And had I not been, had I not been taking to the woman who ran the club in the back by not going to her gynecologist who was a specialist, he found it. I went to one hospital and they told me that I was trying to abort myself. I said abort myself from what? I didn't even know I was pregnant. And uh, he said, "Go home and take care of yourself." And then, it didn't get any better. And I could have died. But you know, I wasn't, it wasn't my time. Never was my time. But uh, that, I was going through that without knowing when I recorded this, uh, this CD. I was very sick. I could have died, you know. I mean, I

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wasn't sick that I couldn't sing, but you know, I had some pain and, you know, I didn't know what was going on. So that I remember. And I remember Swallow was so sweet, and he was still playing acoustic bass and, of course Barry Galbraith was beautiful. I never realized but this was George's idea. And that wasn't very well known at the time—the guitar, bass and drums. It was more trio, you know. I think it was very new. Maybe... maybe Ella did some things, I don't know. She was so... Talk about a... talk about a scat singer, whoa.

Brown, C.: Joe Pass

Brown: Yeah, Joe Pass or...

Jordan: Yeah, Joe, but that was later, I think, yeah.

Brown, C.: But didn't you want to do bass and voice?

Jordan: Oh, well, originally, I wanted to do bass and voice, yes. And, and they said, "Oh, no." [laughs]

Brown: Oh, the whole, the whole date.

Jordan: Whole date, yeah.

Brown: [inaudible/overlapping]

Jordan: Well, I said either the trio, piano... I said bass and voice first, and then George said, "No, no, I don't think so." And well, they said, Alfred and, and his... Francis. They said, "No, no. We're not ready for that yet." And then, uh, I said, "Okay, then, then piano, bass and drums." And George said, "No, no, no, no. What I originally wanted—guitar, bass and drums. And that's how that came about. Guy that took that picture was a drummer from the Page Three, another drummer. Not Sir John. But Ziggy Willman. And he took that picture of me, and uh..."

Brown: Yeah, he got a, he got a photo credit.

Jordan: Yes, he did. He did, yeah.

Brown: Well...

Brown, C.: But...

Brown: Go ahead.

Brown, C.: I just admit the guitar did make it more transparent, give you more space.

Jordan: Oh, yes. I didn't realize it at the time because I'd never sung with guitar before. So to me that was a foreign instrument, you know. I'm used to like piano, you know, all the sax-- of course, Bird and all those cats. But I wasn't into guitar... not that I didn't dig guitar playing,

because Kenny Burrell, I worked with him in Detroit, or sessions. We didn't work. We, we just had sessions together but... I wasn't, you know, I wasn't into guitar. I didn't know how wonderful it was, and it's wonderful.

Brown: Well, you know, I just want to reiterate what Cameron said. The transparency of this date, plus the range of material you do on here. It's so, it's such a, a very distinctive recording in that regard. Did... uh, now, George selected all the tunes or was it...

Jordan: No, no, no.

Brown: ...you guys...?

Jordan: My... I, I did them.

Brown: Right.

Jordan: These are tunes that I did at the Page Three. I had been working on my repertoire down there, you know, I... Not because I thought I would ever get a recording date, but I liked to do new tunes. I liked to, you know, this is all new to me and I was working, you know, one or two nights a week now, and I wanted to try out, you know, some of the beautiful songs that I knew. So that's how that happened. And these were all tunes that I'd been, been doing. They were not new tunes when I recorded them. I had been singing them in the Page Three in the club for a long time.

Brown: And is Steve the only one that you had a working relationship with in, from this date, uh, as opposed to Barry and, and Denzil?

Jordan: Well, Barry, no, I never worked with Barry again and I never worked with Denzil again, and I never went anywhere with this CD, as far as touring. I, I think I got... Max Gordon gave me a week or twice at the Village Vanguard and that was it. But then I didn't have an agent and I didn't push myself, and by this time I had my, I still had my daughter to take care of. And I was working. Then by this time, I started working for an advertising agency, and every time they needed a jazz sound, they'd call me up. I was in the Research Department, typist, or you know, secretary, for one of the directors of the Research Department. And um, he would come in and, uh... I mean, they would call upstairs and my boss had come in and he'd say, "They want you up in Creative." I said, "What for?" "Well, they're doing a jazz. They need somebody with a jazz sound." So "Oh, yeah." And then I went, and one time it went national. I did, uh, Whirlpool refrigerator. And a guy was coming out with a party hat on in the snow and he was like, you know, and so, [singing] "The party's over. It's time to call it a day." And then the ending is, "Well, the party wouldn't have to be over if you had a Whirlpool icemaker refrigerator, or something like that. You know, "It's all over, my friend." And it shows this poor little guy walk... I used to get fan mail for that. I didn't even know what a fan letter was, you know.

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Then I did one for Tom McCann and one for Bulova Watch. And one for Softique. [singing] “Softique, the kinda stuff you take a bath in.” [laughs] Body and Soul. [laughs] Oh, God. But it was a little extra money and I wasn’t doing anything really commercial. I was singing... I was singing like I sing, you know. But it helped me out financially at the time, because I was living here then. I was, I’ve been in this apartment since my daughter was nine. So I’ve been here quite a few years. God.

Brown: [inaudible] says it was all the commercials he did that, that purchased his big, big mansion out in L.A.

Jordan: Is that right?

Brown: I mean, did you get... you didn’t get any residual [inaudible]?

Jordan: No, I didn’t anything like that, but I would get a residual check, you know, if it went national. I think, uh, the Whirlpool went national, went, uh, went whatever they call it. National or inter... whatever. And I got more money. But it wasn’t a lot of... Well, for me it was a lot of money, because I’d get this check every two weeks, you know.

Brown: Okay, let’s cut it. He’s gotta change the tape. Phew.

Jordan: ...in case you hadn’t noticed.

Male: And we’re running.

Brown: Well, okay. So, so, Sheila, after you recorded the Blue Note record. After you recorded the Outer View—You Are My Sunshine on the Outer View, uh, you appeared with George Russell Sextet at the Newport Jazz Festival in ’64. You want to talk about that or any other performances you did with George?

Jordan: Well, that, those were the only two I did. I mean, I did the Newport and then I did one at the museum, I think... Modern Museum of Art one time. I don’t remember what that was for, but those are the only times that I, that I appeared with George, and it was only, it was only to do Sunshine. And then, uh, years later, up in Boston at, I think it was Jordan Hall, he was doing a concert and he had me come up, and I improvised on, I think, Stratosfunk, one of the blues lines. [singing] [laughs]

Brown: That one, I think, [inaudible/overlapping]...

Jordan: Yeah.

Brown: ‘cause that was [laughs], that was weird. Um... So were you still working at Page Three at that time? No?

Jordan: No, because Page Three was closed down. I don’t remember why but, you know, they were out to get it because basically Page Three was a gay club, you know, and in those days, they

did not accept gay people, which is, thank God it's not like that so much today. It still is, but not as bad. And uh, they closed... they found a way to close that club down. But I'd already been singing there for quite a few years, though just a couple of nights a week, you know, and kept me, the music with me, and I had my... fresh with me. And then I had my, my day job at the advertising agency and I was able to take care of me and my daughter. And that's what happened. I raised her by myself.

Brown: A single mother.

Jordan: Yeah.

Brown: Now, um... you were able to go to Europe. Do you recall your, your trips to Europe?

Jordan: I took Traci. The first time I went to Europe was through George Russell, 'cause he was living in Stockholm, and he got me a gig at Ronnie Scott's in London. I took my daughter with me. And then, uh, I came, uh... I went from London to Stockholm and um, I did a, a festival in Stockholm with a lot of that repertoire. I don't think we did Sunshine. No, we didn't do Sunshine. But George just, you know... he wanted to see me get out there and do the music. He was very, very supportive.

Brown: Did you like being in Europe? [inaudible/overlapping]

Jordan: I loved being in Europe because they, they embraced me and I didn't feel that I was an underdog or whatever, you know. You know what? I never even cared about it. I never lost my desire for the music. If people liked it, they liked it. I remember, I won that Down Beat award, uh, critics' award nine times—talent deserving wider recognition. I finally told them, I wrote them and said, "Give this to somebody else. I'm a little..." [laughs] I mean, I love it and I'm honored but, you know... maybe somebody else should be getting it for a change. [laughs] But it was nine years. Every, for the nine years, I was... I think it was nine years. Yeah, it was pretty close to it if it wasn't. You know, but I didn't have an agent so I was... you know how I got most of my gigs? I got most of my gigs from, uh, musicians. They would call me from Europe. They would call me or write me. We didn't... that was before computers. And uh, and after I went over there, that George got me those two gigs, then different musicians started asking me to come over and work with them, and that's what I did. And that's where I realized I had to get a book together that was legible with good lead sheets, you know, which I teach. Um, so there's no mistakes. It's there.

Brown: Was there a reason why you didn't an agent? Did you not get offers or...?

Jordan: I was shy, you know. And also, I was raising my daughter and I, I didn't want to be away from her for... You know, part of it was fear from being away from her and then part of it was I was shy, you know. I nev-- Nobody came knocking on my door... came to my door

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knocking it down to, um, you know, to book me or to whatever, so... I, I think I got the Blue... uh, the Vanguard gig from George. I think George is the one that got me that gig, too. Then there was the Crazy Horse and different places. And Art D'Lugoff's place. I always found a place to sing, you know, always, you know. But I started going to Europe a lot. And I still go to Europe a lot. And now I go to Japan at least, usually once a year. And um, I had started a workshop up at City College. Did I talk about that yet?

Brown: I believe so.

Jordan: Okay.

Brown: I believe, you know, we mentioned that earlier in [inaudible/overlapping] .

Jordan: In '78, yeah. Well, then my workshops continued. I started... I did a workshop at... thanks to Max Roach and Dr. Fred Tillis at, um, Jazz in July.

Brown: Jazz in July.

Jordan: I started doing the workshop up there. They had somebody else teaching but she was a spirit breaker. I won't mention her name. And Dr. Tillis said, you know, "We'd like, we'd like you come up and teach here." I said, "Well, you have to understand, I don't like to... I don't want to get involved with another singer, you know, if it's..." And uh, they said... I said, "Let a year go by. Get somebody else and let a year go by and then I'll come." And that's what I did. And I'm still there, you know. So I do that in the summer. I didn't do it this year. Two weeks. I only did one week 'cause I was in Rome doing a workshop for a week, which was lovely. And then I started a workshop. Uh, there's a wonderful guitarist. He... well, he's passed on now. Attila Zoller?

Brown: Oh, sure.

Jordan: Wonderful guy. Loved him. Well, he started doing a workshop in the summer in August, but just with instrumentalists. And then, this piano player that I met from Queens College who... 'cause I used to give private lessons here. Like, uh, for Queens College, they'd send the kids to me. Like Jimmy Heath was very good about that. So he had a lot of the singers come and take private lessons here with me in the apartment, and uh, that's, that's how I met Eugene Newman [?], because Eugene would come. And at that time, I had a piano—an old raggedy piano. What else is new? [laughs] And uh, and Eugene was a piano player. So he started doing the workshop up there in '96, and I went up there 'cause Attila said, "Well, I'll try singers but I don't really wanna be working with singers," you know. "Sheila's cool but I mean, I don't want these chicks," or whatever. You know, there're always chick singers and whatever, you know. [laughs] So uh, Eugene said, "No, let her try," you know. So it so happened that I... they didn't have a place to put me so I was in a church. So I taught this workshop for two days in a church. And it was very successful. And what happened, then they started hiring me for the week. And so by now, Attila is, uh, getting... he's very sick. So he passed on. But I kept, you know, and uh... I think he liked it. I think, you know, in his heart he... he always complimented me on it. "You're doing a good job," or whatever. But um, I know I loved that workshop, too. I

love jazz... I love all the workshops. And uh, that one I, I started up there in Putney. They do it in Putney now. Putney, Vermont. And uh, that's one week, as I said. And then that got so crowded that I had to hire somebody to help me. So I got Jay Clayton. So Jay, who I love and is a wonderful talent, she started, and we still do that week together. So that's wonderful. Then Fred Haas, a saxophone player and plays very good piano, too, from Woodstock, Vermont. He started doing a vocal workshop aside from the instru-- They start out as instrumentalists, but then they take the singers sometimes, you know. 'Cause a lot of singers want to take workshops, you know. And they have the bread 'cause they probably do extra jobs that I did, you know. So uh, I started doing that one in Woodstock, Vermont, and that's usually in June for one week. And you know, this... I didn't do it this year because I had to go... I was in Greece with Cameron. We did a bass and voice thing there. He's my bass partner.

Brown: Where in Greece?

Jordan: Crete.

Brown: In Crete?

Jordan: We were in Crete. Right? Crete.

Brown, C.: That was a story. [laughs]

Jordan: Uh... yeah.

Brown: We're gonna come back and get you both on [inaudible/overlapping]...

Jordan: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Brown: ...some mutual stories [inaudible].

Jordan: Yeah.

Brown: Let's just pretend like this is a workshop. So your workshops are usually a group of vocalists.

Jordan: Yes.

Brown: In one room.

Jordan: Yes.

Brown: So what do you do? What is it you...?

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Jordan: Sing. [laughs]

Brown: Okay. So you, you just... Let's just say they're all college age.

Jordan: No.

Brown: Or are they usually a range of ages and, and...

Jordan: I like any age.

Brown: ...and ability and...

Jordan: I had a kid... I had... Well, I did the Litchfield one week only. One week last year. But it conflicts with my other workshops, which I, which I like a lot better. But I had a little kid in Litchfield. He was... God, how big... he was about seven or eight. And he liked, liked Frank Sinatra, you know. So I taught... I had him and I helped him. What I usually do is have them all sing first. I open up with the blues. And I make them sing about what their name is and where they come from and why do they want to sing jazz. That's how I open them up. So, and then I have them sing individually. I bring books. I bring repertoire. I teach them bebop tunes, bebop lines. And I work on them individually. It's almost like a private lesson within a, within a workshop, you know. And I say, "And everybody has to listen to what's going on here because it can apply to you, also." And uh, so the teaching, I don't know. I just learned to teach from teaching. That's what I said to John Lewis, one of the last times I saw John. I said, "You know, I learned to teach from teaching, and that's thanks to you and Eddie Summerlin," you know. So... but... that's how I mean... it's just almost improvised. I can't actually say what I do. It's... it could be anything. But I know it's right 'cause...

Brown: So is it... Oh, I'm sorry.

Jordan: I'm sorry. No, I was just gonna say, 'cause a lot of the singers feel that they can't be jazz singers for two things: that they don't read music, they don't play piano, or they don't scat sing. So I have another thing, another little, uh, expression that I made up. I say, "There's a scat virus going around," you know. "What makes you think that if you don't scat, you're not a jazz singer? Was Billie Holiday a scat singer? No," you know, I said, "So please, don't get hooked up into that. But if you want to scat sing, and the... I have an antibiotic for the virus." And they say, "What, what, what is it?" I said, "Bebop. If you have to go back." That's how I learned from listening to bebop. Learning all those bebop heads and the lines. And "Sing with Bird. There's no room for shooby-doobies. None whatsoever." You know? So they're... sometimes they don't want to and they say, "I'm uncomfortable." But they thank me for putting them straight, that they can be a jazz singer without scattin'. I say, "I scat because that's how I started out." I mean, when I finally got into jazz, not singing. I mean, I sang since, as I said, you know, since I was a little kid, but I don't know... I mean, and the other thing is that thing I said—melody. Learn the melody, the original melody of the tune as best you can before you start doing anything with it 'cause that's what it is. The original melodies, as I said, are the steppingstones to improvisation, as far as I'm concerned. That's how I feel, you know. I don't

say I'm right or wrong. I just know it works. And I know I never had... I don't remember ever having a student come up to me and say, "You suck." [laughs] Well, maybe they would... maybe they wouldn't do that. [laughs]

Brown: [inaudible/overlapping] happening. [inaudible].

Jordan: But uh, I love teaching. I get the same... if I'm teaching good, if I feel, um, it's happening, I get the same feeling that I do if I'm singing and we're connecting like with Cameron or if I'm working with Steve Kuhn or whoever I'm working with. If we're connecting, it's the same feeling if I'm teaching. I have that same desire and that same thrill that I get, you know. And uh, the one thing I don't like to do is I don't like to teach the same day I sing, because emotionally, I'm wrung out from teaching, you know. I don't know if that makes sense but...

Brown: It absolutely does.

Jordan: Does it?

Brown: Oh, yeah.

Jordan: So you guys, you guys are, are musicians. You know what I'm talking about. So...

Brown: Well, again, I'm also... I'm actually a professor but... [laughs] So I mean, ours is all curriculum and that.

Jordan: Yeah, yeah.

Brown: But this concept of, of having a collective group and then being able to individually address a person's, you know...

Jordan: Yes.

Brown: ...their issues and, and still be very positive and be very nurturing at the same time trying to cultivate a sensitivity...

Jordan: Yeah.

Brown: That is a fine art.

Jordan: Yeah.

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Brown: And, and, and the more you can help share what, what goes on, how that process works for you... If you, let's say you've got somebody who's all heart, a lot of enthusiasm but is, that's not, not tone deaf, but you know, is really just not able to stay on pitch.

Jordan: Pitch problems. Yeah, pitch problems.

Brown: Yeah, pitch problems. How, how do you negotiate that? How are you able to still encourage [inaudible/overlapping]?

Jordan: Well... I say go to a voice teacher. I'm not a voice teacher, you know. And uh, that... one of my things is go to a voice teacher and see if there can't be some kinda exercises that you can take that keep your pitch together. 'Cause I know I have had singers whose pitch is... and, you know, but I don't make it ultra obvious in front of everybody. And I do it in a very loving, nurturing way, because you have to... I don't know about instrumentalists, but I know singers are very sensitive. And the minute that they feel threatened or they're not doing good or nobody digs them, and I know that feeling from a kid, then they lose all their confidence. I don't want them to stop singing like I did in Pennsylvania when they made fun of me. I don't want them... I don't want it to go there. So I try to bring that... and I tell them stories about what it was like, you know. And, and don't do that to yourself. You want, do you really want to sing? If you really want to sing jazz you will, but you have to dedicate your life to it. It will not pay your bills always, okay. It will not pay money-wise. Maybe eventually. But what it does... the feeling that you get when you're connecting with another musician, and it's happening, or just doing it, money can't buy that. You... there's no amount of money that could buy that. No way. So that's basically... It's encouragement but it's also picking repertoire sometimes. 'Cause sometimes they don't know, you know, and they say, "Could you give me ideas?" And I do, you know. And I have a lot of great charts that Cameron writes up for me. I mean, I pay him for them, you know, 'cause he's, he does copy... he does that copying. He's wonderful. And everything is there. It's not an arrangement, but everything they need is there. And I use that as a, uh, as a sample. I say, "Look at this. What's on here?" First of all, your name's on here. The name of the tune's on here. The composers are underneath. The melody notes, the chord changes and the lyrics. And I always put endings in. I work out endings with Cam. But I don't put intros in. I say, you know... And then I always let them know. Counting, I say we're gonna have... we're gonna have a, a few, a half-hour or so on intros. And I go through what a two-bar intro, four-bar intro, eight-bar intro, vamp 'til ready, you know. Vamp out. Tag ending. We go through all that stuff so they know. And I spend time with that. And I make them learn how to talk down the tune. It's like, I used to get up in Detroit. I remember one time with Tommy Flanagan. I was quite young. I don't remember where we were. But I wanted to do If You Could See Me Now. And he said, uh, "What key?" I said, "I, I don't know." [laughs] And he, do he played it in the original, and I couldn't sing it in that. I mean, I learned my lessons the hard way. So I'm trying to teach them that they don't have to go through that. Or I want to do, uh, Crazy Rhythm. "What tempo?" "I don't know." [laughs] Buh-buh-buh-buh-buh. [laughs] You know, just to tease me. But I learned from that. So we go through timing, how to count time, how to talk down a tune. I say how, "Here's how you talk down a tune. I want an eight-bar intro. I want to have two choruses. I like a piano solo on the first half of the second chorus with a tag ending. And last thing you do is count the time. 'Cause if you count the time before, they'll forget it. And make sure they all hear you, if you have a rhythm section." So it's stuff

like that, you know. And they're very appreciative and, and they really, they really enjoy that. They really get something out of that. I've had many, many letters and cards and thank you notes. Not to brag, but I'm just saying, it must work, whatever I'm doing. I don't know. But it must work. I'm teaching them how I learned it and I had to fall on my face to know what I wanted, you know. And I had to. I took a lot of, oh, falls. Heavy falls. Not knowing how to talk down a tune or what I wanted. And the reason you put the composer's names down there, even if you don't talk about... Well, if it's a jazz musician who's written something, I will say, I will usually say, "This was written by Tom Harrell or whoever." But uh, the main reason in putting down... [clears throat] excuse me... excuse me. The main reason is... [coughs] Let me take a drink of this.

Brown: Sure.

Jordan: Can that be cut out?

Brown: Sure.

Jordan: Okay. The main reason I do, um... the main reason I let them know this is that... if, if they do a TV show or a radio show somewhere, are you gonna remember who the composers were? And you're doing like ten or twelve or fifteen tunes? I don't think so. If you have the composer on your sheet music, underneath the title, there's no problem. 'Cause I know from the shows, the TV shows or the radio, uh, sessions that I do, they bring out a thing, especially in Europe. They want to know who wrote the tune, you know. And so, it's there. It doesn't take me, "Oh, my God, who wrote it?" Or "You guys better go look it up on whatever," you know. I don't have to do that 'cause Cam already puts that in for me. So it's, it's a tremendous help. And it's worth every penny. And I never ever carry my originals. I keep the originals now in two places. I'm so paranoid. I keep a set upstate and I keep a set here, because I was going down working one time with Roswell Rudd, who I used to sing with. Love Roswell. [laughs] And I was going down to Seventh Avenue South or somewhere down there... St. James Infirmary. It didn't last very long. But I was going down there to work with him and I got in a taxi and I had some drinks and I was late. I got in the taxi. I got to the gig and paid the cab driver and realized as soon as I got on the sidewalk and he took off, I left my music in the cab. All of it. All of it. So you know, that took a long time to go back and get that all redone again. I don't know if I had Cameron then or not. I don't think so. I'm sure he's glad. [laughs]

Brown, C.: That's where we met.

Jordan: Yes.

Brown, C.: St. James Infirmary.

Jordan: Yes, that's right.

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Brown, C.: It might have been.

Jordan: I think so. Yeah. So that's... So I learned a big lesson. And I tell the kids that story, too. Whether you're drinking or not, I mean, you know. Uh... don't ever carry all your originals with you. Don't ever be in such a hurry. Keep them stashed away. If you have to put them in a safety deposit box, put them somewhere so... And of course, since Cameron does all of my copying work now, he has copies of them so... I'm covered in three directions. [laughs] Very important.

Brown: I wanted to ask you some questions about, um, earlier when you were mentioning scat singing, you mentioned... I was wondering if there are any other, um, singers, vocalists that you bring up during the course of your workshops.

Jordan: Yes. Abbey Lincoln. You know, Abbey Lincoln was, is, was a great singer and a great, great songwriter. I mean, her tunes are incredible. But did she scat? No. She did not scat. Now, I heard a tape, a cassette tape, years ago of a private party, and I don't remember who gave me this tape. Unfortunately, it also burned in my fire, when I had my house burn down. Billie at a party, and they said, "Scat, Billie." And Billie said, "Eh, well..." you know. And she scatted and it was amazing. [laughs] It was amazing. But that doesn't mean you can't do it. But if you're not comfortable then you don't do it. And obviously, I guess Billie wasn't comfortable doing that. I mean, Ella Fitzgerald sorta had the line on that so it could have been... whatever, you know. But Billie was Billie. But I was shocked, you know. But it's just... she just obviously didn't want to do it. I wish I could find the guy who gave me that tape. He said, "I want you to hear something." I couldn't believe it. It was a cassette. I don't know who that guy was. [laughs] Anyway...

Brown: Maybe we need to get a hold of Larry Applebaum or somebody like that.

Jordan: [laughs]

Brown: [Either Arch Arbitz?].

Jordan: I'd like to also get...

Brown: Or maybe Dan Morgenstern might know.

Jordan: He might.

Brown: We're gonna go see him on Friday. We'll ask.

Jordan: Ask him if he knows any photographers during those late, late, late forties or early fifties. If he knew any... I wish I knew who those photographers were. Virginia would know but she's, she's not too well right now so, um...

Brown: Well, let's talk about your stylistic breadth. I mean, you know, singing bebop, but then George kinda takes you into the stratosphere funk.

Jordan: [laughs]

Brown: And then you're working with Roswell Rudd. So you seem to be comfortable... I mean, for the sake of discussion, we as jazz musicians don't really want to put labels and...

Jordan: Yes, exactly.

Brown: [inaudible/overlapping] of demarcations but...

Jordan: Yeah.

Brown: But Roswell Rudd is not an inside player, known as an inside player. Nor is George really...

Jordan: Exactly.

Brown: So you seem to be able to go in and out, if we can use those, that as the vernacular. So working with Roswell or... and we can come back and talk about that specifically, but how do you feel about stylistically being able to go in and out?

Jordan: I don't even think of style. I just think of how I feel and if I like the music and if I like, if I like the lyrics or if, if I just, if I'm moved by... See, I'm different from most singers. They listen for the lyrics first, that's what they listen to first. I'm the total opposite. I listen to the melody first. 'Cause if it's not a good melody and it doesn't move me and I don't feel it can go anywhere, I don't, I don't want to do the tune. You could have tremendous lyrics, but with lyrics, you can change them. Well, if you have to be careful if you record them, though, nowadays.

Brown: That's right.

Jordan: So...

Brown: And because you're a vocalist and because we, everyone in this room loves Billie Holiday, can you talk about Lady in Satin?

Jordan: Oh, I loved that. Oh, my God, I loved that. That was my favorite Billie... The one thing about Billie Holiday that I never realized is, she was such a subtle improviser that most people didn't know that. And I'm one. And then I got a couple of tunes—the regular old sheet music and, and picked out the melody notes and said, “Wait a minute. This is wrong.” And then

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I said, "Oh, that Billie." She improvised... she improvised so that you would... you can... some, like when Sarah improvised, you know, the way with that incredible voice she had, I mean, whoa... But with Billie it was so subtle, I swore that's the way the tune went. Not so. [laughs] Not so at all. And when I heard Lady in Satin, a lot of... at that time when that came out, I heard a lot of remarks about, "Oh, she's lost her voice and..." I said, "God, don't they get to the heart of this woman?" I mean, this woman's emo-- This is the, the most emotional, and she's always been heavy and emotional, but this is the most emotional... I felt like it was a parting gift. To me, anyway, when I heard Lady in Satin. I never thought of it as, oh, she doesn't have any voice anymore. What does that got to do with jazz? Then go do opera. You know? We're talking about, uh, feelings, you know, and life. For me, that's what, what I hear in Billie. Her life... she, her whole life comes out when she sings. Doesn't matter whether it's an up-tempo or a ballad or whatever, you know. Her whole life is there. It's there and you can feel it and hear it. I'm not listening to, if a note cracks, you know. I'm listening to how she sings that note when it cracks, you know. And that... I mean, I, I get chills talking about Billie. And Bird, too, you know.

Brown: You Don't Know What Love Is. Anytime I just think of the title...

Jordan: Oh, yeah.

Brown: I just get goose-bumps.

Jordan: Yes, absolutely.

Brown: It's just pure heart and soul.

Jordan: Nobody sang like Billie, you know. And nobody, to me, except Skeeter, scatted like Ella Fitzgerald. But in the female department, nobody like her. I tell ya, I heard Ella doing Lady Be Good when I was a kid, and now I do Lady Be Good. Cam will tell ya. I do it as a, as a walking ballad. And then the second chorus I improvise on how... I turned... I heard this on the radio in Detroit as a youngster, you know, I'm a teenager, and I said, "Oh, my God, I gotta do that," you know. And I don't know, I don't even know if I knew Skeeter and Mitch yet. I might have. I probably did. But that turned me on to scating, you know. And I said, "Oh, I'm gonna go get that record and learn how to do that." Are you kidding? Forget it. And that's what I sing about when I do the tribute to, to Ella. So we're talking about scat singing and Sarah with this incredibly gorgeous voice, and you know, wonderful improvising. And Lady Day, you know, but my choice has always been Lady. I loved all the other ones, too, but I love Lady Day, you know. She, she did it for me. I think most of... I bet she would be shocked how many people love her and miss her, if she were alive today. And how many people have gotten something from her most beautiful music, you know, it's... She left it. And Lady in Satin is one of the top ones, man. It is the top for me.

Brown: Whatever happened to Mitch and, and...

Jordan: Well, Skeeter died. He was working in a, a home for, uh, kids that were addicted to alcohol and drugs. And Mitch went blind. Mitch had, did a beautiful painting of Frank Foster and me. I often wanted to get, you know, to get a copy of that or a picture of that painting. It

was beautiful. But Mitch is still alive, but as I said, he doesn't see anymore. And uh, Willie's still alive. He looks like he did sixty years ago, you know. He looks sixty, sixty-five years ago, he looks the same. And he's, uh... and uh, you know. So a couple of them still there. We just lost Frank so, you know...

Brown: When you talk about your, your struggles with alcoholism and you, and you pride yourself on, on being clean and sober now.

Jordan: Yes.

Brown: So what precipitated your [inaudible/overlapping]?

Jordan: Oh, oh, oh. Spiritual awakening. I went on a dry drunk for eight years and never went back to alcohol again, but I started getting into rich people's drug, which I thought is not habit-forming. Not at all. Let's snort a little cocaine. Why, of course not. You know. And it takes the place because I'm, my drug of choice was alcohol always. But ah, was I kidding? Oh, my God... I was not an everyday drinker and I was not an everyday cocaine snorting person, but when I started, I couldn't stop. Okay? So, uh, I was coming out of a stupor, and uh, I was half asleep and this voice came to me. Not a voice voice, but a very spiritual kinda like "waah." "I gave you a gift and if you don't take care of it, I'm going to take it away and give it to somebody else." Man, I... I jumped up and I said, "Oh, my God. Where did that come from?" you know. I called up AA and I told them that I had hadn't drank in eight years, but I didn't go to AA. And I remember my first meeting when I went and they said, "Oh, I'm sure everybody's gonna want to know how you did that." When they left, nobody said a word. "Here. Here's my number. Call me when you need to talk." [laughs] But um, I shouldn't... I am not mentioning any names, but I am in a very special program and it was, it's been a beautiful gift that was given to me. But uh, that, that spiritual awakening that they taught... not everybody gets them, you know, but, but I had to have a spiritual awakening, and, and that happened to me. I never drank and I certainly didn't use drugs when my daughter was little. Never. But when she got a little bit older, I started drinking a little bit, you know, and uh, you know, and I'm, I'm sorry about that. But it is a cunning, baffling, powerful disease. Any of these drugs, 'cause you get nowhere. I try to tell the kids that, too, when I teach. Not to preach a sermon about it, but I say it in, in passing, you know. You might think you're gonna sound better, which I did, but you're not. Go listen to yourself back if you decide you want to get high and you want to sing while you're high. Listen to yourself back. You'll be in for a shock and a surprise. [laughs] So anyway, that spiritual awakening and I went and I got into this wonderful program I'm in and it saved my life. And I'm... I'll, I'll be in this program and stick with it until I die, 'cause I want to give back now. You got to... in order to keep it, you have to give it away so, you know... So it's, it's wonderful. And it's helped me so many, it's helped me out of so many jams like stress and, you know, all this whole thing up where my house is upstate. This whole town it's, you know... going and talking about it and it makes it a lot easier than, you know, doing it... Why would you... Oh, this is what they told me when I called them. She said, "Why, why would you want to do it on

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your own?" when I told her I hadn't drank in eight years on my own. "Why would you want to do it on your own when we're here to help you?" And I said, "Yeah, that makes sense." [laughs] You know, so... I'm one of the fortunate ones, so I'm, I'm really very happy about that. It's really changed my life. I wouldn't be here.

Brown: Yeah. We want you here. A few minutes ago, we mention Roswell Rudd...

Jordan: Oh.

Brown: ...and you picked it up. So let's talk about Roswell. [laughs] And playing with a trombonist instead of a bassist. [laughs]

Jordan: Well... Yeah, I did a, I did a trombone and, and voice thing with him. That, that was his idea. Again, it was like George Russell: "Sing." "Well, who's playing?" [laughs] So uh, but I was sorta used to it after Sunshine, so I said, "Yeah, yeah, okay." But Roswell Rudd, the shocking thing about... not shocking but surprisingly thing about Roswell Rudd... a lot of people don't know this. Roswell Rudd plays all styles of music and plays them... and they're excellent the way he plays it. He does Dixieland, you know. He does bebop. He does free. I mean, Roswell? And one of the most beautiful human beings you'd ever want to meet. Always at the same level. Always here. I don't know. Maybe he goes through a lot of stuff underneath but oh, he's so laid back and so... And I love working with him. He's so much fun. Did you ever that tune he wrote? [singing] "Suh blah blah buh sibi, say in say da, say blay..." or something like that. I used to do that with him. I said, "Where'd you ever get this tune from?" He said, "When I was driving a taxicab. The, the sound of the cab, the motor... buh, buh dah, buh da buh da buh da buh da buh da. Great. So he calls it Suh blah blah buh sibi, say in say da, say blah... uh, suh blah suh blaaay... [laughs] Roswell, yeah. I love Roswell.

Brown: Yeah, well, I know that in the past few years, he's also gotten into world music and he's doing...

Jordan: Oh, yes. Now he's doing that. I mean...

Brown: Yeah. So he's...

Jordan: There's not, no stopping this guy. But if you called him for any of those musics, hired him for any of those musics, he'd come out and he'd be wailing on 'em because he knows them all. A lot of people don't know that about Roswell. I mean, Cameron knows it, I'm sure. But uh... he's a bebopper, man. He can play bebop like you wouldn't believe. And Dixieland.

Brown: A tailgater.

Jordan: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Uh-huh.

Brown: Well, you mentioned Don Cherry earlier. [inaudible/overlapping].

Jordan: Aaahhh... I love him.

Brown: [laughs] [inaudible/overlapping] quite [inaudible/overlapping].

Jordan: Well, Don Cherry is born the same day as I am, except there was ten years difference in our... I'm ten years older than him. And um, I'm... I don't remember how I met Don. I don't remember how I met him. But I know that Cameron's always been after me to write lyrics to like, uh, Don, you know. Well, Don Cherry got me... he was still alive when I wrote lyrics. No, I didn't write lyrics. He was still alive when he asked me to write some lyrics for Art Deco. 'Cause that's one more one, one of his compositions that's a little bit more in, you know. They're all beautiful, though. I've since, also, gotten to love him the way I do Monk, you know. I thought he was totally out there, but he really isn't, you know. Of course, he's out. But then so am I. [laughs] I realized I'm out, you know. [laughs] Out in some ways. But um, I remember we were doing this jazz opera with a wonderful musician who has a big band in, in Switzerland. He's Swiss, Swiss German—George Gruntz. And he was doing jazz operas. So the first one he did was called Money, and it was Amiri Baraka's poetry. And we did this at the La Mama Theater years ago. And uh, he asked me to do this, one of the leads, and I said, "Oh no, I can't do that." So I gave him other singers to call. He said, "No, I don't want them. I want you. You can do this." I said, "No, I can't. I do not know how to act." He said, "Yes, you do." So I did it, and I loved it, you know. So that one didn't go very far because, I don't know, it just didn't take off. But then, he did, uh, in Hamburg, he had a commission to do this opera called Cosmopolitan Greetings, which, with the poetry of Alan Ginsburg. So Mark was on it—Mark Murphy, myself, Dee Dee Bridgewater and Don Cherry. And Howard Johnson, you know. So he had all of... George Gruntz had a way with really knowing who he wanted, and um, he had all of us come over and we rehearsed this jazz opera, and uh, I really got to know Don Cherry then. I mean, he'd come, he'd come to the gig on his bicycle. [laughs] I don't know where he got a bicycle over in Germany, you know. But uh, and he'd always have these great outfits, you know. Nobody... everybody's, "Phew." Turned around and looking. I think, I heard a story one time he went into a little village in Europe to get something, and the lady was so shocked, she almost passed out. She was... you know. 'Cause of what he had on, you know. Sweetheart. So he said to me... he was playing this tune. He said, "Sheila, this is my tune. A tune of my called Art Deco. How would you like to write some lyrics?" I said, "Oh, I don't think I could do that, Don." But I said, "Yeah," you know, but I never did. He said, "I wrote it for Billie Holiday and then Stuff Smith." I said, "Oh." So I thought, well, you know, what am I'm gonna... I mean... so many beautiful songs about Billie Holiday. And I'm not that familiar with Stuff Smith. I'd be the first to admit it, you know, I'm not saying... he's a wonderful musician, but I'm not familiar with his music the same way I was with the bebop, you know, Charlie Parker. So uh, he would play it on the piano at every rehearsal, and he'd... "No, no, I can't." After he died, and Cameron can vouch for this... After he died, I was walking down my road upstate, and I started singing this tune, and it was like the lyrics came like that. It was unreal. And I call that Art of Don, because it's Art Deco but it was the Art of Don, so it's dedicated to Don Cherry. And it's all about him. And the way he walked, you know, and the way he played. And it's such a beautiful

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spirit. He was, he's another, he's another gem. Gem of a musician and as a human being. Just absolutely beautiful. So... Don Cherry.

Brown: Don Cherry. Uh, well, you there was a long association that helped bring your name to maybe a second generation after the sixties into the late seventies, early eighties when you teamed up with Harvey, Harvey S. Talk a little bit, little bit about that, that, how that came to be.

Jordan: Yeah. I'm not gonna go into detail about that because, you know, we talked about it a little bit off-camera. So I'm just gonna say that, uh, I... for some reason, I got hooked on the bass a long time ago. I heard it. Now maybe in another life I was a bass player. I don't know. But I loved the bass. I love singing with the bass. And I used to sing with Swallow every chance I got at the Page Three to try out some things. Of course, the piano player would get all bent out of shape. But uh, I was with Steve Kuhn's group. I recorded several things on ECM with Steve Kuhn, his music, and also a live, which Playground was on. And then, uh, I also was on a Steve Swallow recording of Robert Creeley poetry called Home. I don't know if you've ever heard that. You would it. It's absolutely beautiful poems by Robert Creeley and Swallow's music. So I, so I, I recorded with Kuhn on ECM and I recorded with, with Swallow on ECM. Now when, when Kuhn had his first trio that I was involved with, he asked me to be part of the group for some reason. I don't know. We were friends but I don't, you know, obviously he thought I could add something to it. So it was, uh, Kuhn, Steve Kuhn, Bob Moses, who I love... talk about a genius, man. [laughs]

Brown: Well, talk about it, please.

Jordan: No, he's just... I don't know. He's... I don't know where he's from but he's from, you know. And he's just an absolute genius, as far as I'm concerned. Bob Moses... I love Bob Moses. I love his playing. He's so creative. So it was Kuhn, me, Moses, uh, and Harvey, who was Swartz at the time. He's now Harvey S. And in the beginning it was Steve Slagle. So there were five of us. And so, eventually, the guy that was sort of booking Kuhn said, "I don't think we need saxophone. You got Sheila. I think you should keep Sheila." So I, I liked his quirky tunes. I loved his tunes. So I started singing his tunes. And so, that's what we recorded on ECM. One of the recordings. The other one was a live sing from Fat Tuesdays with a lot of different tunes. But anyway, uh, that's when I... Harvey started saying, uh... he said, "You like doing the bass." I said, "Listen, I'm gonna ask you something and you can say no." I said, "I love... I would love to work out a bass and voice duo. It's been on my... in my head and in my heart since the early fifties," you know, and of course it was Mingus and then Peter Ind, of course. And uh, he said, "Yeah. But we'll have to rehearse." I said, "Of course, we're gonna have to rehearse." You know, "Of course we'll rehearse." So he was living in a loft in the twenties, not far from where I am here. So I started going over there and we started working out ideas and working out tunes, and uh, he was very instrumental in a lot of the things that I'd worked out. But in the meantime, uh, he wanted to go out after about... oh, I don't know, maybe it was eighteen years, I'm not quite sure. But he wanted to go out and work on his own music, and so he, he didn't have time for the bass and voice anymore. Or not that he didn't have time. He just wanted to ded-- and I understand that. So I said, "Well, great." But I said, "You know, this has been my baby since 1950, '51, whatever," I said. "So I'm going to be doing this... I'm

gonna ask somebody else,” and I thought immediately of Cameron ‘cause says no. But I thought he was the first one I asked to do this, before Harvey. Now...

Brown, C.: Oh, you did.

Jordan: Is that right?

Brown, C.: You did. I didn’t feel like I was ready.

Jordan: Yeah. But I had asked... I thought I had asked him. And uh, and then I said, “Well, you know...” ‘cause I love Cameron. I hope he doesn’t hear me saying this. ‘Cause I...

Brown: We’ll try to keep it from him.

Jordan: Yeah. Because he’s a beautiful human being, he’s a beautiful musician, and he’s so caring, you know, and I don’t get that with a lot of musicians. He really is caring, and I love that. So uh, when Harvey, you know, wanted to go out and do his, I said, “Oh, yeah, that’s cool. Okay,” you know. And uh, I was upset. I’m not gonna lie. Of course I was upset. You know, I devoted a lot of years to this. And but we had worked out the ideas together. And of course, Cameron and I have since taken those ideas and stretched them further out or worked on our own little things, too. So um, you know, I give Harvey credit for that, you know, for being with me and working out these ideas. And it’s just something that I thought would take off. I remember one time I was up in Ottawa doing the jazz festival in a club. It was packed. And we were doing the bass and voice. Very quiet. We turn off the fans and everything because any little thing can mess with the pitch, the intonation, you know. So all of a sudden, we finish a tune and this guy comes in the door and yells out: “Where’s the piano? Where is the drums?” like that, screaming. I said, “Oh, my God.” I said, “In my head, man. It’s in my head,” you know. Do you know? He stayed. [laughs] He stayed and he never said another word. I don’t know whether he liked it or not, but I no one thing—he didn’t leave.

Brown: But he stayed.

Jordan: He stayed, right? So, but it’s been, it’s been a thing of mine for a long time. I mean, since the fifties. And I just really felt it could work, and boy, you see a lot of singers now are trying it. Maybe not whole programs but like Cameron and I, we can do like two full sets and have leftovers. [laughs]

Brown, C.: We could four or five full sets at this point.

Jordan: Yeah. [laughs] So, and uh, and, you know. And he’s wonderful, you know. When we’re not, both not real real busy, we try to get together at least once a week or every couple of weeks, you know. Lately, it’s been kind of difficult but, you know, we work out things. We’re

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working out new tunes and new ideas, you know. But we keep the old ones in there 'cause we have whole little programs, you know. Like a dedication to Bird and Fats Waller, you know. And then we have a dedication to Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers—all dance tunes, you know.

Brown: Either of you do any dancing?

Jordan: Well, I used to dance when I was a kid. I loved to dance.

Brown: But I mean in the show nowadays now?

Jordan: Oh, no, no, no. He does sometimes. I see his foot jumping up in the air.

Brown: Spin the bass. [laughs]

Jordan: No, his, his foot goes up in the air. He'll go like that. And I tell him. "Are you dancing?" Okay.

Brown: A little choreography. [laughs]

Jordan: Yeah. And then what else do we do? We do the thing for Miles, a dedication to Miles. And uh...

Brown, C.: Prez and Billy.

Jordan: Prez and Billy. Yeah. Suite for Prez and Billy. And uh, Duke Ellington we do, you know. Uh...

Brown, C.: And a whole thing just for Bird.

Jordan: Yeah. Well, oh, well, the whole, yeah. Of course. So, you know, and I wrote some lyrics to Charlie Parker's Quasimodo. And then I wrote, uh, an intro-- a little thing in the front of it based on the same chord changes—Embraceable You, which I call The Bird, you know. And that sets up... or you could do it alone without doing Quasimodo. Then I sing Quasimodo about how I felt growing up as a kid. And hearing Charlie Parker for the first time. That's what the, the lyrics are about, you know. So this... and I see a lot... and I encourage. Like sometimes at the workshops, I'll say, "Why don't you try to do... Why don't you try to do with..." "Oh, no, no." I said, "Don't knock it until you try it," you know. And so they try it and yeah. Some of them, you know, they're hippin'. It's been, I've been hearing there are bass and voice duos out there happening now, and I feel very good about that. But boy, you know, couldn't have told anybody that years ago. They didn't want to hear, what? You know, like that guy: "Where's the piano? Where's the drums?" you know. [laughs] Nah, it's a great way to sing and play the bass.

Brown: Earlier, you've referenced a fire in your house which cost you a lot of losses.

Jordan: Oh. Oh.

Brown: And then recently with the whole Hurricane Irene.

Jordan: Yeah.

Brown: It's been... any thoughts about that?

Jordan: Well...

Brown: Or [inaudible/overlapping]...

Jordan: Well, I have one thing to say about that, and you know, it's that I do believe in a higher power, so there is a reason for everything. When I had my old house, I was doing George Gruntz's operas, which I sort of got off track for a minute there but...

Brown: But you could come back to it.

Jordan: Yeah. But those operas... I made a... I made a nice salary, and I was able to buy my original house with the land up there with five point, almost six acres. And three are across the road, so I don't have somebody putting up a trailer camp, and then up where I am, you know. And I'm up on top of the mountain and I love it, but I am secluded, you know. Uh, when that house burned down, I was on tour with Harvey in Canada doing the bass and voice tour. And I came back and uh, my friend said, "Don't go anywhere," 'cause I was getting ready to have a few days off, maybe go up to my house, and then I had a tour in London with George Gruntz, and then from London into Germany and a few other places—Switzerland, you know. So uh, so I said, "What could that all be about?" So they came over, and all of a... My daughter was living in California at the time, and she was right behind them. And I said, "Wait a minute, what's going on here?" And my friend said, "Sit down." I said, "Why?" And she's, "Well, I have something to tell you." I said, "What? Did somebody steal my car?" "No." And she said, "Your house burned down." I said, "Oh, my God." And I was in shock. I said, "Oh, my God. Really?" But I still went to London. [laughs] I didn't go up to see it, but I went to London. I did the tour with George Gruntz. I wasn't about to give up the music 'cause I had now... you know, I needed to sing. And uh, when I came back, I went up there and uh, we got as far as just before the house, 'cause it's up on a mountain. My friends took me up and I said, uh, "I can't drive. Can you drive the rest of the way?" And so we went up there. I had planted a rose bush years ago, when I first got the house in '81. Never bloomed. Never. And I, and I had, used to buy these cards from the veterans. They make up birthday cards and thank you cards and all of these. Two things happened that day that made me know that everything was gonna be all right. there was one wall left hanging, and there was a blouse of mine hanging. But all the pictures were in that room where the, the wall was still. So all those pictures got saved. They're... you know, they're scorched but they're, they're still there. I mean, I still have them in the new house. And also, I was insured. Fire insurance, which was great. But what happened. I said to my friends, these two guys that lived down the road. I said, "What is that laying on there on top of

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all that burnt up charcoal pile over there?” He said, “I don’t know. Do you want it?” I said, “Well, yeah, it’s like it’s... so it looks... what is it? It’s white. It looks white.” And he said, “Yeah. Well, the contrast between, you know, the coals, the black coals and... So he... I said, “Oh, for God’s sake, be careful.” ‘Cause this house was a 150 years old and had huge beams. So he was very careful, went over, and he picked that thing up and he brought it back to me, and I’m looking at this huge red rose that I never got again. Just one time. Huge. He gave me this piece of paper, this thing. You know what it was? It said, “In deepest sympathy.” I said, “I’m gonna open this up and if this says God, I’m outta here.” [laughs] Is that out? The one card that didn’t burn was a sympathy card laying on a pile like that, and I saw it. Between that and the rose. And I said, “Everything’s gonna be all right.” That was my higher power telling me that everything’s gonna be all right.

Brown: Divine intervention again.

Jordan: Yeah.

Brown: Well, I want to just ask about the documentary film—Sheila Jordan: In the Voice of A Woman.

Jordan: Yeah.

Brown: How did that come about? And were you happy with the way, the way it turned out?

Jordan: Well, I’m not good at... I’m not, I’m not good at listening back to myself, you know, or seeing myself back. It’s not one of my favorite things. So um, this woman, Cade Bursell, lovely woman, heard me sing up in Maine or Mass, all the way up there somewhere. I don’t remember where it was. And she came after the set was over, and I was leaving. She said, “Would you be interested in me doing a doc-- I’d love to do a documentary of you. You sound like you’ve had a pretty interesting life.” And I said, “Really? Oh, well, I don’t know,” you know, “it’s no big deal.” So that’s how it came about. So she got a grant to do the documentary. Then she got a... she put in about \$20,000 of her own to finish it so as far as it went. She went back to Pennsylvania. She filmed the coal mines. And uh, filmed me. I was 62 at the end. That’s twenty years ago. At the Green Mill in Chicago, where I work every year, once a year, with, for Dave Gemalo [?]. She came there and filmed that so... They went all the way back to Pennsylvania, can you imagine? And uh, just filmed different things. And interviews with different people. In fact, Virginia, who did this painting that I told you, I knew since Skeeter and Mitch. They interviewed her, too. She was on it. And um, Frank Foster was on it and uh, oh, just... My daughter was on it. So it’s, it’s just about, you know... And at the end, I, I sing this song with Harvey that I recorded called The Crossing, and The Crossing is a composition I wrote for my, my sobriety. And I sing it in, at the end. And, and when I sing it in a club, I sing it... I, I’m very open about what I had... my disease, my... what I had and how there is hope and there is help if you want it. I don’t go into detail. But I wrote the... And then I sing The Crossing. And it’s all about, you know, whatever, you know, whatever your hang-up is or it’s... in my case, it was alcohol and drugs, and I call it The Crossing. And it’s, as the, as the credits roll, that’s me and Harvey playing and singing The Crossing. And uh, I don’t even remember it that much, but a lot of people really liked it. It never went anywhere, unfortunately. Nobody picked it up.

So... but I thank Cade Bursell for that, because she spent a lot of money and I'm very grateful. And now she's given me the okay to use it wherever I want to use it, whether it's, you know, for the NEA, for the whole thing, you know. So we'll see.

Brown: Speaking of the NEA, you mentioned [inaudible/overlapping].

Jordan: Oh, my God. I don't know. Is there time?

Brown: Do you want to put that on a different tape?

Male: Yeah, 'cause there's... well, there's three minutes left on this.

Jordan: Oh, I don't think this'll take more. And if it does, you can just cut it off.

Male: Okay, go ahead.

Jordan: Well, speaking with the NEA, I mean, I've heard of these Jazz Masters awards, but I never considered myself a jazz master really and still don't. So I'm coming in from Toronto, five days of teaching and a couple of concerts, I put my bag down, the phone rings. And I said, "Hello." And the guy says, "Uh, I want to speak to Sheila Jordan, Sheila Jordan." I said, "Yes, this is her." He said, "Are you Sheila Jordan?" I said, "Yeah, what do you want?" He said, "My name is Wayne Brown from the National Endowment for the Arts, and I just wanted to tell you that you are to receive the Jazz Masters award, which is the highest honor in jazz music in America." I said, "What?" I said, "Oh, my God, Wayne, I'm so sorry. I thought you were a telemarketing guy." 'Cause I was tired, you know. And he sounded... I mean, you know. If they ask you... they do that, you know. "Is this so and so and so?" And then they wait and, "Are you sure this is so and so and so?" you know, and then you wait. "Yeah." And so I said, "Okay." [laughs] I got impatient. I was tired. Oh, my God. I'll never forget that. I was so embarrassed. I said, "I'm so sorry." [laughs] And then I was in shock. I think I literally fell off that chair. I was so shocked. I said, "Are you kidding? You... I..." And I expected for the next three weeks, I expected at any time somebody's gonna call me and say that "We made a mistake." And I was gonna say, "Yeah, I figured that," you know. "Yeah, I figured that." I couldn't believe it, with all these great musicians out there. I was shocked. I'm in shock still. And it's not about the money. It's about that honor. They're gonna do it on January 10th at the Lincoln Center. What a shock. [laughs]

Brown: But Sheila, it's well deserved.

Jordan: Oh...

Brown: I mean, look at what you're... you're still giving back. You've got all that. You've talked about from Bird, from everything from life, and you're giving it back.

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Jordan: Well...

Brown: And you're doing it with style and with heart.

Jordan: Oh, thanks. Oh, thank you very much. Well, you know, as long as I don't start believing my own worse, I'll be okay, you know.

Brown: You're, you're...

Jordan: I just... it's all I want to do. I don't care, as I said, it doesn't matter whether I'm singing it or teaching it or supporting it. I mean, I don't want anything to happen to this music. It's too special. It's totally changed my life. Really totally changed it. What a gift.

Brown: You can't get any--

Jordan: These guys must be exhausted.

Males: We're on. We're on.

Brown: Today is August 30, 2011, and this is the continuation and, I believe, probably the final hour of the Jazz Oral History Interview with NEA Jazz Master Sheila Jordan.

Jordan: Ooh. [laughs]

Brown: And we are able to include now the bassist/composer/arranger Cameron Brown. Also, a Detroit native.

Jordan: Yeah.

Brown: And we have two of Detroit's finest here. And we just wanted to give them a chance to, to share their thoughts, their recollections and perhaps some of their, um, their memories about working together and about their hometown, if you want to take it away at any time. Or Sheila, did you want to begin with your forté?

Jordan: Well, there was one thing I wanted to say before we go on to Cameron and I and the bass and voice, which I'm glad he's gonna do this. It's great. Um, I wanted to say something about Billy Taylor, Dr. Taylor. Um, he used to say, "Don't call me doctor. I know you too long. Call me Billy." But I remember the first time I saw Billy Taylor was up at, uh, Mitton's After Hours in the early fifties. We would go to the clubs on the weekend and we would stay and they would close at four, hear the music. Then we'd get on the A Train and go up to Harlem to Mitton's After Hours. And all the cats were there. All the cats would come there. Everybody was sitting in. And this one guy walked in one night. First time I ever saw him, he was all decked out in a nice shirt and a nice jacket and a nice tie, and everybody else was like, you know. The guys are funky looking, to tell you the truth. And I said, "Wow, who's this dude?" you know. Well, not dude, that wasn't famous then. I said, "Who's this cat, all decked out like that?"

And it was Billy Taylor. And he was so nice. And Billy Taylor has become, uh, one of my favorite of the three—Bird, George Russell and Billy Taylor. And I have to mention Billy Taylor because he's been so instrumental in getting me the, um, Mary Lou Williams award, or any NPRs. He's always there for me. He always was trying to, uh, to see that I got known a little bit, you know. He was so good that way with concerts and just different awards and everything. And I never forgot that about him. He was so sweet. And I met him to really know him when I finally went up to Jazz in July to teach with Max, when Max was there and, and Dr. Billy Taylor and... And I told him about that time the first time I saw him at Mitton's After Hours. He, he laughed. [laughs] But he, he was a beautiful man. He was very instrumental in helping me very much, like George and like Bird, too, so I just wanted to mention that 'cause I love him... I loved him dearly and still do.

Brown: Well, I think we all owe a great debt to Billy. He was such an advocate. He was a great player. What happened that night when you saw him? Did he sit in and play, or did he, did he [inaudible/overlapping].

Jordan: Oh, yes. No, no, yes. He stood in. I don't remember who was playing, but uh, they were all there. About all of them were there. And uh, he did play. He did sit down and he did play, and I think at first people were a little like some of the cats were like, "Oh, man, who's this cat with his jacket, you know, sports jacket and the tie and the nice, clean shirt?" you know. But he was wonderful and he was a sweetheart. He was very sweet and very dear. But strong in his belief, and that's what I liked about him.

Brown: Well, you know, the Jazzmobile program.

Jordan: Yeah, absolutely.

Brown: And then he went to Kennedy Center.

Jordan: Yeah.

Brown: And him being a national advocate. Then he had Sunday Morning, the TV show...

Jordan: Yeah, yeah.

Brown: ...and he was featuring jazz. So he was really instrumental in getting jazz into the mainstream.

Jordan: He was... that he was. He was very... Well, he was very instrumental in a lot of the things that I got, you know. So he was in my corner.

Brown: Well, this is a gentleman who's in your corner right now.

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Jordan: This guy. Yeah. [laughs]

Brown: So how, when did you first hook up? I mean, what was the circumstances for you guys? 'Cause you've been together now for a while so...

Brown, C.: You mean in terms of bass and voice.

Brown: The bass and voice.

Jordan: Oh, yeah.

Brown: The bass and voice.

Brown, C.: Well, the bass and voice has been... I got to do a project for a Belgian cultural organization November of '97, I think, Sheila?

Jordan: I don't remember.

Brown, C.: So my memory is and what happened with that, and it was just sort of serendipitous. Some strange thing happened where they had, uh, something dropped out of the festival or they had a time slot in the festival that they needed to fill for some reason. I can't remember all the details of it. And they said, "Well, why don't you Sheila and do your duo?" which we had never ever done before. But so, my memory is that we kinda first hooked up as a... must have first kinda made a commitment as a duo in '96.

Jordan: Oh, yeah.

Brown, C.: Because what happened was, I got Sheila involved in this project with, with a great trumpet player, Dave Ballou, and my wonderful band leader at the time, Dewey Redman. And a young drummer, Leon Parker. That was going to be my band. And um, so I sorta knew about this a year in advance and it was well funded with pay for rehearsal and so on and so forth. So Sheila said, "Well, I know you want to do a bunch of really out stuff, so if we're gonna try to do that, you gotta come and rehearse with me a lot so I feel comfortable with it." So we were rehearsing pretty often.

Jordan: Once a week at least, right?

Brown, C.: Once a week, I think we were.

Jordan: Oh, yeah.

Brown, C.: That year. And then what we wound up doing was, we wound up doing a lot of rehearsing on prospective duo stuff, 'cause we were gonna start working as a duo. [laughs] And then that concert. Because we had David Baker there... that was the smartest thing I did on that whole project was get them to bring David Baker over to record it. And um, so since Dave was

there with all the equipment, we said, “Well, let’s record the duo concert, too.” And he recorded three concerts. They did three concerts in three different Belgian towns on three successive days. This was quite a, quite a thing to try to do. That was the festival. That’s how they set the festival up.

Jordan: Uh-huh.

Brown, C.: Anyway... and Sheila liked that concert we did, our first concert, so well that she asked Joe Fields to release it and he did, and it’s our first record.

Jordan: Yeah.

Brown, C.: [laughs]

Jordan: It was really nice. I really enjoyed it. ‘Cause I was just itching to do the bass and voice again after Harvey, you know, went on to do his own music. And I said, “I’m not giving this up.” And Cameron, who I had asked years ago, at the time, you know, he, he wasn’t ready to do it for whatever... he said, but you know, I thought he was. But that’s me. But uh...

Brown, C.: That was in the seventies.

Jordan: Yeah, well, here was a chance, you know.

Brown, C.: I hardly played the instrument.

Jordan: Oh, I don’t know. [laughs] I didn’t think so, but again, you know. So yeah, and it’s, uh... I get a lot of calls, but I push the bass and voice, too, but a lot of times now, I don’t have to push it. They already know about it. We’re doing a concert, uh, at the New York Society Library on the, on 79th Street on the 28th of September. And they specifically asked for the bass and voice. So we’re getting a lot of those things now, which is great.

Brown: Can you talk about your repertoire?

Jordan: [laughs]

Brown, C.: [laughs] I could show you. It’s over in the bag over there.

Jordan: [laughs]

Brown, C.: No, Sheila has amazing ideas about fitting certain things together and, and working on these medleys. It’s her million dollar ears, boy. You know, she does, uh, Blue Skies and sings

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the bridge up a half step. And then she sang me my line to get us modulated back to the original key in the last A section. [laughs]

Jordan: Oh. Did I? Okay. [laughs]

Brown, C.: Well, Sheila, how do we get back to... [laughs] You know. And um, I contribute stuff from time to time and...

Jordan: Yeah.

Brown, C.: It's just, um... it's a wide, wide range. I mean, the new stuff in the repertoire lately is, is Wouldn't It Be Lovely.

Jordan: Yeah.

Brown, C.: Sheila just had a thing for that. It's also... it turns out to be wonderful vehicle for scatting, I think. The changes on it just...

Jordan: Mm-hmm.

Brown, C.: You know... What else have we been doing?

Brown: Well, you talked about certain thematic, um, sets you had. Remember, you said something about...

Jordan: Oh, yeah, yeah. Yeah, we do. We have, we... I, well, these... some of these I had arranged with Harvey but what Cameron and I have done now is stretched them out even further. Added on to them. So as I said, we have the dance medley with all songs about dancing. Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, you know. And then we have the Bird... a Bird, uh, and Fats medley.

Brown, C.: Well, Fats and Bird, I think, I think I sorta contributed the idea of using...

Jordan: Yes, you did.

Brown: ...Bird's original intro...

Jordan: Right. You did.

Brown, C.: ...to scrapple underneath the head of Honeysuckle where it sorta doesn't really fit. But of course, Sheila's ears are so good, she could sing the melody through the little dissonance of that. Just a little, you know.

Jordan: Yeah.

Brown, C.: And then finally we come back to scrapple. So we're trying to, you know, do some... what do they call that? Uh, deceptive cadences. And then tie it all together in the...

Jordan: [laughs] Yeah.

Brown, C.: ...at the end.

Jordan: Then we do a free... We do a, a... sort of like an open thing where I do like a lot of just improv, almost Native American type, uh, feeling, singing. And we go... I wrote this little thing, uh, about musicians. [singing] There are so many beautiful musicians who have passed my way. And it goes on to, you know... I sing about it. And then we go into this whole thing about, uh, Billy and Prez. [singing] He named her Lady. She called him Prez. And then we do, uh, we do Billy's Don't Explain... No, we did, we don't do...

Brown, C.: We do Good Morning Heartache.

Jordan: Good Morning Heartache and...

Brown, C. But we open with, with Mingus's Goodbye Pork Pie Hat, which of course was dedicated to Prez.

Jordan: Yeah. So we have that thing—the Billy and, and Prez thing, you know. So that worked very well.

Brown, C.: But Sheila, Sheila's piece that she calls Morning Song, the one that she sang a little bit of. We've done, we've spun a lot of different medleys dedicated to, you know, different musicians.

Jordan: Jazz musicians. Uh-huh.

Brown, C.: Um, from that starting point where it could go a lot of different directions.

Jordan: Yeah.

Brown: It's, uh, Bird and Monk and, yeah.

Jordan: I always tell him, "Don't be shocked." Sometimes he'll go...

Brown, C.: I'm shocked. I'm always shocked.

Jordan: Like sometimes he'll go, "What's goin' on here?" And I always says, "Don't get shocked. Just if, when in doubt, lay out. It's okay. I know where I... I know what's happening

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‘cause an idea will come and he tries... you know, he’s cool. He, he’s trusts me. But at first, he’s like, ooo, where is she going with this one?’ [laughs] So it’s not really set. We have a, we have a beginning usually and an ending, I’d say. But in the middle, anything can happen, you know.

Brown, C.: Well, I think that’s been fun lately, as the band, as our relationship matures musically.

Jordan: Uh-huh.

Brown, C.: I mean, I think for me, for quite a while, it was feeling like there was a lot of, a lot of responsibility on my shoulders and...

Jordan: Yeah.

Brown, C.: ...to kinda keep everything glued together and...

Jordan: [laughs]

Brown, C.: ...now I’m kinda letting that go.

Jordan: Yeah. [laughs]

Brown, C.: And just trusting her more.

Jordan: Yeah.

Brown, C.: And just, uh, let’s be free. Let’s see what happens.

Jordan: Yeah. He...

Brown, C.: And it’s more fun in a way. I’d say [stammers].

Jordan: Yeah. Uh-huh.

Brown, C.: And so we’re more trusting of each other and, and of the repertoire.

Jordan: Yeah.

Brown, C.: And seeing where it takes us.

Jordan: I just think, uh, performing in general has come much easier for me, and I’m sure for Cameron, is because I’m not trying to prove anything, you know. Here it is and I don’t want it’s set so that, you know, I have an idea and I can’t try it out. ‘Cause sometimes I try it out and it, it fails miserably. But I let the people know it failed miserably in so many words with love and joy, and then they’re relaxed. ‘Cause you know, sometimes people get up like this. Oh, my God.

Are they gonna get out? How are they gonna out? And then I'd put them at ease. This is just anytime I'm singing. 'Cause I was in California in last February, just... Yeah, a year... Was it a year ago I sang? At Vitello's. And uh, I started singing, uh... I think I was singing Confirmation. And I was all going along fine and then all of sudden on the last chorus out, I started to sing and my throat when on me. It went [making sounds], you know. And I said, "Oh, man, what..." You know. But I thought, why am I... I did the whole night. This is an encore so... [laughs] it's over. But anyway, this is what I've been doing, and I'm famous for making up lyrics... make it up as you go along Jordan, they call me. And some, some critics call me "Sheila make it up as you go along Jordan." And I just started... my voice came back. I cleared my throat and my voice came back and I said... and I'm singing this. "Where were you? Oh, you decided to come back home again? Thanks a lot. Did you have a good time?" And it's all of the changes of Confirmation, as I'm going along, you know.

Brown, C.: Right, right.

Jordan: And of course, what happens with the audience? All of a sudden they're... you could see them go, phew." You know? And laughing.

Brown, C.: [laughs] Right.

Jordan: Because they... now, it used to be I would be the one that was so uptight about stuff like that. I'm sure Cameron's been through this, too.

Brown, C.: Oh, yeah.

Jordan: But, but um... you know... I don't... I'm, I'm not gonna get uptight about it anymore. I let them get uptight and then I show them how I get out of it. If I get out of it. [laughs]

Brown, C.: [laughs] Right.

Jordan: I don't say it's gonna work all the time, you know, but yeah. So that's one of the wonderful things about jazz, jazz music, is you can do that, you know. It's free music.

Brown: Do you have a, a steady gig here, or do you have some tours coming up?

Jordan: We have a... I picked 9/11 to do a concert in... somewhere I think in Woodstock.

Brown, C.: Woodstock. Woodstock.

Jordan: And uh, we're gonna do a bass and voice there. And then we have something on, as I said, the 28th. But we work pretty much. I mean...

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Brown, C.: We've been doin' a lot of stuff.

Jordan: Lots, yeah.

Brown, C.: We did this, we did the festival in, little festival in Crete in Greece at the end of June. And then...

Jordan: I don't know.

Brown, C.: What did we do?... we've done... we've been doing a few things.

Jordan: Yeah, we have. You know, actually I've been working. When I got laid off from my job when I was 58 years old, I cried. I was worried. How am I gonna support myself?

Brown, C.: The best thing that ever happened to you.

Jordan: And then a voice came to me and said, "You know what? Be careful what you pray for. You might get it." 'Cause I was praying, I wish I would start singing more now at this age. And so, Doyle Dane Bernbach gave me a year's severance pay and said, "And if it doesn't work out, you can always come back, but we're gonna be enlarged so you'll be a floater, which is like going from office to office when they need temporary help." So I went out there and I have never looked back. And I have worked more now... And every year it's getting a little bit more heavy. I mean, I'm already booked up into next year.

Brown, C.: Damn.

Jordan: You know, so it's amazing. And I'm very happy. But I always try to do the bass and voice as much as I can, 'cause I want it out there and, you know, Cameron's, uh, great around young people. You know, he's a great teacher. I've seen him work, and he teaches with his heart, you know. And uh, he's very open and we, we get along very well. He's like my kid brother, you know. He is like... Yeah, he's like that. So we have a nice... and respect. Respect is very important. And no egos. I mean, I would never get upset if he got... Just say, for example, if he got a bigger applause than I did, or we got somewhere and his name was bigger than mine. I'm not into that. I don't really care, you know. But it's that kind of thing. And he's the same way, which is important, which is more than I can say for a few other musicians, you know, that I've worked with. They really get very uptight about that. "Oh, it's gotta be equal billing. Bluh, uh, uh," you know, and... I'm not into that. But that's not to put them down. It's just the way they feel. But with Cameron, he feels like I do. So he's not into that, which is great.

Brown: Kindred spirits.

Jordan: Yes. Kindred spirits.

Brown, C.: Well, I think, I think, for me, I've been so thankful for the, for the experience of working with Sheila for many different reasons. I mean, um... you know, just on a technical

level, I think it's so challenging to do this. So it's been only strengthening for me as a bass player and as, as an improvising musician...

Jordan: Mm-hmm.

Brown, C.: ...because you're just naked out there. You gotta be the time, you gotta be in tune, and you, and even more than that, you gotta be sensitive to... Sheila's always talking about how we play out of the silence. It's such a beautiful concept. It actually hooks into spiritual stuff I've been trying to deal with as I get older, you know, of, of, uh, coming in and out of the silence.

Jordan: Yeah.

Brown, C.: And, and um... having the silence be a big part of the music in a way...

Jordan: Mm-hmm.

Brown, C.: ...which of course, people like Miles understood very well.

Jordan: Yeah. He's... yes, he did.

Brown, C.: And um... you know, so on so many different levels, it's been just a huge thrill for me. And then... but aside from that, this is not just a singer. This is Sheila Jordan. You know. [laughs]

Jordan: Oh, come on. [laughs] Back off.

Brown, C.: No, quite seriously. I mean, it's a...

Jordan: Well...

Brown, C.: It's a very special...

Jordan: I feel very grateful for, for all of the wonderful musicians I've worked with and uh, and the fact that Cameron and I finally got together, and he was ready to continue with me to do the bass and voice 'cause, you know, there's a lot of things. And he's, he has also encouraged me to do more writing, you know, and especially lyrics. So he got after me about this Remembrance. This Don Cherry tune. And I started writing something down and I said, "Oh, I don't like it. That's, that tune's hard, it's difficult.

Brown, C.: Beautiful. I'm copying it now [inaudible/overlapping].

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Jordan: But I, but, you know, and then I found them... I guess I still have them over there. I thought I didn't have them, but if found them one day when you were here. We were rehearsing.

Brown, C.: Yes.

Jordan: And I was reading them and I said, "Oh, man, these are pretty heavy lyrics."

Brown: Oh, yeah.

Jordan: Not to brag, but I thought... and then I doubted... I said, "Did you write those?" [laughs] I said, "Did you really write those?"

Brown, C.: You did.

Jordan: And then he got me to write some lyrics to, um, Dannie Richmond's...

Brown, C.: To a tune by Dannie called Soft Seas.

Jordan: Called Soft Seas.

Brown, C.: The calypso that Dannie wrote.

Jordan: And I wrote and, and...

Brown, C.: And she wrote some beautiful lyrics to commemorate Dannie.

Jordan: It has like an under thing. Yeah.

Brown, C.: Yeah.

Jordan: But you, you know, you could just take it going home again. But in my lyrics, what I saw when Cameron told me to think about writing some lyrics, I saw Dannie going back to his homeland to be buried or to, you know, bid his farewell to his loved ones. That's what I felt. Soft seas are taking me home again, back to the place where I left my next of kin. Your love has carried me through. No more will I roam. Soft seas take me back home to you. So, you know... So that just came like that. Boom. But at his encouragement. 'Cause had he not said anything, I wouldn't have done it.

Brown, C.: Well, that all, but see that came out of this project that I was working on.

Jordan: Right.

Brown, C.: Where, where at certain moments, Sheila looked at me and she said, "I think more of these songs need to have lyrics. I'm not just gonna scat through this whole record date." [laughs]

Jordan: Oh, did I? [inaudible] [laughs]

Brown, C.: So then we said, well...

Jordan: Write some. [laughs]

Brown, C.: Write some, lady. And then, and then I tried to write some.

Jordan: Yeah.

Brown, C.: And then Sheila said, "That's okay. Let me write 'em." [laughs]

Jordan: [laughs] I tried to do it in a nice way, you know. [laughs]

Brown, C.: You did it in a very nice way, yeah. [laughs]

Jordan: But like, it was the same thing with... well, I think... did you get me to do Don Cherry's Art Deco? How did I start doing that? But that was like all about...

Brown, C.: That, that might have come out of the same thing.

Jordan: It might have. It was all about Don.

Brown, C.: Because... No, but I'm saying it might have... the impetus from it might have come, 'cause we were gonna definitely do that tune on the... but I don't know.

Jordan: I don't remember. I don't remember.

Brown, C.: Because you didn't write them when Don was still alive.

Jordan: No, no. Because they didn't come to me then. They didn't come to me 'til after he passed away.

Brown, C.: He passed away the night before [?]....

Jordan: And I could just see the way he used to walk. He had such a lilt when he walked, you know.

Brown, C.: Yeah.

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Jordan: So yeah, it's... I mean, I'm not a composer of sorts. I mean, I, you know... I would... had I been able to be more, had more lessons and really learned all these techniques and to be a better piano player, then I'm sure I would be a composer, more of a composer.

Brown, C.: Right.

Jordan: But I like lyrics. But only when I feel that, you know, I can, I can work on them and they mean something now so... I'm happy with Dannie's tune and I'm happy with, uh, Don's tune, you know. You're happy with Quasimodo. But you have to... of course, again, you have to get the okay from the composer, whether or not they'll allow you to use... allow you to write lyrics to these tune. That's a whole different ballgame now, you know. So you have to be very careful.

Brown: I want to add a footnote at this point to let the audience know that Cameron Brown played with George Adams, Don Pullen and Dannie Richmond in the group following Mingus's death in '79.

Brown, C.: Right.

Brown: So Cameron has a very, a very close and, uh, I would say a very intimate relationship, a musically intimate relationship with Dannie Richmond so...

Jordan: Mm-hmm.

Brown: And I just wanted to make sure...

Brown, C.: Eight and a half years.

Brown: Yeah.

Brown, C.: I mean, that band was working probably almost half the time.

Brown: Right.

Brown, C.: Which is a lot for a band to work. I mean, in and out, you know, but...

Jordan: Mm-hmm.

Brown, C.: ...it was three European tours, three or four weeks at the Vanguard for Japan. A few gigs in the States. Little, little California things every now and then.

Brown: Right, right. But just to contextualize the, uh, dedication to Dannie Richmond.

Brown, C.: Yeah, yeah.

Jordan: Oh, yeah.

Brown, C.: Oh, yeah. Well....

Jordan: Oh, he loved those cats, Cameron.

Brown, C.: [inaudible].

Jordan: Those are...

Brown, C.: [inaudible/overlapping]

Jordan: Those are his soulmates. [laughs]

Brown, C.: Yeah. I wrote a lullaby dedicated to all three of them when George passed away. And uh, wrote lyrics to it, and um, and then I'm on my second... from this project in Belgium, second, the second CD volume II, we used Sheila's Morning Song as an introduction, and then she sang this ballad that I wrote for them so beautifully on that.

Jordan: Well, I don't think so but...

Brown, C.: Oh.

Jordan: As long as you were happy with it.

Brown, C.: Very.

Jordan: I always think I can do better, but maybe that's part of what it's about. You never know it all. You gotta keep doing it, you know.

Brown, C.: Yeah.

Jordan: And you improve or learn new things all the time. I'm a little hard on myself. I'm a little bit better now than I used to be.

Brown, C.: She's better.

Jordan: Oh. I still don't listen to myself. Nah, [inaudible].

Brown, C.: She can't bear to listen to anything that she's on.

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Jordan: But I love working with his Here and Now band. I didn't think I would. Because I thought some of it was too out for me. But somehow I managed to get what, get my thing in there and be, and be honest with the way I felt it and approached the music. And uh, I didn't know about Don Byron. [laughs] Don Byron's out. But somebody wrote something on my, uh, on an e-mail or something or somewhere in Facebook or something that said, "You know, Sheila, you oughta do something with Don Byron." [laughs] And I, and I laughed to myself. I said, "Oh, my God." Because he really is something else.

Brown, C.: Yeah.

Jordan: He really is. And you know. And thanks to Cameron, I got to find that out. Otherwise, I never would have known.

Brown, C.: Well, we did, we did a one European tour with that quartet with Don and Tony Jefferson and Sheila.

Jordan: Yeah.

Brown, C.: And I had one suite that I wrote called Baby Suite kind of dedicated to children, that I wrote the lyrics to. Sheila sings. But then Sheila realized that she could, she could interject a couple of other children's songs into it...

Jordan: Yeah.

Brown, C.: ...which made a beautiful bigger suite. So it's all about improvisation...

Jordan: Yeah.

Brown, C.: ...and, and sharing and it's great.

Jordan: Yeah, we... I'm very happy with what I do with Cameron. With his band and with the duo.

Brown: Is there anything you'd like to perform for the, for the... to close out this, uh, this evening?

Jordan: What do you want to do, Cameron?

Brown, C.: I don't know. What's your pleasure?

Jordan: Oh, let's do Dat Dere.

Brown: [laughs]

Brown, C.: How did I know?

Jordan: [laughs]

Brown: [inaudible].

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